Prologue

*From: "Stephen Krashen" krashen@usc.edu^*

To: <Recipient List Suppressed:;>

Subject: grammar study

Date: Monday, February 04, 2002 3:24 P

Sent to the Washington Post, Feb. 4

Re: Sentence diagramming and the study of grammar

("Putting grammar lessons on the line," Feb. 3, 2002).

A number of studies done over the last 100 years have confirmed that explicit grammar study does not contribute to writing quality, and that extensive reading does. Those who read more write better, spell better, have larger vocabularies, and have better control of complex grammatical constructions. There are good reasons, however, for including the study of grammar in high school:

it can be an excellent introduction to the study of language, or linguistics, and it can help in the "editing" part of writing. Even those who read a lot may have small gaps, such as the lie/lay distinction, and aspects of punctuation (its, it's). The use of consciously learned grammar rules can help fill these gaps. Grammar study should not, however, be at the core of the English curriculum.

Stephen Krashen

MY INSIGHTS ON LEARNING MODERN ENGLISH GRAMMAR

Indrawati

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Abstract

What is Grammar?; Do we need to study grammar to learn a language?; and Why must we teach grammar? Those questions are mostly being asked by teachers and students of English. Grammar teaching has always been one of the most controversial and least understood aspects of language teaching. Through this paper I will tell you my insight on two Grammar books that have changed my opinion about teaching and learning Grammar. I know I don't deserve two evaluate even judge these excellent books but at least I've just tried to deliver my simple point of view about the books that I've learned and read when joining Modern English Grammar Course. Hopefully, this will change the students' (especially TBI Students of STAIN Syaikh Abdurrahman Siddik Bangka Belitung) attitude and behaviour toward learning grammar in years to come.

Abstrak

Apakah itu tata bahasa? Apakah kita perlu belajar tata bahasa untuk mempelajari suatu bahasa? Mengapa kita harus mengajarkan tata bahasa? Pertanyaan-pertanyaan tersebut sering sekali dipertanyakan oleh guru dan siswa dalam mempelajari tata bahasa dalam bahasa Inggris. Pengajaran tata bahasa selalu menjadi kontroversial dan dianggap aspek yang paling sulit dipahami. Melalui artikel ini saya mencoba memaparkan sedikit analisis saya tentang dua buku tata bahasa yang akhirnya mengubah pola fikir saya tentang pengajaran dan pembelajaran tata bahasa. Saya sadar sepenuhnya saya tidaklah pantas untuk memberi penilaian dan mengevaluasi buku-buku yang sangat istimewa ini, tapi setidaknya saya hanya mencoba menyampaikan sedikit pendapat tentang buku-buku tata bahasa yang saya baca dan pelajari saat mengikuti mata kuliah Modern English Grammar. Semoga tulisan sederhana ini akan lambat laun mengubah pola fikir dan kebiasaan mahasiswa terutama mahasiswa Tadris Bahasa Inggris dalam mempelajari tata bahasa dalam bahasa Inggris.

I. *What is Grammar?*

After studying Grammar from Elementary School until now, I still cannot easily define what Grammar is. But even if you feel you know pretty well what it

is, you might find it is hard to define. "What is Grammar?" is a kind of question that seems easy to answer until somebody asks it. I think it is not wrong if I say Grammar is the system of a language. People sometimes describe grammar as the "rules" of a language; but in fact, no language has rules. If we use the word "rules", we suggest that somebody created the rules first and then speak the language, like a new game. But languages did not start like that. Languages started by people making sounds which evolved into words, phrases and sentences. No commonly spoken language is fixed. All languages change over time. What we call "grammar" is simply a reflection of a language at a particular time.

Do we need to study grammar to learn a language? The short answer is "no". Many people in the world speak their own native language without having studied its grammar. Children start to speak before they even know the word "grammar". But if you are serious about learning a foreign language, the long answer is "yes", grammar can help you to learn a language more quickly and more efficiently." It's important to think of grammar as something that can help you, like a friend. When you understand the grammar (or system) of a language, you can understand many things yourself.   I myself think of grammar as something good, something positive, and something that we can use to find your way in reading, listening, speaking or writing the language itself.

1. 2 Why Teach Grammar?

