

Language in Education

Series Editor

Michael Stubbs

Language is central to education. Yet very little writing about language is presented in a way that is suitable for teachers to help and guide them in their classroom practice. This series aims to explore in a non-technical way, aspects of language immediately relevant to practising and trainee teachers.

Learning about Writing: The Early Years

Pam Czerniewska

Teaching Grammar: A Guide for the National Curriculum

Richard Hudson

Teaching Grammar

A Guide for the National Curriculum

Richard Hudson



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Editor's foreword

This series contains short books on language in education, on topics where practical knowledge is urgently needed in schools.

The books aim to help with daily practice in schools and classrooms in principled ways. They should be of interest to practising teachers and student teachers, to teacher trainers, advisers and inspectors, and to those involved in educational administration, at the level of head of department or head of school, or in local education authorities.

The books follow several important guidelines:

- their main purpose is to make knowledge about language accessible to those who need it
- they therefore avoid jargon and presuppose no knowledge at all about linguistics
- they are not, in fact, books about linguistics: they are books about language, informed by current linguistic thinking
- they contain large numbers of examples, which, as far as possible, are taken from real data, such as children's written work, transcripts of classroom talk and pupils' school textbooks
- they discuss topics which teachers and parents themselves think are important: What *is* grammar and why doesn't it seem to be taught these days? How do children learn to write? Why can't some children learn to spell? What is normal and abnormal in language

development? Why is there so much debate about English teaching? . . .

A great deal of knowledge has been gained about many linguistic topics which are important in education. For practical purposes, such knowledge can be accepted as widely agreed and factual – at least it is the best we have available in areas where it is badly needed by teachers, advisers and administrators. However, this knowledge is often not in an appropriate form: it is often in journal articles or in relatively technical books. It is therefore the responsibility of linguists to present it to teachers, clearly and in an accessible form. If this is not done, then practical decisions will still be taken, by individual teachers and others – but possibly uninformed by the best in current thinking about language in education.

There have recently been very large changes in the British education system, particularly centred on the Education Reform Act and the National Curriculum. In a longer term perspective, the changes which this legislation has brought about are part of a long struggle around the forms and purposes of education. But debates about teaching English as a mother tongue and teaching foreign languages have certainly been very sharp in recent years. And there is no doubt that 'knowledge about language' has been given particular prominence (and has received a great deal of publicity in the mass media) via the curriculum proposals for English and modern languages. 'Standard English' and related topics carry a heavy symbolic load, and much of the discussion, sometimes fuelled by statements by prominent politicians and other public figures, has been confused and even hysterical. An aim of this series is to encourage considered and rational debate in an area where deeply felt emotions are often at stake.

The books in the series have been written with British teachers in mind, though the issues they discuss are clearly also of relevance in other countries. Due to rapid changes in the school system, British teachers are currently under considerable pressures, and are under particular pressures in areas of the curriculum which concern language.

The aim then, is to provide critical studies of aspects of

language which are important to professional practice: to identify problems and to help to solve them with reference to the best current knowledge about language. The books are not therefore primarily conceived as theoretical contributions. However, if linguists seriously think about language as it is used in schools and classrooms, this inevitably leads to new insights, and such studies of language in use may well raise theoretical problems of fundamental interest to linguists.

This book by Richard Hudson tackles directly a very difficult question which has caused misunderstandings and problems for teachers over many years (at least the last 50 years or so). What is grammar and how should it be taught?

Hudson is very well qualified indeed to discuss this question. He holds a Chair of Linguistics at University College London. He is one of the major linguists in Britain, and has published important books on grammatical theory. But he has also concerned himself over many years with introducing students to linguistics (he has published very readable introductory textbooks). And, through other writing and by organizing conferences, he has encouraged many linguists to think about the practical applications of knowledge about language, both in schools and in students' careers after school and university.

