Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar

National Council of Teachers of English

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The ATEG Journal
Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar

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Call for ATEG Journal Submissions

The ATEG Journal is ATEG’S peer-reviewed journal, published annually. Seeking to foster discussion and analysis of the teaching of English grammar at all levels PK-16, we solicit manuscripts that describe best practices of grammar instruction. We encourage submission by all who are passionate about English grammar instruction, including university and college faculty members, PK-12 educators, and graduate students.

Types of Submissions

We welcome original manuscripts on the teaching of English grammar. We accept the following types of submissions:

- Empirical studies (3,000-3,500 words, including references)
- Theoretical- and research-based discussions of teaching practices, including methods and techniques (3,000-3,500 words, including references)
- Critical essays grounded in literature (3,000-3,500 words, including references)
- Lesson plans grounded in literature (3,000-3,500 words, including references)
- Interviews with prominent literacy and language education scholars and PK-16 educators (please consult with the editor prior to submitting an interview)
- Reviews of books, textbooks, software, and other teaching materials (500-1,000 words)

We encourage presenters at the annual ATEG conference to submit article versions of their presentations.

For inquiries about other types of submissions, please contact the editor.

Suggested Topics Related to the Teaching of English Grammar

The following are suggested topics related to English grammar instruction:

- Methods, techniques, and classroom practices
- Language change and variation
- Teacher education
- The writer’s workshop
- Writing, speech, literature, and all forms of discourse
- Technology
- Policies, standards, or assessments
- Materials development or curriculum design
- Diverse student populations, including emergent bilinguals and students from diverse home language backgrounds
Submission Requirements and Procedure

Please follow the guidelines below for all submissions:

• Submissions should conform to APA style and should be a minimum of 3,000 words and not exceed 3,500 words, including references. Reviews should be between 500-1,000 words, including references. For inquiries about longer submissions, please contact the editor.

• For article-length manuscripts, include an abstract (maximum 150 words) on the first page. Begin the body of the manuscript on the second page.

• Submit manuscripts as Word documents, double-spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman.

• Attach a separate Word document that contains tables and figures.

• Submissions should be formatted according to the guidelines set by Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th Edition, including page numbers, references, margins, and headings.

• Article submissions (empirical studies, discussions of teaching practices, and critical essays) will be blind reviewed by two referees; therefore, these manuscripts should exclude author information and any references to the author.

• For lesson plan submissions, please refer to the ATEG Journal Lesson Plan Submission Guidelines available online at https://ateg.weebly.com/ATEG-Journal.html

• It is the author’s responsibility to ensure the submission is original and that paraphrased information and quotations are cited correctly.

To submit your manuscript, send an email to the editor, Adam King, at ateg.editor@gmail.com. In the subject line of your email, type “ATEG Journal submission and your first and last name”. Attach your manuscript as a Word document. Also, attach a title page as a Word document that includes the following information:

Manuscript title:
Date of ATEG Journal submission:
Contact author's name:
Contact author's email:
Contact author's telephone number:
Contact author's bio: Include one to three sentences of biographical information.

If there are additional authors, include their name(s) and the same information required of the contact author listed above, as well as the order of authorship.

The editor will respond as soon as possible and appreciates your patience.
Message from the Editor

The coronavirus pandemic has been impacting our lives and communities for well over a year. In the US, the pandemic shone a light on systemic racism and exacerbated inequities in access to education, healthcare, housing, and jobs. Persons from every sector of society had to live and work under new conditions and respond socially and creatively to address the challenges caused by the pandemic. The efforts of millions of persons—including invaluable essential workers and scientists—are responsible for the progress we are now seeing in parts of the world in reducing infection and mortality rates. Teachers, in particular, played essential roles by serving and supporting students and their families thereby ensuring that our educational institutions and communities continued to function.

We must recognize that although some countries, including the US, are reopening and infection rates have dropped significantly since the distribution of vaccines, the pandemic is not over, and many continue to experience hardship and devastation. Acknowledging that we are still experiencing the multifaceted reality of enduring a pandemic, the members of the ATEG Journal editorial board and I hope this issue will provide you with ideas, inspiration, and resources to continue your work as educators. This issue features two scholarly articles and three book reviews.

In the first article, “Anti-Oppressive Grammar Instruction: A Call to Action for Educators,” Sean Ruday advocates for the adoption of an instructional framework that promotes inclusive practices and student agency. Ruday provides a process that can be implemented across many grade levels and includes student-centered instructional methods and teacher and student reflection. This process includes three steps: reflect on the ways in which language use and instruction are oppressive, including the discriminatory and exclusionary characteristics of grammar instruction; develop assignments based on real-world inquiry; and invite students to reflect on matters of exclusivity and inclusivity in language use and instruction.

In the second article, “Dotting, Slanting and Crossing Lines: Sentence Diagramming as a Scaffold to Teacher Candidates’ Metalinguistic Awareness,” Taylor Norman and Nancy Remler share the results of an action research project in which they analyzed the extent to which sentence diagramming instruction affected middle-grade ELA teacher candidates’ metalinguistic awareness, pedagogical grammar knowledge, and confidence to teach language conventions. Results from pre- and post-tests, surveys, and summative assessments indicate that the sentence diagramming instruction increased participants’ metalinguistic awareness; however, results were mixed regarding participants’ confidence to teach certain grammatical concepts.

Acknowledgements

This is the last issue of the ATEG Journal in which I am editor. This editorship has been an honor, and I am most grateful to be a part of and learn from the wonderful ATEG community. I am delighted to share with you that the journal will continue to be in good hands. It is my pleasure to introduce Adam King as the incoming ATEG Journal editor. A disciple of Amy Benjamin, King has taught independent school literature, grammar, and composition for nearly a decade in the Midwest. King is an award-winning filmmaker and screenwriter and is currently completing an MA in English at Arizona State University.

During my tenure as editor, the goals of the editorial board have been to increase the quality, accessibility, and readership of the journal and fulfill ATEG’s mission to promote approaches to grammar instruction that are inclusive and non-discriminatory. To meet these aims, we established a double-blind review process of submissions, developed new types of submissions, and updated the journal website. Additionally, we launched a new ATEG logo and branding campaign, evident in this issue. These accomplishments were realized through the hard work and dedication of ATEG Co-Presidents, Sean Ruday and Sharon Saylors; ATEG Vice President, Bradley Bethel; and ATEG Journal Associate Editor, Kevin Thomas. These individuals are inspirational, gracious, and simply the best to work with. Additionally, Chris Bradshaw, Director of Printing Service, and Monica Rouech, Pre-Press Specialist, at Central Michigan University Printing Services were instrumental in the production and dissemination of both the print and online versions of the journal. Lastly, this journal would not be possible without the anonymous reviewers and contributing authors and the support of ATEG members.

Thank you for your support of the ATEG Journal. I wish you an enjoyable and safe summer and academic year!

April M. Burke
Editor

July 7, 2021
Message from ATEG’s Leadership Group
Sean Ruday, Sharon Saylors, Bradley Bethel, April M. Burke

Dear ATEG community,

One June 12th, 2021, ATEG Co-President Sean Ruday went with his thirteen-year-old son to a rally in Washington, DC at which teachers pledged to engage in inclusive and anti-racist teaching practices in their schools. While attending the event, Sean thought about the importance of ATEG and its mission to promote inclusive and non-discriminatory language and grammar instruction. Through this mission, ATEG is working to positively impact the field of grammar pedagogy by promoting classroom instruction that respects students’ identities, cultures, and experiences.

