

PREFACE

A few years ago, a friend of mine married a Belgian and moved to Belgium. Scotty needed income, so he did what many English speakers do for work in a foreign country: He got a job teaching English conversation. I found this out when Scotty sent me an urgent email asking me these questions about English:

1. How do you explain when to use the *-ing* form of a verb and when to use the infinitive?
2. Is there a difference between *I like to read* and *I like reading*?
3. Why is it *I am considering moving to France* and not *I am considering to move to France*?
4. Why is it *Thank you for calling me* and not *Thank you for to call me*?

Scotty concluded his email with “Do you get what I’m asking? To me as a native speaker with no teacher training, it just comes naturally. Any suggestions?” (See Key 10 in Chapter 3 for the answers to Scotty’s questions.)

Well, yes, I do have some suggestions, and my number one suggestion for anyone who wishes to teach English to non-native speakers is to learn the most practical aspects of English grammar. You cannot teach well what you do not know well. Scotty was already finding this out himself the hard way as his students would ask him questions that he could not begin to answer. Just because you are a native speaker does not mean you understand how your native language operates, nor does it mean you will have the ability to explain how it works to a second language learner. Being a native speaker means you can speak the language fluently, but you have no overt knowledge of why you say something a certain way. Your inability to explain aspects of your own language to a non-native speaker is natural, but it is not acceptable if you want to teach English to someone. The good news is that this situation is correctable through your intentional learning of ESL grammar issues.

In addition to basic grammar information such as identifying the classification of a word as a noun, verb, adjective, or adverb, Scotty needed to know about English grammar for non-native speakers. Though the two kinds of grammar overlap in some areas, there are important differences. In this book, we look at both kinds of grammar, but we spend a great deal more time on grammar for ESL students.

Interest in learning English as a foreign language is high in countries all over the world, including English-speaking countries with large numbers of non-native immigrants. Today’s teachers of English language learners work with students who have a unique, diverse set of language needs. While some teachers deal exclusively with the

teaching of English as a second language (ESL), in a country where English is widely spoken, or English as a foreign language (EFL), where English is not spoken outside of class, there are also thousands of other teachers in English-speaking countries who suddenly find that their elementary school math classes or high school history classes, for example, have many non-native speakers who must learn the subject matter of math or history and at the same time somehow acquire English. Both of these groups of teachers—those who are obviously responsible for ESL instruction and those who teach subjects in K–12 settings—need to know about ESL grammar. One problem, however, is that these teachers are often apprehensive of grammar and cannot see its value in the teaching of ESL learners.

In teacher training courses on grammar, I have worked with both novice and experienced ESL/EFL teachers as they learn about ESL grammar. These teachers want to know how to explain why we use *-ing* in a certain sentence or why we use *the* instead of *a*. In these courses and numerous workshops, I have also worked with content teachers who have ESL learners in their math, history, and science classes. Though well-trained in their subject matter, these teachers have no idea why their ESL students omit *-ing* endings or do not use the verb tenses that their native-speaking classmates do. Knowledge of ESL grammar certainly can help answer these questions.

Because of previous experiences with grammar, both of these groups of teachers tend to dislike—or at least have a negative mindset toward—grammar. Talking about grammar involves knowing some terminology, but teachers mistakenly tend to equate grammar knowledge with knowledge of grammatical labels such as *present perfect tense* or *dependent clauses*.

Grammar is nothing more than the set of patterns that holds a language together. If vocabulary items such as words and idioms are the building blocks of a language, then grammar is the systematic glue that holds everything within a language together. Simply put, grammar is the foundation of a language, yet teachers often have trouble grasping the extent to which knowledge of ESL grammar will actually help them teach their students.

After one of many workshops that I had conducted on ESL grammar at a national conference, a teacher asked me afterward about some of the grammar points that I had just introduced that day. “I understand count and non-count now,” she said, “so now I understand why my ESL learners make those mistakes on their papers, but are these rules written anywhere? Do you have a list of ESL grammar points? And do you have more ideas about how to teach these grammar points?” I could tell that this teacher—like almost all the teachers that I work with—really wanted to help her students, but she had little knowledge about ESL grammar and very few ideas about how this information might inform her teaching.