Grammar teaching has always been one of the most controversial and least understood aspects of language teaching (Gunn and McCallum, 2005). [1]Few teachers remain indifferent to grammar and many teachers become obsessed by it. As teachers, we asked ourselves our immediate reaction to the word *grammar*, and we came up with words such as *challenging*, *important*, and *necessary*. Our students, however, when asked the same questions on an informal survey,

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[1] Gunn and McCallum, Climbing Mountain of Grammar, (*English Teaching Forum*, 39(1).), 2005, hlm. 30-33.

responded with comments such as "suffering," "boring," and "no – not grammar!" When asked to reflect on how grammar was taught to them, most students replied that their teachers used direct teaching, worksheets, or editing exercises to help students improve their grammar proficiency.

1.3 Attitudes to Grammar

In 1622 a certain Joseph Webbe schoolmaster and textbook writer, wrote: 'No man can run speedily to the mark of language that is shackled…. with grammar precepts.' He maintained that grammar could be picked up through simply communicating: 'By exercise of reading, writing, and speaking…all things belonging to Grammar, will without labour, and whether we will or no, thrust themselves upon us.'[2]

Webbe was one of the earliest educators to question the value of grammar instruction, but certainly not the last. In fact, no other issue has so preoccupied theorists and practitioners as the grammar debate, and the history of language teaching is essentially the history of the claims and counterclaims for and against the teaching of grammar. Differences in attitude to the role of grammar underpin differences between methods, teachers, and learners. It is a subject that everyone involved in language teaching and learning has an opinion on. And these opinions are often strongly and uncompromisingly stated. Here, for example, are a number of recent statements on the subject.[3]

> *'There is no doubt that a knowledge – implicit or explicit – of grammatical rules is essential for the mastery of language.'*
> (Penny Ur, a teacher trainer, and author of *Grammar Practice Activities*)
> *'The effects of grammar teaching…appear to be peripheral and fragile.'*
> (Stephen Krashen, an influential applied linguist)

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[2] Thornburry, Scott. 2004. *How to Teach English*, (London: Longman Group UK LTD), 2004, hlm.

[3] *Ibid,* hlm. 14-15

'A sound knowledge of grammar is essential if pupils are going to use

English effectively.' (Tom Hutchinson, a coursebook writer)

'Grammar is not very important: The majority of languages have

a very complex grammar. English has little grammar and consequently

it is not very important to understand it.'

(From the publicity of a London language school)

'*Grammar is not the basis of language acquisition, and the balance of*

linguistic research clearly invalidates any view to the contrary.'

(Michael Lewis, a popular writer on teaching methods)

I started this paper by copying an email sent by Stephen Krashen. Stephen Krashen (University of Southern California) is an expert in the field of linguistics, specializing in theories of language acquisition and development. I think he is one of the linguistics experts that have a positive attitude toward teaching and learning grammar. In fact, some experts also have negative attitude toward teaching and learning English Grammar as I cited above. Rather, by sifting the arguments for and against, it is hoped that we as teachers of English will be in a better position to make up our own minds in teaching and learning Grammar.

On the next section I will tell you my insight on two Grammar books that have changed my opinion about studying Grammar. I know I don't deserve two evaluate even judge these excellent books but at least I've just tried to deliver my simple point of view about the books that I've learned and read since I've join Modern English Grammar Course.

2. An Overview of The Grammar Book: An ESL/EFL Teacher's Course

Marianne Celce-Murcia and Diane Larsen-Freeman (1999)

Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle

Pp. viii + 655

The Grammar Book is "An ESL/EFL Teacher's Course." This book will enable prospective and practising teachers of English as a second or foreign language to   better understand the grammar of the language they teach. It was originally designed for training new teachers in the grammar points that we all must be able to teach effectively. In other words, this book provides teacher of English with ideas for effectively presenting grammatical points to students of English as a second or foreign language. Exploring *The Grammar Book* is an excellent language-learning textbook that incorporates certain core aspects of grammar. This book utilizes a context-based approach and presents a framework to facilitate the learning of those core grammar aspects when they occur in real life contexts. The intended readers or users of the book are EFL/ESL learners with upper intermediate to advanced levels and teachers of EFL/ESL. However, EFL/ESL teachers can benefit from exploring this book because this particular EFL/ESL book has based its language instructional activities on established linguistic theories and pedagogical approaches.