This issue of the ATEG Journal and the 2021 ATEG Conference’s focus on inclusivity represents our organization’s values and our commitment to supporting inclusive, culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and culturally sustaining (Paris, 2012) grammar instruction. We feel that grammar instruction plays a central role in constructing supportive and inclusive environments in today’s schools by incorporating inclusive terms, using students’ pronouns, implementing gender-neutral language, and rejecting oppressive practices such as Anti-Black Linguistic Racism (Baker-Bell, 2020).

As teachers, we have seen the positive changes that result when we begin the process of creating an inclusive classroom. Most importantly, our students are empowered to become agents of change themselves. We are honored that you are in community with us as we work toward these essential goals and we greatly appreciate your support.

Sincerely,

Sean Ruday, ATEG Co-President
Sharon Saylors, ATEG Co-President
Bradley Bethel, ATEG Vice President
April M. Burke, ATEG Journal Editor

References
Anti-Oppressive Grammar Instruction:
A Call to Action for Educators
Sean Ruday

Sean Ruday is Associate Professor and Program Coordinator of English education at Longwood University. He is Co-President of ATEG, the founding editor of the Journal of Literacy Innovation, and the author of twelve books on grammar, writing, and literacy instruction, all published by Routledge Eye on Education.

Abstract

In this manuscript, the author calls for educators to reflect on the assumptions and biases embedded in language and grammar instruction and to identify ways some approaches to grammar instruction may function in exclusionary ways and reduce student agency in the classroom. With these reflections and identifications in mind, the author urges educators to adopt an anti-oppressive framework to grammar instruction, defined here as an approach to grammar instruction with two key components: 1) it acknowledges as problematic ways language and grammar pedagogy have the potential to be used to exclude students' perspective and reduce their agency and 2) it works to create equitable and inclusive grammar and language instruction. The anti-oppressive approach to grammar instruction the author describes does the following: recognizes ways language is used in oppressive ways, centers students' authentic language experiences, and asks students to use an inquiry lens to think about issues of exclusivity and inclusivity in the English language.

Anti-Oppressive Grammar Instruction: A Call to Action for Educators

Building on the essential works of Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) and Django Paris (2012), who addressed culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogies, respectively, in their seminal works, “the notion that teaching and learning must acknowledge students’ social, linguistic, and cultural assets is becoming more widely accepted today, particularly in urban education” (Woodard et al., 2017, p. 216). These asset-based practices that incorporate and value students' out-of-school lives, cultures, and backgrounds (Gay, 2002) have become even more significant recently as many educators work toward adopting anti-racist (Kendi, 2019) principles in their instruction. Culturally sustaining pedagogy, for example, “requires that [our pedagogies] support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (Paris, 2012, p. 95). This instructional framework is essential to equitable pedagogy that creates space for our students' identities (Lyiscott, 2019), connects to their authentic funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), and establishes relevance to students' lives (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005).

An especially significant concept for educators to consider they work to make their instruction equitable is the idea of curriculum violence, which Ighodaro and Wiggan (2010) defined as the “deliberate manipulation of academic programming in a manner that ignores or compromises the intellectual and psychological well-being of learners” (p. 2). Jones (2020) further elaborated on this concept by asserting that curriculum that is damaging to students' intellectual and emotional development can be con-
structed intentionally or unintentionally. The concept of curricular violence has direct connections to grammar instruction that lacks a culturally sustaining (Paris, 2012) orientation and instead focuses entirely on a rule-oriented prescriptive approach to teaching and learning about grammar and language. Methods of grammar instruction that approach language as a set of inflexible rules and emphasize “correctness” are a form of curriculum violence due to the lack of inclusivity and language variations represented in those approaches and the fact that the form of English grammar taught in schools is “most typically associated with middle-class white speakers” (Woodard & Kline, 2016, p. 6).

Baker-Bell (2020) calls attention to issues of curricular violence in language arts curricula by identifying practices that “perpetuate anti-Black linguistic racism” such as “eradicationist language pedagogies,” which seek “to eradicate Black Language from students' linguistic repertoires and replace it with White Mainstream English” and “respectability language pedagogies,” the goal of which is “to simply use Black Language as a bridge to learn White Mainstream English” (p. 8). By identifying these examples of curricular violence and working to dismantle them, educators can make progress toward anti-oppressive language and grammar instruction and validate the experiences of students who have traditionally been victimized by harmful exclusive practices.

What are the Key Aspects of Anti-Oppressive Grammar Instruction?

These examples convey the need for a reflective, equitable, and inclusive approach to grammar and language instruction. With this in mind, I encourage educators to adopt an anti-oppressive framework to grammar instruction. This approach has two key principles: 1) it acknowledges as problematic how language and grammar pedagogy can be used in inequitable and exclusive ways and 2) it works to create equitable and inclusive grammar and language instruction by centering students' authentic language uses and reflections on grammar and language. These fundamental components represent key starting points to this instructional approach and are important concepts and practices essential to its effectiveness.

The first principle is significant because of the harm that can be done to students if their grammar and language pedagogy is structured in exclusionary ways based on deficit language ideologies (Lanehart, 2002). Lanehart described harmful attributes and effects of deficit-based approaches to grammar and language instruction:

One aspect of deficit language ideology is the belief that if something is not ‘standard’ English, it is not grammatical or that sloppy people use sloppy grammar. These language ideologies transfer to beliefs about people who command different languages or varieties of English and, therefore, reveal underlying power dynamics related to language and equity. (p. 180)

By identifying this language ideology and recognizing its harmful impacts, educators can take an important initial step toward equitable grammar and language instruction. Reflecting on deficit language ideology and its role in how grammar is taught can help us build awareness of what it looks like in practice and the ways it can function as an oppressive system. If we are aware of the language and equity-related power dynam-
ics that Lanehart (2002) described, we can take purposeful action toward implementing inclusive instructional practices that validate students’ authentic uses of language.

The second principle of anti-oppressive grammar instruction builds on the first: after identifying inequitable deficit-based language practices, we can create equitable and inclusive grammar and language instruction by centering students’ authentic language uses. By centering students’ usage of grammatical concepts and linguistic tools, we can build culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and sustaining (Paris, 2012) grammar instruction. Ladson-Billings’ description of teachers who successfully implemented culturally relevant teaching is particularly relevant to this principle: these teachers felt invested in the communities in which they taught, strongly believed that all students could succeed, and centered students in the curriculum through “fluid and equitable” relationships that created space for students to share their ideas and perspectives in the classroom (p. 163). Paris’ (2012) presented the concept of culturally sustaining pedagogy as “a new term and a new approach” that builds off of Ladson-Billings’ discussion of culturally relevant teaching, explaining:

I offer the term culturally sustaining pedagogy as an alternative that I believe embodies some of the best past and present research and practice in the resource pedagogy tradition and as a term that supports the value of our multi-ethnic and multilingual present and future. (p. 95)

The anti-oppressive approach to grammar instruction described in this piece is based on both Ladson-Billings’ (1995) and Paris’ (2012) insights. It is fundamentally rooted in the asset-based pedagogy that both approaches champion, valuing the way culturally relevant teaching centers students in the curriculum through fluid and equitable instructional practices, as well as the updated terminology and stance associated with culturally sustaining pedagogy, such as the way “culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 95).

Continuing in the vein of anti-racist pedagogy, anti-oppressive pedagogy uses cultural sustainability to address the many forms of oppression conveyed through a prescriptive grammar tradition. To construct inclusive, equitable, and anti-oppressive grammar instruction for our students, we can incorporate instructional practices that convey authentic investments in how students use grammatical concepts and linguistic tools in their lives and communities. By equipping students with the knowledge of grammatical concepts that are important to effective writing (Ruday, 2020a) and helping them reflect on how they use those concepts in authentic ways, we can construct grammar and language instruction that centers students’ experiences in realities and provides organic opportunities for them to demonstrate knowledge of grammar and language.

