



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

# Teaching Grammar to Adults

Part of the Cambridge Papers in ELT series

March 2019

## CONTENTS

- 
- |   |              |
|---|--------------|
| 2 | Introduction |
|---|--------------|
- 
- |   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| 4 | Thoughts on Teaching Grammar |
|---|------------------------------|
- 
- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 7 | Grammar Teaching: Teachers and Curricula |
|---|--|
- 
- |   |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 9 | Designing Activities to Teach Grammar |
|---|---------------------------------------|
- 
- |    |                               |
|----|-------------------------------|
| 11 | Conclusions, coda and caveats |
|----|-------------------------------|
- 
- |    |            |
|----|------------|
| 12 | References |
|----|------------|

# Introduction

---

This paper on grammar draws from research on SLA and explicit and implicit teaching and learning of grammar. Explicit teaching, e.g. of grammar rules, provides learners with knowledge that can be applied consciously, e.g. in tests of grammar, while oral fluency, on the other hand, is contingent on having implicit, i.e. intuitive, knowledge. Unlike explicit knowledge, implicit knowledge requires considerable time and exposure to acquire. However, there are multiple caveats when we consider which of the two we should be addressing. For example, we know that adults, in particular, have lost much of their ability to learn implicitly and it is still a matter of debate as to whether explicit knowledge can become implicit over time. In fact, at best, explicit knowledge may have indirect effects on the development of proficiency, such as 'priming' for future noticing.

Considerations of explicit and implicit teaching of grammar force us to review the traditional grammar syllabus which may serve as a checklist for teaching explicit knowledge but which does not correspond exactly to the order in which grammar structures are allegedly acquired. Reasonably, a twin-track approach – targeting both explicit knowledge (through consciousness-raising) and opportunities for real language use – is recommended. Such an approach juxtaposes a traditional grammar syllabus with a communicative one. The grammar syllabus should also include items, such as high-frequency 'chunks', that can be learned as unanalysed 'wholes'. In the end, though, teachers' interactions – especially in providing a focus-on-form during communicative language use – may impact more on grammar development than the choice of syllabus.

Overall, from the insights just mentioned in this brief introduction, it is clear that a great deal of SLA research focuses on – and has always focused on – the acquisition of a target-like grammar, using, for example, learners' output, including their errors, as evidence for theorizing developmental orders and cognitive processes. Much of this research has either been laboratory-based, and/or derived from studies of naturalistic (i.e. non-classroom-based) learning contexts. More recently, the sub-discipline of Instructed SLA (ISLA) has narrowed this focus to (primarily) classroom-based learning, addressing these questions in particular:

- Is there an optimal order in which to teach grammatical structures?
- Is there any value in teaching grammar explicitly?
- What teacher interventions support the learning of grammar?
- How should grammar be integrated into the curriculum?

This paper adopts these questions and addresses them in the coming sections.

## A quick review of terms and acronyms ✓

- **explicit knowledge:** knowledge, such as of grammar rules, that is conscious and can be verbalized, e.g. 'the past is formed by adding -ed to regular verbs'; also known as declarative knowledge.
- **explicit instruction:** the teaching of explicit knowledge, e.g. through the presentation and practice of rules, as in the PPP (present-practice-produce) instructional model.
- **deductive teaching:** a form of explicit instruction in which learners are presented with rules and then apply them.
- **inductive teaching:** a form of explicit teaching in which learners are given data, e.g. in the form of example sentences, and have to infer and articulate the rules, before applying them.
- **implicit knowledge:** intuitive knowledge, or a 'feel' for what is grammatically correct, enabling rapid automatic (because not conscious) processing, and hence a prerequisite for fluency; similar to procedural knowledge.
- **implicit instruction:** instruction that aims to instil an intuitive 'feel' for the language by, for instance, having learners participate in communicative activities without any prior instruction.
- **consciousness-raising:** attempts to focus learners' attention on the formal properties of a language and how these forms encode specific meanings.
- **incidental learning:** learning of language features that occur apart from the primary focus of a lesson or activity, as when learners 'pick up' new words when reading extensively.
- **focus on form:** any teacher (or peer) intervention that draws conscious attention to a feature of the language system in the course of a communicative activity, e.g. through a correction or recast.
- **priming:** an effect of instruction that sensitizes learners to notice language features in real language use.
- **item-learning:** the learning of individual language items, e.g. words, formulaic expressions ('chunks'), or grammatical 'exemplars', without conscious awareness of any rules that underpin them; also known as instance-learning; contrasts with rule-learning.

