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Abstracts of Presentations
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Amy Benjamin
Author, Educational Consultant, and Co-president of ATEG

Grammar and the Common Core

The Common Core Learning Standards clearly include competence in grammar in at least four of the thirty-two literacy standards. Are K-12 teachers ready? Well, you can't teach what you don't know. Amy will present a one-page "placemat" of the Literacy Standards as well as a walk-through of the grade-by-grade expectations. (www.corestandards.org).

Dallin D. Oaks
Brigham Young University

Grammar, Pattern Recognition, and Problem Solving: Some Examples of Grammatical Empowerment

Arguments in favor of teaching grammar in the school curriculum are often based on the benefits that such instruction would provide for students in their writing skills, not only in the avoidance of distracting usage errors, but also more proactively in the fashioning of effective rhetorical style. But proponents of grammar instruction don't often seem to make the case for some of the additional and significant cognitive skills and abilities that can grow out of grammatical study. These skills and abilities can be very important in certain problem-solving tasks. And a greater recognition of the ways in which grammatical awareness can help students in problem-solving, even beyond what normally confronts them in traditional kinds of writing tasks, will further strengthen the argument for having grammar take its "rightful place" as an integral part of the school curriculum. This presentation will provide a few illustrations of innovative approaches that show how grammatical knowledge can provide important insights, abilities, and skills in problem-solving tasks that involve creating, persuading, predicting, and decoding.

Lorraine Johnson
Prince George's County Public Schools Kindergarten Teacher (ret.)

Should Grammar Be Taught?

Lorraine will present the research she began in the Applied Grammar class on the topic, *Should Grammar Be Taught?* The goal of this effort was to demonstrate that children are ready to learn grammar at the time they begin their formal schooling. In particular, she will illustrate her conclusion through examples from her experience teaching kindergarten students.

Helene Krauthamer , Christopher Rothermel, and Natalie Bridgewater
University of the District of Columbia

Error Analysis: Let the Students Research Grammar!

This past semester, a group of advanced English majors and I embarked on a research study using error analysis to assess the written compositions of students taking a General Education course entitled "Discovery Writing: Climate Studies." This is a third semester writing course, following a theme and taught collaboratively. In this panel presentation, two of the student researchers and I will discuss this project, describing our perceptions of error in student writing and our resulting analysis. We will present data that shows how error analysis with a focus on grammar demonstrates improvement in writing through the reduction of error. The study quantitatively showed that the error frequency (# errors/ #words) diminished from the first writing assessment to the final. Grammar instruction in the class was minimal, but students were required to revise essays after completing an "Error Analysis Sheet" and researching their grammar errors on their own. This presentation will provide a sample of the writing and ask participants to complete an Error Analysis Sheet, comparing our results to get a better understanding of what constitutes error and how we can quantitatively assess writing improvement.

Rudolph Brathwaite
University of Maryland

The Prepositional Phrase—Inevitable, Ubiquitous and, Yes, Problematical for Writers

In her book *Line by Line: How to Edit Your Own Writing*, Claire Kehrwald Cook observes: “Prepositional phrases . . . will probably figure in most of the faulty sequences you discover in your writing. Since they can modify nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives, they usually latch onto whatever precedes, and they lend themselves to different interpretations” (35). Cook advises writers to “keep a sharp eye out for problems [associated with the preposition phrase]” (35). Itself one of the eight parts of speech, the preposition influences the direction of five others. Cook points out that “strings of prepositional phrases” are often found in sentences in which there are “weak verbs and ponderous noun” (8) and provides this advice to writers: “if you count more than three phrases in a row, consider revising” (8). Valerie Balester in an article titled “Preposition Overdose May Cause Drowsiness” offers advice similar to Cook’s: “If you’d like to give students a tip for making their prose more clear and less wordy, ask them to watch their prepositions” (1). She attributes the overuse of prepositional phrases to the writers’ “desire to convey every minute detail and to sound [. . .] erudite” (1). In his book *Painless Writing*, Jeffrey Strausser reiterates and confirms the conclusions of both Cook and Balester. Under the caption “Preposition Overuse Ruins Your Style,” Strausser observes that “many students substitute prepositional phrases throughout their writing where verbs would have been the better choice” (3). Ascribing a paper’s wordiness to this preference, Strausser asserts that if a piece of writing is wordy and hard to understand, the cause may reside in its excessive use of prepositional phrases (3). He concedes that prepositions are inevitable constituents of communication, but advises students to “eliminate *unnecessary* prepositions and their accompanying wordy baggage” (4).

