

2020

Grammar, Grammar, and More Grammar: A Review of Teaching English Grammar to Speakers of Other Languages 1st Ed.

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Recommended Citation

Irwin, Grace (2020) "Grammar, Grammar, and More Grammar: A Review of Teaching English Grammar to Speakers of Other Languages 1st Ed.," *MITESOL Journal: An Online Publication of MITESOL*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mitesol/vol2/iss1/2>

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Article Title: Grammar, Grammar, and More Grammar: A Review of *Teaching English Grammar to Speakers of Other Languages 1st Ed.*

Article Type: Book Review

Hinkel, E. (2016). *Teaching English grammar to speakers of other languages*. New York: Routledge.

Grammar, Grammar, and More Grammar: A Review of *Teaching English Grammar to Speakers of Other Languages 1st Ed.*

In the TESOL profession, grammar teaching has sometimes taken a back seat as communicative language teaching has been pushed to the forefront. In the highly readable, focused, and practical new book, *Teaching English Grammar to Speakers of Other Languages* (2016), leading experts in the field provide a meaningful antidote to this problem as they present chapters in which they use research and theory to offer practical suggestions for language teachers on how to teach grammar in the language classroom.

This book is intended for future teachers, current teachers, and teacher educators. It is divided into three parts: Principles and Foundations of Grammar Teaching, Strategies and Techniques, and Grammar for Productive Skills (speaking and writing). Each chapter is well-organized and easy to read—they have headings and sub-headings, and the language used is highly accessible not only to those familiar with the field of TESOL and applied linguistics, but also to novices to the field or teachers who do not have a background in the field. Each chapter has a clear purpose, and most of the chapters are followed by discussion questions and references.

Chapter 1, by Marianne Celce-Murcia, offers a unique perspective by arguing that grammar teachers should teach at the discourse-level, rather than the sentence level, and that even beginning learners can do this with simple dialogues. It seems she has pulled much information from *The Grammar Book* (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2016), but she goes above and beyond what is presented in her book by suggesting activities teachers can use to implement this focus on the discourse-level. In Chapter 2, Sandra Lee McKay provides another unique view in her explanation of how to teach English grammar (form, meaning, and use) from an English as an International Language perspective. The chapter has many sample activities for

beginning, intermediate, and advanced-level students. In Chapter 3, Susan Conrad explains how corpus linguistics can be beneficial for the teacher. While there are not as many activities for the student in this chapter as in others, there are teacher resources, such as guidance on how to do a corpus search and how this might inform choices teachers make regarding what aspects of grammar to teach. Chapter 4, by Keith S. Folse, emphasizes the necessity of considering students' needs when deciding what grammar points to choose or which ones to leave out of a course. For example, he argues that the future perfect tense is not common in English and therefore does not require a lesson dedicated to it. Anne Burnes's Chapter 5 provides very practical models of what teachers can do to realize a functional approach to teaching grammar in their classrooms. The teaching-learning cycle is one example, whereby teachers and students first develop specific content knowledge, then teachers model the text, then teachers and students jointly construct a text, and finally students construct a text independently.

Part II of the book, "Strategies and Techniques" begins with Chapter 6 by Penny Ur. In this chapter, she explains what "grammar practice" is ("learners have repeated opportunities to understand and/or produce grammatical forms and meanings of the target language under more or less controlled conditions" (p.109)) and how to best implement it in the classroom. In Chapter 7, Rod Ellis expands on overly simplistic notions of "noticing" and "consciousness-raising" by discussing three related topics: "consciousness-as-noticing," "consciousness-as-understanding," and "consciousness-as-control." In Chapter 8, Jack C. Richards and Randi Reppen outline their twelve principles of grammar instruction, which "can help students move from *knowledge* of discrete grammar facts to the *ability* to use grammar appropriately and accurately in different contexts" (p. 152). Chapter 9 is especially noteworthy, as it deals with "grammar constructions and their relatives"; in other words, it focuses on how teachers can teach formulaic expressions

(“On the one hand...”) to their students. Also, the two appendices to this chapter are excellent introductions to useful collocations.

Chapter 10, the first chapter of Part III, “Grammar for Productive Skills,” is Michael J. McCarthy’s “Teaching Grammar at the Advanced Level.” In the chapter he suggests using the method of teaching “new meanings” from “known forms” (for example, expanding the meanings of the modal *may* to include not only permission and possibility, but “factive use”: “Examples of such a development *may* be found in many works of literature” (p. 210)) and teaching “new forms” from “known meanings” (for example, teaching *will* to express habituality, which is typically taught through the simple present tense form: “But they *will* usually *attack* whatever body part is not covered” (p. 212)). Dana R. Ferris’s Chapter 11 seems to draw much information from her and Hedgcock’s book *Teaching L2 Composition: Purpose, Process, and Practice* (2014). However, she goes beyond discussions of corrective feedback in order to give very explicit, practical advice for teachers, such as giving mini grammar lessons in order to briefly teach main grammar points. Finally, the book concludes with Chapter 12, in which Ken Hyland explains how teachers might explore “stance”—“the ways writers step into their texts to stamp their personal authority or beliefs onto their arguments” (p. 247)—with their students, and the sort of language they may use to apply that in their writing.

