

## Teaching particular languages

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### ENGLISH

**85–72 Chalker, Sylvia** (University Coll., London). Why can't someone write a nice, simple grammar? *ELT Journal* (London), **38**, 2 (1984), 79–85.

Though both learners and grammarians would like straightforward simple grammars to exist, the subject matter itself is intractable, highly complex, and susceptible of several equally valid descriptions. Clearly a grammar book can only give one description at a time, namely, that which the author feels to be the most adequate, and it therefore becomes prescriptive in spirit, both as written by the author and as used by the student. Hence the confusion and perplexity when language items are assigned to different functions and categories by different authors.

With detailed reference to 15 recent authoritative grammars of English, the problems are illustrated and terminology is discussed. While it is desirable that terminology should be transparent and conservative for the benefit of learners, particularly foreign ones, who are relying on their experience of grammar at school, it is recognised that the terminology is not merely optional labelling of a single system, but is part of the system itself and hence reflects the particular descriptive stance of the author. There is no point in keeping old terms if the whole concept has been redefined. Conversely, the use of traditional terms for new concepts can be more confusing than coining new ones, and a perennial problem is that different authors often use the same term, whether new or old, to mean different things. Learners have false expectations of grammar books, while writers, by being covertly prescriptive though ostensibly descriptive, tend to encourage and disappoint these expectations.

**85–73 Di Pietro, Robert J.** From literature to discourse: interaction with texts in the ESL/EFL classroom. *Canadian Modern Language Review* (Toronto), **40**, 1 (1983), 44–50.

The research on second-language acquisition points up the long-standing and critical problem which exists at the intermediate and advanced levels of ESL/EFL instruction in moving students from a basic command of sentence grammar to a control over the many discourse functions embodied in creative literature. In the approach taken here, literary texts are considered to be written representations of natural discourse. A procedure is outlined for reconstituting these texts as spoken dialogue. There are three phases in the procedure: plot analysis, plot mutation and scenario derivation. By creating their own scenarios, groups of students are led to use conversational management skills and to appreciate the valued models of these skills contained in the original texts.

**85-74 Germer, Erich.** Kann der Erwerb der englischen Aussprache durch die Vermittlung phonetischer Kenntnisse gefördert werden? [Can knowledge of phonetics help learners to acquire English pronunciation?] *Der fremdsprachliche Unterricht* (Stuttgart, FRG), **67** (1968), 174-82.

The article offers different answers to the above question. For beginners in English, the study of phonetics as such is seen as inappropriate. For the early stages of secondary school English, phonetics should only feature as a means of providing a key to pronunciation. In advanced English, however, the study of several areas of phonetics proves to be essential [examples.]

**85-75 James, Christopher and Bailey, Robert** (Ecole Supérieure d'Ingénieurs de Marseille). EAP/EST models in a multi-disciplinary environment. *Échanges Pédagogiques* (Paris), **3** (1983), 11-24.

This article addresses the problem of integrating an English language programme into a study environment in which a great variety of specialised options make up the overall curriculum, the case in question being that of a 'polyvalent' engineering *Grande École*. A general framework is proposed, in which a series of discrete modules, each offering a number of specialised options, can be linked in such a way as to provide 'paths' which students choose according to their disposition and needs. The first such module, taking the form of a technical writing project linked to a common core English syllabus, is presented, and the wider applicability of the model is discussed.

**85-76 Lee, W. R.** (Pres., IATEFL). English as a world language: implications for teaching. *Perspectives* (Rome), **7**, 3 (1983), 31-40.

English is a world language, i.e. it is spoken or understood by large numbers of people in many parts of the world. Many people are anxious to acquire it, but it sometimes arouses a degree of half-conscious resentment because of the pressure to learn it. Communication is not only a matter of bridging the information gap; there is also communication in which language plays a part, but not to convey facts or opinions. In the type of simple classroom exchange which is often criticised for being un-communicative, the giving of an answer which is already known nevertheless allows the participants to communicate that they know a way of asking or replying, and are conveying their attitudes towards the language and their own skills at using it.

