

ABOUT LANGUAGE : TASKS FOR TEACHER OF ENGLISH

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Thornbury, Scott. (2010). **About Language: Tasks for teacher of English**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Scott Thornbury's **About Language: Tasks for Teachers of English** is one of the leading texts in the superlative series on teacher training and development published by Cambridge University Press. In brief, his work contains an analysis of the English language and corresponding tasks for teachers' use in the classroom. For this review, I will present an overview of the organization of the book, a summary of each unit, and finally, an evaluation.

The book consists of two parts: language analysis activities and a key with commentary. There are 28 units, with each containing a variety of task types that are logically sequenced from their identification, classification, and understanding toward their explanation, evaluation, and application. The key and commentary of each unit are useful for readers to check their answers and further discuss related issues. Thornbury adopts a text-based approach to raise the readers' awareness of the knowledge of English language in order to teach successfully. The materials used in the book were taken from authentic sources such as extracts from coursebooks, exercises, advertisements, and news headlines. In each unit, he provides the readers an opportunity to explore their linguistic knowledge of English. Every unit presents linguistic terminology for the language teachers and basic terms as an instructional reference for their learners. The great benefit to this approach is that teachers develop a systematic awareness of the English language, which will then filter through into their classroom lesson plans.

The introductory unit addresses the key ideas related to language teaching. Unit 1 introduces the issue of the many varieties of English, teachers' attitudes towards these varieties, and the language choices for their learners. In addition, teachers need to know how to categorize the language in accordance with prescriptive, descriptive, and pedagogical rules. Unit 2 deals with the linguistic knowledge that native speakers of English use for communication purposes and how that knowledge aids in the design of a language program appropriate for language learners' needs. Also discussed are error analysis and the different kinds of language syllabuses. Unit 3 describes the area of pragmatics. Language program designers have to take form and function into consideration when designing the course content. That is certain structures correlate with a particular function or vice versa. The functional syllabus, for example, must reflect the materials to help language learners develop their grammatical and communicative competence. Units 4 to 8 are devoted to the sound system of English. Unit 4 introduces phonology, which is vital for intelligibility, and the pedagogical choices of teaching pronunciation, particularly for adult learners. Articulatory phonetics is also included in units 5 and 6. The illustration and description of consonants and vowels in English is useful to help the teachers diagnose the problems their learners may have. At the end of the unit, the readers will have a chance to reflect on how to sequence their pronunciation activities. Unit 7 describes the suprasegmental aspects such as word and sentence stress, which carry important meaning in utterances. Unit 8 introduces intonation functions as sociolinguistic appropriateness. The phonological knowledge such as stress and pitch will help the language learners interpret the speakers' intended message successfully. For example, a change in pitch of the same utterance implies different attitudes and emotions of the speakers.

Units 9 and 10 present morphological analysis. Unit 9 describes word formation in English while unit 10 deals with word meaning. In unit 9, Thornbury brings the readers' attention to two terms the language teachers need to know: vocabulary and lexis. In particular, lexis plays an important role in vocabulary teaching. It helps the language teachers develop their learners' awareness of the relationship between syntactic properties and semantic relation of English words as well as their pronunciation. The learners will find it a useful tool to predict the regularity of stress patterns of English words. Stress shift, for example, is associated with some English suffixes. In unit 10, lexical and semantic meaning is the focus. The language learners' errors can be identified based on either lexical or semantic confusion.

The teaching of grammar has been a major concern of English language teachers (Marianne Celce-Murcia, 1991) because it is one of the most difficult areas in teaching. Therefore, Thornbury devotes fifteen units to describe grammatical analysis and have the readers practice pedagogical grammar activities. He also raises the teachers' awareness on which grammatical aspect is teachable and learnable. In units 11 -14, he provides the language teachers the useful tool for analyzing English in terms of word classes, phrases, and sentence structures in both the spoken and written forms. This way language teachers will be able to anticipate problematic structures their learners may have. Unit 15 points out verb phrase structure as the major focus of most pedagogical grammar. Unit 16 describes time and tense, followed by the progressive aspect in Unit 17 and the perfect aspect in Unit 18. In units 19 to 21, the language teachers will understand the concepts of modality, futurity, hypothetical meaning and conditions, respectively. The content and activities reflect the methodology of how to train the learners to apply their grammatical knowledge with appropriate functions. In units 22 to 23, readers learn to indentify noun phrases and determiners. Unit 24 discusses adjectives and adverbs. Unit 25 examines some issues of prepositions and phrasal verbs. The activities will help the language teachers understand the grammatical concepts and consequently recognize predictable patterns of grammar rules such as phrasal verb construction. Moreover, the teachers are trained to recognize the rationale behind the alternation of the phrasal verb exercises such as the lexical verb based activity and the semantic field based activity.

In the last three units, Thornbury presents language analysis at the discourse level in written and spoken English. Unit 26 describes some important discourse markers such as lexical and grammatical cohesion in written texts. They are the clues that help language learners decode the texts successfully. Unit 27 explores several text types and their distinctive organizations in accordance to their different communicative purposes. Cohesion and coherence are introduced to make language teachers recognize how authentic texts are structured. Providing language learners an opportunity to explore particular linguistic features such as grammatical and lexical devices in different text types helps them become better readers and writers. Unit 28 concentrates on the analysis of spoken language. Linguistic devices (i.e., intonation) and paralinguistic clues (i.e., pausing) in spoken discourse are discussed. Thornbury raises the language teachers' awareness of different kinds of conversations and their conventions.

The strength of this book lies in its key and commentaries. They are valuable, practical, and user friendly. The recommended references for readers to expand their knowledge are quite useful,

too. The presentation of illustrations and text is logically organized and eloquent. For example, on page 160-161, the graphic representing the pitch pattern is clear and the explanation is comprehensible. On page 212-213, the chart of the explanation of model construction is useful for the readers to grasp the concepts, meaning, form, and use quickly. Another important point is to cover the areas of sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence. The same concept of grammar and social function is recycled in several units to help the readers recognize how to use language appropriately. For example, on page 260, ways of making requests in several situations are described to help the learners become aware of implicit and explicit discourse devices during conversations and their use in a variety of communicative purposes. In addition, About Language provides language teachers the opportunities to examine the key concepts of language systems and be able to apply their analysis to identify the objective and rationale of coursebook activities. A minor suggestion for future revision is to include a glossary, which the teacher trainees might find useful to check whether the concepts they are trying to understand make sense.

There is no doubt that About Language is well recognized in the English language teaching community as indicated by the number of times it was reprinted; the sixteenth version was distributed in 2010. The text in each unit is logically organized and followed by exercises to engage the readers in developing self reflection on language teaching. Its theoretical and practical aspects as well as debate issues on language teaching are what the novice and the experienced language teachers look for. Understanding linguistic systems of a language the teachers teach is essential because it helps them make better pedagogical choices for their learners.

In closing, About Teaching is a valuable work because of its rich theoretical review and helpful pedagogical practice for the readers who want to develop their professional goals as well as their study goals. In my case, I recently updated my office book collection with a purchase of this latest edition, and I often find myself enjoyably browsing through it. I highly and strongly recommend this excellent book.

Reference

- Celce- Murcia, Marianne. (1991). Grammar Pedagogy in Second and Foreign Language Teaching. In **TESOL Quarterly**. 25 (3): Autumn 459-479.
- Thornbury, Scott; & Watkins, Peter. (2007). **The CELTA Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults Course**. Trainer's manual. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.