Language Arts Journal of Michigan

Volume 27
Issue 2 *Grammar Matters*

Article 20

2012

Book Reviews

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Recommended Citation

(2012) "Book Reviews," *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*: Vol. 27: Iss. 2, Article 20.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.9707/2168-149X.1917>

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Book Reviews

Image Grammar: Teaching Grammar as Part of the Writing Process

By: Harry R. Noden

Reviewer: Melissa Moens

Heinemann, 2011, 280 pp.

ISBN 978-0-325-04174-2

"Grammar is the soul of humankind....grammar bridges the world of living to the world of writing, reading, and speaking" (p. 254). After his original work had been enthusiastically embraced by educators over the past 10 years and 15 printings, Harry R. Noden (2011) has updated this work to offer a second edition. In this updated edition, *Image Grammar*, Noden tells us that this book is one attempt to build this bridge. He shares with us what he discovered along his journey as a secondary teacher in finding an approach to grammar instruction that offers a "new perspective for teaching grammar as part of the writing process" (p. XV). Noden reminds us that *Image Grammar* explores only those concepts that "help students feel the infinite power of grammar, a power derived from images" (p. XV). His use of fine art analogies throughout the text such as "music notes" and "brush strokes" allows Noden to answer for us the question he poses in the introduction, "What fundamental elements in writing are similar to the fundamental elements in art" (p. XV)? The rationale for teaching grammar is to enhance writing. To that end, Noden uses this book as a catalyst to demonstrate how to create images with grammatical structures and how to successfully teach grammar in context, rather than in isolation.

In the first chapter of *Image Grammar*, Noden introduces the "five basic brush strokes," parts of speech students need to know how to employ in order to learn the art of image grammar: the participle, absolute, appositive, adjectives shifted out of order, and action verbs. Noden then shares a lesson for each "brush stroke" and reminds us to show models and have students imitate them. The lessons provided are simple and seemingly effective, as he provides simple definitions and professional and student examples that successfully employ each of the brush strokes.

Also in this first chapter, Noden shares five strategies that allow teachers to help students both "recognize the beauty of an author's art" and "create a power in one's own art" by using the five basic brush strokes to create various types of image effects in their writing (p. 15). He provides the teacher with the components necessary to utilize each strategy: a step-by-step guide, sample passages, what to tell the students, multiple options for each strategy, grading techniques, and suggestions for each strategy.

The first three chapters identify numerous writing techniques that take the reader through the journey of helping students recognize specific details, add details to their writing, and use parallel structures to "make music" in their sentences (p. 65). Chapter 4, 5, and 6 provide the reader with advanced tech-

niques that move beyond imitation toward creation of writing that uses image grammar in sentences. Noden then moves the reader beyond the use of image grammar in sentences in Chapter 7 and 8, showing us how to employ the brush strokes through "story grammar" and fiction (p. 178).

Interestingly, Chapter 9 offers techniques for employing image grammar into nonfiction writing, specifically a feature article or research paper. Noden once again offers techniques, samples, and step-by-step strategies for writing introductory leads, the body, and conclusions for student writers. The final chapter, Chapter 10, offers concepts and strategies for revision.

This book is directed toward the middle school and high school teachers and will undoubtedly offer secondary students an opportunity to view grammar as the key to creating vivid images in their writing, while at the same time making it a creative process because of its analogy to art. *Image Grammar* offers vivid examples of both professional and student writing that allows us to see the journey from novice and experimental writing to the final product.

In each chapter of this book, Noden shares with us the concepts behind the techniques and up to eleven clearly laid-out strategies to help teach each concept. A CD-ROM accompanies the book, as well, and gives us instant access to images to prompt student writing, strategy lessons for teaching, printable handouts to accompany the strategy lessons, and four PowerPoint presentations, which are each a fully developed series of lessons ready to be used in the classroom.

Image Grammar clearly demonstrates what Noden learned on his journey in finding an effective method to successfully and creatively integrate the teaching of grammar into writing and offers us everything they need to successfully aide students in becoming "an artist using grammatical structures to paint powerful images and create engaging melodies" (p. XV). Teachers seeking a how-to guide to effectively teach grammar as part of the writing process, while at the same time, assist students in creating vivid images and details in their writing, will find this book an extremely helpful resource.