English is used world-wide as a means of communication among non-native speakers. The implication for the teacher of English is that any teaching must be relevant to the social situation of the learners. Listening practice must concern itself with what is actually to be heard all around - dialect, slang, etc. included. It is no use teaching immigrants Received Pronunciation, though they may well need more than just job-related English. Where learners come into frequent contact with native speakers (or at least fluent speakers) there is a case for using 'authentic' spoken texts. If English is only one of several languages regularly used as supplementary means of communication, the teaching of it has to be based on local requirements. If resources and skilful teachers are scarce it is sensible to adopt compact courses and to largely abandon 'authenticity' as a goal.

**85–77 Macht, Konrad and others.** Studien zu einer Lerngrammatik des Englischen. [Towards a learners' grammar of English.] *Die neueren Sprachen* (Frankfurt am Main), **83**, 2 (1984), 194–208.

A learners' grammar which intends to enable the learner to continually extend his repertoire of means of expression should not put its main emphasis on examination of linguistic signs acting as parts of a system of forms, but ought to present these linguistic signs in their capacity as communicative devices. This thesis is exemplified in three sections on catenative verbs, relative clauses and the passive. Through the concrete presentation of grammar sections, an attempt is made to guide the discussion of the subject of 'learners' grammar' in the direction of practicable model formations.

**85–78 Schlierike, Harald.** Festigung grammatischer Strukturen durch Verwendung englischen Liedgutes. [The reinforcement of grammatical structures through the use of English songs.] *Englisch* (Berlin, FRG), **18**, 4 (1983), 128–32.

German teenagers typically have close contact with the English language through pop songs, and the use of such songs in reinforcing a verbal tense form (simple past) has been tested in one school class. Error rates drop drastically after such reinforcement of course work, but the effectiveness of individual songs depends on the number of relevant items contained in them, on the semantic content of the song (more interesting and demanding songs produce better results), and on whether a 'saturation point' is reached (e.g. well-known and over-played songs soon lose their attractiveness).

**85–79 Sticci Damiani, Maria.** The non-native teacher of English: a paradox? *Perspectives* (Rome), **7**, 3 (1983), 1–16.

Many teachers may feel insecure about the paradox of teaching a language that is not their native tongue. English is an international language and each population which uses it ends up by developing its own variety of the language. Yet learners of English often limit their perception of it to a single frame of reference. About half the users of English in the world are non-native speakers of it, so the chances of interacting with other non-native speakers are as great as those of interacting with a native speaker. Varieties of English should be acceptable, provided that mutual intelligibility is not impaired.

Non-native speakers have varying degrees of linguistic competence, which can be constantly improved. Nevertheless, the majority will be unable to become bilingual without long immersion in the target language. It does not seem realistic to expect non-native speakers to attain the kind of sociolinguistic competence possessed by native speakers. They may, however, be able to bring into the interaction their own experience as members of other communities and a willingness to meet their interlocutors half-way. They have a certain degree of strategic competence which enables them to make effective use of their linguistic responses in communication, so long as this does not conflict with the face-saving instinct.

Non-native teachers should accept their non-nativeness as a trait of personal and cultural identity, and regard themselves mainly as efficient users of English, thus

putting the emphasis on what they are, rather than on what they are not. A local teacher is excellently placed to help learners of the same mother tongue, and can filter and select everything for them. The teacher's talk provides samples of the more explicit communication strategies commonly used by non-native speakers of English. Since teachers' classroom talk is generally limited in scope and often repetitive, teachers who are worried about their linguistic performance could focus on the most frequent functions in order to feel more confident. They can contribute greatly towards students' learning by helping them develop a positive attitude towards the language, an affective involvement in classroom activities, as well as an awareness of their own identity and resources. The co-operation of native speakers of English is also very important.

