

Implicit Standards for Explicit Grammar Teaching

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Introduction

No one seriously questions the need for language students to develop a good control of grammar. Those who study English as a second or foreign language in order to use it in work or study will find themselves at a serious disadvantage if their grammar is so weak that they cannot express themselves clearly and effectively, or if their underdeveloped interlanguage creates an impression of ineptitude or ignorance.

However, the question of how grammar is to be taught is at the heart of one of the most enduring controversies in **TESOL**. A wide range of opinions is found in the field. Some maintain that explicit grammar rules absolutely must be taught and drilled, or students will be condemned to a lifetime of fossilization at an early stage of interlanguage. Some argue that explicit rules and drills are a terrible waste of time, and that comprehensible input is the only effective way to promote the acquisition of grammar. Many occupy positions somewhere between these two extremes, and many others probably have no idea where they stand.

Of course, the world abounds with examples of people who have acquired their first language without explicit grammar instruction, and there are also many examples of successful second language acquisition with little or no explicit instruction. In general, it appears that exposure to comprehensible input is virtually indispensable for the acquisition of all facets of a second language, including grammar. But this does not prove that explicit grammar instruction is of no value, or that it is not necessary for some purposes.

Rather than attempt to settle the large question of whether grammar needs to be taught explicitly, the researchers will address a different question: Assuming that grammar is to be taught, what standards should such instruction satisfy in order to be pedagogically sound?

The first step in approaching this question is to review the major justifications for grammar teaching, showing in each case what pedagogical criteria are implied. The second step is to look at some examples of grammar statements taken from Betty Azar's well-known textbook and test them against these implied criteria. The reader will see that the more serious and ambitious the assumed benefits of grammar teaching become, the more difficult it is to satisfy the implied criteria, and the less likely it is that anyone ever has satisfied them, or ever will do so.

Justifications for Teaching Grammar

1. Explicit grammar instruction is expected, therefore it must be provided.

This justification does not claim that any benefit will result from explicit grammar teaching except one: it will satisfy the expectations of students and other stakeholders. In principle, then, whatever is done along the lines of explicit grammar instruction is acceptable, so long as everyone is satisfied. The grammar taught does not have to be comprehensive, technically rigorous, or useful in actual application. Strictly speaking, the principles taught do not even have to be factually correct, as long as the students think they are.

However, no responsible educator would ever endorse the teaching of false information. Therefore, whatever information is taught must at least be correct to the best of the instructor's knowledge (*Standard A*). It can be assumed that this standard, which is surely a basic expectation for all teaching, is not controversial, and applies equally to all of the other justifications discussed below.

2. Students must pass standardized tests that assume a specific grammar syllabus.

This introduces a performance requirement that is defined in terms of a particular test. It also implies a content requirement for teaching: all aspects of grammar that students are expected to know must be taught. In other words, a specific syllabus of grammar points is imposed. However, the teaching does not need to go beyond that syllabus: the grammar covered should be correct, but does not have to be technically rigorous (*Standard B*), comprehensive (*Standard C*), or useful for any purpose other than the test.

3. The study of grammar satisfies intellectual curiosity.

This justification is often cited in the context of adult learners, quite rightly. Grammar can be fascinating if it is presented properly. Many aspects of grammar have been investigated in great depth and detail by linguistic researchers, who have discovered elegant underlying regularities and principles. It is not necessary to cover the entire language in order to gain an appreciation of this work, but certain areas of the grammar will be especially rewarding due to the insights they provide into the deeper systems on which the language is based. Technical terminology and concepts will be necessary in order to discuss or understand the principles of interest. The information gained by such study would not need to have any practical uses.

4. Explicit grammar rules enable second language students to edit or "monitor" their own output.

Stephen Krashen's Monitor Model (1999) holds that the learning of explicit grammar rules, while not contributing to language acquisition itself, may enable learners to monitor their own output, detecting and correcting violations of rules they have learned but not yet acquired (*Standard D*). He maintains that only a limited number of relatively simple, superficial rules would be useful for this purpose, and then only when the learner was paying attention to form, knew the correct rule, and had time to apply it.