**How Does Anti-Oppressive Grammar Instruction Look in Practice?**

In this section, I describe a multistep process that teachers can implement when putting anti-oppressive grammar instruction into action in their instruction. This instructional process combines teacher reflection, student-centered instructional methods, and student reflection. To work toward adopting an anti-oppressive framework to grammar instruction, I recommend doing the following:
• Reflect on ways language and language instruction is used in oppressive ways.
• Center students’ authentic language experiences through real-world inquiry.
• Ask students to reflect on issues of exclusivity and inclusivity in the English language and its instruction.

These instructional steps are designed to help educators put the fundamental principles of anti-oppressive grammar instruction into practice in their instruction and can be applied and adapted across a variety of grade levels. By incorporating these practices, teachers can develop awareness of problematic aspects of language and grammar pedagogy that are used inequitably while also constructing student-centered instructional experiences based on authentic uses and meaningful reflections. Now, we will take a look at each step of this instructional process:

**Step One: Reflect on Ways Language and Language Instruction is Used in Oppressive Ways**

Before beginning an instructional process focused on anti-oppressive language and grammar instruction, it's important that educators reflect on the ways that language and language are used in oppressive ways. By engaging in such reflection, we can identify problematic and exclusionary practices, consider what makes them problematic, and think about ways we will avoid those types of practices in our future instruction. To facilitate this type of reflection, we can ask ourselves the following questions:

- What are aspects of language and grammar instruction that exclude students?
- How can those exclusionary aspects cause harm to students?
- What are ways we can avoid those exclusionary practices in our instruction and incorporate inclusive practices instead?

The exclusionary aspects of grammar instruction can take a wide range of forms, such as deficit ideologies that dismiss students' authentic language practices (Lanehart, 2002), the methods of anti-Black linguistic racism Baker-Bell (2020) describes, and gender-binary-based language that does not use inclusive terms of direct address (Ruday, 2019) as well as other types.

By reflecting on these components, we can identify these practices and think about the ways they negatively impact students. For example, language that focuses on gender binaries or makes assumptions about students' gender identities creates an exclusionary atmosphere for nonbinary individuals. In addition, instructional approaches that are based on deficit-oriented perspectives send harmful messages about language varieties and individuals who communicate using them (Lanehart, 2002). Considering how exclusionary language practices effect students is important because it helps us understand the negative impact that these approaches can have on whether or not students feel welcome and included in the classroom. If an English language arts class is characterized by language and/or language instruction that results in students feeling excluded, it is unlikely that the student will view that classroom as a place where they are welcome and valued. In addition, if the language used and the associated instruction in a class privileges some students over others, the resulting environment will be an inequitable one.
Following these reflections, we can think about ways for us to implement equitable grammar and language usage and instruction with our students, thereby avoiding exclusionary practices. Some forms of grammar and language usage and instruction that can work toward creating an inclusive environment are using the singular “they,” incorporating gender neutral terms, and using mentor texts that represent a variety of language forms. The first two of these practices, using the singular “they” and incorporating gender neutral terms, are forms of grammar and language usage that are meant to establish a gender inclusive environment that does not assume gender binaries and is inclusive of all gender identities. While these are examples of language use, they also have direct application to our instruction: educators can talk with students about why we make these language choices and explain how language can be used as a tool for inclusivity in our communication. The third practice, using mentor texts that represent a range of linguistic forms, is an important method for establishing an inclusive environment that values all linguistic registers, helping students see all forms of language, especially those they encounter in their out-of-school lives as valid and important (Wheeler & Swords, 2006). Incorporating a linguistic range of mentor texts positions all forms of language equally (Machado et al., 2018), which works to create an inclusive environment. It is important to note that these mentor texts can represent a wide range of modalities, encompassing not only print-oriented texts but multimedia works such as videos, signs, social media posts, and more. These texts can represent a range of linguistic styles, dialects, and variations that embody language students encounter in authentic settings. This range and variation of possible texts can enhance the sense of inclusivity in language instruction.

**Step Two: Center Students’ Authentic Language Experiences Through Real-World Inquiry**

After reflecting on oppressive uses of language and its associated instruction, I recommend continuing this process through an instructional practice that uses real-world inquiry to center students’ authentic language experiences and provide with them with relevant examples of how grammatical concepts are used (Ruday, 2020b). This instructional practice, which I call The Grammar Inquiry Project, asks students to identify examples of grammatical concepts in their out-of-school lives and share the results of those inquiries. The teaching and learning process associated with The Grammar Inquiry project consists of four steps:

1. Discuss the purposeful use of grammatical concepts, making connections to a range of texts.
2. Introduce The Grammar Inquiry Project, modeling your own inquiries and analyses.
3. Confer with students, focusing on both identification and analysis.
4. Create opportunities for students to share the results of their inquiries with peers and community members.

As these steps suggest, this process focuses on how grammatical concepts are purposefully used in a range of contexts. In the first step, teachers talk with students about how grammatical concepts they have studied are used in a range of contexts, such as literature, song lyrics, and everyday communication. In the second step, the
teacher will introduce The Grammar Inquiry project, “explaining to them that they will be engaging in an activity in which they each find an example of a grammatical concept in a text of their choosing and share with the class what that example is and why it is important to the effectiveness of the text in which it appears” (Ruday, 2020b, p. 24). As part of this introduction, we can model examples of grammatical concepts we have identified in texts that we encountered in our out-of-school lives and our thoughts on the importance of the concept, providing students with an example of what this activity can look like. During the third step of the process, educators meet with students individually to guide them through their identifications and analyses. Finally, in the fourth step, students share these identifications and analyses with classmates and other community members if possible. I have used this instructional process with an eighth-grade English class with great success: students were engaged in the material, felt grammar instruction was relevant, and enjoyed opportunities to share their ideas with authentic audiences (Ruday, 2020b). I feel the benefits of this process would be present in a variety of grade levels with adaptations of grammatical concepts to align with students in those grade levels, as the core principles of authenticity and relevance can benefit learners of a range of ages (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

This instructional process is designed to maximize student agency by providing a learner-centered alternative to out-of-context grammar instruction. Its goal is to help students understand how grammatical concepts and strategies are used in authentic real-world contexts. Through these practices, this process merges principles of culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally sustaining (Paris, 2012) pedagogy with grammar instruction, providing students with authentic connections to how grammatical concepts apply to their experiences and increasing their sense of ownership of these concepts. Ruday (2020b) describes the benefits of this approach:

> By seeing authentic and relevant examples of grammar concepts and considering their significance, students can develop increased ownership of grammar: it no longer becomes something that only exists in grammar textbooks and worksheets; it instead can be seen as a meaningful part of their out-of-school lives and lived experiences. (p. 23)

This relationship between grammatical concepts and students’ lived experiences is essential to establishing an equitable and anti-oppressive approach to grammar instruction. While grammar instruction is often something “done to” students through a worksheet-based (Woltjer, 1998) and deficit-oriented (Lanehart, 2002) model that focuses on correcting errors and identifying mistakes, the inquiry-based framework described here emphasizes students’ authentic language uses, interactions, and analyses. For example, a student who identifies an example of a strong verb they used on social media or in a song they listen to and analyses the significance of that strong verb to the text in which it was used is engaged in a real-world inquiry that maximizes their agency. Similarly, a student who finds examples of figurative language in a sports broadcast on television or in an online article about a sporting event and reflects on the impact of that language on the effectiveness of that communication would take part in an authentic inquiry focused on this concept. This approach to grammar instruction centers students and their authentic language uses and experiences in ways that worksheet-based and deficit-oriented grammar instruction does not. The authentic
language experiences and corresponding examples central to this approach can take a range of forms, including, but not limited to, conversations, books, articles, song lyrics, language encountered on social media, and other forms of language. This form of grammar instruction takes an inclusive approach to grammar and language, valuing all uses of grammatical concepts and recognizing them as important and valuable.