**85–80 Vidalenc, Jean-Louis** (U. of Paris VII). Quelques propositions pour la rédaction d'un polycopié de langue anglaise destiné à des enseignants, chercheurs et étudiants en sciences. [Proposals for written English course materials for teachers, researchers and students in the sciences.] *Études de Linguistique Appliquée* (Paris), **51** (1983), 78–92.

This paper on the teaching and use of English for scientific purposes within a French context begins by reviewing the main theoretical and practical issues in the debate on the delimitation of the English required for any specific purpose. Naive conclusions arising from frequency data derived from scientific corpora (e.g. *may* does not appear in certain scientific discourse, hence it need not be taught to certain students) are to be avoided. [More examples, references.] Three particular points of grammar – verb + *ed* v. *have* + *en*, determiners, modals – are discussed and exemplified in detail.

**85–81 White, Joanna and Lighbown, Patsy**. Asking and answering questions in ESL classes. *Canadian Modern Language Review* (Toronto), **40**, 2 (1984), 228–44.

This paper is based on one study within a larger project on the acquisition of English by francophone secondary students in Quebec. In this study, working from audio recordings and written transcriptions, the authors analysed all question/answer exchanges in seven ESL classes (with three different teachers). The first finding was that teachers asked virtually all the questions. Subsequent analyses examined the acceptability of student responses and the amount of 'wait-time' students had for formulating their responses before their teachers repeated, rephrased, answered, or re-directed the question. Findings indicate that wait-time was very short (average 2.1 seconds overall) and that multiple repetitions and rephrasing of questions did not substantially increase the likelihood of appropriate responses. In the discussion of the findings, explanations for teachers' behaviour are sought and some suggestions are made about the possible benefits of increasing wait-time.

## FRENCH

**85–82 Tukia, M.** (CNRS, Paris). Observations sur le vocabulaire, sur les marques d'énonciateur et sur la construction dans le discours scientifique. [Vocabulary, author reference and structure in scientific discourse]. *Études de Linguistique Appliquée* (Paris), **51** (1983), 36–44.

A selection of texts (one book on French butterflies and moths, one on the vocabulary of psychoanalysis, two books on phonetics and one on phonology, plus a number of theses on instrumental phonetics) forms the basis of this study, which aims to discover whether scientific discourse has a particular structure, vocabulary and type of author reference. Examples of types of scientific vocabulary are drawn from entomology. In discussing structure, it is noted that scientific writers situate their work with reference to previous work in the field, according to 'conventional rules' of scientific publishing. Pronoun use (e.g. special uses of *we* and *I*) is discussed and exemplified.

## GERMAN

**85–83 Müller, Susanne.** Aspekte kommunikativer-funktionaler Sprachbeschreibung bei der Vermittlung von Deutsch als Fremdsprache an Erwachsene auf der Anfängerstufe. [Aspects of communicative-functional language description in the teaching of German as a foreign language to adult beginners.] *Deutsch als Fremdsprache* (Leipzig, GDR), **19**, 2 (1982), 87–92.

Communicative-functional language description is based on an attempt to give the learner communicative competence by making him aware of the connection between form, meaning and function of language structures and lexical items. Here, the essential components of the natural communication process are integrated into the learning process. Teaching units are based mainly on speech intentions and the main aim is to train learners to produce language appropriate to topic, situation and communication. This teaching concept is therefore particularly suited to learners who are not linguists. The emphasis on language awareness makes it appropriate for adult learners.

**85–84 Neuner, Gerhard.** Überlegungen zur Didaktik und Methodik des Textverständnisses im Unterricht Deutsch als Fremdsprache. [Didactic and methodological considerations of text comprehension in the teaching of German as a foreign language.] *Zielsprache Deutsch* (Munich, FRG), **1** (1984), 6–27.

