How is Pedagogical Grammar Defined in Current TESOL Training Practice?

Wendy Wang

This article reports on the results of a survey of pedagogical grammar courses in MATESOL programs in the United States and Canada. An analysis of 39 self-reporting questionnaires and 23 course syllabi provides much-needed information about the content and emphasis of the courses and how pedagogical grammar is defined in current TESOL training practice.

Cet article présente les résultats d'une enquête portant sur les cours de grammaire pédagogique dans les programmes MATESOL aux États-Unis et au Canada. Une analyse de 39 questionnaires portant sur la pratique et 23 syllabes de cours, a permis de recueillir de l'information indispensable sur le contenu et les objectifs de ces cours ainsi que sur la définition de la grammaire pédagogique qui domine actuellement au sein de la formation d'enseignants d'anglais langue seconde.

Introduction

What is pedagogical grammar (PG)? As Little (1994) observes, “Pedagogical grammar is a slippery concept” (p. 99). In fact, there is no consensus even among pedagogical grammarians as to how to define it. Greenbaum (1987) characterizes pedagogical grammar as a mixture of descriptive and prescriptive statements. Allen (1974) defines it as “a comparatively informal framework of definitions, diagrams, exercises, and verbalized rules which may help a learner to acquire knowledge of a language and fluency in its use” (p. 60). For Odlin (1994), “the term pedagogical grammar usually denotes the types of grammatical analysis and instruction designed for the needs of second language students” (p. 1). The varying definitions illustrate that pedagogical grammar is commonly used to refer to pedagogical content (e.g., description of the target language system using different reference sources), pedagogical process (e.g., pedagogical treatment of the target language to facilitate a learner’s second language development), or a combination of content and process (Little, 1994). According to Dirven (1990), a working definition of PG can be understood as “a cover term for any learner- or teacher-oriented description or prescription of foreign language rule complexes with the aim of promoting and guiding learning processes in the acquisition of that language” (p. 1). This definition leaves room for various types of PG (see Figure 1).
In his brief survey of PG, Dirven (1990) makes a distinction between PG and descriptive grammar. The former is finely subcategorized to include a learning grammar, a teaching grammar, and a reference grammar. The notion of a learning grammar, as Dirven observes, refers to the grammar in a given textbook or syllabus. This definition leaves room for “grammar as an activity (presentation), as a learning process and as part of a competence to be acquired” (p. 1). In contrast to a learning grammar, a teaching grammar is often used to refer to “the explicit treatment of elements of the target language system as (part of) language teaching methodology” (Little, 1994, p. 99). In view of the interaction between teaching and learning, Corder (1974) argues that the distinction between a teaching grammar and a learning grammar is hard to draw; it is inadequate, to say the least. Corder suggests that the notions of teaching and learning grammars be replaced with the pedagogy of grammar to cover not only the explicit treatment of grammar, but also “the whole of the syllabus, which must stimulate and guide the learner’s setting up of hypotheses about the target language” (cited in Dirven, 1990, p. 1).

The relationship between reference grammar and PG is taken up by Greenbaum (1987), who characterizes the former as a prescriptive statement with the aim of describing the phenomenon of language as fully as possible, and the latter as a mixture of descriptive and prescriptive statements. A linguistic grammar, a subcategory of descriptive grammar in Dirven’s (1990) diagram, is primarily concerned with the description of language and may restrict its descriptive and explanatory scope to syntactic form (Tomlin, 1994). In discussing differences between a linguistic grammar and PG, Berman (1979) points out that a linguistic grammar “aims first and foremost to describe and thereby explains knowledge, whereas a pedagogic grammar (PG) aims to impart knowledge” (p. 280). Recognizing the pragmatic and hybrid nature of pedagogical grammar, Derewianka (2001) characterizes it as different from descriptive grammars in terms of “the degree of technicality, the scope, selection, sequencing and presentation of material, and the relevance to teaching and learning” (p. 242).
It is interesting to note that reference grammar is incorporated into PG in Dirven’s (1990) diagram; however, linguistic grammar is not. Dirven’s diagram illustrates that to understand PG fully, one needs to understand how it relates to other conceptions of grammar. Because each type of grammar addresses its own audience, its value and validity are determined by the people who use it. The largest audience for PG is surely the language teacher. Therefore, conceptualizations of PG, Hasan and Perrett (1994) argue, cannot be dissociated from what a teacher needs in order to facilitate a learner’s second/foreign language development. From the perspectives of ESOL teachers, none of the above subcategories of PG alone could satisfactorily address their practical concerns. Indeed, as Odlin (1994) points out,