Even though this book is excellent overall and has many strengths, there are a few areas that could be improved. Many of the chapters have overlapping information. Several topics are discussed in multiple chapters, but each mention of these repeated topics is treated like it is the first time the reader has come across it. These topics include the use of corpus data, discussion of the difference between spoken and written language, the idea of “grammar practice,” and noticing and consciousness-raising are discussed in multiple chapters. These repetitions are not

smoothly integrated throughout the book. This is not a problem if the chapters are read independently of each other, but if a reader intends to read the book from beginning to end, the chapters may seem slightly disjointed. To improve future editions of this text, the editor could identify these repeated topics and indicate where else in the book information about the topic could be found by using a footnote or a phrase like “As discussed in Chapter X....”.

Additionally, some of the information presented in different chapters is contradictory. For example, Chapter 1 deals with the importance of the discourse-level over the sentence-level, *even for beginners*, whereas in Chapter 8, the authors say that students should start with sentence-level only and move to complete texts when more advanced; while in Chapter 10, McCarthy asserts: “At the elementary level of proficiency, most learners struggle with the creation of good, accurate sentences, and the cognitive demands of making supra-sentential choices are probably more than most elementary learners can meet” (p. 214). Which viewpoint, then, are readers to believe or accept? The editor and authors of this text could improve future editions by explicitly addressing these contradictions so that the reader does not become confused; they could say: “Contrary to Celce-Murcia’s view in Chapter 1, we believe....” Or, these issues could be addressed in the preface.

This book may be compared to other books for teachers on grammar and English language teaching. Like *Teaching English Grammar to Speakers of Other Languages*, *English Grammar Pedagogy: A Global Perspective* (2014) by Barbara M. Birch describes grammatical features that may be taught in an English language classroom. However, Birch’s book is highly theoretical, and is rooted in a sociolinguistic perspective. It does not have much practical advice for teachers either. *Teaching English Grammar to Speakers of Other Languages* has more ideas for practical activities for teachers.

The book *Teaching Grammar in Second Language Classrooms: Integrating Form-Focused Instruction in Communicative Context* (2011) by Hossein Nassaji and Sandra Fotos gives “options” for integrating *communicative grammar* in second language classrooms. The goal of the book—to combine communicative language teaching and grammar teaching—is much more focused than that of *Teaching English Grammar to Speakers of Other Languages*, which aims to describe current *dominant* trends in the field of grammar teaching. The focus of each of these books is different because they are addressed to different audiences who have different purposes for reading them.

Perhaps the book most similar to *Teaching English Grammar to Speakers of Other Languages* is *New Perspectives on Grammar Teaching in Second Language Classrooms* (2002), edited by Eli Hinkel and Sandra Fotos. Many similar ideas are presented; for example, in both books Celce-Murcia advocates for “discourse-based” grammar instruction. *New Perspectives* is very context-based, focused on encouraging teachers to be “flexible” and select appropriate methods for their learners and teaching situations. The first part of the book is largely theoretical and research-based, whereas the last part describes how to teach particular grammatical structures. Thus, it bridges the gap between theory and practice. Again, both books can be advantageous to readers, but if one wants a more diverse description of the dominant trends in the field of grammar teaching, *Teaching English Grammar to Speakers of Other Languages* is the book to choose.

Describing and Explaining Grammar and Vocabulary in ELT: Key Theories and Effective Practices (2014) by Dilin Liu does just what its title suggests: analyzes and describes how language works to convey meanings. The book begins as highly theoretical but soon integrates the theoretical with the practical. Specific issues of language (such as articles and

word collocations) are described and explained. Thus, it may serve as a good pedagogical grammar textbook. However, for readers who do not want to learn *about* specific grammar issues, but instead want to learn *how* to teach them, *Teaching English Grammar to Speakers of Other Languages* is a more useful book.

Lastly, Keith Folse's *Keys to Teaching Grammar to English Language Learners: A Practical Handbook* (2009) is distinct from the previously described books. It is very much a handbook, describing dozens of grammar points *and* how to teach them to English language learners. However, *Teaching English Grammar to Speakers of Other Languages* describes how to teach grammar from a variety of perspectives rather than focusing on specific grammar points. Both books may be useful to teachers, but once more, if one wants an up-to-date description of innovative approaches to teaching grammar, *Teaching English Grammar to Speakers of Other Languages* is the better option.

As discussed above, *Teaching English Grammar to Speakers of Other Languages* has many strengths. It is a good supplement for those studying TESOL or applied linguistics, but it is also highly readable for those who do not have a background in either field. Each chapter offers much practical advice and many activities for teachers that are immediately applicable to their classrooms. Additionally, chapters can be read independently of each other. For teacher educators, this may prove to be useful, as they can assign one or a few select chapters rather than assigning the whole book. Overall, is an exceptional book. Its strengths greatly outweigh its weaknesses, which any strong reader could overcome without much difficulty. The chapters present unique perspectives on grammar teaching that forge a place for it in the current communicative language teaching trend, perfect for any teacher who wants to update their grammar teaching.

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