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ATEG Journal Editorial Policy

Founded in 1989, the Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar (ATEG) is an official Assembly of the National Council of Teachers of English that provides a national forum for all those interested in teaching grammar. We welcome all views on the role of grammar in our schools.

Published twice a year, *ATEG Journal* seeks to foster discussion of teaching English grammar at all grade levels from kindergarten through graduate school. We solicit articles that describe, analyze, and/or critique any and all aspects of teaching grammar. For example, the following are some suggested topics:

- Classroom practices in the teaching of grammar
- Traditional vs. linguistic approaches to grammar
- Why and how grammar should or should not be taught
- How we handle language varieties in the classroom
- Teacher education and the teaching of grammar
- Integration of grammar with writing, speech, literature, and all forms of discourse

On these matters, we welcome articles, reports from the schools and from teacher education programs, as well as book reviews, textbook evaluations, and other critical responses. Submissions should conform to MLA style and should not exceed 3,500 words. All submissions will be reviewed by two anonymous referees. Please submit your submission as an MS Word .doc or .rtf file sent as an email attachment to:

Amy Benjamin, Co-President
Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar
Benjamin.amy@gmail.com

The ATEG Journal

Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar

An Assembly of the National Council of Teachers of English

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Co-Presidents' Message

Amy Benjamin

This issue of the ATEG Journal has, as you know, been a long time coming. Many thanks to Geoff Layton and Jean Waldman for whipping it into shape.

We welcome submissions for the Journal that will enlighten fellow professionals at all levels and for all kinds of students about how we can do a better job of teaching grammar and what we need to know about grammar to make that happen. Your article may be sent to me: Benjamin.amy@gmail.com. I will then pass it on to two other reviewers. But don't be shy. As you can see by how long it takes to put an issue together, we really are happy to receive submissions and will gladly help you get your piece reader-ready. Use MLA format.

At the 2010 ATEG conference at BYU in Provo, Utah, Sharon (Sherry) Saylors graciously agreed to share the job of administering ATEG as co-president with me. I would like to express my appreciation for her efforts, and particularly for the extensive planning that she has done for this year's conference.

Here's Sherry:

Sherry Saylors

I'm Sherry Saylors, a six-year ATEG member and Associate Professor of English at Prince George's Community College in Largo, Maryland. ATEG has given me great support over the years and has been a proving ground for my growth as a grammar teacher, so I'm delighted to be able to serve as co-president.

Ever since I was introduced to linguistic grammar by my friend and mentor Wanda Van Goor in 2005, I have been delighted by this new way of thinking of language. I have taught composition at Prince George's Community College for seventeen years, both on the developmental level and for the first-year credit classes. Only after I went to my first ATEG conference in 2005 did I realize that teaching grammar could have value beyond error correction and could also be great fun!

Currently, I teach Applied Grammar, a sophomore-level course for students in the English option and in the secondary education teaching option. We use

Martha Kolln's book, *Understanding English Grammar* (Longman) as well as hands-on learning, tutoring developmental students for an hour a week as part of our 3-hour class. In that class, we have a lot of fun while learning sentence patterns, writing conventions, and research papers. We become living sentences, act out parts of speech, and play FRAV Bingo (Fragments, Run-ons, Agreement Errors, Verb Errors) and Grammar Jeopardy. We make sentence pattern wheels and construct our own "grammar rulers."

For the past 1-½ years, I have offered Grammar Clinic, a ten-week workshop of linguistic grammar through the Writing Center, where I am the grammar tutor. Staff and students from all levels devote ninety minutes each week to learn simply for the joy of learning – no tuition, no tests, no grades on a transcript. And yet, there are students.

This spirit of risk-free play will be taking place at our conference this year, with the theme "Teaching Grammar: Working in the Spirit of Play." We are delighted that Pamela Dykstra and Martha Kolln have accepted the role of keynote speakers, and we look forward to sharing our techniques of teaching grammar at all levels from kindergarten through graduate school. You will find methods that you've never before considered as play – for example, using the Internet to find usage patterns, so play is not just for pre-schoolers. For our purposes, any hands-on teaching that can free up the learner to experiment with new ideas can create a spirit of play in the classroom. And a byproduct of this type of play is serious, permanent learning.

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ATEG Listserv Update

I'd like to take a moment to say a few things about the ATEG listserv. The day-to-day maintenance of the ATEG listserv is passing into my hands after years of dedicated work from Jim Dubinsky at Miami University in Ohio. As this listserv is hosted on a Miami University server, Jim will continue to be the "owner" of the list/liaison to the university. However, I will be the primary point of contact for subscribers. If you have questions, concerns, or requests for the ATEG listserv, please feel free to contact me directly at jed.alexander@gmail.com.

