



Video 1 – Real Vocabulary: introduction with Scott Thornbury

Hi! I'm Scott Thornbury and I'm a teacher, teacher trainer and the author of *An A to Z of ELT*, *Beyond the Sentence* and *Uncovering Grammar*. Welcome to this series of videos about Real Vocabulary!

In Macmillan Dictionary's recent Real Grammar series we looked at some controversial points of English grammar: ten grammatical issues which – according to some people – are common sources of error in people's speech or writing. But we questioned whether any of these were really errors at all. And our method was to evaluate these questions not on the basis of rules handed down from generation to generation, but by examining the evidence of language in use. This is what's known as a "descriptive" approach, when you try to discover the way language works by observing what people do when they communicate with one another in different situations. Our large corpora – that's databases of language in use – help us to see that many questions of grammar are not simple matters of right or wrong. Language is more complicated than that, and the norms of grammar can change over time or they can vary according to context.

So we're now applying the same evidence-based approach to questions of vocabulary. Grammar and vocabulary work together to create meaning, and, just as with questions of grammar, there are plenty of traditionalists – that is to say people with a prescriptive rather than descriptive view of language – who will tell you that some uses of vocabulary are simply wrong.

A familiar example is the use of the word *hopefully* when we're talking about what we hope will happen (in a sentence like: "Hopefully, the weather will be better tomorrow"). We call adverbs like this "sentence adverbs" because they affect the whole meaning of the complete sentence. Sentence adverbs are very common in English (we use words like *sadly*, *thankfully*, and *unfortunately* in just the same way), and there is no rational argument for saying that *hopefully* can't be used like this too. Yet there are numerous prescriptive guides to English usage which will tell you that this use of *hopefully* isn't acceptable. The linguistic evidence, however, tells a different story.

In this Real Vocabulary series we'll be looking at ten other words or expressions which have frequently been criticized by traditionalists. We'll compare their claims with the evidence of language in use, in order to decide whether these usages are acceptable or not. That's what this new series on Real Vocabulary is about. Thanks for watching, and I hope you enjoy the videos and find them useful.