This book also provides exercises to test the reader's understanding of what has been presented. Since answer keys to the exercises are provided at the end of the book and grammar explanations, the book can be used both for self-study (intermediate level proficiency is required) and as a pedagogical textbook for a classroom setting. It also has suggestions for classroom teaching of the points discussed, recognizing that teachers will have to adapt them according to their own personal approach to ESL/EFL teaching; exercises and discussion questions of both a factual and a problem solving nature; the latter to encourage pedagogical application of the grammar points.

Different from other grammar book, this book uses Phrase Structure Rules to describe basic English sentences in the form of diagramming, tree diagram. The rules are arranged in a hierarchy so that the first rule tells us what the largest unit, namely, the sentence, is comprised of. The next rule takes one of the constituents of the sentence and further breaks it down to reveal its composition.

Diane Ravitch, an educational historian and policy analyst at New York University, said she enjoyed sentence diagramming as a student. "It helped me

understand the way the English language works, and I think it makes me a better writer to be able to tell the difference between an adjective and an adverb and to know which modifies what," she said. But an NCTE advisory against diagramming and other overt forms of grammar instruction early in the 1970s had a powerful effect, said Edward Cannon, head of the English Department at T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria. An informal survey of local and national experts indicates that diagramming is extremely rare. Some teachers, though, say student writing has gotten so bad that they are willing to try even a 19th century cure. "In general, the teaching of grammar and diagramming does not serve any practical purpose for most students," a 1996 NCTE journal article said, citing many research studies. "It does not improve reading, speaking, writing, or even editing, for the majority of students." An entire generation of teachers has been told that sentence diagramming is not only difficult and boring, but also likely to sour students on writing and public speaking and make them reluctant to do their English class homework. Most writing teachers say that it is much better to introduce rules of grammar gradually and naturally as they edit students' work (see: http:// www. Azusands.k12.ca.us/bilingual/pdf).

Whatever experts or grammarian said about diagramming, I agree with Diane Ravitch's view that diagramming helps me in analyzing the sentences in detail the basic structure of English sentences and understanding the relationship of sentences. In short, for me, a tree diagram is a handy way of the representation the structure rules more graphically.

However, this book lacks interactive exercises that would make it possible for learners to put the knowledge of grammar into real use. In other words, with some guidance from this book, learners might be able to identify context-sensitive grammar elements and the grammar choices that speakers or writers make in their production; however, it does not give learners enough chances to produce longer pieces of discourse either in written or spoken English. For this reason, this book can be a textbook used in conjunction with other resource books, and luckily, my lecturer, Mr. Zainal A. Naning, M.A. has already given us a solution by providing

another grammar book, *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English (LGSWE).*

The book does not leave out grammar as structure. It trains readers to raise their *grammar awareness* and understanding of grammar. And it gives me a new perspective on the exploration of grammar in teaching and learning grammar.

3. An Overview of Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English

Douglas Biber, Stig Johansson, Geoffrey Leech, Susan Conrad, and Edward Finegan

(Northern Arizona University, University of Oslo, University of Lancaster, Iowa State

University, and University of Southern California)

Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Ltd,

1999, xxviii+1204 pp; hardbound.

When my lecturer, Mr. Zainal Naning, M.A. asked me to write a paper about this course (Modern English Grammar) including my overview of Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English (LGSWE), I felt a little bit confused what should I write about this book. Anyhow, after studying this book for some time, let me give my comment about this   As far as I can say, Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English brings fresh perspectives to the study of English grammar. *The Longman   Grammar of Spoken and Written English* is a pedagogical course book for advanced students at university or on teacher-training courses, and an invaluable reference grammar. It combines a comprehensive examination of grammatical structure with information about the 'how', 'when' and 'why' of English as it is really used.

