

Reviews

***Teaching English to the World: History, Curriculum, and Practice.* George Braine (Ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005. xx + 191 pp.**

Reviewed by
Michael Lessard-Clouston
Biola University

George Braine's book *Teaching English to the World* (TEW) is part of a current line of publications with international perspectives on English language teaching (ELT) (e.g., Burns, 2005; Lin & Martin, 2005). However, unlike Burns' (2005) collection, which documents and contributes to how teachers are increasingly part of the globalization of English, and that of Lin and Martin (2005), which brings a clearly critical perspective to bear on ELT policies and practices, Braine's book does exactly what its subtitle suggests: it describes the history, curriculum, and practice of ELT in 15 diverse countries in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and South America. As with Braine's (1999) anthology, the focus of TEW is on nonnative English speaking (NNES) teachers and their experiences learning and teaching English. The authors follow a standard format, beginning with an introduction, an overview of the history of ELT in their country, then an outline of the past and present curriculum for English at various levels and in several contexts, and finally a biography (or autobiography) of one English teacher, usually the author. This consistency is helpful as readers go through various chapters, and it enables the authors to describe the historical and current situation in their countries personally.

Following a preface and introduction by the editor, the different chapters are arranged alphabetically using the countries' names in English, so TEW starts with Kanavillil and Cristina Rajagopalan's summary of ELT in Brazil and ends with Yasemin Kirkgoz's outline of the situation in Turkey. In between we learn and read about ELT in China (by He An E), Germany (Claus Gnutzmann), Hong Kong (Icy Lee), Hungary (Peter Medgyes), India (Premakumari Dheram), Indonesia (Junaidi Mistar), Israel (Ofra Inbar-Lourie), Japan (Oda Masaki and Takada Tomoko), Lebanon (Kassim Shaaban), Poland (Joanna Radwanska-Williams and

Liliana Piasecka), Saudi Arabia (Khalid Al-Seghayer), Singapore (Antonia Chandrasegaran), and Sri Lanka (Minoli Samarakkody and George Braine). While space does not permit a summary of each chapter here, numerous themes echo throughout TEW, such as the importance of influential teachers in the authors' lives, and the involvement of the British Council in many contexts.

TEW is commendable for many reasons, and teachers, researchers, and teacher trainers will find it to be a current and relevant resource. The overviews of ELT curricula are short but helpful, and the personal accounts of meeting the challenges of English learning and teaching are encouraging. What comes across is just how complex and diverse ELT is in specific countries, as it involves numerous levels of language proficiency, schools (including kindergartens, elementary, middle, and secondary schools, colleges and universities, all discussed in chapters here), and types of students (e.g., academic vs. vocational). It is also interesting to read about situations where English is the main or only foreign language (such as in Japan or Saudi Arabia) versus those where it is just one of several foreign languages (e.g., in Lebanon and Poland). Also communicated through this book is the way in which English and teachers of English have been involved, in various contexts, both in continuing and challenging some of the hegemonic views of English and ELT. Readers in Japan, for example, will identify with the impact of tests on English learning and teaching in places as similar or different as Hong Kong, Israel, and Lebanon.

While some people might view this collection as one largely by and for NNES teachers, as a native English speaker I believe this book is of relevance to various audiences. Teachers preparing to go to one of the countries above, for example, should consider the related chapter as required background reading, and teacher trainers who want to understand any of these ELT contexts will also find this anthology useful. TEW offers a wealth of information and numerous anecdotes on the ELT profession around the world, including the sobering realities of low salaries and high drop-out rates among ELT professionals (e.g., in China, Israel, and Hungary), as well as encouraging stories of how relevant English education is both to students and teachers. The importance of professional development is evident throughout the book, and I valued insights from writers such as Inbar-Lourie and Mistar, who share something of their failings as well as their successes. I also appreciated the references to research and works about ELT in various languages (apart from English), and the (auto)biographies of English teachers, with whom I found myself connecting on numerous levels—as a learner, teacher, researcher, and

teacher educator. Reading these surveys of a wide range of countries and ELT situations I also developed a renewed and growing respect for teachers in developing countries (e.g., Indonesia), who struggle with many realities that I have not faced in my own experiences in Africa, Asia, and North America.