References:

Noden, H. (2011). *Image grammar: Teaching grammar as part of the writing process*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Melissa Moens has her Master's degree from Grand Valley State University with a K-12 Reading Specialist endorsement. She has taught 10 years at West Michigan Academy of Environmental Science in Walker, MI teaching middle school Language Arts. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her husband and two young daughters.

Code-Meshing as World English

By: Vershawn Ashanti Young and Aja Y. Martinez

Reviewer: Lorri A. Luurtsema
National Council of Teachers of English,
2011, 298pp.
ISBN 978-0814107003

If there is one thing language arts teachers know, it's that there is a right and a wrong way to speak and write the English language. Volumes of books of rules and standards espouse the correct usage of grammar, including verb tense, semantics and syntax, and punctuation. Students study proper English in 'grammar' schools and high schools across the nation. As a fifth grade teacher, I, too, stressed the importance of "proper English" and wielded the red pen mercilessly on a plethora of student essays to make the need for grammar corrections known. But after reading the collection of 12 essays in Vershawn Ashanti Young's and Aja Y. Martinez's *Code-Meshing as World English*, I have to reconsider everything I have ever learned about 'Standard English' in the American classroom.

In the introduction, Young describes code-switching as the practice of requiring students from minority backgrounds to use Standard English in the classroom when writing and speaking, and use their dialects of English outside the classroom. Young says "code-switching ideologies and practices currently dominate English instruction in the United States from kindergarten through college" (p. xxiii). Young believes this practice "stigmatizes world languages, dialects, and accents associated with certain people" and "alienates too many students from language education" (p. xxiii). Martinez agrees and adds that forcing students to switch languages can lead to "internal conflicts, interpersonal strife," and identity struggles (p. xxv).

Instead, the editors are proponents of code meshing, "the practice of blending accents, dialects, and varieties of English," such as home languages that are considered non-standard, with "school-based, academic, professional, and public English in all formal and informal contexts" (p. xxi). They contend allowing students to use their home languages in the classroom allows for more effective communication, richer prose, and more authentic expression.

The book is divided into three sections designed to address potential areas of concern by English teachers and language researchers about code meshing: pedagogy, policy, and performance. The first section, pedagogy, offers practical suggestions on how teachers can begin shifting instruction away from code-switching to code-meshing and improve writing and speaking instruction with linguistically diverse students. The second section, policy, addresses "spoken and unspoken laws, rules, and ideologies that form the bases for language and literacy teaching" (xxvii). The third section, performance, delves into how musicians, students, artists, and writers use code-meshing on the academic and public stage.

In "A Place Where There Isn't Any Trouble," author Frankie Condon discusses code-switching as a racial issue. He cites a Wall Street Journal article from April 30, 2010 that reported that the Arizona Department of Education began notifying school districts that teachers who speak "accented or ungrammatical English must be removed from English language learning classrooms" (p. 2). He writes that the "narrative of

English-only that sustains, reproduces, and preserves whiteness is designed to conserve not only the language but also the identities of its dominant speakers . . . while dismissing and discrediting the home tongues, knowledge, and ways of knowing of all those against whom the language is staked" (p. 4).

Similarly, in Chapter 1, "Code-Meshing Meets Teaching the Conflicts," Gerald Graff discusses the clash between "black" and "white" languages and the social and academic implications therein. Black students are forced to make a choice between "talking black" and "talking white" which is "tied to a deeper conflict between conforming to the rules of respectable bourgeois culture and violating those rules and dropping out" (p. 18). He argues that while many black children do not speak or write Standard English, they have "an unnoticed abundance of literacy skill that may be even more important – that of arguing" (p. 9). He believes schools and colleges are not taking advantage of students' argumentative skills and, thereby, are wasting the potential of those students. Recent research conducted by Briana Mezuk of the University of Michigan found that students who are involved in competitive debate programs score noticeably higher on standardized tests and "achieve a significantly higher rate of college admission than their peers" (p. 11). Who would have thought the ability to argue could be an asset?