Step Three: Ask Students to Reflect on Issues of Exclusivity and Inclusivity in the English Language and its Instruction.

This step of the instructional process centers students in another way by asking them to reflect on issues of exclusivity and inclusivity in the English language and in English language instruction. By asking students to engage in this reflection and share their perspectives on how the English language and its associated instruction is used in both exclusive and inclusive ways, we can help students develop the critical consciousness that Ladson-Billings (1995) describes as a key component of culturally relevant teaching. Specifically, Ladson-Billings asserts that one of the three components of culturally relevant teaching is that “students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (p. 160). To engage students in this reflection, I recommend asking them to think about the structure, use, and instruction of the English language and then to reflect on how these components of language and its instruction privilege certain identities and backgrounds. The specific questions and prompts to which students respond can take a range of forms and can be adapted for different grade levels.

For example, we can ask students reflective questions such as

- What have you noticed about learning grammar in your educational experience?
- Do you feel all forms of language are valued in grammar instruction? Why or why not?
- Do you think the English language values all identities and backgrounds? Why or why not?

By considering these questions, students can reflect on their experiences with grammar instruction and share their perspectives on issues of inclusivity and exclusivity in the English language and how it is taught. These questions are designed to help students begin to reflect on important issues of exclusivity and inclusivity. After students engage in initial reflection, we can further prompt students to think specific topics related to this concept:

Teachers might ask their students to comment on the idea of standard English… by encouraging them to think about which perspectives are valued in standard English and what the features of standard English say about society in general. Teachers could also encourage their students to think about pronoun use in English by asking them to reflect on which pronouns they most hear and how pronoun use has evolved over time. (Ruday, 2019, p. 22)

Through these types of questions and reflections, we can create space for students’ insights on the English language and construct opportunities for them to engage in the critical-consciousness-raising work that Ladson Billings (1995) describes as
essential to culturally relevant teaching. These conversations and analyses can help students engage in authentic and meaningful inquiries about language and its connections to cultural and societal issues. For example, reflections on the idea of standard English can lead students to think analytically about how issues of curriculum violence (Ighodaro & Wiggan, 2010; Jones, 2020) and linguistic racism (Baker-Bell, 2020) are present in schools; students can think critically about the kinds of linguistic forms that schools typically prioritize and the ways this connects to existing societal power structures. Similarly, students who reflect on issues related to pronoun use and gender-neutral language can comment on the role of language in creating inclusive environments or in failing to construct such environments, depending on the specific linguistic choices that are made. For instance, students could examine situations in which gender-neutral language is or is not used and reflect on the larger implications of those language choices. By engaging in these experiences, students can develop an increased awareness of how the English language has been used to exclude as well as how it can be used to include, thereby aligned with the features and goals of anti-oppressive grammar instruction.

Conclusion

It is essential that educators acknowledge the impact and power of language and grammar instruction. We live in an important educational time in which problematic educational practices are being identified and challenged. Educators and researchers have described how curriculum violence (Ighodaro & Wiggan, 2010; Jones, 2020), deficit-related language instruction (Lanehart, 2002), and “anti-Black linguistic racism” (Baker-Bell, 2020, p. 8) contribute to inequities in today’s schools and have shared important insights about the equitable benefits associated with culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally sustaining (Paris, 2012) pedagogy that creates space for students (Lyiscott, 2019) and is relevant to their out-of-school lives (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005).

These curricular issues reflect important social, political, and cultural movements in society that work to identify and challenge oppressive systems and work toward an equitable society. As grammar and language teachers, we need to do similar work in our instruction in order to create inclusive, equitable, and anti-oppressive learning environments for our students. These practices can maximize students’ linguistic agency by centering their identities and experiences in the classroom. Rather than focusing on issues of “correctness” or “incorrectness,” which are inherently problematic, we can center our students’ linguistic experiences, thereby valuing their individual identities and perspectives. If we fail to reflect on and challenge oppressive systems and practices associated with the teaching and learning of grammar and language, we will not take the steps necessary to make our instruction inclusive and equitable. Similarly, it is important that educators understand that grammar instruction is not ideologically neutral—the way that we approach grammar and issues of exclusivity and inclusivity associated with it communicates our position on these topics to our students. If we teach grammar and language in ways that reject oppressive practices, value students’ language experiences and identities, and facilitate their reflections
on issues of exclusivity and inclusivity in the English language, we send students an important message about how much we value them and their language identities.

References


Dotting, Slanting and Crossing Lines: Sentence Diagramming as a Scaffold to Teacher Candidates’ Metalinguistic Awareness

Taylor Norman, Nancy Remler

Taylor Norman is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Middle Grades and Secondary Education at Georgia Southern University. After a career as a rural high school English teacher, Taylor attended Purdue University for her graduate degrees in English Education. With a background in English language arts pedagogy, Taylor’s research stories the identities and practices of preservice and inservice English language arts teachers in order to build bridges between theory and practice in middle grade and secondary language arts classrooms.

Nancy Remler is an Associate Professor in the Department of Middle Grades and Secondary Education at Georgia Southern University. With graduate degrees in English and English Education, she has taught high school English, first-year composition and advanced composition at the university level. After publishing two novels, she then led Georgia Southern’s faculty development programs. Currently, as a teacher educator, she also engages in research investigating best practices of online learning and pedagogical content knowledge of preservice secondary English language arts teachers.

Abstract

The field of English language arts (ELA) teacher education generally agrees that grammar and usage should be taught rhetorically and in context (Crovitz & Devereaux, 2016, 2020; Devereaux & Crovitz, 2018; Elbow, 1981; Weaver 1996a, 1996b, 2007); yet, a teacher’s lack of grammatical content knowledge can affect this theoretical approach to grammar instruction. After recognizing a lack of grammatical knowledge among their four middle-grade ELA teacher candidates (TCs) at a southern regional university, two teacher educators conducted an action research project analyzing grammatical knowledge growth in relation to confidence level through the intervention of sentence diagramming. This study asserts that when ELA TCs learn the purpose of dotting, slanting, and crossing lines in sentence diagrams, metalinguistic awareness of sentence structures and parts of speech is gained. Pre- and post-test data, participant surveys, and summative assessments indicate that sentence diagramming supports TCs’ grammatical knowledge and, subsequently, the growth of their pedagogical content knowledge.

I have always had a hard time with grammar, and even though I passed with an A in my grammar and linguistics for teachers class, I retained none of the information and would fail if I took the final again.

– English language arts (ELA) preservice teacher in her senior year

Unfortunately, this passage is common among undergraduate preservice teachers enrolled in their senior-level ELA methods courses. We two ELA teacher educators have witnessed teacher candidates (TCs) struggling to apply grammatical content knowledge to the pedagogies recommended by Crovitz & Devereaux (2016, 2020) and Weaver (1996a, 2007). Often, our TCs already demonstrate strong writing and
speaking skills and feel confident in using the language, as indicated in the above epigram. Where they lack confidence is in explaining it. That lack of confidence presents a significant obstacle to their learning to teach grammar and usage through mentor texts and students’ writing (Weaver, 1996a, 1996b, 2007; Crovitz & Devereaux, 2016, 2020). In fact, we’ve often observed TCs yielding to the urge to teach the way they were taught (Farrell, 1999), even though the skill-and-drill, isolated approach to sentence analysis became stagnant in the late 1800s (Hartwell, 1985).

These TCs join an alarming number of people on the verge of entering the middle-secondary ELA classroom who do not know how to employ effective instruction in language conventions (Topping & Hoffman, 2006). This phenomenon points to an unfortunate domino effect of low grammar confidence in middle-secondary students, some of whom will move forward to become ELA teachers themselves.