The solution for these teachers and these questions is this book—*Keys to Teaching Grammar to English Language Learners: A Practical Handbook*. To meet the needs of all teachers of English language learners, I have written a book that presents grammar in a user-friendly way and assumes no prior grammar study. Because the teachers that I work with are first and foremost **teachers**, I provide information on our ESL students’ problems with grammar points, their first language interference issues, and numerous examples and explanations of actual teaching techniques that all teachers can use in their classrooms.

Keys to Teaching Grammar to English Language Learners: A Practical Handbook is not meant to be an exhaustive reference book for ESL grammar. This book focuses on teaching teachers about some of the most common ESL grammar points that will enable them to help their English language learners achieve their language goals. The emphasis here is on practical application of grammar.

Over the years, grammar in foreign language education has occupied both extremes of the pedagogical continuum—from being the main component of language study in the grammar-translation method to being downplayed and even intentionally omitted during the peak of the naturalist/communicative methods that focused exclusively on communication. Regardless of the assigned role of grammar in the second language teaching method that happens to be in vogue at any given time, two things are clear: Grammar is an immensely important component of learning a second language, and all teachers of English language learners need to know something about ESL grammar.

Why is knowledge of grammar so important for teachers? Instructors who are teaching an ESL course in which grammar is featured in any way obviously need to know about ESL grammar, but knowledge of ESL grammar is important for all teachers, including teachers of conversation courses, composition courses, and reading courses, as well as K–12 teachers who have ESL students in their classes:

- In a conversation class, lessons are often organized around specific tasks such as ordering food in a restaurant, and these tasks might require practice with **modals** (*May I take your order? What should I order?*).
- In trying to compose longer sentences in composition class, English learners may make errors with **gerunds and infinitives** (*To solve this problem efficiently, I believe that we must try to avoid using fossil-based fuels in future vehicles*).
- In a reading course, the teacher may want to check the number of **adjective clauses** (*O. Henry, who was arrested and sent to prison for embezzlement, is the most famous U.S. short story writer*), as well as **reduced adjective clauses** (*O. Henry, arrested and sent to prison for embezzlement, is the most famous U.S. short story writer*) in a reading passage to determine readability of the passage and to see the kinds of clauses to which English learners are being exposed.

Being able to explain ESL students' errors is a high priority for many teachers, and K–12 teachers in particular might want to know why ESL learners say they have **many homeworks* and **much problem* with math or **I like the math*. **Is easy for me*. (The use of asterisks indicates ungrammatical English. See page 2.) Because of the importance of a learner's first language in learning English, all teachers should be familiar with those ESL grammar points that may be particularly problematic because of the learner's native language.

To facilitate your learning about ESL grammar, this book will help you: (1) identify ESL grammar points; (2) understand the details associated with each one; (3) learn about vocabulary used with each grammar point; (4) anticipate common ESL errors by grammar point, by first language, and/or by proficiency level; (5) learn specific techniques to make teaching more effective; and (6) put yourself in your students' place as you complete an exercise from an actual ESL student textbook. These objectives are for all teachers regardless of where you are teaching or who your students are.

Book Organization

This book is divided into five chapters and includes five appendixes.

Chapter 1 examines the differences between ESL grammar and traditional grammar taught to native speakers in middle and high school. It includes four pre-tests that readers should answer before finishing the chapter. Chapter 1 explains what ESL grammar is and examines the role that it can play in eight different teaching situations.

Chapter 2 reviews basic grammar terminology. Section 1 focuses on 20 common native speaker errors in English. Section 2 presents the eight parts of speech from an ESL viewpoint. Building on the eight parts of speech, Section 3 looks at basic grammar functions such as subject and direct object. Section 3 also includes information on types of sentences. Because of the major role that verbs play in ESL grammar, Section 4 is dedicated entirely to the 12 English verb tenses.