### Abbreviations

CLIL: Content and language integrated learning

CLT: Communicative language teaching

ISLA: Instructed Second Language Acquisition

PPP: present - practice - produce

SLA: Second language acquisition

TBLT: Task-based language teaching

# Thoughts on Teaching

---

# Grammar

---

## Is there an optimal order in which to teach grammatical structures?

The idea that learners have a 'built-in syllabus' for second language acquisition, independent of their first language and impervious to instruction, has been around since the 1970s, and has become an article of faith for most SLA researchers (although some scholars now challenge the idea that language development is monolithic and uniform<sup>1</sup>). Summarizing the research, Ellis and Shintani conclude: instruction does not appear to have much effect in preventing developmental errors, changing orders of acquisition or enabling learners to bypass stages in acquisition sequences.<sup>2</sup>

---

**instruction does not appear to have much effect in preventing developmental errors, changing orders of acquisition or enabling learners to bypass stages in acquisition sequences.**

---

Therefore (they add), 'grammatical syllabuses cannot easily accommodate the essential nature of L2 acquisition.'<sup>3</sup>

Michael Long elaborates: 'The assumption [implicit in such syllabuses] is that learners can move from zero knowledge to native-like mastery of negation, the present tense, subject-verb agreement, conditionals, subjunctive, relative clauses, or whatever, one at a time, produce utterances containing them accurately, and move on to the next item on the list. It is a fantasy.'<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, a grammatical syllabus may have some legitimacy in that it provides a program for teaching explicit knowledge about the language, which may, arguably, facilitate acquisition – indirectly if not directly (see below). But the order in which items are introduced is probably of little consequence, in terms of their ultimate acquisition: traditional notions of formal complexity, frequency and utility might continue to be the best criteria for selection.

With regard to frequency, corpus data now provide a useful corrective to the weighting given certain grammar items on traditional syllabuses. Take, for, example, relative clauses:

**Defining Relative Clause:** *The house that my brother lives in is tiny.*

**Non-defining Relative Clause:** *My brother, who lives in Paris, is a doctor.*

Traditionally, both types tended to be given equal weight. However, the Cambridge English Corpus shows that non-

---

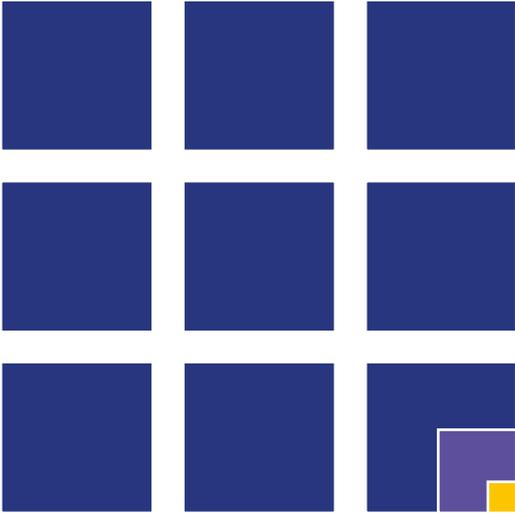
<sup>1</sup> 'Learning is not climbing a developmental ladder; it is not unidirectional. It is nonlinear.' Larsen-Freeman 2017, p. 27

<sup>2</sup> R. Ellis & Shintani 2014 p.72

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> Long 2015, p. 22.

defining relative clauses are vanishingly rare. In fact, if we imagine that there are one million relative clauses in each box below, only those in the purple box are non-defining relative clauses. Moreover, those in the yellow box account for sentences like 'My brother, who lives in Paris, is a doctor' while the rest signal non-defining relative clauses used to make comments (known as sentence relatives) like 'My brother lives in Paris, which is nice'.



