

RESOURCE
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series editor
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GRAMMAR FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

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Foreword

There are few topics which arouse more heated and passionate debate than grammar. And the debate extends even to young learners, with some advocating the necessity of inculcating grammatical concepts and rules with this age group, and others equally resistant to such practices.

The authors of this book take a middle passage between the shoals of grammatical prescriptivism and of communicative over-indulgence. They take the view that meaning will always be primary at this level, so that grammar will be integral to activities rather than taught as a separate area. The extent to which grammar is made explicit will also clearly depend on factors such as age and cognitive maturity within an age range from 6 to 14.

Their aims are threefold: to enable learners to express themselves as clearly as possible in English, to increase their grammatical accuracy, and to raise awareness of grammatical features—rather than to teach explicit rules.

They do this by offering a rich variety of activities, many of which are game-like in nature, but all of which are based on the most common essential grammatical features of English. The activities take account of the learning style preferences of the learners, and are flagged for physical, aural, spatial, and verbal emphases. This is particularly important for younger learners, who often have a preference for activities involving movement and the manipulation of objects.

Those teachers who have already used other books in this series by Gordon Lewis will not be disappointed in this collection, written in collaboration with Hans Mol, who brings his own long and extensive experience of working with younger learners to bear. Teachers of younger learners will find this an invaluable addition to the Young Learners titles in this series.

Alan Maley

Introduction

'We shouldn't lose sight of the one thing children do best: have fun.'

(Kenna Bourke)

'What is grammar?' is the kind of question that seems easy to answer until somebody asks it.'

(Michael Swan)

What is grammar to you?

Grammar is certainly one of the most controversial areas of language teaching. In fact, your approach to grammar will in many ways determine your position on communicative language teaching, task-based learning, lexical grammar, and any other of the many methodologies and approaches in the world of language teaching.

Maybe you've never stopped to think about grammar much. Before you continue reading this introduction, do the following activity (either for yourself or with colleagues). Tick the statements which best represent your own beliefs about grammar in English language learning. If you can't find anything that suits you, think about your own opinion or belief.

My experience is ...

- ☐ Children love grammar! They are keen to follow rules, enjoy doing grammar exercises and coming up with the correct answer.
- ☐ Children understand grammar if you don't bother them with abstract rules.
- ☐ Children don't like grammar. They get bored because it's hard to understand.
- ☐ Very young learners don't need explicit grammar; older young learners do.
- ☐ My students expect me to teach grammar because they (or their parents) are convinced it is of value to them.
- ☐ It takes children a long time to understand grammar. I notice it can take years sometimes, so children have to keep on repeating what I teach them, and I need to keep on explaining it.
- ☐ It's OK to make mistakes, because applying grammar without errors is a long process that most people will never achieve.
- ☐ If there is a grammar point I want to deal with, I just make sure I use it in everything I say or do. I don't teach explicit grammar.
- ☐ I find it hard to explain grammar, because my grammar is not perfect either. So, I avoid it.

- ☐ I feel comfortable teaching grammar to my young learners—it gives me something to hold on to, because it tells my students that certain things work in certain ways.
- ☐ I always focus on both form and meaning—the one can't exist without the other.

The grammar continuum

For many teachers, grammar is the backbone of all language learning. 'Structure', as it is often called, is perceived as the core thread of the language syllabus and, indeed, the majority of school curricula and the majority of course books are designed according to grammatical criteria.

At the other end of the grammar spectrum, a huge population of communicative language teachers oppose the explicit teaching of grammar. They object to isolating grammar as a system within a system. For many who adhere to the notion of communicative language teaching with a capital 'C', grammar should be learnt intuitively through context; grammar should be inferred through meaning and task.

We feel there is no place for explicit grammar instruction for very young learners, if only because they are not cognitively ready for it; not in their first language and certainly not in their second. We do feel, however, that for older young learners (6–13) there is a place for a focus on grammar: not the grammar of abstract rules, but fun grammar which works through examples, games, and activities that let learners 'make sense of this madness' through an age-appropriate critical and creative analysis of language.

The learners

And what about these learners? If grammar is taken so seriously and so much attention is paid to it, we believe that children might as well have fun doing it! Children as well as teens tend to like activities that are challenging and slightly out of the ordinary and yet which give them the satisfaction that they are actually learning something useful.

It can be argued that teachers of young learners are in a special position because their students are at a highly receptive age when everything around them interests them, and are therefore most likely to remember and correctly use what they have learnt. We feel that we should take advantage of these factors to teach grammar in a fun and motivating way.

In this book, we take a middle approach, which we hope will appeal to both sides of the grammar debate. If only because learners have widely varying learning styles, we advocate an eclectic approach to

language teaching. We believe that meaning should always be our main focus in language learning, as communication is in essence the act of transferring messages from one person to another. We do not believe the study of grammar needs to be isolated outside the meaning framework. It is an intrinsic part of it. For us, grammar is a system that helps make meaning more precise.

