
Stacey L. Katz and Carl S. Blyth. *Teaching French Grammar in Context*.
New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007. 265p.

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This book is a valuable resource for teachers and professors of French as a Second Language. It gives them the means to answer students' questions that are sometimes difficult even for a French native speaker. This book is also valuable regarding grammar rules that the author explains in a simple and direct way, readily understandable by students. This research also helps educators acquire a meta-language to use in explanations of points of grammar. It emphasizes the socio-linguistic importance and the influence of using grammar in class.

The book is divided in two parts: The Initial Background and The Grammar. In the first part, which begins in Chapter 2, the authors note that it is important for professors to differentiate the grammar structures and the methods that are used to teach the language. The second part, which includes Chapters 4 to 8, concentrates on the grammar structures that are the best and more effective ones in the teaching of grammar. The authors, to avoid the more sterile aspects of teaching grammar, have had the good idea of beginning every chapter with a humorous drawing that explains and shows the grammar subject of that chapter.

The first chapter is an introduction to the organization of the research and an overview of the important points that are discussed in the subsequent chapters. The second chapter provides a definition of grammar. It explains also the different approaches concerning the teaching of French in the language classes, along with the difficulties found by new instructors who are charged with teaching it. Should grammar be taught in a language course? Some will say no; others will state that it is absolutely necessary to teach it. It all depends on the approach used, a communicative or explicit one. In relation to this, the authors state that "people for whom teaching grammar must include explicit presentations followed by mechanical drills and metalinguistic commentary, may not see structured-input activities as a legitimate way to teach grammar" (10).

In the second chapter, the authors explain that there are different kinds of grammar depending on the interlocutor. They consider the "perspective or normative of what one should or should not say in order to speak and write a language correctly" (11). Concerning the linguists, they have their own grammar that "tends to be technical in their discussions of particular aspect."

Chapter 3 concentrates on the most effective methods for teaching grammar, bringing into question the effectiveness of textbooks. In fact, the authors have

constructed a list of different problems typically encountered. In their view, “the explanations are overly simplified, incomplete, and or pedagogically unsound. The explanations are constructed at the word or sentence level and do not take greater discourse factors into consideration. The students do not receive enough input before being asked to produce target structures. The students are asked to produce language that would never be found in naturally occurring discourse situations. The exercises require students to attend to too many issues at once, thus not focusing their attention on the target structure. The exercises are not contextualized” (27). This does not mean that all textbooks fail in education; some are even very good. However, it is important that professors recognize the gaps and problems in order to modify the sections that do not correspond to the situation. Some techniques and strategies are explained by concrete examples.

In Chapter 4, the authors have concentrated on the determinate, indeterminate, and partitive articles. They explain the difficulty for learners to understand their functions. Some exercises, strategies, and games come with this chapter and represent a huge help for instructors.

The past narrative tenses are in chapter five, which shows professors how to teach these difficult tenses by helping students to understand the difference between the present perfect, the imperfect, and the past perfect. As in previous chapters, the authors have here created several pages of exercises and activities that apply the theory.

At this point, as the learners are familiar with different aspects of grammar, it is necessary to construct correct phrases. In this regard, the authors state that the order of words differs between written and spoken French. Furthermore, the linguists recognize that there are “actually two separate languages” (145). Unfortunately, textbooks typically do not acknowledge the difference between these two forms of language, resulting in the students learning a “hybrid language that is composed of both written and spoken elements” (146), which results in completely bizarre conversation. Thus, when these same students, proud of speaking French, go to France on holiday, they are surprised to find that the French people do not understand them. Notwithstanding, as Katz and Blyth explain, it is no wonder, as “students usually receive little or no explicit instruction about the differences between spoken and written forms, and when they are asked to produce spoken discourse they end up sounding obviously foreign, even if they have excellent pronunciation. They may not make any ‘mistakes’, yet somehow native speakers immediately know that they are not francophone. Often, the reason they are exposed as non-native is that learners use constructions that are pragmatically odd or sociolinguistically inappropriate in particular discourse contexts” (147). The goal of this chapter is then to demystify the use of the order of words in the phrases, so that language professors can teach

written and oral syntax. For this, the authors supply a series of interactive exercises that can be used in class.

Chapter 7 focuses on the complexity of interrogation forms. It is truly not easy to explain to students that there are several ways of saying *what* in French (*qu'est ce qui*, *qu'est-ce que*, *que*, *quoi*, and *quel*), particularly as all these words begin with *q*. It should also be considered that sociolinguistic factors play an important role in the determination of which interrogative form to use. In this regard, the authors tell us that “one cannot, or should not, teach interrogative constructions without considering factors such as whether the discourse is written or spoken, and whether the situation is formal or informal” (187). To clarify these uses, the book provides simple but effective explanations. Instructors, using the methods advised, will find that students will not immediately select the form that is simply the easiest to remember, but will choose instead the correct interrogative form.

Chapter 8 concludes this fascinating work. It is divided into several sections: the first showing a common lack of understanding regarding the teaching of grammar in communication courses. The second section presents different pedagogical points and the role of grammar. In the third section, the authors provide some suggestions on different ways to adapt the resources from textbooks in order to reflect the methods that they have recommended.

This research is very important for professors and instructors who are charged with the teaching of French as a Second Language, where they have to face differing cultures in class as well. Following the recommendations of Katz and Blyth, teachers will find answers to students' questions as well as ideas for exercises. They will be able to adapt their textbooks to teach grammar and communication being aware that these two use different languages. I recommend this book to all those who not only teach French but also others languages and communication to students. ✱