Nor is utility necessarily a clear guide, especially in the absence of concrete information as to the learners' needs. Learners anticipating academic study in English would do well to study defining relative clauses. Those who plan to function in more informal registers might be better off looking at sentence relatives. For learners whose needs are still unclear, traditional notions of structural complexity or of 'learnability' may apply: some grammar items are just easier to learn than others – an intuition that supports the idea of a 'built-in syllabus.'

More recently, however, the view that the developmental order is immune to influence from the learner's first language has been challenged. A recent study,<sup>5</sup> using sophisticated statistical models, shows that a learner's L1 has a significant impact on the development of their second, a finding that most language teachers will find intuitive, and which suggests that there may be some value in syllabuses that are 'tweaked' for specific language groups. Such tweaking could involve using learner corpora,

such as the Cambridge learner corpus, to identify the errors typically made by speakers of specific languages.

Finally, it is generally recognized that at least some grammar learning, especially at early stages, takes the form of *item-learning*, as when learners memorize and deploy formulaic sequences (or 'chunks'). As Ellis and Shintani argue, 'the prevailing view today is that learners unpack the parts that comprise a sequence and, in this way, discover the L2 grammar. In other words, formulaic sequences serve as a kind of starter pack from which grammar is generated.'<sup>6</sup> N. Ellis goes further: 'Learning grammar involves abstracting regularities from the stock of known lexical sequences.'<sup>7</sup> This suggests that, at beginner and elementary stages at least, the syllabus should be weighted towards teaching (but not necessarily analysing) formulaic sequences.

### Is there any value in teaching grammar explicitly?

Given that oral fluency is an important goal for most learners, and given that fluency is largely contingent on rapid and automatic processing, i.e. implicit knowledge, the way that such knowledge is acquired is key. Traditional instruction assumes that explicit knowledge (e.g. of rules) becomes implicit through practice. However, opinion is divided on this issue, mainly because it is difficult, not to say impossible, to determine whether the accuracy of a learner's output is a product of explicit or implicit knowledge, and, if the latter, whether such knowledge was at any time explicit, i.e. consciously held, and, if so, by what processes did it become implicit.

In brief, the research suggests that explicit instruction e.g. through the learning and practice of grammar rules, results in significant gains, according to a meta-analysis of 49 studies.<sup>8</sup> However this is only the case if measured by tests of explicit knowledge, e.g. sentence-completion tasks; when assessed in terms of ability for communicative use, explicit teaching showed only minimal effects (at least in the short term).

5 Murakami, A. 2016.  
6 R. Ellis & Shintani 2014 p. 71.  
7 N. Ellis 1997, p. 126.  
8 Norris and Ortega 2000  
9 Scheffler & Cinca 2011  
10 *ibid*, p. 13.  
11 R. Ellis, 2006 p. 98.

On the other hand, a study of advanced Polish learners<sup>9</sup> showed that they were able to correctly verbalise the rules underpinning their fluent output, suggesting that at some point these rules had been learned explicitly and that ‘explicit rules can, in an indirect way, contribute to SLA.’<sup>10</sup>

Research into the relative effectiveness of different kinds of explicit instruction – specifically *deductive* vs *inductive* approaches – has been inconclusive, leading Ellis<sup>11</sup> to argue that ‘it is likely that many variables affect which approach learners benefit most from, including the specific structure that is the target of the instruction and the learner’s aptitude for grammatical analysis. Simple rules may best be taught deductively, while more complex rules may best be taught inductively.’

