

Rodney H. Jones and Graham Lock, *Functional Grammar in the ESL Classroom: Noticing, Exploring and Practising*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

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For teachers of English as a second or foreign language, especially those who have been applying text-based approaches to language education for some time, a first reaction to *Functional Grammar in the ESL Classroom: Noticing, Exploring and Practising* by Rodney Jones and Graham Lock might be to ask why it has taken so long for a book such as this to appear. It is certainly a welcome addition to the field because of the way that it integrates, in ready-to-implement lesson plans, established ESL teaching practices with text-based and functional understandings about the way language is used and learned.

Jones and Lock provide teachers with a framework for relating, in a principled way, teaching and learning about language as text in context with a repertoire of activities for teaching students about the grammatical structures of English, a repertoire that reorients communicative language teaching (CLT) activities familiar to ESL teachers (Brown 2007:45-52) so they can be included more effectively in a text-based program.

Communicative activities have been categorised in a variety of ways, for example, according to whether students are using language to comprehend (listening, reading), compose (speaking, writing) or interact (e.g. cooperative problem-solving) (Nunan 1988:55) or whether student language use is controlled (e.g. drills, dictation, cloze) or free (e.g. role-play, discussion) (Brown 2007:184-187). They can also be categorised according to the type of task the student is engaged in (e.g. listing, ordering, sorting, comparing, problem-solving) (Willis & Willis 2001: 177). Jones and Lock have avoided creating the inevitable and often, for teachers, intractable inventories of activities these typologies tend to produce by designing what can be thought of as a 'matrix' in which activity types intersect with pedagogic processes in the service of teaching language use in context.

The book is organised around a sequence of six classroom activity types, or 'general procedures' for teaching grammar to students of English as a second or foreign language. The procedures, introduced at the very beginning of Chapter 1, are: *comparing, sequencing, gap filling, restructuring, elaborating* and *transforming*. Their purpose in the classroom is to 'raise learners' awareness of how differences in grammatical forms express differences in meaning' (p. 3). Chapter 1 includes a section entitled 'A fresh look at grammar' which explains in a clear non-technical way the rationale for designing the activities presented in the book on the basis of 'descriptions of English grammar that systematically relate grammatical forms to meaning and to context' (p. 7). As the authors argue, this approach, derived from systemic functional linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004), represents a shift away from pedagogies which

foreground grammatical forms and rules, which separate vocabulary from grammar and which focus on sentences rather than whole texts.

Each teaching procedure has a dedicated chapter in which the procedure is revisited in terms of three types of pedagogic processes: *noticing*, *exploring* and *practising*. These three processes generate the second axis of the matrix. The process *noticing* involves students in engaging with sample texts in ways that draw their attention to key features of the target language. The target language should represent a challenge for students, 'something new to learn' (p. 3), but, as Jones and Lock argue, it is not enough to provide students with a challenge, without providing them with 'the support they need to notice what is important' (p.4).

Further support is provided through *exploring* activities, in which students interact with texts, as well as with the teacher and fellow students, to find out how important language features are used to make meaning in context. The support students receive in *noticing* and *exploring* activities is described by Jones and Lock as *scaffolding*, following Gibbons (2002) as indicated in the further reading at the end of the chapter. The scaffolding proposed by Jones and Lock includes different kinds of exploration questions, in either L1 or L2, which develop student awareness of grammatical features and their use in whole texts, in contrast to approaches in which grammatical 'rules' are inadequately exemplified for students using isolated sentences. Through the type of scaffolded exploration proposed by Jones and Lock students begin to make generalisations about the 'patterns they see in the language' (p. 6) and how they might apply these patterns to their own language use. To be able to use these features in spoken and written texts, students need opportunities for *practising* them. Jones and Lock acknowledge that, for ESL students, practice must be repetitive to some degree, but this repetition can involve meaningful language use and should also include opportunities to practise the target language in contexts that approximate authentic use.

While Jones and Lock make it clear that, in practice, the processes of *noticing*, *exploring* and *practising* often combine in dynamic ways in teaching sequences, most of the model lesson plans provided in the remaining chapters of the book present these processes as separate steps in sample lessons. Each lesson plan is aligned with a language learning level - beginning, intermediate or advanced - although, as the authors note, all the teaching ideas in the book can be adapted for any level.

The six teaching procedures around which the book is organised are presented in sequence, beginning in Chapter 2 with the procedure that demands the least of students in terms of changing or producing text (*comparing*) and finishing with the most demanding procedure (*transforming*) in Chapter 7. Each chapter begins by introducing the teaching procedure on which the chapter is based, and its purpose, followed by a summary of the general steps of the procedure. The summaries of the seven teaching procedures are helpfully collected at the end of a book in an appendix teachers can use as a quick reference. The teaching procedure presented in each chapter is exemplified in the form of two sample teaching ideas, each one designed to focus students' attention on the use of a different element of grammar. Each

teaching idea is presented as a lesson plan designed around a sample text in which the grammatical element in focus contributes to the text achieving its purpose. These texts illustrate how authentic texts can be adapted for use with language learners at different levels. A useful index of 'grammar foci' appears at the beginning of the book (p. vii).

