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TEACHING GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes "Understanding and Using English Grammar", one of the most well-known and effective grammar textbooks for intermediate to advanced English students. Moreover, it demonstrates the results showing that grammar methods are mixed with communication methods in the book, providing a framework for students to learn and practice grammar in the context.

KEYWORDS

Grammar textbooks, concepts, contextualized language, background knowledge, self –discovery, communicative activities, authentic topics.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding and Using English Grammar” by Betty S. Azar & Stacy A. Hagen (2017) is one of the well-known and effective grammar textbooks which is suitable for teaching intermediate to advanced students of English. I have been using this book for teaching my Intermediate and Upper-Intermediate level students. It worth noting that, while keeping the same basic approaches and techniques as in previous

editions, the Fifth Edition includes more communicative and interactive activities. This program includes the whole package for effective teaching grammar : Student Book, Workbook, Chartbook, Teacher’s Book and Companion Website.

Grammar as product

Regarding to the methodology, grammar-based teaching approach was utilized in this textbook, to be more precise, grammar methodology was blended with communicative methods. As we know, grammar is considered as a basement for any language use and it should be taught so appropriately that students can understand the language which they hear or see and use their knowledge in their communication correctly. Taking into account all of these, the textbook provides a logical and natural framework for students to learn and practice the grammar of English in a context rather than just a collection of rules. Moreover, the activities are mostly meaning-based and students can learn

concepts practicing them step-by-step. A wide range of thematic activities and exercises in the book gives learners a great opportunity for contextualized language use. It helps them to understand why and how certain forms or structures are used in various situations.

In addition, noticing activities are also included in most of the lessons before the formal instruction. For instance, in chapter 5: Subject-Verb Agreement there is given a table with some words and students are asked to find whether they are singular or plural and nouns or verbs.

EXERCISE 1 ► Warm-up. (Chart 5-1)

Look at the words in blue. Are they singular or plural? Are they nouns or verbs?



	SINGULAR	PLURAL	NOUN	VERB
1. A wedding costs a lot of money.				
2. Weddings cost a lot of money.				
3. Wedding costs are increasing.				
4. The cost of weddings is increasing.				

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As we know learners can not be forced to do noticing tasks, while oppositely they can do it when they feel

that they are ready for it or have enough background knowledge. According to Ryan (2001), learners

extract from the available information around them the regularities that form into their knowledge system and in this case noticing activities help teachers to make their students aware of some of these patterns . He also adds that if students have an awareness of them, then ultimately their pattern detector might function a bit more efficiently.

The sample activity which was given above guides students to discover the grammar rule by themselves and it is also called consciousness-raising task. In

fact, there was given so much emphasis on self – discovery by the learner. One example for this could be the exercise № 1, in Chapter 7:Articles. In this activity learners are required to match the explanation to the sentence it describes. The explanations are: a specific gift, gifts in general and one, gift, but not specific. According to their meaning students can find the right sentence which they describe and discover a rule about the usage of definite or indefinite articles in contexts. After that a brief explanation of the grammar rule is given.

EXERCISE 1 ► Warm-up. (Chart 7-1)

Match the explanation to the sentence it describes.

- | | | |
|--|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| a. gifts in general | b. a specific gift | c. one gift, but not specific |
| 1. ____ I received a Valentine's gift. | | |
| 2. ____ The gift was very thoughtful. | | |
| 3. ____ Is it better to give or receive gifts? | | |



It should be noted that, clearly and well-designed grammar explanations in each chapter give students an opportunity to understand the grammar of the target language faster and better. Because, all of them are strengthened with real examples.

Grammar as process

Having analyzed the textbook, I found that in most lessons there were given a lot of opportunity for the learners to express themselves effectively by doing various communicative activities. As we know, in process teaching students are required not only to discover the rules by themselves but also to use the language for self-expression. Here each student's own personalities and attitudes are taken into account. For

example, the exercise № 3, in chapter 2 is one of the effective communicative activities in this textbook. In this activity students are asked to work in pairs and ask from each other questions on given situations using the question structure “How long have you...”.

In this process learners can practice the grammar knowledge which they gained about Perfect Progressive tense answering questions from their point of view.

EXERCISE 3 ▶ Let's talk. (Charts 2-1 and 2-2)

Complete the questions with the past participle form of the verb. Work with a partner. Take turns asking and answering questions with **How long have you**.

1. wear glasses → *How long have you worn glasses?*
→ *I've worn glasses for three years.* OR *I don't wear glasses.*
2. speak English
3. know our teacher
4. study English
5. have a passport/visa
6. own (a cell phone, a computer, a tablet, an iPod®, etc.)
7. be awake
8. live in this town
9. participate in sports
10. play (the piano, the guitar, the violin, etc.)



In terms of preparation, teachers using this book do not need to prepare extra materials from the internet or others. Because, each lesson is rich in authentic topics and suitable texts for students' practice the language. Mostly students are familiar with the topics which were used in this textbook. The activities are focused on discussing the issues which students are

facing or have enough background knowledge. For instance: a) About the negative Impact of Social Media on Children and Teens; b) About the learners' personal interests or preferences c) About vacation or others. These factors make the activities and the whole textbook authentic and reliable for students to learn the grammar of the target language.

Grammar as skill

As reflection activities there were provided a wide range exercises such writing journal entries using certain tenses or writing some paragraphs about a website using expressions of quantity.

Part II. Write a journal entry about your experience in a class on your first day of school.

1. Begin with *It was my first day at the university / in high school / in English class / etc.*
2. What was the teacher doing when you walked in? What were other students doing?
3. Did you notice anyone or anything special?
4. How did you feel?
5. What were your first impressions about the class and what were your thoughts later?

WRITING TIP

It is important to consider your first piece of writing a draft, not your finished copy. When you begin to write, jot down ideas first and then sentences. As you write your paragraph, you can always change, reorder, or delete ideas. After you finish the paragraph, edit it carefully. Correct any errors in your next draft. Then read it again and make additional changes or rewrite if necessary. You might need to do this a few more times. It may sound like a long process, but your writing will be much better.



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These activities help learners to reflect on what they learnt and produce them in different types of writings. Moreover, for completing reading, listening and writing activities grammar rules and structures play vital role in this book. Each of them require students to use certain grammar forms or rules which were explained at the beginning of the lesson. By doing this students will have an opportunity to understand the meaning of those rules or forms and use them in a context.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as this grammar textbook is the latest (5th edition) and modernized version among its

series, in my opinion it has no less satisfactory areas. However, the Azar-Hagen Grammar Series is absolutely course neutral. It can be linked with other skills books such as “New Headway” or “Solutions” to deliver more grammar practice. Moreover, the exercises in this books are calibrated to the appropriate level, and the content has been carefully crafted to avoid vocabulary and structures that might be too challenging. Also, plenty of exercises across a wide range of grammar topics provide extensive opportunities for students to practice. I have found this grammar textbook very useful and would strongly recommend to my colleagues too.

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