Arguments in favour of implicit learning draw on brain-imaging research, which shows that implicit and explicit knowledge are stored separately, and that ‘implicit, uninstructed immersion-like L2 training appears to be more effective than instructed classroom-like training in the attainment of L1-neurocognition of grammar’<sup>12</sup>;

---

**implicit and explicit knowledge are stored separately, and that ‘implicit, uninstructed immersion-like L2 training appears to be more effective than instructed classroom-like training in the attainment of L1-neurocognition of grammar’**

---

However, attempts to replicate ‘implicit, uninstructed immersion-like L2 training’ in classroom contexts, e.g. through a task-based approach, or through content-based instruction, such as CLIL, have to be assessed in terms of their feasibility: not all learners have the time nor aptitude to take advantage of them. ‘Because adults may have lost much of the facility for implicit language learning that serves them during their L1 acquisition process, they may be able to make better use of explicit

L2 instruction.’<sup>13</sup> Such a view concedes that fluency – for most adult learners – may not be an achievable goal.

---

**‘Because adults may have lost much of the facility for implicit language learning that serves them during their L1 acquisition process, they may be able to make better use of explicit L2 instruction.’**

---

Explicit grammar teaching might also have a ‘priming’ effect, in line with Schmidt and Frota’s ‘noticing hypothesis’: ‘Learners are more likely to notice exemplars of a grammatical structure in the input if they already have explicit knowledge of it.’<sup>14</sup> A pre-requisite for noticing is awareness, operationalized through consciousness-raising tasks, i.e. tasks that ‘require learners not just to notice the form of a grammatical structure but also to comprehend the meanings that it conveys.’<sup>15</sup>

Summarizing the evidence, Loewen concludes that ‘the best type of L2 instruction may be that which integrates both implicit and explicit types of instruction,’<sup>16</sup> a view shared by Dörnyei, who argues that the two systems might function co-operatively, with explicit knowledge ‘filling in the gaps’ when implicit knowledge fails.

9 Scheffler & Cincala 2011

10 *ibid.*, p. 13.

11 R. Ellis, 2006 p. 98.

12 Ullman 2015, p. 152

13 Loewen 2015, p. 86.

14 R. Ellis, 2016, p. 134

15 *ibid.*, p. 130

16 Loewen 2015 p. 93

# Grammar Teaching:

---

# Teachers and Curricula

---

## What teacher interventions support the learning of grammar?

Research aimed at accounting for why learners in immersion contexts fall short of acquiring a target-like grammar suggests that learning is prejudiced if there is an exclusive focus on content without any focus on form. Similar criticisms have been made of other methodologies whose aim is to instil implicit knowledge, such as task-based instruction, and CLIL (see above). Teachers' form-focused interventions have been shown to play a key role in redressing the potential weaknesses of such approaches.

---

Research aimed at accounting for why learners in immersion contexts fall short of acquiring a target-like grammar suggests that learning is prejudiced if there is an exclusive focus on content without any focus on form.

---

Form-focused interventions identified in classroom interaction are typically divided into pro-active and reactive ones. The former include explicit teaching (as discussed above); they also include ways in which features of the

input are made salient in some way, e.g. through text highlighting (*input enhancement*), or a high frequency of occurrences (*input flood*). Loewen comments, 'while research has found some effects for these two methods, there is also evidence to suggest that they might not be the most effective in promoting L2 development.'<sup>17</sup>

A reactive focus-on-form is typically achieved through corrective feedback, including some kind of brief explanation (called 'instructional detours'). According to one researcher, 'research in support of reactive form-focused instruction suggests that it may be precisely at the moment when students have something to say that a focus on language can be most effective'.<sup>18</sup> Ellis endorses this kind of intervention (which he calls 'integrated explicit instruction') on the grounds that 'explicit information will be more effective if it is provided while learners are communicating as they are more likely to remember it and be able to access it in a subsequent communication'.<sup>19</sup>

Correction can be explicit, as when a teacher responds to a student utterance such as 'Yesterday I go to town' with 'No. The past of go is went', or it can be implicit, when, for example, the teacher simply 'recasts' the learner utterance in a more acceptable form: 'So, yesterday you went to town.'

