

Rankin, Tom and Whong, Melinda. 2020. *Grammar: A Linguists' Guide for Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 214 pages.

This book occupies an interesting niche. It begins by establishing the principle that theoretical linguistics and language teaching have traditionally not been closely connected, then tries to bridge the gap between them. Indeed, it has a specific, explicit agenda to encourage language teachers to consider the findings of theoretical linguistics in their teaching, while providing the necessary support to do so. As well as presenting facts and discussions, it addresses key philosophical issues in language teaching, and suggests how they can be applied to practical use in the classroom. However, this book stands out not only in what it is, but what it isn't. It is not an introduction to theoretical linguistics, although it does present the same information as would be found in such an introduction. Nor is it a handbook of language pedagogy, although its purpose is to support language teachers in their classroom practice. It isn't even mainly about the philosophy or history of linguistics or language teaching, but it addresses all of them in some detail. As may be inferred from the title, it provides little didactic advice; its purpose is rather to guide language teachers towards a practice more grounded in linguistic theory. The authors' expertise is evident throughout the book: Rankin is a linguist who has focused his research on learner English, Whong is a language pedagogue whose research has touched upon textbook structure and second language acquisition.

The style is easy-going and accessible, and the structure pedagogically planned. Examples are frequently illustrated as a numbered series of cases-in-point in separate text boxes. This agreeably pedagogic device provides the non-specialist language teacher with easy reference to concise examples either to support the development of classroom materials or to address particular questions of their own or from advanced students. The compartmentalisation of these theoretical principles into tightly ordered separate parts of the text is one of the features which most recommends this book to the non-specialist. Where examples are included outside these cases-in-point, they are part of longer and more detailed expositions of theoretical ideas rather than examples of language features in context. The cases-in-point are particularly accessible in the online (.html) version, where pagination of such large blocks of separate text is not an issue, but

less so in the .pdf version where they are inserted arbitrarily to favour their being displayed on whole pages. This presumably also affects the printed book.

The inclusion of core elements from various sub-disciplines of linguistics is evidence of thorough planning and effective writing. Many of their examples are from English as one would expect from both the expertise of the authors and the fact that it is the only language they can be sure every reader has in common. These are often contrasted with examples from other languages to highlight the broader application of linguistic principles. Indeed, the book has almost all the content one would expect from an introduction to linguistics textbook, if not the structure.

On first reading, it seemed remarkable to this reviewer that the word 'English' was not included in the title of the book. The presentation of the cases-in-point with one English and one non-English example for comparison is consistent when the feature under consideration exists in English. The examples become less dependent on English later in the book, which is a wise pedagogic choice, but English remains the focus throughout. This focus on English linguistics is, however, useful for teachers of English without a more general background in linguistics, as it serves to highlight the structural features of English grammar within a broader context. Similarly, *applied* linguistics is tacitly excluded from the linguistic theory considered in this book. This makes the book even more appropriate for teachers such as those educated in Nordic countries where applied English linguistics is such common currency, and where a more general, non-language-specific linguistics is rarely encountered during language teacher education at any level.

The book is divided into five coherent chapters, moving gradually from theoretical to practical themes. In chapter 1, a brief traditional summary of the history of the linguistic discipline is given, starting with Chomsky's 1959 ground-breaking review of Skinner's 1957 *Verbal Behavior*. There follow clear explanations with reference to a few well-chosen key publications, each representing major current theories. Brief and informative definitions of key terms within linguistics are then given. An absence of any reference to construction grammar stands out in the review of the history of linguistics, perhaps exactly because it is the least generalising of major current theories. However, most of these descriptions are unreferenced, and this chapter cries out for its own annotated selected bibliography, if the purpose is to encourage further

forays into linguistic theory. An even briefer history of grammar in relation to language teaching leads to the policy statement *Bring Back Grammar*, which informs the following chapters.

Chapter 2 expands on more philosophical points and how they are supported by the facts, including on what principles languages are defined and may be distinguished from one another, as well as the purpose of theory in a wider educational and social context.

Chapter 3 continues with the philosophy of linguistics. It firstly attempts to defend the concept of grammar in itself from accusations or assumptions of prescriptivist pedantry, and to distinguish grammar from other formal aspects of language use. A nuanced view is given of prescriptivism and the apparent arbitrariness of grammar rules based on sociolinguistic features, with particular reference to the accusative coordinated subject in the *me and...* construction. The conclusions reflect mainstream views within the field, as befits a guide.

Chapter 4 addresses first and second language acquisition, lightly grazing applied linguistics. Most of the focus is on the difference between L1 acquisition and L2 learning, and in the sorts of features of L2s which are so subtle as to be incapable of explanation without reference to linguistic analysis. This notion of linguistics bringing clarity to obscure language questions is indeed a recurring theme in the book as a whole.

Chapter 5 ties the contents of the previous chapters together into recommended best practice. This leads to a sort of pedagogic syncretism, predicated on the amalgamation of sub-fields of language study which rarely combine in a single person in today's specialised academy. In this chapter, applied methods are considered in relation to theoretical influences, especially concerning the application of grammatical concepts, while using multilingualism as a classroom resource, and translanguaging as educational practice.

Each chapter finishes with numerous suggested exercises and discussion questions for class. These are sometimes genuinely exciting and thought-provoking. Whether this book could be applied as a textbook for courses within the university systems in and around Scandinavia is another matter. The details of teacher candidate education differ so much from nation to nation and even from college to college that it is hard to generalise.

In conclusion, this book is accessible, easily read and reflects the connection between linguistic theory and language teaching clearly and

helpfully. For those who are linguists first and teachers second, there is little new information, but worthy suggestions on how to incorporate our backgrounds and research into classroom practice. It is also useful as a reference work, particularly for those teachers whose background or classroom duties have a cursory or peripheral connection to theoretical linguistics. This would include those whose background is chiefly in applied linguistics, and who may not have considered much linguistic theory since their own time as an undergraduate. For these readers, I feel this book ends too early; the addition of a glossary of the highlighted terms and a curated bibliography would make it of much greater practical use to that demographic. Notwithstanding, language teachers, especially English teachers in colleges and upper secondary schools, will find much in this book to reinforce their theoretical knowledge and support their more advanced and inquisitive students.

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#### *References*

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