Functional Approaches to Written Text: Classroom Applications

Volume II
Edited by Tom Miller

CONTENTS

Introduction
Thomas Miller

1. Describing and Teaching English Grammar with Reference to Written Discourse
Marianne Celce-Murcia

2. Tense and Aspect in (Con)text
Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig

3. Towards a Psycho-Grammatical Description of the English Language
Jean-Rémi Lapaire and Wilfrid Rotgé

4. Using the Concepts of Given Information and New Information in Classes on the English Language
William J. Vande Kopple

5. Theme and New in Written English
Peter H. Fries

6. Waves of Abstraction: Organizing Exposition
J. R. Martin

References

Index
The next issue will be guest edited by Richard Cooper, ex-President of TESOL France, free-lance EFL teacher and teacher-trainer in Paris, author of Les Langues par la Video (Belin) and co-author of Video (OUP). French, British and American researchers will contribute subjects on Video.

Publication date for the next issue is set for October 1997
Editorial
Jacqueline Quéniart, President

TESOL France has great pleasure in publishing the second volume of an anthology focusing on Discourse Analysis. The first one was published in the October 1995 issue of the Journal. Both were guest-edited by Thomas Miller, Assistant Cultural officer at USIS in Paris. Before our guest-editor leaves our country, I would like to warmly thank him for his invaluable contribution. Wasn’t I proud when I heard the first volume publicized during the Robert Kaplan Colloquium at the TESOL International annual Convention in Chicago in March 1996 by the father of Discourse Analysis himself!

The first volume provided a range of various approaches to Discourse Analysis, thus helping readers in France, in Europe and abroad to get more familiar with this field of linguistics. This one puts more emphasis on grammar and provides new insight on grammatical issues such as demonstratives, the existential “there”, tense and aspect... The contributors question a sentence-based grammatical approach versus a study of grammar in context. They advocate observation of authentic material - radio scripts, news reports... - to come to a full understanding of grammatical structures.

They show how such a procedure leads to a more sophisticated approach to grammar for the benefit of the learner. They suggest that such data-based analysis should provide a basis for grammars and teaching materials. Moreover they hint that it could help develop both the reading and the writing skills. All six contributors provide practical examples and specific exercises. The publication is relevant in the context of the 1996 TESOL France Colloquium entitled “An Update on Grammar: How it is learnt. How it is taught” which will attempt at a state of the art in grammar in our country.

Our hope is that both this volume and the colloquium give all the readers and participants an opportunity for productive exchange of information and debate between linguists and teachers in the classroom.
The JOURNAL of TESOL France

Guest Editor: Thomas Miller
Design & Layout: Shelton Typographics, Paris (+33) 01 43 67 73 35
Publications Director: Jacqueline Queniart
ISSN 1266-7838

The JOURNAL is published twice a year. A subscription is included in the dues for membership in TESOL France.

Manuscripts from members and non-members of TESOL France are welcome for consideration by the Editorial Board. In the preparation of manuscripts, prospective contributors should follow the guidelines at the back of this issue.

Essays and reviews in The JOURNAL can be reprinted, provided the source is acknowledged.

Manuscripts, editorial communications and queries about advertising should be addressed to:

TESOL France, an affiliate of TESOL International and of IATEFL, is a non-profit organization of teachers of English in France. Its purposes are to stimulate professional development, to disseminate information about research, books and other materials related to English, and to strengthen instruction and research.

TESOL France organizes various events and a convention each year in Paris. Members receive The News, a bi-monthly newsletter and The Journal, the academic journal of the association.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 1996

President: Jacqueline Queniart Membership: Stephen Brewer
Vice-President: Vicki Moore Publications: Paul Sanderson
Secretary: Susan Fries Publishers Liaison: M-P Beaulieu
Treasurer: Jean Cureau Education: Jean-Louis Habert
Past President: Elyane Comarteau Forum Evenings: James Cox

Honorary Members: Roger Budd (British Council)
Denis Girard (Education Nationale)
Thomas Miller (USIS)
Introduction

Tom Miller, Guest Editor

Most teachers at some point in their career have found that sentence-based explanations are not up to the task of explaining why one form is chosen over another or what the effect a different order will have on a listener or reader. In fact, Marianne Celce-Murcia argues that an understanding of the context is required for almost all grammatical structures in English. Using authentic texts, the articles in this volume show how form follows function. As the chapters in this volume show, functional grammar approaches are useful not only in teaching grammar per se but in teaching other skills such as reading and writing. The first four articles deal with constructions which textbooks often ignore and which cause problems for teachers such as demonstratives, tense and aspect, and there and it-cleft constructions. The last two chapters show how concepts in systemic grammar can be used in the reading and writing class.

