

Resource Books for Teachers: Grammar

Author:	Scott Thornbury (2006)		
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The controversial questions in grammar teaching, as Ellis (2006) in the 40th anniversary issue of *TESOL Quarterly* pointed out, are what, when, and how. What is not a debatable issue, however, is that "[g]rammar, like death and taxes, is one of the few certainties in the life of a language teacher" (Maley, 2006, p. 3). Regardless of the context in which they teach, all language teachers must in one way or another attend to grammar because it is the skeleton of any language, a structure for language learners to use to convey meaning. Whether language teachers like teaching grammar or not, they cannot avoid dealing with it; in the process, however, many teachers find it challenging to make grammar interesting and fun.

Grammar, a new addition to the Resource Books for Teachers series by Oxford University Press, offers practical and engaging activities to assist both seasoned and novice teachers in teaching English grammar. The collection of activities in the book is rooted in Thornbury's extensive experience as an English language teacher and with his interactions with various practicing teachers, materials writers, and other grammar texts. The activities are based on both theoretically and practically sound principles that are not partial to any one methodological perspective; nevertheless, the principled activities are consonant with the postmethod approach to language teaching that seeks a multidimensional view of language pedagogy, taking into account the particularity of the social, cultural, and political contexts in which teaching and learning take place (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Many other English grammar resource books present psycholinguistic perspectives on how grammar works (e.g., Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Yule, 1998). This book's purpose, however, while offering rationales for emphasizing important and problematic grammar issues, is to provide valuable practical ideas for teaching grammar, activities that can fill a teacher's bag of tricks.

While traditional grammar-teaching texts primarily focus on word- and sentence-level grammar, this book covers grammar at three levels: word, sentence, and text. Thornbury strongly believes that grammar should not be studied as "single, decontextualized, sentences" because "most language in use occurs, not as sentences, but as cohesive text" (p. 103, emphasis in original). As such, text grammar (or discourse grammar) is also treated in this book in a way that at least some English language teachers will appreciate.

After a foreword by the series editor, Thornbury devotes a six-page introduction (pp. 5-10) to setting the stage for the rest of the book. He describes and illustrates the point, purpose, intended audience, and organization of the book. The point of the book, as Thornbury explains, is to look at grammar beyond sentence-level grammar, approaching it also from the word- and text-levels. The purpose of the book is then to offer its intended audience--practicing and novice teachers--*how* to teach these different levels of grammar in fun and motivating ways.

The book is organized into three parts, following the three-way distinction stated above.

- Part I deals with *word grammar*. In this section, Thornbury offers 15 activities that range from teaching basic metalinguistic terminology, e.g., simple present tense, past progressive to consciousness-raising of grammatical items, e.g., prepositions, pronouns to chunking of grammatical structures.
- Part II treats *sentence grammar* or syntax--the rules that govern the structure of sentences. Thornbury, in line with contemporary grammar teaching principles, emphasizes that while form is crucial, form and meaning are inseparable and must be attended to equally. Therefore, the 35 activities in this section offer teachers a surplus of ideas to develop learners' ability to deduce from grammatical rules and produce both well-formed and meaningful English sentences. The activities range from introducing new grammatical structures to reflecting on common errors to reviewing structures.
- Departing from traditional grammar resource texts, Part III provides activities for teaching *text grammar*. Thornbury asserts, and rightly so, that "a lot of grammar is intelligible only in context. If it is intelligible only in context, it is probably best studied and practised only in context, too" (p. 103). In this part of the book, Thornbury offers 12 activities to raise students' awareness of how contextual environments determine grammatical choices and sentence intelligibility.
- In addition to these three parts, the book also contains an Appendix with a list of the "100 most frequent words of English" based on the BNC (British National Corpus), a Further Reading page, and a Glossary of grammatical terms.

Each activity is labeled as follows: level, time, aims, materials, preparation, procedure, variations, follow-ups, and comments. While Thornbury provides detailed steps for engaging students in each activity, he reminds us that local teaching-learning settings and needs will ultimately determine the appropriateness of each activity. Teachers will appreciate the versatility of each activity; that is, each activity can be adapted to meet the needs of their particular curriculum, syllabus, and students. And beyond additional follow-up activities Thornbury also provides variations for teaching the same activity. A Comments section in which the author

offers words of wisdom and other pedagogical suggestions is also included. The variations, follow-ups, and 62 concrete activities add up to well over 100 activities that can help teachers zest up their grammar teaching.

However, as with any book, there are areas that could have been more carefully crafted. The first is minor editing errors: a few spelling errors and an incorrect page number reference. Additionally, the URL (<http://thetis.bl.uk>) to *The British National Corpus* on the Further Reading page is a broken link; the actual link is <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/>.

A more substantial area of concern is the use of homogenous pictures and names of people and locations: All of the pictures depict white Europeans (or those of European ancestry) and names of people in the activities are exclusively Anglo-British or Anglo-American (e.g., Pam, Jim, Mike). Country names are always European (e.g., Spain, France, Italy). Although individual teachers can modify the activities to make the names of people and places more relevant to their particular settings, I think an author shares responsibility for being pedagogically, politically, culturally, and socially conscious enough in today's world to be more inclusive of the various international contexts in which English language teaching is carried out. By including illustrations and names of people and places beyond Europe, the author could have avoided inadvertently promoting Eurocentricity.

Lastly, although the author clearly argues for the need to focus on grammar in context, and thus provides a dozen activities for teaching text grammar, the number of activities devoted to discourse grammar is small compared to the activities offered for teaching word- and sentence-level grammar. Might we not expect reverse proportions when Thornbury cites the lack of such a grammar-in-context focus in traditional grammar treatments and in light of his two remarks cited earlier in this review?

Despite these limitations, the ideas and activities Thornbury offers for teaching grammar are creative, useful, motivating, and appealing. Additionally, the framework he provides for teaching grammar reflects his language teaching principles. Rather than following the traditional Presentation-Practice-Production paradigm, which he finds problematic in its close association with a particular teaching methodology that emphasizes a monolithic approach to language teaching (e.g., the audio-lingual method), his grammar-teaching framework closely reflects the field's current postmethod, eclectic teaching principles. Also, Thornbury's including form-focused activities associated with particular traditional and "designer" methods (Nunan, 1989), and his judicious use of invented sentences (rather than just authentic language) demonstrate his experience as a language teacher who appreciates effective activities regardless of their methodological associations. However, even these form-focused activities are followed up by communicative activities which also exhibit his multidimensional approach to language teaching. Both new and experienced language teachers serious about enriching the grammar-learning experience of their students will find the structure and ideas Thornbury provides in this book invaluable--hence, worth their investment.

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Joseph J. Lee
Georgia State University, Atlanta, USA
<esljolx@langate.gsu.edu>

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