While each teaching procedure presented in the book will be familiar to ESL teachers, they are applied with a fresh perspective. The procedure presented in Chapter 2, *comparing*, involves providing students with pairs of model texts that are similar but which vary systematically in one area of grammar. The procedure enables students to notice the differences, to explore these in relation to differences in the context and to practise producing texts based on the models. How this can be done is illustrated in sample lessons ready for use in the classroom. The sample lessons include step-by-step teaching sequences, model texts, explanations of the target grammatical features and sample worksheets. Ideas for adapting the teaching ideas to different teaching contexts are also included. The pattern established in Chapter 2 is repeated in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 elaborates the general procedure *sequencing*, an adaptation of the familiar ESL activity in which students re-order the elements of texts but in a way that requires students to read the text much more closely than often occurs during this type of activity.. Students are given a text in which the sequencing of an identified text element has been changed. These can be elements that contribute to 'larger patterns of textual organisation', such as paragraphs or 'sentences within paragraphs', or elements that contribute to the grammatical organisation of the text, that is, 'clauses within sentences' and 'words and phrases within clauses' (p.29). The first teaching idea in this chapter focuses on thematic organisation within paragraphs. It begins with an excellent review for teachers of two basic patterns of textual organisation that contribute to text cohesion. Echoing the 'topic sentence' that begins a paragraph, the term 'topic' is used by Jones and Lock to label information given prominence by being placed at the beginning of a clause. Similarly, the term 'comment' is used to label information given prominence towards the end of a clause. These terms are then used to explain ways sentences can be organised so information flows effectively through the paragraph, for example, by starting a clause with the same topic as the previous clause, or by picking up the comment of a clause in the topic of the next one. The first teaching idea presents sequencing activities to teach students these two patterns of organisation (noticing/exploring) and worksheets in which students practice using the patterns to sequence sentences in paragraphs. The second teaching idea uses the topic/comment distinction to teach students in a more precise way about when and why to place adjuncts, such as adverbial phrases of space and time, at the beginning and end of clauses.

One of the most well known, and perhaps over-used, ESL activities is the cloze, a gap-filling exercise used in both teaching and assessment tasks. In Chapter 4, Jones and Lock, re-visit *gap-filling* in a more considered way than is common in the field. They begin by pointing out the limited value of students filling single word gaps in 'isolated sentences'. Instead they

propose and model gap-filling activities based on the use of whole texts in context, in which the gaps are longer, 'beyond the word', so students' attention is drawn to grammatical patterns, and so they have to think about meanings and potential choices, rather than being confined to one 'correct' answer (p. 43). Gap-filling is a technique used in ESL teaching to develop accuracy, and Jones and Lock continue this tradition. The grammar addressed in this chapter includes elements of English that ESL students often find very difficult to use accurately, including subjects and finite verbs, pronouns and definite articles.

The *reconstructing* procedure presented in Chapter 5 is the one that, in the opinion of this reader, would be the most difficult for teachers to learn how to implement effectively, although once mastered it has great potential for supporting students in their early attempts to produce extended stretches of spoken and written English. It is a variation on activities such as skeleton texts, disappearing texts and dictogloss. The first teaching idea in the chapter uses the procedure to teach students about verbs, specifically the relation between the function of the verb, the type of process it represents, and the form of the present tense used, a relation not captured in the 'rules' for using the present tense typically give to ESL students.

The procedure introduced in Chapter 6 is *elaborating*, which turns the reader's attention to grammatical features used to add information to texts 'to make them fuller or more complete' (p. 73). This chapter is perhaps one of the most important in the book because it highlights an aspect of English usage too rarely addressed in teaching programs, yet which is essential for students to master if they are to progress to controlled, skilful and sophisticated use of English. Comprehension of more demanding texts involves unpacking elaborated meanings, and using elaboration in written English is a feature of higher levels of achievement (Macken-Horarik 2009). The teaching ideas presented in this chapter model ways of teaching students how to elaborate meanings when composing narrative texts by varying verb tenses and using 'sensing' and 'being' clauses. These include simulating contexts in which asking for extra information is expected, for example, a detective interrogating a witness.

Chapter 8 presents the procedure that demands the most of students in terms of producing language. This procedure, *transforming*, is again familiar to ESL teachers but too often is only used at sentence level, as in the example provided by Jones and Lock, when students are asked to transform active voice sentences into passive voice sentences. Instead, Jones and Lock suggest a text-based approach involving two steps. First, a whole text is transformed by representing the meanings in the text in a different mode, for example, in note form or as a visual image. This new representation then becomes the basis for composing another text. The first teaching idea in the chapter demonstrates how the transformation of active voice into passive voice sentences can become more meaningful when the context of a text is changed to one in which passive voice helps the text achieve its purpose. The second teaching idea models a principled way to show students how to choose where to place indirect (recipient/beneficiary) objects in clauses, by linking the choice with the distribution of given and new information, as exemplified in the sample text, a spoken exchange.

The book concludes by demonstrating in Chapter 8 how two or more of the teaching procedures presented in the previous chapters can be combined in the same lesson. In addition, a glossary of the specialised terms introduced throughout the book elaborates and consolidates the explanations that accompany each teaching idea.

In summary, this book is a valuable contribution to the field of ESL teaching practice. It will be of immediate interest to teachers implementing functionally-oriented text-based pedagogies because it models the design of theoretically principled, yet extremely practical, activities and teaching sequences that drill down into the grammar to a greater degree than many comparable approaches. At the same time, the step-by-step presentation of immediately usable lesson plans, accompanied by straightforward functional explanations of grammatical features that remain baffling when considered from the perspective of form alone, makes this book a resource all teachers can use productively, not only those who teach English as a second language, but all teachers of English language and literacy.

References

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