Summarising the evidence, Rod Ellis writes, 'overall, explicit corrective feedback, such as explicit correction or metalinguistic explanation, has been shown to be

---

<sup>17</sup> Loewen 2015 p. 180  
<sup>18</sup> Lyster, 2007, p. 47.  
<sup>19</sup> R. Ellis 2015 p.198

more effective than implicit feedback, such as recasts or clarification requests.<sup>20</sup> Other researchers might dispute this view, but, either way, corrective feedback ‘works’, ‘and so teachers should not be afraid to correct students’ errors.’<sup>21</sup>

## How should grammar be integrated into the curriculum?

The relative merits of a number of different curriculum design proposals – such as PPP, TBLT, and content-based teaching (as in CLIL) – have been hotly debated in recent years. Of course, the various claims in support of each one need to be evaluated in the light of the particular context factors they address, such as the age and proficiency level of the learners, their needs and goals, the time available, the skills and training of the teachers, the expectations of other stakeholders, not to mention the local educational culture.

Very generally, though, and consistent with the arguments outlined above, current thinking suggests that

- where the instructional model focuses primarily on meaning (as in TBLT and CLIL) this should be counterbalanced with a rigorous focus on form (e.g. in the form of corrective feedback);
- where instruction is already largely form-focused (as in a PPP approach), instruction should be counterbalanced with plentiful opportunities for meaning-focused, communicative exposure and interaction.

The wisdom of combining both explicit and implicit approaches has already been noted. Some scholars would go further and argue for the need for an explicit ‘jump start’ so as to pre-empt the chances of arrested (linguistic) development. ‘There is now converging evidence from studies in the laboratory, the classroom, and the natural L2 environment the best way to develop implicit/procedural/automatised knowledge may not be to try to provide it directly, but instead to foster optimal conditions for its acquisition in the long run and that means providing an explicit jump start.’<sup>22</sup> Dörnyei concurs: ‘To provide jump starts for subsequent proceduralization and automatization,

instructed SLA should contain explicit initial input components,<sup>23</sup> including, he suggests, rote-learning.

Ellis takes a different line, arguing that initially the goal should be ‘a threshold communicative ability’, with an emphasis on formulaic language (see above) achieved, for example, through comprehension-based activities and simple production tasks. He concedes, however, ‘that such an approach can be usefully complemented with one that draws beginners’ attention to some useful grammatical features (e.g. past tense-  
ed in English) that they might otherwise miss.’<sup>24</sup>

20 R. Ellis, 2015 p.203.

21 R. Ellis & Shintani 2014 p. 281.

22 DeKeyser and Juffs 2005, cited in Dörnyei 2009 p. 175.

23 Dörnyei 2009, p.302

24 R. Ellis 2006 p. 91.

# Designing Activities to Teach Grammar

## Designing learning materials

This section proposes a dual-track course design, based on the notion of *narrow* and *broad channel* curricula,<sup>25</sup> where the former is a syllabus of discrete-items, such as grammar structures (also known as a synthetic syllabus), and the latter is one in which the units are non-linguistic, such as tasks or topics (also known as an analytic syllabus).

Given that the relation between explicit and implicit knowledge is far from being resolved, and given that most learners in EFL contexts will have limited access to opportunities to use English in real communication, and hence to develop implicit knowledge, it would seem prudent to retain elements of explicit grammar teaching even if it is accepted that explicit learning alone is unlikely to translate into fluent language use. Such elements would include grammar presentations (i.e. 'explicit jump starts') based on a 'narrow channel' grammatical syllabus, intended to 'prime' learners for subsequent noticing. At lower levels especially, the grammar syllabus might also include high-frequency formulaic 'exemplars' to be memorized, but with no requirement that they should be analysed into their grammatical constituents.