Chapter 3 explains 16 key ESL grammar points. There are many grammar points that could have been included here, but these 16 are the minimum that any teacher should be aware of before working with English learners. Four of the 16 focus on verbs, with Key 1 being the verb *to be*, and Keys 2, 3, and 4 focusing on verb tenses used to express present, past, and future times, respectively. Keys 5 through 16 cover a diverse set of ESL grammar issues, such as count and non-count nouns, prepositions, articles, pronunciation of *-s* and *-ed*, adjective clauses, infinitives/gerunds, phrasal verbs, modals, word forms, passive voice, conditional sentences, and negation. Each of these 16 Keys is organized around five topics: typical ESL errors, grammar explanation, vocabulary information, native language information that points out possible interference from a student's native language, and ideas for teaching the grammar, including a student textbook exercise with teacher notes (in Appendix E).

In Chapter 4, teachers have an opportunity to prepare for the unexpected through "hot seat" questions that students ask: Why do we spell *opening* with one *n* before the *-ing* but we spell *beginning* with two? What does *had had* mean? Why do we say *taller* and *windier*, but we do not say *comfortabler* or *recenter*? Teachers cannot know the answer to every student question, but this chapter includes 20 questions that ESL learners frequently ask their teachers.

Finally, Chapter 5 offers 25 concrete "been there, done that" techniques on different aspects of carrying out your lesson plans with grammar. It is important to read all of the techniques because a technique may be applicable to many different grammar points even though it is illustrated in this chapter with only one grammar point.

There is intentional overlap of information in this book, and you should take that into consideration when you research a certain grammar point. For example, Chapter 2 features terminology regarding count and non-count nouns on page 52. Chapter 3 provides specific information about count and non-count nouns, including the rules and common ESL errors, on pages 177–188. Chapter 5 offers several techniques that could potentially relate to count and non-count nouns, including pages 367, 371, 377–378, 380, and 385–386.

The five appendixes located at the back of the book include a mini-lesson on 20 common native speaker errors, a quick reference chart listing the parts of speech, a list of irregular past and past participles of verbs, examples of two ways to present the same grammar lesson, and a sample exercise from a student grammar textbook for each grammar Key. A useful glossary of Grammar Terms is also included at the end.

What's New in This Edition?

Every chapter in *Keys to Teaching Grammar to English Language Learners, 2nd Edition*, has been updated and contains new material.

Chapter 1 explains why we need to teach grammar to our English language learners. Based on feedback from users of the first edition, a few items in the pre-tests were revised. Information regarding why native speakers are not naturally qualified to teach the grammar of their own language to non-native speakers has been added. A section discussing teachers' options in correcting students' grammar errors has also been included.

Chapter 2 reviews basic grammar terminology. New or revised material has been added for these topics: auxiliary verbs, transitive verbs, linking verbs, single modals, phrasal modals, past modals (e.g., modal + *have* + past participle [*could have done*]), lexical vs. grammatical prepositions, multiple meanings of noun + noun combinations (where one noun serves as an adjective), review of types of clauses, review of types of sentences, number (including singular, plural, and dual), review of types of incorrect sentences, and sequence of verb tenses by proficiency level (i.e., the tenses studied in beginning ESL classes, in intermediate ESL classes, and in advanced ESL classes).

Chapter 3, which addresses key areas of ESL grammar that all teachers should know, has the most significant changes. The original 15 Keys have now become 16 with the addition of a new Key on Negation. While each Key used to have four parts (typical ESL errors, grammar explanations, contrastive analysis with seven foreign languages, and teaching ideas), each Key now has five parts. The change involves vocabulary related to individual grammar points.

Because vocabulary and grammar are so inextricably linked, each Key now includes a section about words associated with that grammar point. Important data from corpus linguistics presents either collocations for key grammar points or frequency information. For example, in **Key 5, Count and Non-Count Nouns**, a vocabulary box introduces common collocations for *how many* and *how much*. In **Key 7, Articles**, data is given to show the relative frequency of *a*, *an*, and *the*.

The content of *Keys to Teaching Grammar to English Language Learners* is aimed at classroom teachers. To this end, each Key in Chapter 3 references an exercise from a student grammar textbook so that teachers can see authentic examples of how grammar is presented to students (see Appendix E).