Without question, teaching grammar in a second language setting involves prescription, yet the range of structures important to consider resembles a descriptive grammar much more than a prescriptive grammar for native speakers. Moreover, teachers concerned about how their students succeed in learning any grammar will naturally be curious about the psychological constructs that underlie interlanguage competence and performance. (p. 10)

This suggests that a sound PG needs to embrace all aspects of grammar teaching concerning pedagogical content (e.g., prescription, description, and explanation), pedagogical process, and the learner (e.g., learner grammar). The last component is what seems to be missing in Dirven’s (1990) diagram. The notion of a learner grammar, a term introduced by Corder (1974) to refer to the actual knowledge of the learner at any given stage, is an important one. A good knowledge of a learner grammar provides teachers with much-needed information to construct learning activities that target selected gaps in their students’ grammatical knowledge. If PG is to be conceptualized to include pedagogical content, pedagogical process, and the learner, it will affect many decisions about what to teach in a PG course.

In spite of the importance of the PG course in ESOL teacher preparation (Celce-Murcia, 1991a, 1991b; Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Ellis, 1998; Larsen-Freeman, 1991; Borg, 1999; Wagner, 1995; Williams, 1994), little is known about how PG is conceptualized and defined in current TESOL training practice. However, there have been attempts to redefine grammar in MATESOL programs to be in line with the goals of communicative competence (Meier, 1998a; 1998b). The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine current conceptualizations of PG by analyzing the content and structure of the PG courses in the MATESOL programs in the United States and Canada. The research questions addressed in this study are:
1. What are the objectives of the pedagogical grammar course?
2. How is the pedagogical grammar course characterized and structured?
3. How can instructors enrich the quality of the PG course?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus on Structural Knowledge</th>
<th>Focus on Pedagogical Grammar</th>
<th>Focus on Applied English Grammar</th>
<th>Focus on English Grammar and Phonology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(2) English Grammar</td>
<td>(1) Advanced Grammar for Language Teaching</td>
<td>(1) ESL Linguistics</td>
<td>(1) Phonology and Structure of American English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Structure of English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1) Pedagogical Grammar and Phonology of English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Advanced English Grammar</td>
<td>(1) Advanced Grammar: Theory &amp; Practice</td>
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<td>(1) Advanced English Grammar Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1) Aspects of English</td>
<td>(1) English Grammar for ESL/EFL Teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1) English Syntax</td>
<td>(1) English Structure and Language</td>
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<td>(1) Grammars of English</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1) Grammars of Modern English and the Teaching of Grammar</td>
<td>(1) English Syntax and Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(1) Grammatical Structures</td>
<td>(1) Grammar</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(1) Introduction to the Grammar of English Usage</td>
<td>Structures of English for TESOL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(1) Structure of Modern English</td>
<td>(1) Grammars for Teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) The English Language: Structure and Usage</td>
<td>(1) Pedagogic Grammar for ESL Teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) The Structure of Present-day English</td>
<td>(1) Pedagogic Grammar of Second &amp; Foreign Languages</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) Teaching English Grammar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) Teaching ESL Grammar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 18 (46%) Total: 15 (39%) Total: 3 (8%) Total: 3 (8%)

**Method**

To collect information about the PG courses in the MATESOL programs in the US and Canada, I conducted a survey in April 2001. A single-page questionnaire was developed, which consists of eight items in forced-choice and open-question formats (see Appendix). Information about the following was solicited: (a) course titles; (b) course requirement status; (c) required texts and readings; (d) course objectives and requirements; (e) instructor’s perception of the PG course; (f) course content and emphasis; (g) instructor’s
Table 2
Required Texts (No. of Institutions That Require the Text are in Parentheses)


self-rating of the course; and (h) instructor’s suggestions for enriching the quality of the PG course. The questionnaire was sent to the directors of 152 MATESOL programs in the US and Canada, with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey. These programs were selected from The Directory of Professional Preparation Programs in TESOL in the US and Canada 1999-2001 (Garshick, 2001). Of the 152 questionnaires that were distributed, 42 were returned, yielding a response rate of 28%. There were three null responses, which were not included in the analysis. The study reported here examines
Table 2 (continued)


39 completed questionnaires and 23 course syllabi provided by the respondents.