The above-mentioned restricted view of the monitoring process seems logical, but for purposes of this discussion the implications of a broader view should be considered. This view, which is held by many in the field, is that all aspects of grammar can be learned explicitly and used to edit output, as part of the revision process (in writing) or self-correction (in speaking). If this position is to be maintained, it imposes high standards on grammar teaching. First, the entire grammar must be taught, comprehensively and in detail. Second, technical rigor is required, for otherwise the rules will be too vague or imprecise to yield the desired results: The students will need instruction in the terminology and concepts of descriptive linguistics, otherwise they will not be able to understand the rules. (One of the main goals of descriptive linguistics is to describe the ability of speakers to judge whether sentences are grammatical, which would be central to the editing process.) The success of the entire enterprise will be gauged in terms of how well students are able to use this knowledge in self-editing.

5. Students need explicit grammar rules in order to formulate their own output correctly.

According to this view, it is useful or even necessary for second language learners to apply the rules that they have learned when speaking or writing, not merely as part of the monitoring or editing process, but as part of the process of language production. This justification for teaching grammar implies all of the standards mentioned in justification #4, since a person who can produce correct structures is surely able to make grammaticality judgments about those structures. In addition, learners would need to be taught how to select the grammatical constructions that correctly convey the concepts and relationships that they wish to express (*Standard E*). This is a very strong requirement, but it is clearly implied by justification #5.

Here is a summary of the above discussion in table form:

Justification	Standard A correct	Standard B technically rigorous	Standard C comprehensiv e	Standard D effective for self-editing	Standard E effective for self-
1. Explicit grammar instruction is expected, therefore it must be provided.	Yes	No	No	No	No
2. Students must pass standardized tests that assume a specific grammar syllabus.	Yes	No	No (but cover specific points)	No	No
3. The study of grammar satisfies intellectual curiosity.	Yes	Yes	No (but include points of intellectual interest)	No	No
4. Explicit grammar rules enable 2nd language students to edit (“monitor”) their own output.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
5. Students need explicit grammar rules in order to formulate their own output correctly.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Examples of Substandard Grammar Instruction

Here are some specific examples of published grammar teaching materials that fail to satisfy the standards outlined above. All of the examples in this section come from Betty Azar's **Understanding and Using English Grammar**. Azar's work has been chosen because it is widely recognized as a leader in the field, because it is the product of a great deal of careful effort, and because the researchers believe that many teachers who use it would endorse justification 5, the most demanding.

- *Standard A: Grammatical information must be factually correct.*

Many of the statements in Azar's book are incorrect. Here are a few examples:

1. "A pronoun is used in place of a noun." (p. 132)

John has a car.

He drives to work.

Actually, **pronouns** normally take the place of entire **noun phrases**, which can be very lengthy:

The old man who was lying on the pavement at the bus stop in front of my apartment building appeared to be in distress.

I asked him if he needed help.

If a **pronoun** is actually substituted for a **noun**, the result is an ungrammatical sentence whenever the **noun phrase** contains more than just the **noun**:

The old man appeared to be in distress.

I asked the old him if the old he needed help.

There is perhaps only one **pronoun** in English that can actually replace only a **noun**, leaving the rest of the **noun phrase** intact. Although this is the only **pronoun** that actually follows Azar's rule, she does not even mention it in her book.

Should I give the message to the tall woman standing on the speaker's platform, or to the short one sitting at the back of the room?

Should I give the message to the tall woman standing on the speaker's platform, or to the short her sitting at the back of the room?

Since it makes a difference grammatically whether a **pronoun** replaces a **noun** or a **noun phrase**, it is impossible for Azar or anyone else to describe **pronoun** usage correctly without drawing this distinction. But she does not do this. The concept of **noun phrase** is completely missing from the book.

2. "A singular pronoun is used to refer to a singular noun....A plural pronoun is used to refer to a plural noun." (p.132)

When considering the singular/plural distinction, it becomes even clearer that most **pronouns** replace or refer to **noun phrases**, not **nouns**:

John, Mary, Sally, and Fred are playing bridge.