One of the many hats I wear in the "real world" is that of an IT professional. The administration of this listserv is just one aspect of my increasingly active role in ATEG's technology affairs. In the following weeks (and months), I'll be coordinating with ATEG officers and members, including the current webmaster and web hosting contacts, improvements to ATEG's website and online presence. Again, please feel free to contact me with feedback or suggestions regarding this task.

Thanks again for your time, and I hope you all continue to enjoy the conversations!

Sincerely,

John Alexander, ATEG Listserv Manager

To join or leave this LISTSERV list, please visit the list's web interface at: http://listserv.muohio.edu/archives/ateg.html and select "Join or leave the list." Or visit ATEG's web site at http://ateg.org/

Grammatical Choices and Text Meaning:
The Case of the Passive Voice

Peter H. Fries, Central Michigan University, Emeritus

Although many writing authorities discourage the passive voice, its continued presence indicates that it can have positive functions. This paper will explore ways in which writers use the passive to construct effective sentences in several genres using actual examples from real texts.

I Introduction

This paper grows out of an experience I had at NCTE a few years ago. At that meeting I attended several sessions on teaching grammar, and I also did a quick survey of the books on grammar in the exhibit hall that were advertised as teaching 'grammar in context'. I found lots of 'grammar in context' that focused on using real examples taken **from** context. For example, one approach had booklets of stories, such as *the Heart of Darkness*, that the students were to read, the booklets then listed a number of sentences taken from the story that illustrated the grammatical construction under focus that students were to analyze and discuss.

However, I did not see any discussions of grammar which attempted to relate the grammatical discussions to the meanings expressed in the works, or to the purposes of the authors whose words and sentences were being used. In other words, the grammatical discussions addressed examples that had been taken from their contexts, but the discussions never related the examples back to the contexts in which they were originally found.

In this paper I want to provide an example of how one might teach grammar in context by examining the uses of a construction—the passive clause—and relating these uses to the meanings expressed in the texts within which it is found. As I begin, let me state a number of underlying assumptions. I use a Systemic Functional approach to the description of language. Systemic Functional Linguists view all language use as resulting from sets of meaningful choices. The significance of these choices can best be seen as they operate in connected texts. ***JOIN ATEG FOR THE COMPLETE ARTICLE!***

Meaning – A New Context for Grammar Instruction

Geoffrey W. Layton

Master's Candidate, Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, Illinois

I was raised on "old school" grammar in the 1950s and early 60s, first in an aptly designated "grammar school," where the eight parts of speech formed the basis of standardized test questions; and then in middle and high school, where subject-verb agreement, gerunds and participles, sentence diagramming and dependent clauses, along with sentence fragments, comma spices, and run-on sentences were every student's nemesis; and then again in college, where grammar was revered, and composition courses (and their instructors) were among the most highly regarded in the English department.

Grammar became important to me again when, after a long career in advertising, I became an English teacher, and my first job was at a Chicago inner-city school serving at-risk students whose reading and writing skills were seriously deficient. It seemed obvious to me that the problem was easily solved – simply impart the same grammar lessons I had learned in my youth to my own students. Imagine my shock and surprise when every student failed the mid-term grammar test.

A catastrophe of that magnitude was clearly not the students' fault, nor did I think it was mine. I felt compelled to find out why formal grammar had failed these kids where it seemed to have served me so well. I quickly learned, of course, that grammar had become the "Rodney Dangerfield" of the English department and that grammar had not only lost its caché, it had been all but banned from the classroom. And although grammar does seem to be getting more respect recently, it still has not recovered from the research condemning it as useless and even harmful.

The difference between the traditional grammar instruction of my youth (the one that I had tried to impose unsuccessfully in my classroom) and the currently accepted grammar pedagogy seems to be based on the concept of "context." Indeed, if there is a glimmer of hope that grammar may regain at least some of its stature, that hope is based on the concept of "context." ***JOIN ATEG NOW!***

Toward a Rhetoric of Enfranchising African American Students by Teaching Grammar and Language Varieties

Monique Leslie Akassi, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of English, Virginia Union University

There has been a significant amount of scholarly work devoted to the issues of African American students' grammar and the use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in academia; AAVE is "a cover term for a variety of English which is learned as a first language by African Americans, and which is used by the majority of African American adults when conversing in informal settings" (Swann, Deumert, Lillis, and Mesthrie 7). During the early 1970s Professor Robert Williams proposed that "white linguists were wrong to consider African American language to be a dialect of English since the linguistic code really had its roots in West African languages" (Delpit, *The Skin That We Speak* xxii). In addition, some scholars believe that Black students should be able to write and speak in what they term their native language[1] in composition courses because these students have been oppressed for centuries due to hierarchies placed on languages and the negative stereotype regarding the African American culture. Furthermore, these students come from a long line of ancestors who were brought to America not only unable to speak English but also forbidden to learn it. Therefore, many were obliged to use syntax structure from their African mother tongues and apply it to the English language and from that process, AAVE was born.