This could function alongside – but would not necessarily be linked to – a broader, more communicative, skills-based syllabus, designed to activate implicit learning processes by maximising exposure and providing incentives

for oral and written production (and 'at the point of need' feedback). In this sense, a two-track curriculum juxtaposes (but does not blend) traditional form-focused instruction, enshrined in the structural syllabus, along with the kind of syllabus that was envisaged by proponents of CLT at its inception, i.e. one that 'reverses the emphasis of the structural. It concentrates on getting learners to do things with language, to express concepts and to carry out communicative acts of various kinds.'<sup>26</sup>

## Grammar should be presented in as efficient manner as possible

Grammar should be presented in as efficient manner as possible (possibly in the L1) so as not to subtract from class time that might more profitably be spent on real language use. (In terms of design, the grammar presentations might reflect online 'pop up' or 'help' windows). A 'flipped' instructional model – in which grammar-based tasks are completed out of class and in advance of interactive task-based classroom activities – might reduce the need for time-consuming in-class grammar presentations. Again, it should be stressed that the (explicit) grammar syllabus and the (implicit) skills/communication syllabus need not be linked but should work in parallel. If the skills-based syllabus is sufficiently broad in its grammatical and lexical

<sup>25</sup> McNaughton 2002  
<sup>26</sup> Widdowson 1990, p. 139.

reach, learners should be able to make connections across the two syllabus strands, prompted by 'noticing' tasks of the type 'How many [grammar items X, Y, Z] did you find in the text/did you use in your text?' Furthermore, a language-rich skills strand offers possibilities for *incidental learning*, mainly of vocabulary but also of grammatical exemplars.

---

**it should be stressed that the (explicit) grammar syllabus and the (implicit) skills/communication syllabus need not be linked but should work in parallel**

---

Furthermore, grammar presentations (or 'consciousness-raising tasks') need not aim for immediate uptake, e.g. through a succession of controlled to free practice activities, since attempts to re-direct or subvert the natural developmental order are (arguably) a waste of time. The point of such activities is simply to prime learners for subsequent acquisition when they are developmentally optimally disposed: 'Grammar teaching should aim at raising learners' consciousness in different ways but leave it to learners to make use of their explicit knowledge in their own way and in their own time.'<sup>27</sup>

In short, and to cite Ellis again, 'there is no need for teachers to make a choice between explicit and implicit forms of grammar instruction. Both are effective. A language curriculum that includes both explicit and implicit instructional components, not necessarily interlocked, is perhaps most likely to ensure that the instruction results in balanced L2 development'.<sup>28</sup>

## Training Teachers

A concern for methods and activities risks overlooking the key role played by teachers, through their interactions, in supporting learning. Ellis<sup>29</sup> quotes Mitchell (1988) to this effect:

No functional syllabus, 'authentic' materials, or microcomputer program can replace the capacity of the live,

fluent speaker to hit upon the follow-up topics of interest to particular individuals, continually adjust his/her speech to an appropriate level of difficulty and solve unpredictable communication difficulties from moment to moment... In all this, the teacher and his/her interactive skills are decisive.

Given the importance, then, of the teacher and his/her ability to 'scaffold' interactions by, through example, providing corrective feedback and 'at the point of need' explanations, training should target these skills from the outset, particularly those that function so as to focus on form in the context of real communication. A checklist of interactive pedagogical skills might include:

- giving corrective feedback in an unambiguous but supportive fashion
- intervening in, but not interrupting, fluency tasks
- recasting learners' output so as to maintain conversational flow
- eliciting grammar explanations, examples and translations (where appropriate)
- using visual prompts (time-lines, gesture, graphic organizers etc) to illustrate grammatical concepts clearly and economically and/or to prompt self- or peer-repair
- modelling and drilling example structures
- checking understanding by the use, for example, of concept checking questions
- maintaining a balance between display and referential (i.e. real) questions

<sup>27</sup> R. Ellis 2016, p. 143.  
<sup>28</sup> R. Ellis 2015, p. 210  
<sup>29</sup> R. Ellis 1990, p. 79.