They are having a good time.

Since there are no plural **nouns** here, Azar's rule does not allow "**they**" to be used. Instead, her rule would produce this:

*He, she, she, and he are having a good time.

Obviously, the singular/plural distinction has to be made at the level of **noun phrase**, not at the level of **noun**. But Azar does not even hint at the existence of **noun phrases**. This is not just a small oversight; it is a huge gap in her approach to English grammar.

3. "Possessive adjectives ["her" "your"] are followed immediately by a noun; they do not stand alone." (p. 132)

"Possessive pronouns ["hers" "yours"] are not followed immediately by a noun; they stand alone." (p. 132)

"Adjectives describe [modify] nouns." (p. A4)

First of all, when Azar says that a **possessive adjective** is followed "immediately" by a **noun**, she leaves out the possibility of more than one **adjective**. For example, in the phrase "**my red ball**," there's an **adjective** -- "**red**" -- where Azar says there should be a **noun**!

Secondly, Azar doesn't mention the fact that an **adjective** -- or string of **adjectives**, or an **adjective phrase** -- is often preceded by an **article**, as in

the red ball [1 adjective]

a big red rubber ball [3 adjectives]

a very big ball [adjective phrase]

SO, when she says that the **pronouns** "**his**" "**my**" "**their**" etc. are **possessive adjectives**, she implies that they can be used just as other **adjectives** are -- which we know can be preceded by articles. For example,

the my ball

a big my rubber ball

a very my ball

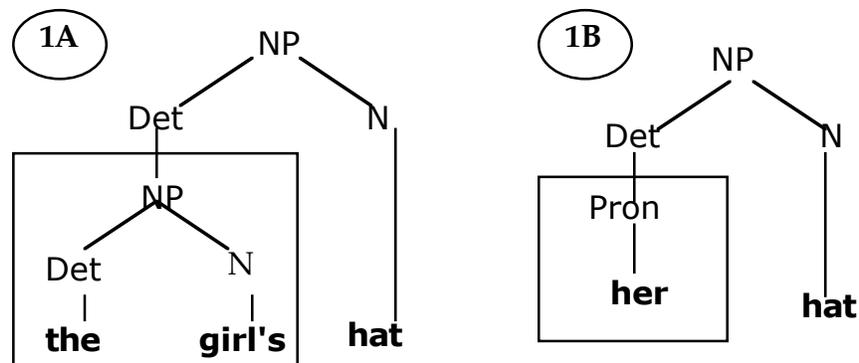
(Azar actually contradicts herself on p. 115 by referring to "**his**" in "**his car**" as a **possessive pronoun**.....!)

Thirdly, because **adjectives** can also appear in the predicate, Azar's **possessive adjectives** ought to be able to go there too, as in

The ball is my.

In fact, a **possessive pronoun** -- like any other type of **pronoun** -- replaces a **noun phrase**. All of the possessive forms that Azar discusses are **pronouns**, even those that she calls **adjectives**, because they all replace **noun phrases**.

In the trees below, notice that the two kinds of **possessive pronouns** are related to two different levels of **noun phrase**.

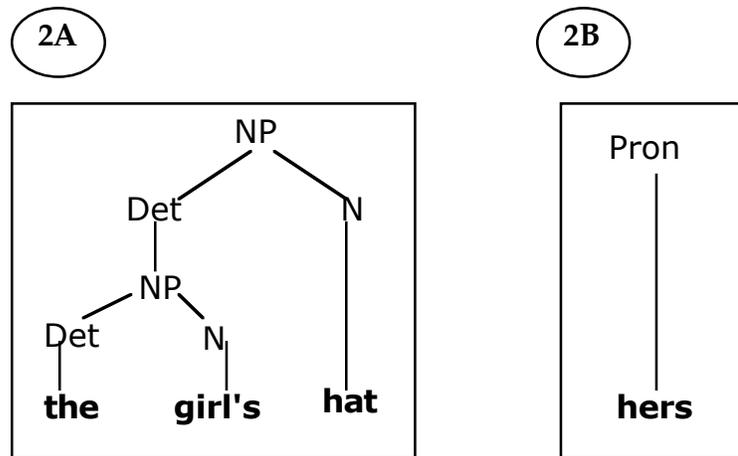


The **possessive pronoun** "her" in "her hat" (the box in 1B) corresponds to a possessive **noun phrase** (the box in 1A) that is part of a larger **noun phrase**. It refers to the possessor but not to the thing that is possessed.