Embracing an action-research opportunity, we embarked on an attempt to build TCs’ metalinguistic awareness, an ability which develops as early childhood readers and writers learn to recognize semantic and phonemic structures, and when adolescent and adult readers and writers learn to interpret texts explicitly and critically by analyzing language structures, usage, and mechanics (Homer, 2009; Trybulec, 2021). We hypothesized that sentence diagramming activities would strengthen TCs’ metalinguistic awareness of English grammar, thereby heightening their confidence in teaching the complex and often inconsistent linguistic structures. With a stronger confidence in teaching their subject matter—coined by Shulman (1984, 1986, 1987) as pedagogical content knowledge—TCs would also enhance their ability to teach grammar in the context of reading and writing activity as espoused by Weaver (1996a, 1996b, 2007), Crovitz & Devereaux (2016, 2020) and Devereaux & Crovitz (2018). Perhaps diagramming was the “metacognitive tool” that could “increase students’ awareness of their own language usage” (Cook, 2020, p. 14).

Because of a past educational experience in Taylor’s life, we added Reed and Kellogg’s (1896) sentence diagrams as a scaffold to our context-based grammar instruction. While studying linguistic and syntactic structures as a TC, Taylor learned to diagram and found great value in it once an ELA teacher. Learning to dot, slant, and cross lines in order to show her knowledge of grammatical functions proved a valuable tool when planning contextual and rhetorical grammar instruction. Like Classics scholar Mulroy (2003), who theorizes that grammar analysis and sentence diagramming are important tools when understanding syntactic categories as well as parts of speech, Taylor’s undergraduate linguistic professor believed diagramming sentences would build ELA TCs grammatical content knowledge. Years later, this study gave us a chance to evaluate these theories. So, we investigated the impact of sentence-diagramming instruction on our TCs’ learning by asking a three-part research question: To what extent does instruction in sentence diagramming, specifically for parts of speech, independent/dependent clauses, and prepositional/verbal phrases, affect preservice teachers’ a) metalinguistic awareness, b) grammar pedagogical content knowledge and c) confidence in teaching language conventions?
The Grammar Issue

The TC quoted above, and others like her, are products of a data-driven educational system that measures grammatical correctness on state-mandated objective tests and college entrance exams. Despite the wealth of research demonstrating the ineffectiveness of direct grammar instruction (Burgess, et al., 2000; Turvey, 2000; Weaver, 1996a, 1996b, DiStefano & Killion, 1984), American schools still measure academic achievement with objective tests assessing isolated grammatical concepts. Those assessment results show less about students’ metalinguistic awareness and more about which students are (and are not) fluent in the socially-situated discourse of the American student, which places influent students at a direct disadvantage (Devereaux & Crovitz, 2018; Trybulec, 2021). Nevertheless, ELA teachers—even those who support contextual methods—teach grammar overtly and in isolation to prepare students for those tests, often relying on computer programs or skill-and-drill warm-up exercises in the first ten minutes of class. Consequently, Shaughnessy (1977) shows that students are looking for prescriptive, rather than contextual or rhetorical, ways to avoid errors, so the cycle continues.

Our Position on Sentence Diagramming

We recognize the seeming hypocrisy in our strategy. For decades, NCTE leaders have agreed “that diagramming is of little value” in strengthening speaking and writing skills. (NCTE, 1955, p. 135). In fact, NCTE’s (1985) position on teaching grammar is that “the use of isolated grammar and usage exercises not supported by theory and research is a deterrent to the improvement of students’ speaking and writing” (para. 2).

We agree. That is why we included sentence diagramming in the context of our TCs’ learning about reading and writing best practices. What’s more, we recognize the value of sentence analysis as a means of engaging analytical skills, of opening that “window into the human mind and our amazingly complex mental capacity” (Dikici, 2012, p. 207). Our purpose for grammar instruction was not to refine our TCs’ spoken and written skills (we employed appropriate best practices for those skills), but to use diagrams as a springboard for “talk[ing] about language,” its patterns, and its inconsistencies (NCTE, 2002, para. 1). Through those discussions we intended to heighten TCs’ metalinguistic awareness.

While we appreciate the controversy surrounding sentence diagramming, we can't help noticing that enthusiasm for the exercise lives on, as evidenced by the websites (O’Brien, 2020; Burgturf, n.d.; “Sentence Diagramming,” 2020), recently-published books (Florey, 2006; Moutoux, 2010; Hefty, et al., 2007), YouTube videos (“Grammar Table,” 2020a, 2020b; Tedx Talks, 2019) and news articles (Landecker, 2009; Summers, 2014; Stinson, 2014) applauding the sentence analysis activity. We posit that for those future teachers who claim, I know this is correct, but I can’t explain why, diagramming might serve as one way (but not the only way) “to distill data down into finite tiers so as to see a larger form” (Tedx Talks, 2019). If TCs can articulate the functions of words, phrases and clauses, perhaps they can better help their future students understand the same.
Method

Invoking Shulman’s contention (1984, 1986, 1987) that pedagogical content knowledge requires strong content knowledge, we embraced Kemmis and McTaggart’s (1988) four-moment action-research model of reflecting, planning, acting, and observing. Our reflecting and planning moments occurred during Fall 2019 conversations about supporting TCs who had limited grammatical content knowledge. Our acting and observing phases began in the spring of 2019 with the introduction of sentence diagramming to our grammar instruction.

Data collection consisted of TC surveys, pre- and post-test results, and summative classroom artifacts. We triangulated data from our multiple sources, theorizing they would suggest a valid solution to a practical problem (Willis 2008). We designed a pre- and post-test (Appendix A) and a summative assignment (Appendix B) to align with state standards required in languages conventions for grades 4-7 (Georgia Department of Education, 2020a). The survey (Appendix C), adapted from qualitative self-efficacy and mindset surveys (Dweck, 2006; Keown, 2017; Lee & Tsai, 2010), measured TCs’ confidence levels regarding their knowledge of subject matter and effectiveness in teaching subject matter. We administered the surveys three times through the semester, at weeks three, eight and thirteen, to measure increased confidence levels over time.

Findings

Surveys

Surveys asked participants to gauge their confidence in teaching grammatical concepts on a four-point scale ranging from not confident to absolutely confident. Results indicate an overall increase in TCs’ confidence levels, with few slight dips. Overall confidence levels with most concepts increased slightly although confidence levels about complements and verbal phrases revealed slight lapses. Initial survey results show that TCs already felt confident or absolutely confident with parts of speech and independent/dependent clauses, so some lapses in confidence after sustained critical thinking about concepts might be understandable. The question about clauses was closely related to the question about sentence types, but the analytical level reflected in the latter question is more advanced, so it makes sense that confidence levels about sentence types be slightly lower than those about clauses.

Questions about parts of speech and complements also show moderate increases in confidence levels. The question about verbals reveals an initial significant increase in confidence with a slight decrease by the final survey. Such a dip is also understandable, given that verbals are so varied and can easily be confused for verbs and prepositions. Across the study in general, however, TCs revealed increased confidence about verbals.

Pre-/Post-Test Results

The four TCs completed an assessment on their ability to describe, define or provide examples of all eight parts of speech, the four types of sentences, the types of verbs and four common phrases, concepts expected of students by grades 6-7, per the
state’s Language Progressive Skills Chart (Georgia Department of Education, 2020a). We analyzed data for accuracy and TCs’ decisions to answer or skip over test items.