My own experience in the classroom helps to validate the findings of these writers and, indeed, suggested to me the title of this paper. Insofar as they are important structure words—Strausser notes that they “are essential [. . .] to communicate our ideas” (3)—prepositional phrases are important to writing; their overuse and misuse, however, are a major problem for students. I propose to illustrate how these phrases produce errors and how teachers can help students avoid such errors.

Monique Leslie Akassi
Bowie State University

(Re)Examining the Politics of Language and Grammar in the Trayvon Martin Case

In “Language On Trial: Rachel Jeantel” (NPR, June 26, 2013), controversial issues regarding the politics of language and grammar were raised regarding testimony in the George Zimmerman case in the Seminole County Circuit Court in Sanford, Florida. Rachel Jeantel, a speaker of Creole, Spanish and English, testified as the prosecution’s key witness. Controversy arose about her usage of the African American Vernacular English during her testimony, in which she explained poignant details regarding her last conversation with Trayvon Martin before he was murdered. The defense attorney for Mr. Zimmerman ridiculed and mocked Ms. Jeantel’s mother tongue as a rhetorical technique of tarnishing her credibility. Specifically, the defense attorney asked Ms. Jeantel to repeat many of her statements under oath, especially words and syntax associated with her mother tongue—At one point, he even asked her, “Are you claiming you don’t understand English?” In response, some have argued that both the White and Black communities negatively stereotyped Rachel Jeantel for using AAVE as opposed to Standard English. However, “Linguists who study African American Vernacular English (AAVE) — also called Ebonics — recognize all the features in Rachel Jeantel’s speech, including John Rickford, a professor of linguistics at Stanford University” (“Language On Trial”). Furthermore, according to Khalil Gibran Muhammed, the director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at The New York Public Library, “. . . scrutinizing Jeantel’s language is really about class and power.” Indeed, although issues regarding AAVE being recognized as a language among the approximately 6,912 languages today, the recent case has raised questions regarding how far we have really come since the Oakland City School case (1996) and Martin Luther King Jr., case about racism and the usage of the AAVE. Therefore, the purpose of this presentation is to (re) examine the rhetoric in the politics of language and grammar in the Trayvon Martin murder trial case against George Zimmerman through the theoretical lens of W. E. B. Du Bois’s *Double Consciousness* regarding the politics of language with race, class, and identity among people of African descent.

Gail Tucker and Sherry Saylor
Prince George's County Public Schools and Prince George's Community College

Reflections Upon the College Awareness Preparation Program (CAPP), held at Prince George's Community College This Summer

At first glance, the CAPP Program seems to be just another initiative designed to prepare high school seniors for college. However, the program distinguishes itself in several ways. First is the extent of collaboration between PGCC and the County Public School System (PGCPS). This collaboration enabled teachers on both levels to learn from each other. The college teachers learned better ways of maintaining a productive classroom environment; the public school teachers learned new ways of thinking about grammar education, taking it out of the exercise book and into student writing. In this presentation, Gail and Sherry will share a few of the exciting techniques that engaged the students in active learning about grammar as an intrinsic part of the writing process.

Peggy Wilson and Linda DiDesidero
University of Maryland and Marine Corps Univ. at Quantico

All-Skate!

Peggy and Linda will lead a discussion about ways of integrating grammar into writing instruction. This session will give us all a chance to process some of the great ideas we've been sharing at the conference.