# Conclusions, coda and caveats

## Conclusions

It is worth noting that the bulk of the research cited above comes from within an 'information-processing' model of language acquisition, which views acquisition as a primarily *cognitive* process, involving input, interaction and output, and largely divorced from its social contexts of use. More recently, there has been a so-called a 'social turn' in SLA theorizing.<sup>30</sup> This embraces a number of different learning theories, but all share the view that language learning 'is not only shaped by the social context in which it happens; it is bound inextricably to such context.'<sup>31</sup> Within this framework, it is generally accepted that grammar performs important social, discursive and interpersonal functions, underscoring the view that it is best learned and practiced when it is 'situated' in its contexts of use. Given that the classroom provides only limited opportunities for the formation of an L2 'speech community', it may be necessary that course designers and teachers use digital technologies to extend the 'small culture' of the classroom into the wider world through, for example, social networks, blogging, online chat, the exchange of multimedia projects and so on – where 'the classroom walls become its windows.'<sup>32</sup> Through such means, it is argued, grammar's real effect on communication can be experienced.

Finally, grammar is still a loaded term and the teaching of it is inevitably coloured by ideological issues (e.g. standards, tradition, personal experience, and so on).

Researchers themselves are probably not immune to the influence of their own beliefs and values, choosing to investigate and endorse approaches that are consistent with these: Guy Cook<sup>33</sup> makes the point, for example, that there is an almost complete absence of studies investigating the teaching of grammar through the use of translation. While recommendations based on research evidence will also be interpreted (or rejected) in the light of the beliefs and attitudes of stakeholders, nor should research be accepted uncritically: 'We should keep in mind that SLA theory and research can only provide proposals that can be tested and examined in language classrooms, not final solutions to teaching problems.'<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, as Kelly,<sup>35</sup> in his history of language teaching, observed, 'The place of grammar in the learning process has never been really clear, for even when the tide has been running in a certain direction, some teachers have always tried the opposite.'

30 Block 2003

31 Ortega 2009, p.217

32 Breen, M. 1998, p. 55

33 Cook 2010.

34 Nassaji and Fotos 2011, p. 138.

35 Kelly 1969 p. 222

# References

---

- Block, D. (2003) *The Social Turn in Second Language Acquisition*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Breen, M. (1998) 'Teaching language in the postmodern classroom.' In Ribé, R. (ed.) *Developing learner autonomy in foreign language learning*. University of Barcelona.
- Cook, G. (2010) *Translation in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2009) *The Psychology of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (1990) *Instructed Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ellis, R. (2006) 'Current issues in the teaching of grammar: An SLA perspective.' *TESOL Quarterly*, 40/1, p. 98.
- Ellis, R. (2015) 'Form-focused approaches to learning, teaching and researching grammar.' In Christison et al (eds) *Teaching and Learning English Grammar: Research Findings and Future Directions*. New York: Routledge.
- Ellis, R. (2016) 'Grammar teaching as consciousness raising.' In Hinkel, E. (ed.) *Teaching English Grammar to Speakers of Other Languages*. New York: Routledge.
- Ellis, R. & Shintani, N. (2014) *Exploring language pedagogy through second language acquisition research*. London: Routledge.
- Ellis, N. (1997) 'Vocabulary acquisition: word structure, collocation, word-class', in Schmitt, N., and McCarthy, M. (Eds.) *Vocabulary: Description, Acquisition, and Pedagogy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kelly, L.G. (1969) *25 Centuries of Language Teaching: 500 BC – 1969*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2015) 'Research into practice: grammar learning and teaching.' *Language Teaching*, 48, 363-280.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2017) 'Complexity theory: The lessons continue.' In Ortega, L. & Han, Z. (eds) *Complexity Theory and Language Development: In celebration of Diane Larsen-Freeman*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Loewen, S. (2015) *Introduction to Instructed Second Language Acquisition*. London: Routledge.
- Long, M. (2015) *Second language acquisition and task-based language teaching*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Lyster, R. (2017) *Learning and Teaching Languages through Content: A counter-balanced approach*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- McNaughton, S. (2002). *Meeting of Minds*. Wellington, NZ: Learning Media.
- Murakami, A. (2016) 'Modeling Systematicity and Individuality in Nonlinear Second Language Development: The Case of English Grammatical Morphemes'. *Language Learning* 66:4.
- Nassaji, H. & Fotos, S. (2011) *Teaching Grammar in Second Language Classrooms: Integrating form-focused instruction in communicative context*. New York: Routledge.
- Norris, J. & Ortega, L. (2000) 'Effectiveness of L2 instruction: A research synthesis and quantitative meta-analysis.' *Language Learning*, 50: 417 – 528.
- Ortega, L. (2009) *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. London: Hodder.
- Scheffler, P. & Cincala, M. (2011) 'Explicit grammar rules and L2 acquisition.' *ELT Journal*, 65/1. 13-23.

