

Foreword

English has become a global language. In the minds of many worldwide, it guarantees a better life through enhanced social and economic opportunities. As a result, English teachers are in high demand. Some claim that English is attractive because as it has spread throughout the world, it has severed its ties from any specific culture, making it easily malleable to fit the needs of those who adopt it. Grammar rules and vocabulary can simply be taught to eager learners so they can use English for social and economic advancement.

However, learning English is more than mastering a certain number of words and memorizing a set of grammar rules. Although plugging words into scientific formulas might be the key to success in chemistry or physics, it is less effective for language learners. Language acquisition studies have discovered that both native and nonnative speakers learn English best not by being taught rules but by interacting with other users of the language, either orally or through print. This interaction introduces a social element to grammar that brings with it hidden social messages. For example, suppose a language learner has been taught that English has a very simple way to make requests: simply say the verb with no subject being expressed, as in “Open the door.” After class, the student is carrying a pile of books and comes to a closed door. What would be the reaction of other English speakers if the student were to shout out to someone passing nearby, “Open the door”? The student would probably be considered rude. “Could you please open the door?”, which has the form of a question rather than a command, would probably be considered more polite. Suppose an English

teacher sees one of her students writing with a crayon rather than a pencil. She helpfully asks, “Don’t you have a pencil?” If the student answers “yes,” does that mean that the student does or does not have a pencil? The answer depends on which part of the world the student is from.

The systematic ways in which the meaning expressed by grammar rules changes according to social settings is called ***pragmatics***. The rules governing the expected sequence of sentences in a conversation or a composition according to pragmatic conditions fall under the rubric of ***discourse***. In other words, if English language learners want to use English to better themselves, they need to know more than grammar. They need to know how pragmatics and discourse affect their choice of grammar rules as they interact with other English speakers if they want to avoid misunderstandings. Teachers who are preparing their students to interact with other users of English by combining grammar with pragmatics and discourse are teaching them ***communicative competence***.

The lessons in this book reflect the many teacher training workshops and grammar classes that I have taught in Mexico, Hungary, and the Philippines as well as in Florida, Texas, and other parts of the United States over the last thirty years. They shed new light on English grammar by including the results from research in second language acquisition, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis in ways that are accessible to those who have a limited background in linguistics. The following English language users should benefit from this approach:

- ***International students*** so they will understand why the grammar rules they so carefully studied through the years do not seem to work after they arrive in the United States and begin interacting with native speakers of the language.
- ***English teachers*** in the United States or abroad so they will understand that grammar has social implications that permeate even their own language usage in the classroom.
- ***Schoolteachers*** who are using the language experience approach for developing literacy skills so they will understand what kinds of materials they need to use to develop the language abilities of their students beyond the “street English” they bring to the classroom.
- ***Composition teachers*** so they will understand the differences between the spoken and the written language.
- ***Teacher trainers*** so they will understand how grammar fits into the second language acquisition process.
- ***Students in general*** who think they are really more interested in science, mathematics, or other “more practical” subjects than English language studies so they will understand how they too are language teachers when they interact with others.
- ***Parents*** so they will understand their role in helping their children develop their language skills.

The book is divided into three parts, reflecting different ways that interaction affects English grammar. **Part I** looks at general issues that confront English language teachers and learners. Why is interaction important for learning English grammar? What does English grammar sound like in a conversation? How does interaction influence English vocabulary? How do we know which version of English is correct? **Part II** examines how social interaction affects English grammar, with a focus on grammatical features based on the verb. How do we indicate when things happen? How do we get information from others? How do we politely get things done? How do we say “no” without offending? **Part III** turns to how interaction with written materials helps us learn academic English. How do we talk or write about things in extended discourse? How do we use grammar in our writing to create images in the mind? How do we use grammar to make our writing seem more educated? How can we use grammar to improve our writing style?

The chapters themselves are organized around grammatical concepts that traditionally interest language teachers, such as the use of negation, verb tenses, and the articles *the* and *a*. Each chapter begins with awareness activities to illustrate how the designated grammatical focus works in social interaction. Then the grammatical concept is reviewed in a way that might be expected in a traditional grammar book. The concept is then placed in the broader context of pragmatics and discourse to show how interaction with other language users brings forth alternative structures. This is followed by a reflection section which contains questions and problems designed to review and extend the concepts

introduced in the chapter. This is followed by a grammar detective exercise designed to help English teachers and language students discover how English is used around them. Each chapter ends with a short collection of teaching ideas. At the end of the book is an answer key for those who do the reflections as a self study.

Thanks go to the thousands of teachers and prospective teachers around the world who participated in earlier versions of these lessons either through courses or through special teacher training workshops. Their enthusiastic reactions made this book possible.