I'm wearing the girl's hat.

The girl is upset because I'm wearing her hat.

On the other hand, in trees 2A and 2B, it is clear that the **possessive pronoun "hers"** corresponds to the larger **noun phrase** (everything in the boxed area) that includes both the possessor and the thing that is possessed.



Such a **noun phrase** is not itself part of a larger **noun phrase**; it is an independent **noun phrase**.

The girl is wearing my hat, and I'm wearing the girl's hat.
 She is wearing my hat, and I'm wearing hers.

Possessive **noun phrases** like "**the girl's**" appear in the **determiner** position within a larger **noun phrase**. **Determiners** include articles ("**the**," "**a**") and deictics such as "**this**" and "**that**." A **noun phrase** may have at most one **determiner**. This is why one cannot say *"**the her hat**"* or (as above) *"**the my ball**."* Such a phrase has two **determiners**, which is not allowed by the rules of English. This also explains the grammatical flaw in the following sentences:

The hat is her.
 or
 The ball is my.

A **determiner** is part of a **noun phrase** and cannot stand alone (it must be followed by something, including at least a **noun**). And so **possessive pronouns** such as "**her**" or "**my**" -- which are in the **determiner** position -- cannot stand any more than a **determiner** like the can stand alone:

This is the.

On the other hand, **possessive pronouns** like "**hers**" replace independent **noun phrases**, and can therefore stand alone:

The hat is hers.

Concepts like **noun phrase**, **determiner**, etc., make it possible to accurately describe the grammatical patterns that include possessives. Without these concepts, the true rules about possessives cannot be stated.

It seems that the problem confronting **ESL** grammar-text writers (such as Azar) is to find a way to make the "rules" simple enough so that they can be learned and remembered by the non-native English learner. Since the "rules" -- such as the ones presented herein -- do suffice in limited contexts, Azar perhaps feels that it's counterproductive to load the learner down with more detail.

But the fact remains that what she has given them mis-information, which has to be unlearned at some point because certainly the learner will encounter English examples with more complexity as he makes gains in proficiency. This is the conundrum of teaching grammar at all!

Here are some possible arguments for Azar-type grammar rules:

"These are traditional statements about English grammar, and can be found in many sources."

True, but false statements do not become true by virtue of longevity or repetition.

"Azar's rules were not meant to be taken so literally."

But this would suggest that students were never expected to actually learn these rules, or remember them, or use them. What kind of pedagogy would this be?

"The examples and exercises will show students how the rules are actually used."

But if examples and exercises contradict the rules, attentive students will be confused. If they don't contradict the rules, they will reinforce them, misinformation and all.

"The innate principles of Universal Grammar will automatically tell students how to interpret the rules."

But it is not clear exactly what Universal Grammar contains, or whether second language students have access to it. Furthermore, if students use their innate grammatical intuitions to immediately spot the errors in rules, won't they quickly conclude that their textbook is not to be trusted? And in any case, Universal Grammar cannot handle all of these problems (for example, the possessive words, which actually are adjectives in some languages).

"Students will acquire the correct grammar from comprehensible input, apart from anything taught in their grammar books, so no harm is done."

This may be true, but it does not justify teaching rules that are not correct.

- *Standard B: Grammatical information must be technically rigorous.*

Azar frequently provides incomplete or misleading grammatical information, as in the following statements.

**"A gerund is the *-ing* form of verb used as a noun. A gerund is used in the same ways as a noun, i.e. as a subject or as an object."
"Playing tennis is a gerund phrase." (p. 297)**

If "**playing tennis**" is a **gerund phrase**, with the **gerund** that heads the phrase being the "***-ing* form of a verb used as a noun**," then it would be treated as a **noun** in a **noun phrase**.