Post-tests show all four participants correctly answering more items than they did on the pre-test. Furthermore, they attempted more items on the post-test, leaving only 12 unanswered items collectively as contrasted against the 36 unanswered items on the pre-test. Specifically, TCs tended to omit pre-test answers about verb types and verbal phrases; however, they attempted to answer those questions on the post-test. Their errors in those post-test answers point to the slightly elevated confidence revealed in the confidence-level surveys. Moreover, the attempted answers on the post-test bear similarity to linguistic research in error analysis that identifies student errors as partially formed concepts and as signifiers of students’ work in their zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Of the four items about verb type, pre-tests show participants attempting the second item only. The three participants who tried to define, describe or give an example of the linking verb failed to do so. On the post-test, however, all participants attempted and correctly answered this item. The first item assessing their knowledge of intransitive verbs still revealed some confusion; nevertheless, two participants attempted an answer. Other patterns emerged in the pre- and post-test data as well. Regarding phrases, they defined and identified more phrases on the post-test--showing an increased success with identifying infinitive and gerund phrases. These attempted answers, either correct or incorrect, show an increase in TCs’ metalinguistic awareness. On the pre-test, three of the four TCs’ did not attempt or have working knowledge of the four verbal phrases listed. After the intervention of sentence diagramming, the post-test showed that they could recognize a concept well enough to attempt an answer.

We infer from these data that learning occurred over the several weeks of data collection and that learning accounts for the elevated confidence levels indicated on the confidence surveys.

**Summative Classroom Artifact**

To bridge theory and practice, participants completed an end-of-term activity applying their metalinguistic awareness of rhetorical and contextual grammar instruction. The activity required TCs to harness their sentence analysis and sentence diagramming knowledge by selecting three sentences from any text, labeling and diagramming the sentences, and reflecting on the activity.

TCs chose sentences from sports articles, works of fiction, and even email messages to label and diagram. They could have selected any sentence from their chosen texts—even the simplest sentence possible. Instead, their chosen sentences revealed relatively sophisticated thinking. Diagrams included compound subjects or verbs, multiple phrases, and various types of complements. In fact, one TC wrote in her reflection, “I do not know what I was thinking when I chose these sentences, but I chose some difficult ones.”

TCs’ choices of complicated sentences suggest growing confidence. For instance, one TC declared gradual increased confidence with verbals so that by the final survey
she gauged herself as “confident.” Those survey responses align with her choices in the summative activity. She analyzed several sentences, each including multiple phrases, thereby increasing her likelihood of diagramming verbals. For example, two of her sentences included infinitives: *I took the time to survey her kitchen and Want to go for a walk tonight?* This TC did make errors in diagramming those infinitives, designating them instead as prepositional phrases (a very common error given that *to* can function as a preposition as well as the first word of the verb’s infinitive form). Nevertheless, this same TC correctly diagrammed all other phrases (which were prepositional phrases) in her sentences. She also correctly diagrammed her direct objects and an understood *you* subject.

Another TC diagrammed the sentence *Results will not be available to faculty until the final grading period is over* this way:

![Diagram of sentence](image)

The TC has incorrectly identified the verb, predicate adjective and dependent clause; however, her choice of a complex sentence mirrors her increased confidence as indicated by her confidence surveys. Initially, this TC communicated minimal confidence at explaining the function of clauses in complex sentences and described herself as not at all confident with predicate nominatives/adjectives. In her second survey, though, she responded as feeling absolutely confident in both areas. Still, when she selected the above sentence for diagramming, she opted not to simplify it, but to grapple with some relatively advanced sentence analysis and to risk doing so incorrectly.

Ultimately, this TC has opted to take the types of academic risks Elbow (1981) indicated were so important when developing writing skills. Similar risks are also integral to learning syntax. As she noted, “I don’t think these diagrams are correct, but I gave it my best shot!” TCs’ diagrams indicated that when sentence components existed as single words, the diagram included more correctness than error. However, when sentence components existed as phrases, the diagram was more likely to show errors. In the assignment’s reflection, all participants reported working a reasonable amount of time by their standards. One TC wrote, “Putting this together took time, but less time than making a Powerpoint or worksheet.” Another TC said, “There was not that much effort put into this besides reviewing old materials to make sure I was labeling sentences correctly.”

Finally, all participants reported they would use similar methods to teach language concepts required by the state’s standards. While we find their enthusiasm encouraging, we emphasize that our study does not intend to endorse sentence diagramming as a practice in middle-grade curricula, but to use it as a scaffolding tool for preparing
ELA TCs with the awareness of grammar’s complexity. We have emphasized to them
that diagramming should not replace teaching grammar in the context of reading and
writing. Instead, the exercise can be one way to foster critical thinking about language
conventions and might steer future ELA teachers away from rote memorization and
grammar worksheets.

Discussion
The purpose of the study was to reveal whether the intervention of sentence diagram-
ming did what we intended. Although content knowledge and instructional confidence
show little improvement after the intervention, metalinguistic awareness of clauses,
phrases, and verb type do show growth over time. Data reveal that TCs understand
more language about grammatical concepts at the end of their methods course than
they did at the beginning of it. Pre- and post-test data show that TCs' grammatical
content knowledge increased in terms of verb and sentence type; additionally, the
data reveal TCs' metalinguistic awareness of verbals increased.

Data regarding their confidence in teaching those concepts are more questionable.
Although their confidence increased somewhat in terms of verb and sentence type,
they still report low confidence in teaching other concepts, such as verbals. Through
learning the complexity of syntactic structures, TCs became more aware of the com-
plexities in language use and, therefore, aware of the complexities that exist when
teaching students how to use language correctly. Whether because of the intervention
of sentence diagramming or the awareness of their participation in the study, bringing
attention to their underdeveloped content knowledge reinforces the fact that grammar
is a complicated topic deserving more attention than it traditionally receives (Moore,
2021).

While initial data indicate some benefit to diagramming as a scaffolding technique, the
small sample size and the study's short time frame limits what we can recommend
regarding the exercise. Survey results and summative artifacts, however, encourage
us to stay the course. With additional data from larger participant groups, perhaps we
can draw stronger conclusions about TCs' metalinguistic awareness and its associa-
tion with increased content knowledge and instructional confidence. Meanwhile, we
harken Turvey’s (2000) work with student teachers as they incorporated grammar and
usage instruction through the study of myth, drama, fiction, and nonfiction. She saw,
as we did, that when TCs build their metalinguistic awareness and strengthen their
grammatical content knowledge, they heighten their confidence to include it in their
instruction and discuss the complexities of its concepts.

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Appendix A

PRE/POST-TEST

Instructions: Define, describe, OR give an example of each concept below.

I. Parts of Speech
   1. Noun: __________________________________________
   2. Pronoun: _________________________________________
   3. Verb: ____________________________________________
   4. Adjective: _______________________________________
   5. Adverb: _________________________________________
   6. Preposition: _____________________________________
   7. Interjection: _____________________________________
   8. Conjunction: _____________________________________

II. Sentences & Clauses
   1. Declarative sentence: ________________________________
   2. Imperative sentence: ________________________________
   3. Interrogative sentence: ______________________________
   4. Exclamatory sentence: ______________________________
   5. Simple sentence: __________________________________
   6. Complex sentence: _________________________________
   7. Compound sentence: ________________________________
   8. Complex-compound sentence: ________________________
   9. Independent clause: ________________________________
   10. Dependent clause: _________________________________

III. Types of Verbs
    1. Helping verb: _____________________________________
    2. Linking verb: _____________________________________
    3. Transitive action verb: ______________________________
    4. Intransitive action verb: ____________________________

IV. Phrases
    1. Prepositional phrase: ______________________________
    2. Gerund phrase: ___________________________________
    3. Infinitive phrase: _________________________________
    4. Participial phrase: ________________________________
Appendix B

For Weekly Assignment 9, I used a real-world text to present you with an assignment that connected real-world texts with grammar instruction. Now, it is your turn to do this on your own. Please follow the following step-by-step directions to complete Weekly Assignment 9:

1. Find a text—any text.
2. Choose three sentences from text. You can do 1 of 2 things. You can use a sentence directly from the text, or adapt it to fit your needs (i.e. sometimes phrases can be removed to shorten the sentence, and direct it toward your instructional purpose).
3. Label all parts of speech.
4. Diagram all parts of the sentence.
5. Reflect on the practicality of this method.
   - How much time and energy was used to create this three sentence activity and its key?
   - How could you sustain such a method in your daily practice?
6. Upload your work here.
Appendix C

Self-efficacy, Mindset, & Grammar Knowledge

A. Self-efficacy regarding Grammar-Pedagogical-Content Knowledge: Please rate your level of self-confidence about your grammatical knowledge.