Several of the chapters cover the same territory with slightly different approaches. Marianne Celce-Murcia, William Rotgé and Roger Lapaire, and William Vande Kopple all deal with existential there, while Marianne Celce Murcia and Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig deal with tense and aspect. William Vande Kopple, Peter Fries and James Martin all deal with issues of placement of information within clauses and its effect on the message. Fries shows how an understanding of Theme and N-Rheme can help students read and write, while Martin shows how an effective control over theme and manipulation of grammatical structures is crucial for revising compositions and for mature writing.

In “Describing and Teaching English Grammar with Reference to Written Discourse” Marianne Celce-Murcia focuses on demonstratives, tense and aspect, existential there sentences, and it clefts, items which are taken up in later chapters. Celce-Murcia shows that structures are dependent on the context and genre, with some genres allowing more variation with the same grammatical structure than others. Celce-Murcia concludes by advocating more data-based analyses of authentic materials so that reference grammars and teaching materials can begin to supply teachers with guidance as to the use of grammar beyond the sentence level.

In her chapter “Tense and Aspect in Context”, Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig advocates using authentic texts to teach tense and aspect, showing how genre is related to the use of tense and aspect. Using a complete radio script, Bardovi-Harlig
describes how past tense and aspect relate to point of view and foreground or background. Using a descriptive text, Bardovi-Harlig shows how tense can be used as temporal orientation. In a news report she shows how use of tense and aspect is related to given and new information. Bardovi-Harlig suggests exercises for each genre and structure.

In their chapter “Towards a Psycho-Grammatical Description of the English Language”, Jean-Rémi Lapaire and Wilfrid Rotgé describe how mental operations leave traces in the surface grammar. They describe how TH, for example is used when an item being referred to is online (open file) contrasted to WH, which is used to refresh the reader’s memory. Following the French linguist Guillaume, they argue that deep unifying principles, or core values, govern surface realizations of grammatical markers. Rotgé and Lapaire advocate teaching grammar in context beginning with more abstract psycho-grammatical explanations of grammatical features.

In his chapter “Using the Concepts of Given Information and New Information in Classes on the English Language”, William Vande Kopple uses the Functional Sentence Perspective approach. Vande Kopple shows how dividing the sentence into two parts - one with given information and another with new information can explain the use of many structures. Vande Kopple shows how several grammatical structures such as the passive voice, reversals, and fronts help the writer place given before new and make it easier for the reader to identify which is which. Other patterns such as the expletive there, what-clefts and it-clefts help call special attention to new information. Vande Kopple suggests exercises for each structure and provides a checklist for students for using given and new strategically.

In his chapter on “Theme and New in Written English,” Peter Fries introduces the notion of theme and N-Rheme using a systemic-functional perspective. Theme is associated with the initial constituent in the clause and functions to orient the reader to the message. N-Rheme is the final constituent of the clause and serves as the focus of attention and therefore the locus of new information. Using an advertisement, Fries shows how the theme and N-Rheme relate to author’s purpose and to the textual structure. Fries introduces rhetorical structure theory and demonstrates how a careful analysis of linguistic features can help readers recognize the overall text structure and can help them write more effectively.

In his chapter entitled “Waves of Abstraction: Organizing Exposition” James Martin shows how the notion of theme can be used to help students revise texts. In order to package information more effectively, students must learn when to change
processes, which are normally encoded as verbs, into nouns; or logical relations, which are normally encoded as conjunctions into verbs. This process, called grammatical metaphor, is necessary if the writer is to manipulate the theme of the clause effectively and write in a mature manner. Martin uses successive re-writes of a student composition to show how effective use of theme and grammatical metaphor improves a composition.

It is hoped that the chapters in this series provide the reader with a taste of practical uses of various approaches to discourse analysis, and that the works cited can provide a basis for further reading.