This works sometimes. But there are other instances when the **gerund** -- although it is the subject of the sentence -- functions as a **verb** in a **verb phrase**. "**Playing tennis**" is such an example, since "**playing**" takes the **direct object** "**tennis**." Here's a parallel example:

Singing the national anthem respectfully is always appropriate.

The **gerund** here functions as a **verb** -- because it takes a **direct object** and an **adverb**. But sometimes a **gerund** behaves differently:

The respectful singing of the national anthem is always appropriate.

The **gerund** here functions as a **noun** -- because it has a **determiner**, an **adjective**, and a **prepositional phrase**.

Look at this from a student's perspective. On p. 132, Azar says that "Object pronouns are used as the objects of verbs...or as the objects of prepositions..." On p. A3, she says that "The object of a preposition is a noun or a pronoun." And on p. 298 she says that "A gerund is frequently used as the object of a preposition." An exercise on p. 298 poses this problem:

Thank you ____ (help) _____ me carry my suitcases.

The correct answer, obviously, is

Thank you for helping me carry my suitcases.

But consider the following:

"Me" is an **object pronoun**. Therefore it must be the object of a **verb** or a **preposition**. Clearly, the point of the exercise is to get students to use "helping" as the object of the **preposition** "for." Of what, then, is "me" the object? If "helping" is being used as a **noun** here, how can it have an object? **Nouns** do not have objects.

A student who remembers and tries to obey all the rules will find no answer here that does not break at least one of them.

Once again, the problem is a lack of crucial grammatical concepts and terms. The structures that Azar calls **gerund phrases** are more appropriately viewed as a special class of **noun phrases**. They are odd in that they may contain no **nouns** at all! For example,

Thank you for singing so sweetly.

This has the internal structure of a **verb phrase**.

Similarly, "...helping me carry my suitcases" is obviously related to the sentence, "You helped me carry my suitcases." It has lost its subject -- "you" -- which however can still be identified because a copy of it remains earlier in the sentence ("Thank you...").

The subjects of sentences, as well as the objects of **verbs** and **prepositions**, are **noun phrases** -- not **nouns**, not **pronouns**, and not **gerunds**. This insight would enable the rules to be stated in ways that are consistent with each other. As they stand now, Azar's rules conflict with each other. How can anyone learn a language by studying incorrect rules?

Again, here are a few objections that might be raised to the discussion:

"You can't expect students to learn these complicated grammatical terms and concepts."

The point isn't that students should be expected to learn such terms and concepts; rather, that without them, teachers and textbook writers cannot make correct statements about grammar. The choices would seem to be: teach misinformation based on inadequate concepts and terms; teach the grammar correctly, using and defining the necessary technical terms; or don't teach grammar explicitly.

"We're just trying to teach our students a few simple rules to satisfy their curiosity; we don't need all that theory."

However, the point of this discussion is that even simple rules should be formulated correctly, if they are to be formulated at all. Very little meaningful discussion of English grammar can take place without such basic terms as **noun phrase** and **determiner**. And how can intellectual curiosity be satisfied if there is no intellectual content?

"Most teachers don't know these terms."

The researchers believe that all **ESL / EFL** teachers should be familiar with the essentials of grammatical theory, but we recognize that many are not. This, of course, is precisely why Azar and other textbooks of that kind have been accepted so uncritically by so many teachers. An emphasis on teaching

explicit grammar is not actually recommended, but those who wish to do so should be alert to the grammatical misinformation that is being published. This means, at the very least, being at a higher level of sophistication than the Azar books.

- *Standard C: Grammatical information must be comprehensive.*

Many aspects of English grammar are barely sketched in Azar. Often, the most obvious facts about a construction are explained, but when it comes to somewhat more subtle matters, the student is left to his own devices. Here are a few examples:

1. "In everyday spoken English, certain forms of *be* and auxiliary verbs are usually contracted with pronouns, nouns, and question words." (p. A17)

This is fine as far as it goes, but no mention is made of the role of reduced stress in contraction or the role of sentence structure in stress reduction. Consequently, the student has no way of knowing that the following are not allowed:

Speaker A: Who's ready to go?