**Results**

A close examination of the responses and the syllabi revealed that the content and structure of the PG courses vary considerably from one program to another. This section presents the results of the survey. Drawing on survey findings, I then discuss how PG is conceptualized and defined in current TESOL training practice.

**Course Requirement Status and Course Titles**

Thirty-seven respondents (95%) reported that a course in PG was offered in their TESOL programs. Five percent of the respondents indicated that PG was integrated into a descriptive linguistics course. Most of the TESOL programs surveyed (30 of 39) required the course for a master’s in TESOL; more than half the programs (20 of 39) required it for a certificate in ESL/TESOL, and nearly one fifth of the respondents indicated that the course was required for other programs (e.g., ESL endorsement, BA in applied linguistics, etc.).

It is interesting to note that although there is unanimous recognition of a course in PG in the MATESOL programs surveyed, the actual course titles vary from *Structure of Modern English* to *English Grammar for ESL/EFL Teachers*, and from *Teaching English Grammar* to *Pedagogical Grammar and Phonology of English*. These titles appear to indicate different orientations (see Table 1).

Nearly 46% of the course titles fall into category #1, indicating an emphasis on developing structural knowledge. Forty-six percent of the course titles can be characterized by category #2, featuring pedagogical grammar or
applied English grammar. Eight percent of the course titles fall into the third category with emphasis on both English grammar and phonology.

**Required Texts and Readings**

In spite of the varying course titles, the required textbooks reported by the respondents are remarkably similar. A total of 28 required textbooks were cited (see Table 2). Twenty-three respondents (59%) reported using Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman’s (1999) *The Grammar Book*; some used it along with one or two other texts. Of the remaining textbooks cited, six texts were used in a few courses, ranging from two to four, and 22 textbooks were used in just one course each. Only two respondents provided recommended readings; most respondents appeared to use the required textbook(s) to structure their courses. The popularity of Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman’s (1999) book may reflect our current knowledge base for the subject matter. However, the choice of the textbook said little about how it was used and which grammar dimension was emphasized in the PG courses surveyed.

**Course Objectives and Requirements**

Of the 39 respondents, 23 (59%) provided detailed course objectives in their syllabi (referred to in a variety of ways including purpose, goals, objectives, and aims), and 16 respondents (41%) listed brief course objectives in returned questionnaires. A total of 103 objectives indicate a broad range of course content that can be roughly classified into eight categories (see Table 3).

The most cited objectives (41%) fall into the category of developing grammar knowledge (e.g., to familiarize prospective ESL teachers with the grammatical structures of English; to build a repertoire of terms and concepts for talking about grammar from traditional, structural, and functional perspectives, etc.). The second most frequently reported objectives (27%) are in the area of teaching grammar (e.g., to suggest techniques for teaching grammar; to discuss methods and problems of teaching grammar, etc.). The rest of the objectives cited fall into the following categories: Teaching practice (9%), understanding and analyzing learner grammar (9%), material evaluation and development (7%), explaining grammar (4%), assessment (1%), and other (3%). These objectives not only provide information about the knowledge and skills that instructors consider to be important for prospective teachers, but also reflect their conceptualizations of PG in their TESOL training practice.

In terms of course requirements, 24 respondents cited a total of 19 types of tasks. Unfortunately, two respondents did not specify how their tasks were graded; hence their tasks were not included in the following summary (see Table 4). Although these course requirements provide indirect information about the content and structure of the PG courses, the lack of samples make it impossible to speculate on the focus and emphasis of each task. Judging by
Table 3
Course Objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Objectives (N=103)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Grammar knowledge: Describing and understanding English grammar</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teaching grammar: Methods and techniques</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Teaching practice: Designing/implementing grammar lessons</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Understanding and analyzing learner grammar</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Material development: Selecting and evaluating teaching materials and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning tasks</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Explaining grammar</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Assessment</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

their titles, a few tasks indicate an emphasis on various aspects of teaching grammar, such as designing and implementing grammar lessons (e.g., #8 and #10), analyzing and explaining grammar (#9), and evaluating and developing teaching materials (e.g., #13, #17, and #18). It is also interesting to note that an Internet grammar search (#14) was required in one PG course, indicating an emerging use of technology in PG instruction.