Schmidt, R.W., and Frota, S.N. (1986). 'Developing basic conversational ability in a second language: A case-study of an adult learner.' In R.R. Day (ed.), *Talking to learn: Conversation in Second Language Acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Ullman, M.T. (2015) 'The declarative/procedural model: a neurobiologically motivated theory of first and second language.' In VanPatten, B. & Williams, J. (eds.) *Theories in second Language Acquisition: An Introduction (2nd edition)*. London: Routledge.

Widdowson, H. (1990) *Aspects of Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

---

**Scott Thornbury** has taught and trained in Egypt, UK, Spain, and in his native New Zealand. His writing credits include several award-winning books for teachers on language and methodology. The second edition of *About Language* was published in 2018 and his latest books are *Scott Thornbury's 30 Language Teaching Methods* and *Scott Thornbury's 101 Grammar Questions* (Cambridge). He is also the series editor for the *Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers*. His website is [www.scottthornbury.com](http://www.scottthornbury.com).

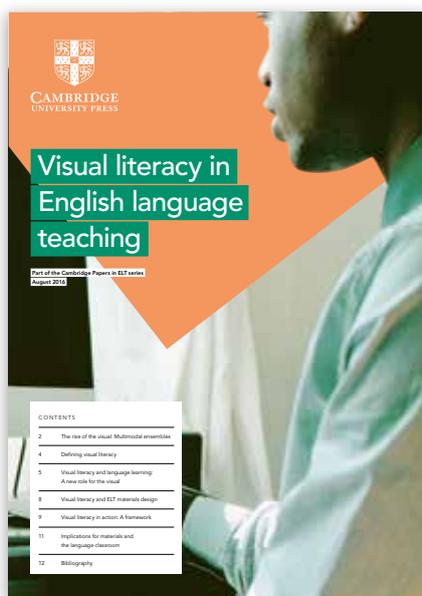
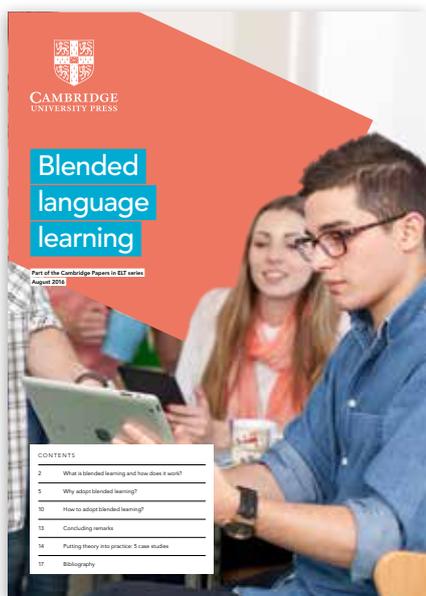
---

To cite this paper:

Thornbury, S. (2019) *Teaching grammar to adults*. Part of the Cambridge Papers in ELT series. [pdf] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Available at [cambridge.org/cambridge-papers-elt](http://cambridge.org/cambridge-papers-elt)

Find other *Cambridge Papers in ELT* at:  
[cambridge.org/cambridge-papers-elt](http://cambridge.org/cambridge-papers-elt)







[cambridge.org/betterlearning](https://cambridge.org/betterlearning)