LGSWE is a grammar book that has some characteristics, such as:

1. Examines patterns of use in the news, fiction and academic English
2. Takes grammar and vocabulary together and looks at how they interact

3. Is based on the analysis of 40-million words of British and American, written and spoken corpus text
4. Uses over 3000 examples of real, corpus English to illustrate the points
5. Uses frequency tables and graphs to make the new findings of this grammar clear

Biber and his colleagues attempt a detailed description of all the syntactic phenomena of English. But Biber et al. (hereafter *LGSWE)* go beyond other 'Grammar Books' in several important ways:

1. The work is based on corpus analysis, and there is a strong emphasis on linguistic function in the interpretation of the quantitative results of the analysis.
2. A central organizing element is the importance of register as a factor in linguistic choices.
3. Spoken, conversational English is treated as equal in standing to written English.
4. The emphasis is much more explicit on the relationships between discourse factors and language users' syntactic choices and between those syntactic choices and language user's lexical choices.

The corpus upon which *LGSWE* is based is the *Longman Spoken and Written English Corpus* of 40 million words of British and American English in 37,000 texts. The corpus includes four main registers: transcribed conversations (6.4 million words),fiction (5.0 million words), news (10.7 million words), and academic prose (5.3 million words); in addition, there are two supplementary registers: 5.7 million words of nonconversational speech and 6.9 million words of general prose.

Throughout the book, the differences between conversation and the written registers are treated in detail, and Chapter 14 is devoted to particular aspects of conversation, such as how the constraints of real-time, interactive language production influence the language user's choice of syntactic constructions.

Synopsis of the contents of *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English.*

A. Introductory
A corpus-based approach to English grammar

Introduction to the basic concepts of the work, including the use of the corpus.

B. Basic grammar

1. Word and phrase grammar
   The characteristics of words; the basic word classes; function words; the

   characteristics of phrases; types of phrase; embedding and coordination of
   phrases.

2. Clause grammar
   The major elements of clauses and their patterns; peripheral elements;
   ellipsis;

   negation; subject-verb concord; dependent and independent clauses.

C. Key word classes and their phrases

1. Nouns, pronouns, and the simple noun phrase
   Types of nouns; determiners; number; case; gender; derived nouns;
   pronouns.

2. Verbs
   Single-word and multiword verbs; semantic domains; valency; auxiliaries;
   copulas.

3. Variation in the verb phrase
   Tense; aspect; voice; modality.

4. Adjectives and adverbials
   Types of adjectives; comparatives and superlatives; formation of
   adjectives; syntacticroles of adverbs; semantic categories of adverbs.

D. More complex structures

1. Complex noun phrases
   Premodification; nominal sequences; restrictive and nonrestrictive
   postmodifiers; postmodification by relative clauses, prepositional phrases,
   and appositives.

2. The form and function of complement clauses
   that, wh-, -ing, and infinitive clauses.

3. Adverbials
   Circumstance, stance, and linking adverbials.

E. Grammar in a wider perspective

1. Word order and related syntactic choices

Marked word orders, such as inversions; passive constructions; existential *there;* clefts.

2. The grammatical marking of stance
   Kinds of stance; attribution of stance.

3. Lexical expressions in speech and writing
   Collocations ("lexical bundles"); idioms; free verb-particle combinations;

   binomial phrases.

4. The grammar of conversation
   Differences between conversation and writing; dysfluencies; grammatical

   characteristics of sentences constructed in real time.

The authors are generous with the use of examples from the corpus to illustrate their descriptions. Often, the selection of examples is as large as, or even larger than, the description itself; for example, Section 10.2.1.2, on circumstance adverbials of time, consists of five sentences by the authors and 14 example sentences from the corpus. And as anyone who has worked with corpora knows, it is sometimes hard to avoid the distraction of reading the data for its own sake; similarly, in *LGSWE,* it's easy to start skipping over the authors' text in order to hurry to the next example. One suspects the authors of having sometimes deliberately chosen the most enticing examples from the corpus to illustrate each point.