A1. Able to define all eight parts of speech.
   a) not confident
   b) minimally confident
   c) confident
   d) absolutely confident

A2. Able to contrast independent clauses from dependent clauses.
   a) not confident
   b) minimally confident
   c) confident
   d) absolutely confident

A3. Able to describe how predicate nominatives differ from predicate adjectives.
   a) not confident
   b) minimally confident
   c) confident
   d) absolutely confident

A4. Able to explain how the two clauses in a complex sentence function.
   a) not confident
   b) minimally confident
   c) confident
   d) absolutely confident

A5. Able to select verbal from a classroom text.
   a) not confident
   b) minimally confident
   c) confident
   d) absolutely confident
B. Mindset regarding Grammar-Pedagogical-Content Knowledge: Please rate your agreement with the following claims. You may explain your opinion in the spaces provided.

Intelligence

B1. People are naturally smart with grammar knowledge and language usage.
   a) strongly disagree
   b) disagree
   c) no opinion
   d) agree
   e) strongly agree

Comments:

B2. With study and consistent practical application, people can strengthen their grammar knowledge and language usage.
   a) strongly disagree
   b) disagree
   c) no opinion
   d) agree
   e) strongly agree

Comments:

Effort

B3. In part A of this survey, you rated your confidence levels with grammatical concepts. Explain why you rated your confidence the way you did, selecting all that may be applicable:
   a) grades on school assignments
   b) consistent grammar instruction in school
   c) absence of or insufficient grammar instruction in school
   d) spoken language patterns showing up in your writing
   e) hard-to-break spoken/writing habits
   f) experiences with others who have different language patterns
   g) general personal high or low confidence levels
   g) other

If you answered "other," please explain:
B4. What educational, professional or personal strategies best enable you to analyze sentences and use language correctly (select all that apply)?
   a) grammar worksheets
   b) sentence diagramming
   c) collaborating with peers when editing written work
   d) memorizing correct language conventions
   e) consistent practice with speaking correct language conventions
   f) reading grammar handbooks
   g) viewing grammar videos
   h) mnemonic devices, such as jingles or acronyms, to remember language conventions
   i) other

If you answered "other," please explain:

Response to Error: Please respond to the following hypothetical scenario which places you in the position of a classroom teacher:

B5. While teaching the differences between a direct object and an indirect object to your class, you confuse the two definitions and do not realize it until after school.

How would the discovery of that error make you feel and why?

When you return to class the next day, how would you address the error?
Review: Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy by Gholdy Muhammad

Carlin Borsheim-Black

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Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy by Gholdy Muhammad offers a powerful four-part framework—identity, skills, intellect, and criticality—that teachers can use to foster excellence and equity in teaching and learning across all disciplines for all students—especially students of color. The framework grows from Muhammad’s extensive historical research into the literacy practices of Black literary societies and is built on the premise that Black people have a long history of resisting oppression, fostering resilience, and achieving excellence through reading, writing, and engagement with literary texts in community. The Introduction and Chapter One argue that educators can look to these Black literary societies of the past for inspired direction for improving the ways they teach Black youth—and all students. Moreover, the history of these Black literary societies suggests that educators today do not need to work to empower youth or inspire their genius; genius is already within them—it is part of who they are and have always been.

Chapter Two makes clear the ways literacy educators “still struggle to advance the literacy achievement of Black boys and girls” (p. 39). In response, Muhammad introduces Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy as an approach to teaching that responds to students’ identities, cultural identities of others, and historical and current social contexts. While Muhammad contextualizes Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy as aligned with culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), she also distinguishes it as “more pointedly centered on the literacy histories of Black people and a practical framework that teachers can use to guide and shape instruction” (p. 48).

The next four chapters, Chapters 3 – 6, lay out the four-part framework, which includes: 1) the pursuit of identity, 2) the pursuit of skills, 3) the pursuit of intellect, and 4) the pursuit of criticality. Each chapter offers the historical roots of the pursuit in African American literary societies, explains the nature and implications of the pursuit,
and applies the pursuit to specific lesson examples across various subject areas. *The pursuit of identity*, emphasizes that literacy learning must be rooted in who our students are and whom they want to become. *The pursuit of skills*, defines skills as competence, ability, and expertise based on what educators deem to be important for student learning in each content area—which are behind the standards and assessments that shape much of what is taught and learned in schools today. *The pursuit of intellect*, elevates students’ learning of skills to the habits of mind, the mental powers, needed to consider the human condition, respond to local and global problems, and aspire to loftier ideals. And, *the pursuit of criticality*, emphasizes the importance of being able to “read, write, and think in ways of understanding power, privilege, social justice, and oppression” (p. 120).

Although the book does not directly address the teaching of language or grammar, the four pursuits offer insight into the ways educators can elevate their teaching of language and grammar and be responsive to the linguistic diversity students bring to school. To illustrate, I used the lesson plan template found in the back of the book, together with the four-part framework, to identify potential learning objectives for teaching about Black language, for example, in English Language Arts:

- **Identity**: Students will describe the role Black language plays in their sense of themselves, relationships with friends and family, and their connections to communities of which they are a part.
- **Skills**: Students will use Black language in their writing to achieve particular rhetorical goals.
- **Intellect**: Students will identify features of Black language, including vocabulary, signifyin’, and habitual be, for example, and analyze uses of those features in Black-authored poetry and speeches.
- **Criticality**: Students will consider the racial ideology behind “Standard English” and critique its effects on attitudes about Black language.

The example is meant to illustrate the power of the framework to bring together various aspects of culturally and historically responsive teaching—of responding to students’ lives and identities, of helping students achieve in various contexts, of connecting their learning to big picture issues, of teaching them to critique power and oppression. In sum, Muhammad’s framework has the potential to be transformative for elevating the teaching of grammar—and teaching across all disciplines—especially for Black and Brown youth.

**References**


Review: Making Sense of Outliers: Englished Explained:  
A Guide to Misunderstood and Confusing Elements  
of Grammar by Steve Hart

Kevin K. Thomas

Kevin K. Thomas, M.A. in Humanities, is a copywriter. He is also Associate Editor of and a contributor to the ATEG Journal. His publications have appeared in The Looking Glass: New Perspectives on Children’s Literature; First Opinions, Second Reactions; and Temenos.

Steven Hart’s English Explained: A Guide to Misunderstood and Confusing Elements of Grammar, published in 2020 by Hong Kong University Press, is a practical book for students and teachers of English as an additional language. This text focuses on questions that often arise as English learners discover irregularities and variations in the language. In 50 brief 3-4 page chapters, Hart explores the most highly questionable areas of Standard English (SE), where the standards’ limitations pose the most problems for learners. By acquiring knowledge of these most troubling areas, Hart’s claims both teachers and students can answer any question on English grammar with confidence (p. xiii).