In this book, he presents a large number of central, up-to-date grammatical ideas, and then shows how they can be tackled in lessons. The book should be of great help to teachers who feel that grammar is important, but do not quite know how to teach it. And it should also persuade others that grammar can be a substantial and interesting study for children in schools. (It is unfortunate that many people's rejection of grammar in schools is based on views of grammar which are simply very out-of-date stereotypes.) The topic is especially important for new kinds of teaching needed for the National Curriculum in English.

Michael Stubbs

To Gaynor, Lucy and Alice

Preface

I have written this book with rather specific readers in mind, namely teachers at primary schools, or secondary-school English teachers who are responsible for applying the new National Curriculum for English in England or Wales. This requires teachers, among other things, to teach children about ordinary spoken English, Standard English, and language in general; but it is generally recognised that many teachers of English are not adequately prepared to do this. For various historical reasons entirely beyond their control, most teachers were taught very little about language at school and college, certainly much less than they are now expected to teach their pupils. Somehow this hole has to be plugged, and most of the plugging will probably have to be provided by books.

The National Curriculum defines quite specific objectives, but leaves a great deal to the imagination; for example, when it says that children should be able to talk about 'grammatical differences between Standard English and a non-standard variety' it does not say which particular grammatical differences (there are hundreds of them) or of course which non-standard variety. This gives schools and teachers ample room for exercising their own discretion, but until you know what is on the menu you can't choose from it, so I have made some quite specific decisions in the hope that this will be more helpful than keeping the discussion at a decent level of generality. In particular, part II contains suggestions for ten 'grammar lessons' on different topics and for different ability levels. The intention is to show the kind of thing that can be done with grammar, rather than to lay down a complete syllabus.

I have assumed no technical knowledge about language, and I have tried hard not to frighten readers by unnecessary

technicalities. Many of my colleagues in academic linguistics would probably be horrified by some of my simplifications, and by the things I have just not mentioned at all. At the same time, the book is meant for teachers, not for pupils, so I have tried to present a coherent intellectual framework of ideas about language which I would be quite willing to defend on academic grounds. These ideas may be hard to assimilate at first, so I have repeated them in different places, supported with examples; by the time you have been introduced to the same idea from several different directions you may find it is quite easy and natural.

To support the learning process I have collected all the main ideas together and presented them in an 'encyclopedia of grammar', which makes up part IV of the book. I thought this would be more helpful than a brief 'glossary of technical terms'. You may find this useful while reading the book, or afterwards; or you may like just to browse through it.

It should become obvious within the first few pages that grammar 'ain't what it used to be'. I am not trying to reintroduce the bad old ways of teaching grammar that have virtually died in most of our schools. Nor am I offering just a set of general principles about linguistic equality and the like: grammar takes us into the fine details and complexity of language structure, and if we don't get our hands dirty exploring this, we haven't 'done grammar'. I believe that both you and your pupils will find the experience exciting and rewarding.

This is my seventh book, but it has been far harder to write than any of the others. What you see is the fourth attempt, which stands on the ruins of one complete book and two half books. I believe that each version has moved nearer to the kind of book you really want and need, thanks to a very large amount of helpful advice and encouragement from Mike Stubbs, the series editor. However I should also like to acknowledge tactful criticism from Liz Gordon and Theo Manicki, both of whom read all or part of the third version and told me it was still too technical; and to thank Anna Gregory and Sheila Black, who read an earlier version of the present book and gave encouragement and guidance.

The book has been a family affair. I admire the work done by my wife Gaynor and her team of social workers, and wanted to make a contribution, however small, to solving some of the problems that afflict our society; and improbable though this may seem, I believe that grammar has an important part to play in making our society work better. Our daughters have contributed in different ways: Lucy has encouraged me by showing that it is possible to interest an adolescent in grammar; and Alice has kept my feet on the ground by showing that it isn't easy to do so. Finally, my father John went through the whole manuscript with his editorial pencil, and has made it all flow much better. He is a master of good style, and he claims that he learned it through all the sentence analysis and parsing that he did at school in the days before school grammar died. I am grateful to him for all his hard work, and I suspect you will be too.

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