A book with such a broad title may be criticized for reflecting the ELT situation in a rather limited way in only 15 countries, particularly through the eyes and experiences of just one (or, in three cases, two) writers per country. Braine admits that South America is only represented by one country (Brazil), and there is no chapter on a country in Africa or North America. As with any edited collection, some chapters in TEW are better written (and more easily read) than others, and the gems here include those by well-known authors like Gnutzmann and Medgyes, as well as those by individuals new to me, such as Al-Seghayer and Shaaban. Although the format is standard, some of the teachers' stories are written in the first person, while others are in the third person. There also seemed to be occasional anti-U.S. sentiments and in a few cases misguided or off-putting comments about native English speaking teachers (as in the chapter on Japan). Yet if TEW's chapters are read as personal narratives representing the views of the authors, readers will find much from which they can learn. I therefore highly recommend it.

References

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***Practical English Usage (3rd ed.)*. Michael Swan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. xxx + 658 pp.**

Reviewed by

Fiona MacGregor

Josai International University

“Real language problems need *practical* solutions” declares the back cover of Michael Swan’s *Practical English Usage*, and practicality pervades the book, from its straightforward approach to almost every aspect of the language to its example sentences that sound so natural you feel as if you are eavesdropping on a conversation. Now in a fully revised third edition, this classic reference work deserves a place on every teacher’s bookshelf, as well as in libraries for higher-level learners to consult. In his introduction, Swan sets out what the book does and does not do: “[It] is not a complete guide to the English language . . . its purpose is . . . to give learners and their teachers the most important information they need to deal with common language problems” (p. x). The information mainly addresses modern standard British English and “the book is not intended as a systematic guide to American usage” (p. ix). However, where American style varies it is noted; one entry covers the main differences between American and British usage.

For easier reference, this edition has a 6-page contents overview at the front (replacing the former alphabetical list of entries) and a 35-page index at the back. Another new feature is “Don’t say it! 130 common mistakes.” This contains 35 examples each at basic, intermediate, and advanced levels, plus 25 for very advanced learners, with corrections and keys to the relevant explanatory section. Each list of errors could form the basis for an in-class discussion and review. Entries have been updated, thus the entry on correspondence, which covers formal and informal letter writing, now has a second section on e-mail and text messages.

Of the 634 alphabetical entries, more than half are devoted to grammar. However, this is not a book to consult for prescriptive rules, which Swan says “are made by people who believe that they can improve a language or protect it against change” (p. 291). Swan’s rules are descriptive of what actually is happening to the language. A section on variation and change details some trends such as comparative *more* replacing *-er* forms, or *who* replacing *whom*. For complex items, such as modal auxiliary verbs, the reader can consult the general entry for an overview, and then look

up a particular verb for details; *may* and *might*, for example, take up eight sections over six pages. Spoken grammar is also covered in entries on contractions, short answers, tags, and reply questions.

In addition to American English, other varieties and styles included are standard English and dialects, correctness, spoken and written English, formality, abbreviated styles, slang, and taboo and swear words. In the latter category, the words are listed with their literal meanings and starred according to their strength. Swan cautions students to be aware not only that their use might offend their interlocutors, but also that “a foreigner who uses swear words may give the impression of claiming membership of a group that he or she does not belong to” (p. 565). Teachers of reading will appreciate the extensive section on news headlines, in which specific features of their grammar and vocabulary are decoded.

Areas I found of particular interest were the multiple entries on determiners, those little words that often cause big problems for my students; the lists of basic meanings of common and useful prefixes and suffixes, which could provide source material for exercises to expand vocabulary and improve reading comprehension; and the eight-page section on discourse markers, where I learned, among other things, that *e.g.* actually stands for *exempli gratia*. There are also entries on politeness including “social” language which contains many useful conversational gambits, distancing verb forms, and softening expressions. Topic areas include age, dates, names and titles, telephoning, and telling the time. Spelling, punctuation, and pronunciation are also addressed. A large number of entries deal with lexical problems, such as easily confusable words or expressions. The following are a few examples from over 80 entries: *accept* and *agree*; *besides*, *except*, and *apart from*, *efficient* and *effective*; *maybe* and *perhaps*; *say* and *tell*; *sensible* and *sensitive*. Learners may find these the most helpful sections, since this information is not often found in dictionaries. Over a hundred words are dealt with individually, including warnings where there may be “false friends.”

The last point above reflects an occasional Eurocentric bias often found in publications from Britain, and has less relevance to Japanese learners, being primarily an issue for speakers of languages that contain words that look the same in English. Perhaps there is a need for a guide to those English loan words whose meanings have changed in Japanese. One area I would like to see expanded is the entry on idioms, collocations, and fixed expressions. At only two pages, this seems slight, given the current emphasis on lexical approaches to language learning. These are, however, minor points and do not constitute any weakness of the book.

