


English Grammar Pedagogy: A Global Perspective

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English Grammar Pedagogy: A Global Perspective			
Author:	Barbara M. Birch (2014)		
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Grammar consists of meaningful structures and patterns regarding speakers’ status, geographic location, and pedagogical context. As learning grammar takes place in a sociocultural context, global perspectives cannot be ignored, either. As Larsen-Freeman (2009) argued, “The pedagogic approach to the teaching of grammar in various parts of the world differs, depending not only on different grammatical complexities, but also on the pedagogic traditions” (p. 522). In addition, Hinkel (2006) asserted, “the analyses of large spoken and written English language corpora have allowed much insight into how native speakers of English use language features in real life and across various dialects” (p. 112). Therefore, in this book, Birch emphasizes the legitimacy of different varieties of English, especially World Englishes.

In the preface, Birch outlines the contents of this book, and then examines the grammatical issues by paying careful attention to both learners and teachers. She presents a balanced overview of the traditional views of teaching and learning grammar, and explains the new trends on these traditional perspectives. Throughout the book, she uses graphic organizers, figures, and other important visual aids to clarify the concepts as well as interactive critical thinking tasks labeled study, discussion, essay questions, and activity questions. By means of these questions, this book offers a valuable opportunity for students and teachers to review the content and to fully comprehend the material. Each of the three parts begins with a review, and every chapter starts with a thought-provoking quote from a famous linguist.

Part I brings a contemporary take to the traditional approach to teaching grammar. It suggests that language learning is achieved both through interactions within the sociocultural contexts and also explicitly through instruction. Chapter 1 focuses on English as a global language and offers a framework encapsulating “language constellations, intentional diffusion and resistance” as an outcome of imperialism and colonialism as well as the concentric circles of English as a formal, local and regional language. Chapter 2 proposes new perspectives and constructions on traditional grammar theories. This chapter also introduces Construction Grammar—an approach that integrates usage and exposure with the general cognitive processes. Chapter 3 discusses how language learners construct sociocultural identities and explains specific factors in the construction of learner identities such as language awareness, metalinguistic awareness, bilingualism, multicompetence as well as the factors in language learning and their relation within each other such as interaction, focus on form, uptake, scaffolding, natural order, priming, automatization, and practice. Chapter 4 ties everything together by unifying the theoretical methods and more practical ones, as one method does not fit all learner profiles and not all methods are practical for the real classroom. In this way, Birch succeeds in combining a great number of methods that are valuable to teachers in teaching English.

Part II deals with the general consensus regarding the norms and their analysis at different levels such as morphology, word formations, phrases, sentences, and discourse levels. While Chapter 5 is more theoretical, Chapter 6 takes a more practical approach, and defines what a word is and distinguishes resource (syntactic categories of words) and system elements (components of discourse clarifying the relationships of words in the long term memory). In Chapters 7 through 11, Birch discusses language teaching at the phrase, verb and sentence level by focusing on *colligations* (“abstract grammatical structures closely related to the open choice principle”) as well as descriptive and referential roles of these. Chapter 12 concludes this part of the book by creating discourse awareness not only by referring to grammar but also touching on the communicative functions of lexical bundles and expressions.

Part III has two chapters that focus on unstable aspects of grammar such as colloquial language items, slang versions, and local and regional grammars. This part slides smoothly from Academic English to different dialects and diglossia, which are seen as fluid forms of English.

This book is a good guide for pedagogical purposes on teaching grammar. Bringing a different perspective to the world of grammarians, Birch fills important gaps for those of us who want to teach grammar not only by looking at the stable forms but also by considering the regional and dialectal versions. Perhaps including the samples of these versions would have been helpful, but this book does include a substantial bibliography and a useful index. Overall, Birch has written a valuable book that addresses important issues in teaching grammar with a new perspective.

References

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