Today many scholars and practitioners are recommending that educators acknowledge and respect African American students' "first language" without criticizing it and thereby further oppressing them; moreover, educators must teach students the power of code switching, a rhetorical strategy that students can use to apply AAVE in writing genres such as memoirs and narratives, and then switch to Standard Written English for other genres. **DON'T WAIT – JOIN NOW!**

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[1] Although some scholars believe that AAVE is a dialect rather than a language, there are many who argue that AAVE is indeed among the 6,912 languages today.

Book Reviews

Coffin, Caroline, Jim Donohue and Sarah North. *Exploring English Grammar: From Formal to Functional.* **London and New York: Routledge, 2009. 449 pp.**
Reviewed by R. Michael Medley, Ph.D., Professor of English, Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, VA

The publisher correctly promotes Coffin, Donohue and North's *Exploring English Grammar* as an "engaging textbook [that] bridges the gap between traditional and functional grammar" (i). I make that judgment as a user of the book. This is a text for those who are not yet ready to trade traditional grammar analysis wholly for systemic functional analysis, but who, nonetheless, want to initiate students into a grammar that "posits…a two-way relationship between the social and cultural environment and linguistic choices" (p. 226).

As I consider how to approach teaching my Grammars of English course, one concern is that students are unequally prepared for this course. Some are comfortable with the categories and terminology of formal grammar, even if they have forgotten some of the details, which eventually seem to come back to them. At least one third of every class, however, seems to come with almost no background. If they have been taught grammar in the past, that teaching has been a kind of inoculation to immunize them against ever learning it again. For those students, especially, I question myself: Do I want to introduce them to whole new layer of grammar terminology when they are barely able to use the most basic formal grammar? My experience with *Exploring English Grammar* has confirmed that introducing systemic functional grammar (SFG) as an extension of and departure from traditional grammar is a good gamble.

The text begins with a chapter that covers some components of traditional grammar: word class labels (parts of speech) and clause patterns (SVOCA). This chapter packs in many concepts that are key for later analysis of different text types but which beginners in the class may struggle to understand and apply. **YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO TO GET THE REST OF THIS BOOK REVIEW – JOIN ATEG NOW!**

Ariel, Mira. 2008. *Pragmatics and Grammar*. Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. 364 pp. Reviewed by Herbert F. W. Stahlke, Professor Emeritus, Department of English, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 46036

Pragmatics and Grammar (P&G), published in the Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics series, is a thorough and thoughtful survey of the state of research on the relationship between grammar and pragmatics and the role of each in the interpretation of sentences in discourse. "Grammar," as used in *P&G* and the field it represents, refers to linguistic information formally coded in utterances-- for example, English past tense or subject-verb inversion. "Pragmatics" deals with "plausible, inferred interpretations" (2) that allow hearers to make sense of the sentences they hear.

Ariel divides the work into seven carefully sequenced chapters. Chapter 1, "Introduction: grammar, pragmatics and what's between them," introduces the concepts of inference and coding and explores why and how to distinguish the two. Chapter 2, "Distinguishing the grammatical and the extra-grammatical: referring expressions," explores in greater depth how grammar and pragmatics differ, drawing especially on analyses of anaphora. Chapter 3, "Distinguishing roles, explicated, implicated, and truth-functional inferences," offers an interesting analysis of meanings of "and" beyond simple coordination and a perceptive treatment of inferred interpretations of "most." Chapter 4, "Grammar, pragmatics, arbitrariness," explores the extent to which grammatical coding is pragmatically driven rather than arbitrary, examining such phenomena as topic/comment relations, resumptive pronouns, and case marking. Chapter 5, "All paths lead to the salient discourse pattern," examines how cognition shapes grammar. Chapter 6, "The rise (and potential fall) of reflexive pronouns," uses the behavior of reflexives and reciprocals to illustrate interactions between grammar and pragmatics and their role in language change. Chapter 7, "Grammar/pragmatics interfaces," draws together the wide-ranging discussions in previous chapters to provide an account of the notion "what is said."

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