Speaker B: *I'm. *

I won't go on Tuesday, but *I'll on Wednesday.*

I don't know if you're the one who broke my window, but *if you're, you'll have to pay for it.*

2. "Not immediately follows an auxiliary verb or *be*." (p. A18)

But there are other uses of **not** that are ignored by this statement:

Not one person has called me today.

Bill, not understanding the message, tried to play it back.

Are you going or not?

I won't go with you, not even if you beg me.

Explaining these examples requires concepts like **scope of negation** and **derived structure**, matters that are not even hinted at in Azar.

One might raise the objection that no textbook series could possibly cover all of the intricacies of English grammar. However, the examples cited here are not esoteric oddities; they are commonplace constructions that are heard and read every day. If Azar is typical, it appears that grammar textbooks barely scratch the surface of their subject. It is clear that, for all practical purposes, students will have to acquire most aspects of grammar from comprehensible input, whether they receive explicit grammar instruction or not.

- *Standard D: Grammatical information must be effective for self-editing.*

The shortcomings pointed out already make it quite clear that the information a student can glean from Azar is inadequate for self-editing. A student who had written

The book is my.

or

I won't go on Tuesday, *but I'll on Wednesday.*

would have no reason to think anything was amiss.

A student who had written

Not one person has called me today.

would (after checking the rules) rewrite it as

One person has not called me today.

(correct, but with a different meaning.)

And if a student were to write

The singing the national anthem respectfully was appropriate.

it is hard to predict how he would edit it, using Azar's fragmentary description of **gerunds**.

- ***Standard E: Grammatical information must be effective for self-expression.***

If grammatical information is not effective for self-editing, it will be equally ineffective for self-expression. Many principles of sentence structure are only vaguely stated in the Azar book. Here are several more examples:

1. **"Sometimes a prepositional phrase comes at the beginning of a sentence."** (p. A3)

Although the placement of **adverbs** is described in careful detail (p. A4), Azar has only this to say about the position of **prepositional phrases**. This "sometimes" is not very helpful. It does not inform students that they can write

In the morning, I worked on my lessons.

but not

Of the road, I finally came to the end.

or

On the table, the book is mine.

2. Another less-than-helpful "sometimes" is found in a discussion of progressive tenses: "**An expression of place can sometimes come between the auxiliary *be* and the *-ing* verb in a progressive tense....**" (p. 31)

She was in bed reading.

This does not explain how to determine when the expression of place can come there. For example, it is correct to say

We were listening to music in the family room.

or

We were in the family room listening to music.

but not correct to say

She was on the wall admiring the pictures.

instead of

She was admiring the pictures on the wall.

Furthermore, Azar's restriction to expressions of place is not accurate, as it is also correct to say

We were in the family room last night listening to music.

There are ways to explain these matters, but they require a relatively sophisticated approach to grammatical description, one that is beyond the rudimentary concepts and terms that Azar employs.

3. "The simple past indicates that an activity or situation began and ended at a particular time in the past." (p. 27)

"The present perfect expresses the idea that something happened (or never happened) before now, at an unspecified time in the past. The exact time it happened is not important.... If there is a specific mention of time, the simple past is used.... The present perfect also expresses the repetition of an activity before now. The exact time of each repetition is not important." (p.36)

The distinction between the **simple past** and the **present perfect** is very difficult for many ESL/EFL students to grasp. It is also very difficult to explain. Traditional explanations -- including the statements found in Azar's text -- pile on detail after detail but still fail to capture the distinction in a way that actually corresponds to the facts of English usage.

Consider these examples:

I have seen five robins in the last 20 seconds.

There is a specific mention of time in this sentence, but the **present perfect** is used, not the **simple past**.

I often saw polar bears when I was living in Alaska.