Even a work as comprehensive as this cannot cover everything, so Swan frequently recommends that students consult a good dictionary, or sometimes a grammar reference work, for more detail. Throughout the book, there is extensive cross-referencing which can lead to fascinating, if at times distracting, reading. All in all, I found it an awe-inspiring book for its sheer scope and attention to detail. The style is clear, giving it the distinction of being a reference book that is also a good read. I anticipate it being a source of vital information for years to come.

***Spoken English, TESOL and Applied Linguistics.* Rebecca Hughes (Ed.). New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. pp. xx + 289.**

Reviewed by

Cheryl Kirchhoff

Meiji Gakuin High School

Hughes' collection of essays by leading researchers in the field of speech discourse is a stimulating book for teachers who are thinking critically about teaching spoken English. The essays pursue issues of pronunciation, World Englishes, vague language in speaking, analysis of classroom discourse, and the role of speech in language learning theory. Hughes' previous book, *Teaching and Researching Speaking* (2002), complained that, "The role of mode and the status of speech in language acquisition paradigms has been remarkably undertheorized" (p. 24). Her new book responds to that need and showcases authors who are leading the way to new theories and applications for spoken English in TESOL. The aims of the book are twofold: one, to highlight current research and issues on spoken discourse, and two, to discuss how these insights will affect language teaching. Most of the essays are faithful to these aims and discuss current qualitative research, implications, and ideas for application to classroom teaching.

The twelve essays are divided into four parts, each focusing on an issue of spoken language research. Part 1 deals with native speaker attitudes towards language learners, particularly the state of World Englishes and negative attitudes that hinder communication. Authors in Hong Kong describe their experiences over the last 10 years as the World Englishes

(WE) paradigm has been replaced with a priority on native-like accent. Unique sociopolitical influences behind this change are uncovered leaving the authors with doubts about the future of WE. The second essay shows evidence that communication problems between native and non-native speakers can be caused by negative attitudes of the native speaker. Successful communication requires both interlocutors to make an effort. The researcher found that native speakers with negative attitudes toward nonnative speakers use various avoidance strategies that hinder communication. Both essays suggest that all English users, particularly native speakers, should be made aware of worldwide varieties of English. This view is echoed by Canagarajah (2006) in "TESOL at forty: What are the Issues?," in which he describes the need to teach students to be able to "shuttle between communities" in our multidialectal world (p. 26).

Part 2 focuses on elements of prosody: intonation and speech rhythm and how they relate to turntaking in conversation. Ann Wennerstrom, in her essay on intonation, reviews reasons why intonation is essential for comprehension and comprehensibility. Intonation organizes discourse "much as the formatting conventions of subtitles and paragraph indentations do in written discourse" (p. 75). Intonation also shows the speaker's intentions at sentence endings, for example, rising intonation with echo questions or a flat extension when hesitating in a word search. Her microanalysis of a Japanese learner revealed how the learner's analytic approach to speech hindered intonation and comprehensibility. She suggests explicit instruction of lexical chunks and intonational phrases to improve comprehensibility. Teachers' "foreign talk" to learners was also analyzed and found to contain unnatural intonation. Recent research on rhythm in speech is presented in an essay by Ee Ling Low. The former way of describing languages as "stress timed" and "syllable timed" is now acknowledged to be less a dichotomy and more a continuum. Investigation of speech rhythm revealed that nonnative speakers have far fewer reduced vowels in their speech when compared to native speakers.

Part 3 highlights several aspects of teaching spoken discourse including the need for prioritizing speech over writing in language teaching, the overlooked but important role of vague language in speaking, and new approaches to analyzing classroom discourse. Anna Mauranen's essay advocating a greater priority to be placed on spoken language is particularly thought provoking. She recounts how research into aspects of speech (pragmatics, discourse analysis, conversational analysis) have "revitalized linguistics and challenged the adequacy of sentence-based models which have developed from analyzing written language or

invented sentences" (p. 143). Increasing globalization has resulted in a growing need for teaching spoken communication. New corpus studies on spoken language and the analysis of conversation have given evidence that speaking is highly organized and requires more skills than writing. She challenges teachers and linguists to acknowledge that in order to equip learners with the skills needed for real-world language use, spoken language needs to have priority over written language.

The fourth and final part of the book focuses on assessment, evaluating learners' speaking progress, and measuring learners' mental functions. Neither article offers useful insight for assessing speaking in the classroom. John Levis' essay criticizes existing pronunciation assessment methods as haphazard or for having relative standards. He suggests evaluating for intelligibility and fluency, but gives no clear direction on how to measure these qualities. The final essay describes sociocultural theory and suggests new ways to assess psychological processes involved in language learning.