It is possible to introduce grammar not as something difficult and abstract, but as something in which social skills, physical activity, intellectual thinking skills, creative challenges, and personalization can be combined to improve the learner's communicative performance.

However, since grammar is a system with a set of rules, it also needs to be learnt. An analogy with sports can illustrate this. A football team can train and work on strategy all day long, but the players will also need to practise some basic fundamentals before any strategy can work: they need to be able to pass the ball and shoot—and to do this effectively they need to drill these skills. It's the same with grammar. Before we can conceptualize things like time and agency, we need to understand the elements of how to express them. Here is where a focus on form can also be helpful.

Three goals and many tasks

This book presents activities for young learners that seek to achieve three goals:

- to teach learners to express themselves as clearly as possible with confidence
- to strengthen grammatical accuracy in a fun and purposeful way.
- to increase grammar awareness among young learners.

In this we're most interested in grammatical *performance* and *awareness* rather than *knowledge* of grammatical concepts or rules.

We've chosen to offer a wide range of activity types, including activities that involve drawing and writing on the board, story-telling, songs and chants, games, board games, and lots of TPR (Total Physical Response) activities that require children to move about. Generally speaking, you will find the following five types of activities:

- *Input task*: children read or listen to an input text and study this to find examples of the grammatical structure;
- *Noticing task*: the activity shows examples, or sets a task that makes children aware of the grammatical topic without explaining it;
- *Awareness task*: children analyse examples and think about, for instance, what certain grammatical words are called or what parts grammatical structures consist of;

- *Check-up task*: children answer questions or perform mini-tasks to show (and check) their own or other children's understanding of the grammatical structure;
- *Game task*: children are asked to use the grammatical structure in a game setting, which will make grammar use fun and spontaneous;
- *Experimentation task*: children are asked to apply their knowledge of grammar by producing, for instance, a dialogue or written text.

When to use grammar activities

Fun grammar activities such as the ones in this book can be used at any time during your lessons. Some you could use as warmers, to find out how much the children (already or still) know about a grammatical point; others you can use as activities for revision; others again are suitable for follow-up practice when you have worked through the set activities in your course book; and finally some can be used to present/introduce grammar.

Learning styles

When teaching grammar, traditional exercises such as mechanical drills, gap-fills, and sentence transformations all have a part to play. However, they are not always very motivating or stimulating and course books offer many of these already. In this book, we have attempted to offer exercises that stimulate creativity and activity, and which encourage children to actively express themselves through grammar. Playing grammar games is not only fun, it is also extremely valuable. After all, a child who can follow an instruction during a board game, or who can throw a beach ball to another child in response to something a third child has said, has got the point and has learnt something new. Games have rules and so does grammar—they strengthen each other.

No two children learn in exactly the same way. In any given classroom there will be as diverse a mix of learning styles as there are children. Also, one child may show more than one learning style, depending on what the task or topic is. To appeal to these learning styles—to differentiate instruction—is a huge teaching challenge and not one that we pretend to solve. Nevertheless, resource books such as this one provide teachers with quick, explicit alternatives that they can immediately implement. We have therefore indicated which learning styles we feel activities are most suited to.

Psychologist Howard Gardner distinguished eight styles of learning. Through those, he illustrated that it is not about how intelligent you are, but how you are intelligent, implying that learners can reach the same goals and standards in different ways. For the purpose of clarity we have focused on four styles, though we acknowledge that there are others

and that children may often 'have' more than one style at their disposal. Many activities would appeal to various types of learners.

- *physical* (movement–TPR–kinaesthetic): these activities would appeal to children who learn easily by doing, by moving. In activities like these, children will be building, drawing, dancing, playing physically active games, etc.
- *aural* (musical, singing): these activities would appeal to children who learn best by listening and watching the teacher or other children do or say things. They often have interaction between speakers, or involve listening to and singing songs or chants.
- *spatial* (visual, drawing, art): these activities would appeal to children who like to draw, write, design, and make things. Suitable activities will often have an aspect of art or crafts in them.
- *verbal* (linguistic, explanation, logic): these activities would appeal to children who are generally good at reading, writing, and memorizing. Typical activities would include stories, or writing and listing tasks.

Summary of learning styles

Style	Strong in	Likes to	Learns best through
Physical	athletics, dancing, acting, crafts, using tools	move around, touch and talk, use body language	touching, moving, processing knowledge through bodily sensations
Aural	singing, picking up sounds, remembering melodies, rhythms	sing, hum, play an instrument, listen to music	rhythm, melody, singing, listening to music and melodies
Spatial	reading, maps, charts, drawing, mazes, puzzles, imaging things, visualization	design, draw, build, create, look at pictures	working with pictures and colours, visualizing, drawing
Verbal	reading, writing, telling stories, memorizing dates, thinking in words	read, write, talk, memorize, work at puzzles	reading, hearing and seeing words, speaking, writing