This expresses the repetition of an activity before now, and the exact time of each repetition is not important; but the **simple past** is used, not the **present perfect**.

I have met President Bush.

The activity in this sentence began and ended at a particular time in the past -- even though the time is not stated, meetings do begin and end at particular times. But the **present perfect** is used, not the **simple past**.

I never met President Kennedy.

This expresses the idea that something never happened before now, at an unspecified time in the past, but the **simple past** rather than the **present perfect** is used.

The garbage truck is going to be here soon. Have you put the garbage out?

The garbage truck just drove away. Did you put the garbage out?

In these 2 sentences, the choice of **present perfect** or **simple past** has nothing to do with any of Azar's rules. The time of the action in question, if it happened at all, is the same in both sentences -- it began and ended in the past, at some particular time that is not important.

Azar's rules -- which attempt to explain the use of these forms in terms of the time, repetition, etc. of the action -- nibble at the edges of the truth but do not find it. As Celce-Murcia and Larson-Freeman point out in their discussion of the **simple past** / **present perfect** distinction (p. 125), "the choice is not dependent upon the time at which the event took place." Rather, the choice depends on "our present perspective on the event."

In each of the examples, the **simple past** is used when the speaker regards the time-frame of the event as finished and closed. The **present perfect** is used when the speaker regards the time-frame as current and open.

Since the speaker no longer lives in Alaska, President Kennedy is no longer alive, and the garbage truck is no longer able to pick up the garbage, these time-frames are closed and finished, and the **simple past** is used. Since the speaker is still looking for more robins, President Bush is alive, and the garbage truck is on its way here, these time-frames are open and subject to

further change and the **present perfect** is used. Such an explanation predicts that a healthy man planning his next vacation might say, "**I've never seen Paris,**" while a man on his death-bed might say, "**I never saw Paris.**"

Unless such points of grammar are clear to the learner, he will be unable to use them in monitoring his own output.

Discussion

There seems to be a paradox in teaching grammar. In order to state the rules correctly, a number of complex grammatical concepts are required, and most students won't understand them. In order to make the rules simple enough to teach, they have to be reduced to formulations that fail to state the facts correctly.

It is likely that students do not actually grasp the literal meanings of grammar textbook rules; or if they understand them, they probably do not actually learn them; or if they learn them, they probably do not remember or use them. One hopes this is the case, since the rules in books such as Azar would lead them to misunderstand and misuse English grammar. If students are successful in acquiring a good grasp of grammar, it must be from some other source. The researchers suggest that regular encounters with the real language -- in other words, comprehensible input -- is the true source of grammatical competence.

But if this is the case, what is the point of the grammar books? What is the point of teaching rules that are not true?

If the only purpose of grammar instruction is to satisfy the expectation that grammar should be taught, then it should not be too difficult to formulate a number of general principles that are both true and teachable. For example:

"Sentences have subjects and predicates."

"Regular English verbs in the past tense end in *-ed*."

"A noun may be preceded by one or more adjectives,"

and so on. This level of description is not too difficult to achieve, because the statements are vague and superficial, and because comprehensive, useful treatment of grammar is not required.

However, if the goal is to provide truly useful information about the entire grammar, the statements must be clear and precise. By taking the step from **"Sentences have subjects"** to **"A subject is a noun or pronoun,"** one undertakes the responsibility of making sure that this definition of subject will actually work when it is incorporated into other rules, such as the passive. This cannot be done without taking into account the technical terminology and concepts that specialists in formal grammar have developed as tools for achieving precision and accuracy. Without such tools, the rules are very likely to misrepresent the facts.

At the very least, **ESL** teachers should be aware of the glaring inadequacies of grammar textbook rules. The researchers encourage **ESL** teachers at all levels to examine textbook rules critically. It is essential for professionals to understand the flaws in their materials and to find ways to work around or beyond the misinformation in a text; no one wants to be caught off-guard by rules that don't work. Nor does any teacher want to waste time and energy teaching false rule formulations. By understanding the shortcomings of the grammar books, **ESL** instructors may be able to focus on more productive classroom experiences for their students.

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