In Chapter 6, "Publishing in the Contact Zone: Strategies from the Cajun Canaille," Nichole E. Stanford discusses code-meshing within the context of living in the deep South and the friction between French Cajun and Standard English. She writes that Louisiana banned French in 1921 and public schools were given charge of eradicating the language from the state. As a boy, Stanford's grandfather learned to become ashamed of speaking his native tongue and children were physically punished for speaking French. Today, those same schools are busy stamping out all signs of Cajun English in their classrooms. Stanford is arguing that professionals in education should set the example and lead the way in blending dialects and for "more code-meshing in our own contact zone—our publications—by scholars who now code-switch . . ." (p. 118).

Like the French-speaking Cajun, people from western North Carolina's Appalachian country have experienced the negative effects of stereotyping based on their dialect and some have tried to "standardize" their speech. In Chapter 9, "Fiddlin' Tongue," Jeremy B. Jones writes about growing up in Appalachia and as a middle school student, desperately trying to lose his accent for fear of sounding "stupid, like a hillbilly" (p. 195). By the time he went to college, he made "an extra, concerted effort to dampen it into nothingness" (p. 195). Jones writes about the various places he's lived and visited in his life—Honduras, Mexico, Costa Rica, Iowa—and how he conforms to speaking the local tongue "to fit in, to be local" (p. 196). When he returns to the Blue Ridge Mountains for visits with family, he writes about feeling confused about his actual voice and his tongue sometimes "becomes stilled" (p. 197). He argues that, perhaps, the best thing he could do to negate stereotypes about his mother tongue is allow his Appalachian twang back into his life.

The collection of essays in this book tells us language is more than a means of communicating. It is dynamic and complex. It is self-expression, identity, who we are. The increasing diversity of our small towns, elementary classrooms, and

college campuses require us to examine our prejudice about dialect and our beliefs about what it means to speak Standard English. After reading this book, I have become more accepting of students' non-standard written and oral expression, and I have come to value the uniqueness of each student and the stories they tell. While my background and education demand I utilize the red pen, I am beginning to realize that there is more to teaching than correcting—and that is allowing. Classroom teachers seeking to better understand linguistically diverse students and their contribution to literacy instruction or who simply wish to challenge their own philosophies or ideologies about Standard English will find this book a useful resource and an interesting read.

Reference:

Young, V. A., & Martinez, A. Y. (2011). *Code-meshing as world English*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Lorri Luurtsema graduated with a Master's degree in reading from Grand Valley State University in 2010 and completed a reading specialist endorsement last year. She currently teaches technology to students in grades one through five for Caledonia Community School in Caledonia, MI.

Teaching Grammar: What Really Works

By: Amy Benjamin and Joan Berger
Reviewer: Jenna Engel
Eyes on Education, 2010, 171pp.
ISBN 978-1596671386

With a title like *Teaching Grammar: What Really Works*, one might be tempted toward skepticism regarding the book's contents; Amy Benjamin and Joan Berger, however, managed to dispel my doubt.

With simple humor, visuals, grammar "owner's manuals," and sample lessons throughout, upon completion of the book I was convinced: Benjamin and Berger do know what really works when it comes to teaching grammar.

The authors suggest a way of teaching grammar with new eyes; a way that is engaging, lively, and social. Again, including those three words—engaging, lively, and social—in the same sentence as the word grammar caused tension in my mind. Can grammar really be "engaging, lively, and social" for students? This book demonstrates that it is entirely possible.

"Old-fashioned grammar instruction is not going to work very well for most students, no matter how often, or how loudly, it is taught" (p. xii). The goal of this book is not to replay the same ideas that have driven the teaching of grammar for years upon years. Benjamin and Berger introduce a method for teaching grammar that pushes students to use active, critical thinking, not just memorization, by drawing on student intuition and authentic situations instead of prescribed sentences and worksheets. Students are categorizing, comparing, and analyzing, as well as verbally, visually, and kinesthetically manipulating words and language.

The book is split into two parts: the first part provides a foundation for the fundamentals of basic grammar; the second

part presents sample lesson units at a deeper grammatical level and embeds them in writing instruction. Most suitable for middle and high school, the lessons and concepts can be easily modified for the intermediate grades as well.