Instructors' Perceptions of the PG Course
To explore the instructors’ perceptions of the PG course, item #5 in the questionnaire asked respondents to characterize their courses using the following categories: (a) a linguistic grammar; (b) a reference grammar; (c) a teaching grammar, and (e) a learner grammar. Thirty-four percent of the respondents indicated that their courses were best characterized by a teaching grammar. A linguistic grammar was cited by 18% of the respondents, and a learner grammar by 5% of the respondents. A considerable number of respondents (43%) claimed that their courses were a combination of various subcategories of PG. Only two respondents characterized their courses as a combination of all four types, whereas various other combinations ranging

![Figure 2. Instructors' perceptions of the PG course.](image-url)
from two to three subcategories of PG were cited by 14 respondents (see Figure 2).

Course Content and Emphasis
To learn about the content and emphasis of the PG courses, item #6 in the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate what percentage of their course content focused on the following aspects: (a) language structure, (b) meaning, (c) language use, (d) working with real-life data, (e) explaining grammar, and (f) talking about learner grammar. An open-ended prompt was provided for respondents to add any content focus not listed in item #6. Nine respondents (24%) claimed that their courses covered all six aspects. Twenty-six percent of the respondents reported that they focused on five of these aspects in various combinations; 26% of the respondents concentrated on four aspects, and 13% on three aspects, in various combinations.

Evidently, language structure received the most emphasis (28%), followed by explaining grammar (17%), language use (16%), and meaning (14%). Aspects receiving low emphasis include talking about learner grammar (8%) and working with real-life data (7%). In response to the open-ended prompt, respondents (10%) cited their emphasis in the following areas: teaching grammar, reviewing and designing materials for language learners, micro-teaching, and phonology (see Figure 3).
Instructors’ Self-Ratings and Suggestions for Enriching the PG Course

Instructors’ self-ratings of the effectiveness of the PG courses appeared to be high. Asked how well they met this criterion, 25 respondents (64%) rated their courses either as “very well” or “well,” 12 (31%) as “adequately,” and only one (3%) as “not very well.” A crucial piece of information sought in the survey was instructors’ suggestions for enriching the quality of the PG course. Thirty respondents (77%) completed this section and offered valuable suggestions (see Table 5).

Nine respondents (30%) suggested that real-life data (both written and spoken) be used in discussing and analyzing grammar, particularly from learners’ perspectives. Seven respondents (23%) cited the need for more emphasis on discourse grammar, and six respondents (20%) stressed the importance of pedagogical application. Five respondents (17%) suggested having two separate classes or sections to meet different needs of prospective teachers (e.g., separate classes or sections for native versus non-native speakers, or for teachers planning to work with younger learners as opposed to adults). Others also suggested offering two separate classes, one to address “how English works,” and the other with emphasis on pedagogical grammar issues. The remaining respondents indicated a need for more emphasis on the following aspects: teaching methods (7%), explaining grammar (7%), developing grammar knowledge (7%), and other types of knowledge (3%) such as varieties of Standard English.

In addition to suggestions, respondents also cited various challenges in teaching the PG course. Several respondents reported their struggle to cover the overwhelming course content with too little time. Other challenges facing
Table 5
Instructors’ Suggestions for Enriching the PG Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestions</th>
<th>Respondents (N=30)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. More use of real life data</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. More emphasis on discourse grammar</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. More emphasis on pedagogical application</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Separate classes/sections to meet different needs</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. More emphasis on teaching methods</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. More emphasis on explaining grammar</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. More emphasis on grammar knowledge</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instructors include: (a) how to get prospective teachers really to believe in the importance of grammar; (b) how to help them overcome the fear of teaching grammar; and (c) how to teach PG to those who are unclear about basic grammatical concepts and terminology.

Discussion

Evidently there is inclusion of a course in PG in the MATESOL programs surveyed; however, the varied course titles and content emphases indicate that conceptualizations of PG in current TESOL training practice vary just as much as the term PG. A detailed analysis of the collective course objectives and content foci reveals that current conceptualizations of PG appear to embrace three types of grammar knowledge and skills: (a) structural knowledge, which can be categorized either by a reference grammar or a linguistic grammar; (b) a teaching grammar, which is composed of grammar teaching methods/techniques, designing/implementing grammar lessons, explaining grammar, evaluating and developing teaching materials/activities; and (c) a learner grammar, which refers to understanding and analyzing developmental and cross-linguistic errors (see Figure 4).