The unravelling of the content of an advertisement is presented as an example of the comprehension of foreign language texts. From this it is concluded that four levels of analysis are essential to comprehension; those of the word, the sentence, the text and of culture-specific interpretation. The latter is of great importance in the selection and preparation of suitable teaching materials, a balance being required between the estrangement of students resulting from strong cultural differences between native and target language communities, and the tedium of texts relating to banal everyday

situations. Stress is thus laid on the importance of 'learning for life', using functionally motivated texts. Both linguistic textual analysis, related to strategies of comprehension, and cultural interest should help determine the shape and methods of teaching.

**85–85 Oehler, Jürgen.** Zweisprachige englische Wörterbücher im Vergleichstest. [Comparative analysis of German/English–English/German dictionaries.] *Die Neueren Sprachen* (Frankfurt am Main), **83**, 2 (1984), 209–18.

A comparative analysis of four recently published German/English–English/German dictionaries (*Cassell's*, *Collins*, *Langenscheidt Handwörterbuch* and *Schöffler/Weis*) of approximately the same size. The author tries to find to what extent these editions meet the special requirements of advanced students and teachers of English. On a checklist strengths and weaknesses are shown up and the results of an investigation presented which looked for the translations of 60 English and 60 German words (half of which were taken from the field of literature and linguistics). For a better evaluation, the bilingual dictionaries are contrasted with editions of *Langenscheidts Enzyklopädisches Wörterbuch*, *Wildhagen/Héraucourt* and the *Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*.

## ITALIAN

**85–86 Freddi, Giovanni.** Quale Italia? Quale Italiano? [Which Italy? What Italian?] *Civiltà Italiana* (Florence), **6**, 1/3 (1983), 7–29.

Language is a component of the culture of a people, and the experiences of its speakers leave their mark on its grammar, phonological system and vocabulary. Italians have no cause to regret that their language has not become an international language like English, French, or German. Such a language loses its sociolinguistic density and its basis in common shared experience, being propagated in a neutral form.

When a language is taught in a way which relates to real life situations, the cultural implications are important, though these necessarily vary according to the identity of the learner. In the case of Italian, learners include: dialect speakers, non-Italian speaking nationals belonging to minority groups, Italian emigrant workers and their families, foreigners resident in Italy, and foreigners interested in Italy and Italian culture.

**85–87 Musarra, Franco and Severins-Suurmeijer, H.** Difficoltà nella ricezione di neologismi italiani all' estero. [New words in Italian – difficulties for teachers of Italian abroad.] *Civiltà Italiana* (Florence), **6**, 1/3 (1983), 171–7.

As a consequence of the social and technological changes of recent years, Italian has acquired many new terms. Words originating in regional dialects have entered the standard language; others have been borrowed from foreign languages, particularly American English; while advertising and publicity have yielded many neologisms. Although some research has been done in this field, most of the reference books are

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out of date. Teachers of Italian in other countries find themselves out of touch with new developments in the language, and have difficulty in gaining access to this vocabulary. [Lists of new words and common suffixes and prefixes are provided to assist them.]

**85–88 Titone, Renzo.** Problemi teorici e forme di applicabilità dell'approccio funzionale in riferimento all'insegnamento dell'italiano L2. [Theoretical problems related to the functional approach and its application to the teaching of Italian as a second language.] *Civiltà Italiana* (Florence), **6**, 1/3 (1983), 62–77.

The literature on the functional approach is reviewed with special reference to Vjatjutnev's 'communicative didactic unit'. The functional approach has two aspects: intrinsic (cohesion and organic unity of the linguistic components of the 'text'); and extrinsic, or extra-linguistic, relating to the act of communication and the situation. To be successful the functional approach must proceed from the verbal act to the verbal intention underlying the communicative situation, i.e. from the universal to the particular (the reverse of the so-called situational approach).

Much remains to be done as regards the 'communicative minimum' for Italian and the formulation of a threshold level of linguistic competence, such as already exists for other languages. To learn a language means gradually acquiring the capacity to communicate, adapting function to situation, and linguistic form to communicative function. The sterile and impoverished world of the classroom can only furnish a prelude to, and a simulation of, real communication and full mastery of the foreign language.