Benjamin and Berger have an unassuming style of writing that empowers the novice reader who knows little about grammar as equally as they empower the grammar guru. Starting with a topic as straightforward as what makes a complete sentence, moving through the teaching of verbs, adverbs, and nouns, and then finishing with more complex concepts such as appositives and participial phrases, the teaching of grammar has never seemed easier. Benjamin and Berger clearly communicate the understanding behind each grammar concept and offer multiple "Teaching Practices" for each one, which can be immediately applied in the classroom. Helpful figures and explanation boxes throughout give the reader a better understanding of each grammar term. Every verb, noun, adjective, pronoun, and so on even comes with a handy "Owner's Manual" to reference in determining its recognition and usage.

The authors manage to package effective grammar instruction into one concise, easy-to-read book with practical applications at every page turn. The grammar instruction presented in this book shows how to teach grammar in a way that is visual and active so that it makes sense to students as well as teachers. Many times I found myself exclaiming "Now I get it!" or "That makes it so much easier!" Not only does this book clarify the teaching of grammar in a way that assuages the grammar fears of teachers, but it demonstrates how grammar can be fun. Tests for sentences, filling in the "slots" within a sentence, and entering into "Verb Territory" (a map of Action Town and Linking Town) make the teaching and learning of grammar concrete, visual, and active.

"Once you understand something from inside out, you value it more" (p. 171). Benjamin and Berger suggest that giving your students ownership of a range of grammar techniques will give them a deeper appreciation of language. Students will understand language in a way that helps them enhance their writing, deepen their discussion about language, and increase their test scores. Benjamin and Berger suggest that teaching grammar with new eyes may even entice students to fall in love with authors' writing just as you do when you come across powerful sentences. But don't take my word for it: push your skepticism aside, read the book, and discover for yourself what really works when it comes to teaching grammar.

Reference:

Benjamin, A., & Berger, J. (2010). *Teaching grammar: What really works*. Larchmont, NY: Eyes on Education.

Jenna Engel graduates with her Master's degree in Literacy Studies/Reading Specialist from Grand Valley State University in April of 2012. She currently teaches Title I and is an Instructional Paraprofessional in Grand Rapids, MI. She lives in Kentwood with her husband and two Boxer dogs.

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Amglish in, like, Ten Easy Lessons

By: Arthur E. Rowse

Reviewer: Amy M. Baas

Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011, 236pp.

ISBN 978-1442211674

We live in a blue jean and t-shirt world that reflects the expansion of casual communication including the internet, cell phones, and social networks such as Facebook and Twitter: "Just as most people are now choosing casual clothing, they are also becoming informal with language" (p. X). One result: Amglish—a "tossed salad" of every language, dialect, slang, acronym, abbreviation, and whatever may be at the heart of whomever is currently speaking or writing. Without hesitation, Arthur Rowse launches into a topic that many English teachers are trying to combat: the use of casual English. He states that he has realized that it's no longer teachers and lexicographers who are shaping language, it's ordinary people such as young musicians, humorists, and general dissidents who are leading the way (p. X). The title of Rowse's book, *Amglish in, like, Ten Easy Lessons: A Celebration of the New World Lingo*, is a bit deceiving if you're expecting to read a book that will teach methods of correcting this worldwide phenomenon. In fact, this book is more of a collection of short tidbits of how languages around the world have been affected by the slang, music, and media of the American culture, and how we should all be accepting of a more casual approach to speaking and writing.

Rowse introduces the book with humorous incidents of presidents and a residential hopeful who have been caught using more casual or creative English. Sarah Palin, for example, created the word, "refudiate" in her July 2010 tweet, "Peaceful Muslims, pls refudiate (p. 1). George W. Bush was heard saying, "They misundereestimate me," after winning the 2000 election (p. 9), and President Obama frequently had problems with object pronouns early in his presidency, making mistakes such as, "The schools don't belong to you or I" (p. 24). Amglish, Rowse argues, gives permission to all classes of people to put aside grammar, syntax, spelling; create new words; splice sentences, fragments, and phrases; and slur words where it feels right to do so. The hippie movement of the 1960's was a "natural convergence" of young rebels and college dropouts in addition to musicians, writers, and dreamers (p. 55). In his book, Rowse is suggesting that Amglish is having a similar, "If it feels good, do it," affect across people groups around the world. In fact, Rowse suggests the necessity to put all judgment aside and accept everyone regardless of how they speak. Amglish appears to be a synonym for acceptance: an acceptance for all languages and an avoidance of judgment for the way it is used. NCTE officials have even backed the stances that teachers need to respect the languages that students are comfortable using and acknowledge that spelling, punctuation, and how you use the language are not as important as what you say and what the message is (p. 42). This idea is the basis and argument of Rowse's book.