Chapter 4 consists of 20 hot seat questions. A few questions have been revised, and a few have been replaced with more useful topics. For example, two new questions focus on adverb clauses and noun clauses, two grammar points not covered extensively in the book before.

Chapter 5 offers 25 concrete teaching techniques. Based on teacher feedback, a few of these have been revised with new examples.

Three new appendixes present important information for teachers of English grammar. The first new one, now **Appendix B**, presents concise information about the eight parts of speech in one convenient chart, including the definition, categories, examples, and common ESL errors. The second, **Appendix D**, compares two ways to present the same grammar lesson: an inductive presentation (where students are given rich language data with questions to guide their discovery of the grammar patterns)

and a more traditional deductive presentation (where the teacher presents the material directly). **Appendix E** offers a sample exercise from a grammar textbook, plus teaching notes, for each Key. Important notes regarding the design of the exercise or suggestions for teaching this type of exercise successfully have been included.

Notes in Margins. Readers offered very positive feedback on the inclusion of hints and suggestions that appear in the gray boxes in the margins of the book. In this new edition, the number of these boxes has more than doubled, and the content of many of the boxes has also been revised or updated.

What Hasn't Changed?

- **Overall book organization.** The book still has five chapters with the same topics. While all five are important, the largest and most important chapter continues to be Chapter 3, which consists of 16 key areas of ESL grammar that all teachers should know before they teach any ESL class.
- **Pre-tests.** Chapter 1 features pre-tests to help readers understand what they do not know yet about English.
- **Native speaker errors.** Chapter 2 lists the same native speaker errors that frustrate teachers.
- **Grammar terminology.** Chapter 2 has extensive information about English grammar, including basic terminology, such as subject, verb, and preposition.
- **Key ESL grammar areas.** Chapter 3 has the same 15 Keys from the first edition, plus a new Key on negation (Key 16).
- **Hot seat questions.** Chapter 4 addresses grammar questions that are frequently asked by English language learners. Teachers still have the opportunity to be confronted with these questions in private so that they have a better chance of explaining these issues in their classes.
- **Teaching techniques.** Chapter 5 offers 25 “been there, done that” techniques that can be used with almost any grammar point in any class.

How to Use This Book

There are as many different ways to use any book as there are different teachers, and each class or workshop group that I work with is somewhat different.

Chapter 1 is an overview of the differences between native speaker grammar and ESL grammar. In addition, Chapter 1 includes several pre-tests to help direct your learning toward areas that may need further information.

Of the four sections in **Chapter 2**, Section 1 can be completed individually or as a class, but the remaining sections (2, 3, 4) should be studied as a class since the grammar terminology may require deeper review. The 20 native speaker errors in Section 1 of Chapter 2 introduce the concepts of prescriptive versus descriptive grammar. A pre-test is provided to help individuals determine which of the 20 errors they need to study further.

Chapter 3 contains 16 core ESL grammar points, called Keys, and most of the course or workshop time should deal with this chapter. **Chapter 4** consists of 20 hot seat questions, which may be viewed as an extension of some of the pre-tests in Chapter 1. Ideally, the teaching techniques in **Chapter 5** should be covered whenever connections can be made with one of the 16 grammar Keys. For example, Teaching Technique 1 (pp. 365–366) mentions an option for starting a lesson on teaching *an* and *the* and is tied to Key 7, Articles. Teaching Technique 10 (p. 374) discusses using song lyrics as a vehicle for practicing verbs and modals (Key 12, Modals) or infinitives and gerunds (Key 10, Infinitives and Gerunds).

Finally, the goal of *Keys to Teaching Grammar to English Language Learners: A Practical Handbook* is for teachers to become not just better but the best teachers of ESL grammar possible. To accomplish this goal, teachers need to develop their own deeper understanding of the grammar of the 16 Keys in Chapter 3. To this end, each Key includes an action research box called **You Find Out** that teachers should attempt to work through on their own. These questions allow teachers an opportunity to connect the material in the book with grammar issues that are meaningful to the individual teaching needs of teachers.

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Keith Folse
University of Central Florida
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