Book Review

A Note on the Grammar Book: An ESL/EFL Teacher’s Course*

Chan Chung
(Dongseo University)

Chung, Chan. 2008. A Note on the Grammar Book: An ESL/EFL Teacher’s Course. Linguistic Research 25(2), 125-137. Although Celce-Murcia and Larson-Freeman (1999) (CL hereafter) is an excellent comprehensive textbook for the students in an ESL/EFL teacher’s course, it has some drawbacks. This review examines what they are and explores better ways to present the relevant issues. First, CL do not clearly distinguish grammatical functions from grammatical categories. The lack of this distinction causes confusion and inconsistency when PS rules are considered. Second, CL’s treatment of the determiners such as possessives, partitives, and phrasal quantifiers is too simplified and may lead to a wrong grammaticality prediction. Third, a discussion seems needed regarding the connectivity in the relative clause constructions, which helps to choose an appropriate relativizer. Fourth, a caution needs to be addressed on verbs’ subcategorization frames, many of which are not semantically predictable. Problems in the coordination constructions are also illustrated. (Dongseo University)

Keywords ESL/EFL, grammatical functions, determiners, connectivity, subcategorization, coordination

1. Introduction

The Grammar Book: An ESL/EFL Teacher’s Course (Celce-Murcia and Larson-Freeman 1999, CL hereafter) is one of the best-known comprehensive textbooks for ESL/EFL teachers. It covers almost all the major constructions in English with linguistics-based analyses. One of its merits arises from the three-dimensional account of each construction: the form, meaning, and use. While most of the other ESL/EFL teacher’s textbooks tend to cover only the form and the meaning, it extends the account to the

* I would like to thank Ann Wennerstrom for letting me sit in her class at the University of Washington and have opportunities of discussing the issues presented in this paper with her and other class participants. My thanks also go to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions. Of course, all remaining errors are solely mine.
use dimension mainly based on the corpus analysis. Moreover, teaching suggestions in each chapter are also very useful. Even though it has such merits, it seems to have some issues and drawbacks. These defects arise from two factors: one is the mixed use of grammatical categories and grammatical functions, and the other arises from neglect or misrepresentation of some important issues in several constructions such as the noun phrase structures, relative clauses, subcategorization frames of verbs, and coordination structures. The main goal of this review is to discuss those issues and to explore better teaching alternatives from linguistic and pedagogical perspectives.

The organization of this review is as follows. Section 2 considers the problems caused by the lack of distinction between grammatical functions and grammatical categories. Section 3 examines problems arising from the analysis of noun phrases, especially focusing on the treatment of determiners. Section 4 examines the connectivity in relative clauses. Section 5 considers the need of presenting verbs’ subcategorization frames. Section 6 discusses the coordination constructions. Section 7 offers a summary and conclusion.

2. Grammatical Categories vs. Grammatical Functions

In chapter 5 of CL, confusion seems to arise from the description of the phrase structure rules due to the lack of clear distinction between grammatical categories (parts of speech) and grammatical functions. For example, the terminologies such as the predicate (PRED) or the subject (SUBJ) traditionally represent grammatical functions, whereas the ones such as the noun phrase (NP) or verb phrase (VP) represent grammatical categories. A problem with the rule system given in CL is that the category names and function names are all mixed up:

(1) a. S → SUBJ  PRED
b. SUBJ → NP
c. PRED → AUX  VP  (Adv) (CL: 103)

Categories and functions are both used as primitive notions in most syntactic theories, but they are distinguished to represent different syntactic levels. That is, a category is a more superficial level of representation and can be defined in terms of a form or a position in a sentence. However, a grammatical function is a more abstract