After a lengthy chapter introducing how Amglish became a major sensation around the globe, Rowse delves into a third and fourth chapter pertaining to a bit of history behind

language and how English became so predominate in many countries. He cites that after military hostilities ended in the late 1980's, a massive invasion brought American pop culture including music, movies, and TV shows, as well as consumer products global (p. 85). Rowse spent five years researching language, discovering how various vocabulary words were introduced to English from other languages, as well as how American English made its impact on the languages of other countries. After an introduction of how so many countries are adopting Amglish and stating that teens abroad speak Amglish to be considered smart with their peers (p. 97), he turns the tables and explains that many countries are now turning their backs to English in fear that their native language is dying, or minimally the "purity" of their language is being lost. The French have led this battle, but even authorities there have faced great resistance to eliminate the Amglish words from daily vocabulary (p. 109). Spain, Brazil, and Iran also attempted to ban the spread of American English but were not successful (pp. 119-120). The Amglish sensation continues to thrive in the "if it feels good, do it" arena, and because many countries are unsuccessful in putting up barriers to too much English infiltration, the result is chapter 5, "The Lishes of Amglish." Rowse provides 26 linguistic mixtures, with names that show a blending of English with various national languages (p. 176), including Danglish, Greeklish, Janglish, just to name a few.

Having sandwiched the more researched-driven chapters into the middle of his book, Rowse concludes by summarizing the points he's trying to make throughout the book in ten lessons for just "going with" this new Amglish trend. I found these lessons to be comical, almost sarcastic, but I don't know if this was Rowse's intent. For example, lesson one suggests that e.e. cummings gained hours, possibly even years for other things by avoiding the shift key on his typewriter (p. 209), and lesson two states that it is better to phone than write because it's faster, easier, more in style, and an excellent way to avoid being exposed to criticism for grammar and spelling (p. 210). While Rowse's humor is fun and acknowledges the necessity for accepting all languages and how they are spoken—and I completely agree with this—I am concerned about the limited space given to the need to still be able to use "business English." Because it is still scored on standardized tests, I am certain that as teachers, we still need to instruct our students on the rules of grammar, spelling, and sentence structure. Lesson ten, just 1.25 pages at the very end of the book, is all that Rowse gives to the idea that just because informal grammar is taking over the world, this doesn't mean that we all shouldn't be proficient in the working language of society (p. 220).

Amglish, in Like Ten Easy Lessons: A Celebration of the New World Lingo, is a fun read and very informative about the progress of American English throughout the years and its impact around the world; however, this is not a book that teachers will add to their resource shelves. I was entertained and I learned a lot about American English, but the idea that incomplete sentences, missing apostrophes, deleted punctuation, and creative spelling should be readily acceptable makes me wonder if acceptance is going a little too far. As a language arts teacher, I fear that if I completely adhere to this acceptance, I will continue to face, as I already have, a resistance to learning the "business lingo," which students will need to know to be successful on standardized tests, as well

as in college and beyond. While several sections of the book seem a bit redundant, Rowse provides an excellent history of the role of English through the centuries and the media devices used to strengthen the spread, and how this, as well as American culture has coerced the progression of Amglish around the world. Teachers are being advised in this book to respect the languages that students are bringing to school; after all, politicians (e.g. Sarah Palin, President George W. Bush, and President Obama) and the media are paving the way for Amglish to be accepted, and movies and music are the promoting its drive. This verbal tsunami, as Rowse explains, has sent its wave over the entire world (p. 171); we as readers, writers, and speakers need to decide if we're going to jump on this bandwagon or be crushed by the wheels trying to stop it.

Reference

Rowse, Arthur E. (2011). *Amglish in, like, ten easy lessons: A celebration of the new world lingo*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

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