The apparently illogical elements in SE, as Hart explains, are derived from the standardization process itself, or rather from the coexistence of standardized and non-standardized elements. Where the standards do not apply is where learners with advanced levels of English proficiency find confusion: “This standardisation has the knock-on effect of making the elements that have not undergone a change appear even more curious and illogical to those whose first language is not English” (p. xiii). English Explained contains a series of concise and straightforward examinations of these commonly troublesome irregularities and variations of common usage, and the book is organized into four parts: Noun, Number and Determiner; Verbs (Tense, Mood, and Modals); Prepositions, Adjectives, and Adverb; and Subject, Clauses, and Questions.

In each chapter, Hart introduces the context for a given problem area of SE. For example, in Chapter 16, which covers conversions of words to another word class, Hart reminds us that—like all languages—English is continuously developing: “English is a fluid language that is constantly evolving. New words are created and old ones manipulated all the time” (p. 49). He explains that in cases of conversion where a noun is the origin of a verb, the verb typically refers to an action that relates to a common characteristic of the noun. In one example, he explains how a word is created for new technology before being converted to refer to the use of that technology:

I use Google when I want to find out about something. (noun)
Did you Google it? † (verb). (Hart, 2020, p. 49)
Inversely, where a verb is the origin of a noun, Hart (2020) explains that the noun often relates to the results of an action:

verb—to drive noun—a drive

So, the action of driving results in a drive in a car. (Hart, 2020, p. 49)

By offering recent as well as long-established examples of conversion, Hart illustrates the ever-evolving nature of language, described in the chapter’s introduction, while exemplifying the two different forms of conversion he covers.

After explaining the context for a given problem area of SE, Hart provides explanatory responses to common student enquiries related to the type of outlier discussed in the chapter. For instance, in Chapter 16, the student enquiry includes an example of conversion as well as two examples that a student might confuse for conversion. In the first, the student enquiry is about the use of “contract” (to decrease in size) and in the second the enquiry is about “The wise”:

We could contract these further to make it easier.

The wise have no time for these matters. (Hart, 2020, p. 50)

In response to the enquiry, Hart explains that “contract” in the first example is merely a case in which an independent verb and noun have the same spellings. In the second example, he explains that while “the wise” takes on the appearance of a noun, such adjective-to-noun conversions can still be modified by an adverb; however, they are incapable of taking a possessive case. Thus, “the wise” cannot function fully as a noun:

I would categorise them as the very wise.

*The wise’s way is to question everything. (Hart, 2020, p. 51)

Through his responses to student enquiries, Hart provides teachers with the language to clarify the rules and context for what otherwise might appear as contradictions to English learners.

*English Explained* is an important contribution to the study of English as an additional language for both students and teachers. The definitive strength of this book is also what makes it unique: its keen focus on misunderstood and confusing grammatical elements. By providing explanations of the exceptions in SE, Hart demystifies the limits of standards in English grammar. *English Explained* supplies reasoning for irregularities and variations which native English speakers have simply internalized, thus, equipping teachers to support students in overcoming barriers to their acquisition of English as an additional language.

**References**

Review: Breaking Tradition to Teach Beyond the Standard: American English Grammar by Seth R. Katz

Kevin K. Thomas

Kevin K. Thomas, M.A. in Humanities, is a copywriter. He is also Associate Editor of and a contributor to the ATEG Journal. His publications have appeared in The Looking Glass: New Perspectives on Children’s Literature; First Opinions, Second Reactions; and Temenos.

Seth R. Katz’s American English Grammar, published in 2020 by Routledge, is a college-level textbook that introduces the basic grammatical elements that define American English, not only those of Standard English (SE) but also several varieties of the language. Katz differentiates standard and non-standard varieties of American English Grammar (AEG) on the basis of differing rules rather than treating the standard as a measure of correctness. In so doing, Katz equips students to both understand the workings of SE and to critically analyze the social basis for its position as a standard. Indeed, through a descriptive approach to grammar education, this book has the potential to empower students to distinguish between varieties of English by their different rules. As a result, readers develop an understanding that discrimination is often based in an individual or social group’s use of one set of grammatical rules over another.

Katz emphasizes the practicality and rule-basedness of non-standard varieties of AEG and the rather arbitrary nature of many SE rules. For example, he predicts that the use of “less” before a count noun will in the near future become more accepted than “fewer” which only became preferred and eventually established as standard use after Robert Baker wrote in 1770 that “fewer sounded more ‘proper and elegant’ with count nouns” (Katz, 2020, p. 32). Similarly, Katz explains that there was a period of time during which it was standard to use more/most together with -er/-est—for example “‘With the most boldest and best hearts of Rome’”—and it was not until 1672, when John Dryden described it as “gross” that such usage became “condemned as a double marking of degree” (pp. 62-63). These historical insights provide not only a basis for such arbitrary standards, but also they demonstrate that there is nothing inherently superior about SE.

American English Grammar makes clear that the only essential differences between all varieties of AEG, including SE, are the differences in internally consistent rules for each variety. Katz includes such examinations of non-standard varieties throughout the book, and the introduction chapter includes an annotated guide on non-standard varieties, with references for each of these discussions in the book (pp. 9-16). For example, in describing non-standard forms of pluralization, Katz explains the grammatical rules that each non-standard form follows. An “absent plural,” such as in “Lots of boy_ got to the school,” is used a small percentage of the time in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and only when the noun is preceded by a clear determiner.
which would make the -s redundant. However, despite its efficacy, the absent plural may sound strange to speakers of varieties which regularly use the plural -s, as in "Lots of boys." Katz further explains that in Southern-based rural vernaculars, the absent plural is used strictly for nouns describing weight or measurement, such as in “four pound,” in which case the -s is again redundant. In a third variety of non-Standard pluralization, irregular plural nouns are regularized according to the general standard of using -s to denote plurality, e.g., “deers” and “firemans." (p. 31).

For Katz, the descriptive school of thought takes into account meaning in the interpretation of grammatical structures. Unlike Traditional approaches to grammar instruction, Katz looks beyond the isolated sentence to demonstrate the function of grammar in context. He explains, “how we identify the form and function of particular words within a sentence may depend wholly on our understanding of the speaker or writer’s intention, rather than on a pre-assigned form or function label” (p. 5). For example, against common understanding, Katz emphasizes that prepositions are not just function words but, in fact, carry much of the meaning in a sentence because they express meaningful relationships. He writes, “Just think of the differences of meaning of the following sentences, carried entirely by prepositions: The cat is under the table. The cat is on the table. The cat is above the table” (p. 45). In these sentences, “under,” “on,” and “above” do not just indicate the relationships between words in the sentence, but evoke an entirely different image in each case.

*American English Grammar* provides a thorough description of the most basic elements of AEG in a manner that engages with its student audience. The book covers eight grammatical elements: nouns, prepositions, adjectives, determiners, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, and conjunctions. Throughout, Katz provides examples from diverse texts, from ancient texts like the Bible to transcriptions of contemporary TV shows. Moreover, he demonstrates various approaches to interpreting particular passages; he makes clear where his exposition diverges from traditional and prescriptivist approaches to the study of grammar, and where applicable, he offers ways of testing a particular interpretation. At the end of each chapter, Katz provides exercises and a list of key points to recap the content covered, and he concludes the book with a review exercise where students are asked to analyze a brief essay from a popular magazine and identify all the grammatical structures covered in the book.

Accessible and filled with tools, *American English Grammar* provides college-level students with the critical lenses to assess the rules which define the common varieties of AEG, including but not limited to SE. By explaining the grammatical rules that non-standard varieties follow, as well as the arbitrary history of many SE rules, this book empowers students with the descriptive tools to critically understand how the English language works and what makes one variety different from another. In short, this book gives students the tools and confidence to think like descriptive grammarians by making the study of English grammar inclusive of multiple varieties of AEG and of multiple interpretations of grammatical elements.

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