

## PREFACE

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 (ELLs) 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) or English as a foreign language (EFL), there are 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 ELLs 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 ELL instruction and those who teach subjects in K–12 settings—need to know about ELL grammar. The problem is that these teachers are often apprehensive of grammar and cannot understand its value in the teaching of ELLs.

In teaching graduate TESOL courses on grammar, I have worked with both novice and experienced ESL/EFL teachers as they attempt to understand ELL 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* with a certain noun. In these same courses and in numerous workshops, I have also worked with content teachers who have ELLs in their math, history, and science classes. Though well-trained in their subject matter, these teachers have no idea why their ELLs omit *-ing* endings or do not use the verb tenses that their native-speaking classmates do. Knowledge of ELL grammar can 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 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 ELL grammar will actually help them teach their students.

After one of many workshops that I had conducted on ELL grammar at a national conference, a teacher asked me 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 ELLs make those mistakes on their papers, but are these rules

written anywhere? Do you have a list of ELL 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 ELLs, but she had little knowledge about ELL 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 ELL teachers, 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 ELLs' 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 ELL grammar. This book focuses on teaching teachers about some of the most common ELL grammar points that will enable them to help their English language learners achieve their language goals.

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 ELLs need to know about ELL grammar.

Why is knowledge of grammar so important for teachers? Instructors who are teaching an ELL course in which grammar is featured in any way obviously need to know about ELL grammar, but knowledge of ELL grammar is important for all teachers, including teachers of conversation courses, composition courses, and reading courses, as well as K–12 teachers who have ELLs 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, ELLs 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 the 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 ELLs are being exposed. Being able to explain their ELLs' errors is a high priority for many teachers, and K–12 teachers in particular might want to know why the ELLs say they have *\*many homeworks* and *\*much problem* with math or *\*I like the math. \*Is easy for me.* (The use of asterisks indicate ungrammatical English. See page 2.) Because of the importance of an ELL's first language in learning English, all teachers should be familiar with those ELL grammar points that may be particularly problematic because of the ELL's native language.

To facilitate your learning about ELL grammar, this book will help you: (1) identify ELL grammar points; (2) understand the details associated with each one; (3) anticipate common ELL errors by grammar point, by first language, and/or by proficiency level; and (4) learn specific techniques to make teaching more effective. 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 three appendices. A companion workbook is available for those who want additional guided written practice and ideas for further teacher research on ELL grammar.

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

In Chapter 2, you will review (or learn!) basic grammar terminology. Section 1 focuses on twenty common native speaker errors in English. Section 2 presents the eight parts of speech from an ELL 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 ELL grammar, Section 4 is dedicated entirely to the twelve English verb tenses.

Chapter 3 explains 15 key ELL grammar points. There are many grammar points that could have been included here, but these fifteen are the minimum that any ELL teacher should be aware of before working with ELLs. Four of the fifteen 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 15 cover a diverse set of ELL 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, and conditional sentences. Each of these fifteen keys is organized around four topics: typical ELL errors, grammar explanation, native language information, and ideas for teaching.

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 ELLs 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 in Chapter 5 because of 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 46. Chapter 3 provides specific information about count and non-count nouns, including the rules and common ELL errors, on pages 152–60. Chapter 5 offers several techniques that could relate to count and non-count nouns, including pages 290–92, 294–95, 300–1, 303, 308, and 309.

The three appendixes located at the back of the book include a mini-lesson on twenty common native speaker errors, a list of irregular past and past participles of verbs, and a glossary of grammar terms useful in reading this book.

## 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 ELL 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 the core ELL grammar points, called Keys, and most of the course or workshop 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 15 ELL grammar Keys. For example, Teaching Technique 1 (p. 288) mentions an option for starting a lesson on teaching *an* and *the* and is tied to Key 6, Articles. Teaching Technique 10 (p. 297) 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 ELL grammar possible. To accomplish this goal, teachers need to develop their own deeper understanding of the grammar of the 15 Keys in Chapter 3. To this end, each Key ends with a small action research question called *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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