For teachers desiring to keep up with current research trends in speech pedagogy this book presents a stimulating collection of essays. While not a book of practical teaching applications, it does give plenty of food for thought about deeper or broader issues concerning teaching speaking.

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***The Language of Language: Core Concepts in Linguistic Analysis (2nd ed.)*. Madalena Cruz-Ferreira and Sunita Ann Abraham. Singapore: Prentice Hall, 2006. xvii + 266 pp.**

Reviewed by

Byron O'Neill

Kyoto Notre Dame University

The Language of Language: Core Concepts in Linguistic Analysis (2nd ed.) is a student-centered, interactive textbook based on author Madalena Cruz-Ferreira's lecture notes for an introductory undergraduate linguistics course at the National University of Singapore. It consists of 12 chapters that can be organized into 6 sections—an introduction, morphology, phonology, grammar, meaning, and language usage. The authors state in the preface that their goal is to "encourage informed thinking about issues relating to language structure and use, by discussing as broad a sample as possible, in a book of this size, of the kinds of activities that linguists busy themselves with" (p. xiii). They achieve this by assuming no prior knowledge of the field and by being selective in what they include.

Each chapter is divided into seven parts. The first part is the "Chapter Preview," where a series of open-ended questions set the tone. An "Introduction" then serves to create a link from any previous chapters before presenting the "Main Content," which is separated into numbered subsections for ease of reference. Multiple "Activity" boxes provide thought-provoking tasks that invite readers to review and interact with the information presented so far. "Food for Thought" presents relevant quotations from renowned linguists. Finally, a short bibliography for "Further Reading" is followed by a list of "References."

The first section of the book serves as an introduction to the study of language by describing its universality and diversity. Chapter 1 begins by defining language as a mode of communication between humans and the various forms and functions that this involves. A brief examination of some key features of language is followed by an introduction to the scientific examination of language. Chapter 2 explores how languages are related to each other through discussions of variation, the classifications of language families, language shift, and universal grammar.

The next two sections discuss how linguistic meaning is presented through words, which acts as a foundation for a discussion on speech

sounds. Chapter 3 is an introduction to morphology through an examination of English word classes and morphemes. Chapter 4 looks at how and why new words are constructed. Chapter 5 defines phonetics and phonology before showing how speech sounds are biologically produced. The different types of sounds are discussed before the reader is shown how they could be transcribed and analyzed with the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and Distinctive Feature (DF) approaches. Chapter 6 closely examines the role phonemes play in everyday language use and introduces the reader to phonemic systems and analysis.

The fourth section addresses sentence-level grammar. Chapter 7 begins with syntax and constituency, and follows up with phrases, phrase structure, and recursion. Tree diagrams are used to illustrate some of the more difficult concepts. Chapter 8 deals with sentence structure by discussing syntactic form and function, obligatory and optional sentence constituents, and verb categories.

Semantics and pragmatics are explored in the next section. Chapter 9 initially looks at the concept of meaning through four parameters: sense vs. reference, denotation vs. connotation, literal vs. metaphorical, and compositional vs. idiomatic. Semantic shift and the relationship between meaning and sound, spelling, other words, and between sentences is also discussed. Chapter 10 looks at the functions that language performs with information on speech acts, the Cooperative Principle, politeness, and the organization of conversation.

The final section gives an overview of discourse and language communities. Chapter 11 starts by examining the structure of information within and across clauses before analyzing discourse patterns. Chapter 12 serves as an observation of groups of language speakers categorized as native, bilingual, and The Others, a euphemism used by the authors to describe nonnative users of language. Language loss, language endangerment, and language death are also covered.

The Language of Language: Core Concepts in Linguistic Analysis (2nd ed.) explores the nature of the English language, and suggests ways in which students and linguists can study it. My only criticism is that it focuses much more on the former than on the latter. This book would be more valuable with less emphasis on the mechanics of language, which the authors feel is a necessary prerequisite to understanding the science of its examination. Perhaps this is so, but for those interested in the topics suggested in the subtitle, a more balanced approach might be more effective.

Text, Context, Pretext: Critical Issues in Discourse Analysis.
Henry G. Widdowson. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004. x + 185 pp.

Reviewed by

Gerry Lassche

Miyagi Gakuin Women's University

Henry Widdowson, the father of applied linguistics, has written *Text, Context, Pretext* to give a wake-up call to the field of discourse analysis. In this volume, Widdowson compellingly argues that discourse analysis in its best known faces is being confused with interpretation, displaying a *functional fallacy*, as he refers to it. As a result of poorly thought out methodologies and guiding philosophies, the field is in disarray, and runs the risk of being sidelined altogether, if it does not present a more objective and systematic treatment of analyzing language.