These three types of grammar knowledge and skills constitute an expanded version of Dirven’s (1990) definition of PG. Consistent with Dirven, many respondents perceived reference grammar and teaching grammar to be integral parts of PG; however, it is noticeable that PG appears to be a much broader cover term in current TESOL training practice. As illustrated in Figure 4, the various types of grammar knowledge and skills taken together indicate that PG is generally conceptualized to include descriptive grammar, teaching grammar, and learner grammar. Such conceptualization of PG shows that attention has been given to teaching PG as content, as a pedagogical process, and as a learning process.
However, a closer analysis of instructors’ perceptions of the PG course reveals two distinct conceptual orientations among the respondents. Some perceived PG to be a combination of various subcategories of grammar, whereas others considered it to be unidimensional (i.e., viewing PG either as a teaching grammar, a linguistic grammar, or a learner grammar as shown in Figure 2). These survey findings indicate that there is no real consensus among TESOL professionals as to what constitutes PG and therefore what knowledge, skills, awareness, and attitudes should be taught to prepare prospective teachers to integrate grammar into ESOL pedagogy. This lack of consensus may put prospective teachers at risk of failing to develop the knowledge base and skills necessary for teaching grammar in various second- or foreign-language teaching contexts.

The suggestions provided by respondents indicate important directions for enriching the quality of the PG course. A growing emphasis on discourse grammar, pedagogical applications, and on using real-life data in analyzing and discussing grammar reflects the current move in ESOL methodology away from “language analysis, as the goal of language teaching, to the goal of teaching language for communication” (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000, p. 5). If ESOL teachers are to help students to become communicatively competent, acquaintance with these three types of knowledge and skills appears to be a necessary part of an ESOL teacher’s development. Given the diverse needs of prospective teachers, the survey findings also indicate that changes should be made in the set-up and structure of the PG courses to better prepare prospective teachers to meet the grammar challenges in various teaching settings.

I recognize the limitations of this study (e.g., low response rate, lack of qualitative data to illustrate how linguistic, reference, teaching, and learner grammars were understood by the respondents). Despite these limitations, the importance of this study lies in its being the first to attempt to examine how pedagogical grammar is defined in current TESOL training practice. The findings, though suggestive, are much needed. They point to an urgent call for a consensus as to what knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness prospective teachers should develop when completing the PG course. Such consensus will serve as an important conceptual base for instructors as they...
structure the PG course to help prospective teachers to appropriate their own conceptual and pedagogical tools in teaching grammar. Until we reach such consensus, considerable variation in the content and structure of the PG course in MATESOL programs persists.

Acknowledgments
The preliminary data of this survey were first co-presented with Cathy Day at the 36th Annual TESOL Convention, April 11, 2002, Salt Lake City, Utah. I would like to thank all the instructors for taking the time to respond to the survey and for their generosity in sharing their syllabi. I would also like to acknowledge and thank Cathy Day for her suggestions that helped to shape the survey questions and the article. Finally, many thanks to the reviewers and editors for their constructive comments.

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References
Appendix

The Pedagogical Grammar Course: A Survey

Your response to this questionnaire will contribute to a survey of the pedagogical grammar courses in the MATESOL programs in the United States and Canada. Please respond to the following questions and thank you for your cooperation.

1. Does your TESOL program offer a course in pedagogical grammar?
   __ Yes   __ No
   What is the title of the course?

2. Is this course required for
   a. Master's in TESOL
      Yes___  No___
   b. Certificate in ESL/TESOL
      Yes___  No___
   c. Other:_________________________

3. Which textbook(s) is currently used in the pedagogical grammar course?
   Author(s), title(s):______________________________
   Other (If you use a course pack, please enclose a copy of the reading list.)

4. What are the objectives and requirements for the pedagogical grammar course? (Please enclose a copy of the course syllabus.)
   ______________________________________________________

5. Of the various types of pedagogical grammar, which of the following best characterizes your course?
   __ a linguistic grammar


__ a reference grammar
__ a teaching grammar
__ a learner grammar

6. Approximately what percentage of your course focuses on:
__ Structure
__ Meaning
__ Language use
__ Working with real life-data
__ Explaining grammar
__ Talking about learner grammar
__ Other (please specify)

7. In your opinion, how well does the course prepare prospective teachers to teach grammar?
__ Very well
__ Well
__ Adequately
__ Not very well
__ Inadequately

8. What could be done to improve the effectiveness of the pedagogical grammar course?

__________________________________________________________________________

9. Would you like to receive a summary of the results of this survey?
__ Yes  __ No

Name: __________________________ E-mail address: __________________________