Since many lay readers of *LGSWE* will turn to the book for guidance in "correct English," the authors are careful to emphasize that their work is descriptive, not prescriptive. Of course, this is not to say that the book is not of use as a guide for those who are uncertain in their usage; any writer who wants to ensure that his or her usage is in accord with English norms, be they prescriptive or statistical, will find it extremely helpful. For example, the section on verb concord with existential *there* (p. 186) spends some time discussing the fact that the prescriptively deprecated use of a singular verb followed by a plural noun phrase *(There's apples if you want one)* is actually more common in conversation than the prescriptively approved form *(There are apples...).*

LGSWE is an attractive, well-designed, and well-typeset book. I noticed no significant typos or errors of copyediting. But I must admit to being both mystified and somewhat annoyed by the histograms. Five different styles are used, all of them low in resolution: cumulative vertical bars, adjacent vertical bars, horizontal bars of a few discrete lengths, horizontal rows of squares, and horizontal rows of circles. The vertical styles require the reader to distinguish up to six shades of grey. The horizontal styles have no scale, but rather a legend such as "each m represents 5%," so that one has to count the squares or circles. Confusingly, the style chosen for any particular histogram seems often to be random and unrelated to either the nature of the data   shown or the logic of the display. For example, Tables 5.26-28 (pp. 432-3) show the distribution across registers of various forms of *do;* the first two tables use horizontal squares, but the third uses horizontal circles.

Moreover, LGSWE provides a very wide, wealthy, and informative information about English Grammar. In conclusion, I must admit that LGSWE brings a new horizon for me in studying Grammar. Although I have to deal with many new terms in Grammar but it does enriches my knowledge, perception, ideas, and understanding what 'mysteries' lies behind Grammar of spoken and written English. The next section that follows I will explore my experience in joining Modern English Course with my lectures, Mr. Naning and Mr. Petrus.

4. Modern English Grammar Course

This course has 18 (eighteen) meetings. The first to sixth meeting, we had Mr. Ismail Petrus, M.A. taught this course. While studying grammar with him we used *The Grammar Book: An ESL/EFL Teacher's Course.* Since the seventh meeting, Mr. Zainal A. Naning M.A has taught this course. Every meeting we have two presentations, one presents some topics, usually three topics, in *The Grammar Book* or *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* and the other presents a research paper summary.

I think there are many benefits that I've got from this presentation, either as a presenter or an audience only. First, if I become the presenter, I have to pursue myself very hard to understand the topics presented. Like or dislike I have to study very hard in order to make a successful presentation since I have to answer all the questions given by my friends and my lecturer. Second, I think it's one of the best ways for me to practice my English in front of many people as well as learn to become a good presenter in classroom discussions.

Another requirement in joining this course is we have to make summary every meeting. Once again like it or not we have to always read the books before we write the summary. Actually, in the beginning of the course, I felt it was a burden for me to make summary every meeting. But lately, I can feel that it forces me to read more and more. As a result, I always have a brief description about what topics discussed and presented in class. Moreover, it makes me easier to involve in class discussions since I've have already read the topics as well as make the summary. One thing that I like from Mr. Naning is he always scores and returns our summary paper and what he has done so far triggers me to make a good summary.

In addition, when assigning this paper, Mr. Naning also asked us to write what happens before and after taking this course. All I can say is I think I've got much from this course. Since my S1 degree, my educational background is Electrical Engineer, not English Education, studying new concepts of grammar like what I've got in this course really makes my eyes "opened" of how complicated, interesting, and challenging "World of Grammar" is.

5. Conclusion

As far as I can tell what I've already got in Modern English Grammar Course leads me to a destination where as a teacher of English, I can explore some possible application of these perspectives in teaching English grammar. I'd say that actually I'm still green in teaching English but I personally agree that grammar cannot stand alone, it should be taught skill, context and task based

Teaching methods may come and go. And quite often they come round again. Teacher's intuition, on the other hand, that is developed and fine-tuned by years of thoughtful classroom experience, tend to outlive these swings and pendulums. This is not meant to be an invitation to complacency. As professionals, language teachers have a duty to keep themselves abreast of developments in second language acquisitions research, in applied linguistics, in educational theory and practice – both inside and outside the domain of language teaching – in fact in any field that has a bearing on language and on learning.

Epilogue

(A dialog between a teacher of English and a student in classroom while studying grammar)

…………..

Mr. Priestley: There is a difference between "learning English" and "learning

about English." Now, I want you to learn English, and I believe

the best way to learn to speak English is by speaking it; and that

is why in our meetings, instead of talking to you about English

Grammar, I try to get you to talk all kinds of things.

Pedro: Excuse me, Sir, but haven't there been some new ideas in English

Grammar teaching about "structures" and "sentence patterns"?

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