On the face of it, the application of this book to classroom teaching is tenuous. While Widdowson's work (1984; 1990) in applied linguistics has been influential, the current volume makes no direct reference to language teaching. Even his past work (especially Widdowson 1979; 1984) has had limited impact on language teaching, as Widdowson's writing tends to be quite dense, with long-winding arguments not organized in a more reader-friendly manner. For example, I feel that Widdowson's important dichotomy of *genuine texts* versus *authentic practice* is still misapplied in the ELT literature and remains the minority view in discussions regarding these topics for this very reason. Potentially, this book could be relegated to a similar status due to its style of presentation. On the other hand, how to treat texts, what is context and how it shapes language, what agendas speakers have—all of these are very important questions that teachers need to keep in the back of their minds as they prepare their lessons. Such questions inform the relevance, the authenticity, the heart of curriculum design by asking: what shall be the content of our teaching?

The book is divided into 10 chapters, the first 5 dealing with the concepts outlined in the title of the book. In Chapter 1, *text* and *discourse* are differentiated. Discourse is the process of interpretation, of meaning negotiation, between people. The language that emerges from this process is text. This reiterates the position that Widdowson (1979) takes earlier, that *text-ness* does not reside as an intrinsic quality of the text, but is instead a quality conferred by its users.

In Chapter 2, Widdowson tackles Halliday's systemic functional (S/F) linguistics. While S/F is credited for its description of language components, Widdowson insists that these components do not code particular functional interpretations. The reason for this is that such evaluations can only be made with due reference to *context*, the content of Chapter 3. In this chapter, a historical analysis of how the concept of context is treated by significant contributors, as is how relevance theory (RT) only chooses to pay attention to particular aspects of context in its judgments of what texts "mean." Corpus analysis (CA), the examination of what kind of language patterns, especially lexical, tend to occur in similar contexts, is the subject of Chapter 4. In S/F, the particular language used in a particular setting for a particular purpose is referred to as *genre*, which I would suggest is conceptually similar to *co-text*, but of which Widdowson makes no mention. Finally, "pretext," the agenda or intention that language users bring to the table when negotiating meaning, and its impact are discussed in Chapter 5.

The final five chapters discuss how different approaches to text and discourse analysis have fallen short of being systematic, and thus have lost credibility. Chapter 6 criticizes critical discourse analysis (CDA) for being selectively attentive to particular features of text and context—in effect, for using a politically-motivated pretext in its methodology. CDA brings so much data to bear on a text, that researchers are forced for practical reasons to focus on individual language features to study. The resulting discriminate choosing of features is reminiscent of CDA's failing, and this dilemma is described in Chapter 7. "Analysis and interpretation" is the focus of Chapter 8: what do these concepts mean? Where many linguists criticize literary critical interpretation, Widdowson defends it as an approach that unabashedly makes private interpretations. He goes on to contend that since these interpretations are universally different, they cannot be subjected to devaluation for simply being *academic*, nor can CDAs be elevated for being exclusively sociopolitical.

In Chapter 9, the methodologies of the different approaches to text and discourse analysis are subjected to a final review and are found lacking given their selective attention to language features which support the view that they have brought to the text. Widdowson concludes in Chapter 10 by calling for more scientific (i.e. systematic and objective) methodologies, which in turn would be more credible and authoritative for public consumption.

To my recollection, I have not read a more comprehensively scathing review of ELT-related research anywhere, as this volume has not exactly

followed the guidelines for winning friends. But because it does not pull any punches, it will influence thinking. Coupling wit with incisive logic supported by specific and numerous illustrations, this volume scores some mighty hits on current approaches and eminent names in the field of linguistics. Reading this book is like having someone pull the curtains back on the political and ideological battles being waged in academia. The book is an education in these epic scenes, but I am glad not to be one of the actors referred to in its pages.

Text, Context, and Pretext is not light reading, but reading it will reward the committed language researcher, student of linguistics, and even classroom teacher. I had to read Chapter 3 several times before I could make sense of it (and that only after proceeding to read Chapter 6 and 7 and then going back). Yet, the book was stimulating for its innovative treatment of concepts and aggressive use of style, and I would recommend it as a must-read for anyone with an interest in how language is and should be evaluated, in a spectrum ranging from the sociopolitical (for instance, Lakoff, 2004) to the educational and language learning realms.

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