Comparison to other similar products

The other similar products I've used are nearly 10 years old at this point. The *UNIX diction* command isn't nearly as thorough or flexible. I could coerce the *CP/M* software I used into doing most of the things that *Proper Grammar II* does, but it wasn't as easy to use.

Bugs

I didn't find bugs so much as missing features. Suggested changes have been sent to SoftWood, and I hope they will appear in the future.

Vendor support

I didn't discuss any bugs with the company, but found SoftWood to be very prompt at upgrading *Proper Grammar II* to a version that worked with *Final Copy II Release 2* when I needed that.

Warranty

The warranty is the usual miserable warranty that makes software companies' lawyers happy, and users either laugh or cry. The software is what you get, they will replace the disks if they are bad, and nothing is SoftWood's fault.

Conclusions

Proper Grammar II is a good product. It does what it claims to do, and makes doing it easy and fast. It is doesn't take full advantage of the communications and user customization features of the Amiga, but that doesn't affect the basic operation of the program. The only caveat is that you won't want to use *Proper Grammar II* if the majority of your work is ASCII text files.

The Macros menu, the only menu other than the Project and Edit menu, is for REXX macros. The Macros menu allows you to bring up a file requester to run macros, and to invoke ten macros named PGMacro_1 through PGMacro_10. Because these macros are available as the function keys F1 through F10 respectively, the menu entries aren't very useful. However, the *Proper Grammar II* REXX commands render this point moot. The REXX commands allow you to juggle screens and windows, get text from *Proper Grammar II,* and insert text in the current project. There is no way to open a document from REXX, or to save one, or to build macros to coordinate *Proper Grammar II* with other products.

Likes and dislikes

The major shortcoming of the product -- one that caused me to leave it on my shelf for years -- is that it doesn't work well with ASCII files. It insists on reformatting them, and doesn't provide any way to control that reformatting. You must either make every sentence a separate line, with no newlines in it, or reformat your document afterwards. This includes deleting extraneous spaces and dealing with lines that are much too long.

Proper Grammar II insists on using fonts supplied by SoftWood, which make it look like a DTP package doing its best to display an outline font that will print nicely at 300 DPI. While this is acceptable in a DTP package, it isn't in a utility like *Proper Grammar II.* Because of this, I can't really use the program on my workbench.

Proper Grammar II does not use the 2.0 features when they are available. It can't open on a named public screen, it doesn't create a public screen, and it doesn't create any AppIcons.

On the plus side, there is a great deal of flexibility in tailoring what *Proper Grammar II* considers an error. I found it quick to learn and use, and compliant with the *Amiga User Interface Style Guide.*

Documentation

Proper Grammar II comes with an average manual. It guides you through the program for simple things. However, the documentation on the REXX commands, like the REXX commands themselves, is to brief to be useful. Nothing more than a list of commands, with a short -- and often ambiguous -- description of what it does. There is no syntax or examples; you have to figure the commands out by trial and error.

SoftWood chose to print the manual is brown on white rather than black on white. It's not a problem, but is a bit disconcerting.

The window has four areas:

- Four or five lines of text for displaying grammatical errors
- Four or file lines of text for displaying a brief explanation of errors
- A row of buttons for accessing grammar functions
- The main text area for editing the working document

A typical session starts by Opening a document and clicking on the Check button. *Proper Grammar II* then scans the document one sentence at a time, looking for things that it thinks are confusing: grammatical errors, misspellings, commonly misused words, and so on. While it runs, the Check button becomes a Stop button. When *Proper Grammar II* finds an error, it highlights the erroneous text in the text window, and the Check button becomes a Continue button to click when you have dealt with that error. If you change the sentence with the error, *Proper Grammar II* rechecks it, otherwise it continues from where it stopped.

The text that appears for an error, and the available options, depends on the nature of the error. For most grammatical errors, there is a short explanation of the error in the middle window. For example, an incomplete sentence generates an explanation of what makes a complete sentence, and what things to check. You can usually request a detailed explanation. For an incomplete sentence, the detailed explanation includes cases where an incomplete sentence is correct.

For spelling errors and some grammatical errors, *Proper Grammar II* suggests one or more replacements. Clicking on the Replace button replaces the highlighted text with the suggested replacement. Sometimes more suggestions are available at the click of a button, and you can select one of those to replace the text. For spelling errors, you can add the misspelled word to the user dictionary.

For any error, you can ignore that error for the rest of this session or permanently. You can also use the Project>Preferences>Rule On/Off Status menu to bring up a list of the error classes that *Proper Grammar II* can detect, and disable or enable each class. If you have disabled a specific rule in a class, you can enable it from this requester as well. Unfortunately, you can't selectively disable rules from this requester, only classes of rules.

The other menu entries in Project>Preferences set aspects of *Proper Grammar II*'s behaviors that you won't change often:

- The definition of a paragraph during ASCII I/O
- Whether *Proper Grammar II* starts on a workbench screen or a custom screen
- The kind of that custom screen *Proper Grammar II* starts on
- How sensitive *Proper Grammar II* is to certain kinds of errors

Product Review

Proper Grammar II

Brief description

Proper Grammar II is a grammar checker, and much more. It helps you make sure that your text clearly and grammatically says what you want it to say.

This document

I ran *Proper Grammar II* on this document and corrected all the errors, except for those in titles and proper names. Word usage is what *Proper Grammar II* says it should be. The only place where I disagreed with *Proper Grammar II* is that it thinks "SoftWood" should be "softwood".

Company information

Name: SoftWood, Inc.
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Phoenix, AZ
85076
USA
Telephone: +1 602 431-9151
Fax: +1 602 431-8361

List price

Retail is US $99.95.

Special Requirements

Proper Grammar II requires either two floppy disks or a hard disk, at least one MB of RAM, and AmigaDOS 1.3.3 or better.

Copy protection

None.

Machine used for testing

I tested *Proper Grammar II* on an Amiga 3000 with 16 MB of RAM running AmigaDOS 3.

Review

Proper Grammar II has most of the features of a simple editor. This isn't surprising -- most user actions that aren't simple commands are text edits. The only things in the menus that would be out of place in an Amiga text editor are the Project>Statistics and some Project>Preferences entries. The rest of the display, however, is not much like an editor's.