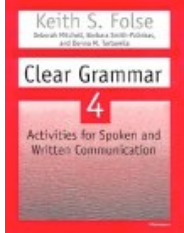


<i>Clear Grammar 4. Activities for Spoken and Written Communication</i>			
Authors:	Keith S Folse., Deborah Mitchell, Barbara Smith-Palinkas, Donna M. Tortorella (2003)		
Publisher:	Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press		
Sub-Title	Pages	ISBN	Price
Student Book	Pp xiii. + 257	0-472-08886-6	\$19.95
Student Workbook		0-472-08887-4	\$13.95



This is book 4 and probably last of the *Clear Grammar* series, aimed at intermediate to low-advanced students (according to the back cover) or high-intermediate to advanced students (according to the introduction), the latter being probably more accurate on the whole. The authors claim the book offers a "number and variety of types of exercises" with 175 exercises and activities. This is misleading as the *types* of exercises are not so numerous and mostly traditional: correction of mistakes, double or multiple choice, filling in blanks, copying sentences. Mostly, students are required to write exercises instead of practising the language. Notable exceptions are the speaking and writing activities which are original and interesting. The authors tell us these make up 20% of the book. The subtitle of the book (with its emphasis on communication) is thus vastly overstated.

They also claim that this series is different from other books in that in-context grammar forms 40% of the exercises with multi-sentence and mini-dialogue activities, which is true enough. Still, single-sentence practice has the same percentage of exercises.

The last claim to originality is that some of the chapters have a deductive approach (with the rules clearly stated) while others have an inductive approach (students have to find the rules). I see no such difference: all the chapters have a deductive approach, with lots of blue and grey boxes stating rules explicitly. Extremely rare are the "Challenge" or "Discover Grammar" exercises encouraging students to propose explanations and rules.

Unit 1: Review

Unit 1 is a review of book 3, so there seems to be continuity in the series. A theme,

cloning, runs through this first unit. As the subject is scientific, there are some really original exercises such as role-plays with scientists (p. 11), the writing practice (p. 18) or an exercise using elements of a bibliography (pp. 12-13). Unfortunately, this is the only time the device is used. It adds coherence and interest to the exercises.

Unit 2: Past perfect

As a principle, I am against a chapter devoted exclusively to one tense: there is no choice, no surprise (although there are two forms). Furthermore, exercise 1 is a copying exercise of very little value. Compared to the "challenge" of explaining formally the reasons for using such or such a form, these two exercises are not on the same level at all, not for the same students. The exercises are very classical in form. Exercise 8 is an interesting pair work activity and so is the writing practice (p. 32).

Unit 3: Word forms

Modifying nouns into adjectives, adverbs, etc, recognizing which part of speech is a word in a sentence (verb? noun?) are good if classical exercises. As usual, the speaking and writing activities are good.

Unit 4: Conditionals

There are too many simplistic exercises in this unit: copying phrases (this is supposed to be an advanced level), recognizing structures, an accumulation of classical exercises. Still, as in most of the units, the speaking and writing activities are good.

Unit 5: Adverb clauses

Half the time, the exercises have more to do with vocabulary (the meaning of connectors) than grammar.

Unit 6: Noun clauses

The notion of noun clauses eludes me. Here is a mixed bag of various things: compound nouns, relatives, direct/indirect statements, the use of *say* and *tell*, punctuation. On p. 105, in a grey box entitled *CAREFUL! Do not make these common mistakes*, the sentence *That you have completed the paperwork before the end of the year is important to being admitted* is considered as a model sentence. While admittedly correct, it is also terribly convoluted. How are students to know this is not common language and that they will rarely, if ever hear it, even less use it?

Unit 7: Reduction of clauses

This means suppressing relative pronouns. Is it worth a whole unit?

Unit 8: Modals

These would make exercises for tests. No more. Exercise n° 10, about the difference (or rather lack of difference) between *should* and *ought to* is more misleading than useful as

both choices are equally acceptable most of the time.

Unit 9: Subject/verb agreement

There is one original exercise here which takes as a subject Betsy Ross and the American flag.

The rest, although useful, with difficult sentences, is a mixed bag of different problems at different levels of difficulty.

Unit 10: Prepositions

Prepositions, postpositions (which are more questions of vocabulary than grammar), the genitive are treated together, which is confusing.

Unit 11: Review of verb tenses

Very classical exercises, putting the verb in the right tense in a story, finding the forms of irregular verbs.

Unit 12: Review of book 4

More of the same.

The book ends with an answer key, an index to the four books, a final test consisting in the correction of errors (I am not convinced of the validity of such a test, as correcting is a particular skill which needs training in itself). A diagnostic is offered in the form of multiple choice questions. Finally, a good (free) placement test can be found online at <http://www.press.umich.edu/esl/compsite/cleargrammar/> and used in all sorts of situations

A student workbook accompanies the class book. In each unit (the same as in the class books), seven exercises are proposed: realia (twice), original sentence writing, games and puzzles, dialogue and conversation practice, sentence practice, TOEFL review. The realia is only real in appearance: these are fake documents, serving a pedagogical purpose. Why not admit it? Does it make the exercise less valid? As in the class book, the drawings are uninspiring. But on the whole, this is a more satisfactory production. There are fewer exercises which are more interesting. A student could be happy with *only* the workbook which provides enough material for revision.

These books are good enough, a real mine of exercises on the given subjects, but certainly not the breakthrough in novelty of approach that is announced.

Nicole Décuré
Université Toulouse 3
<decure@cict.fr>

© Copyright rests with authors. Please cite TESL-EJ appropriately.

Editor's Note: The HTML version contains no page numbers. Please use the [PDF version](#) of this article for citations.