Imparting knowledge: Workshop on the teaching of English linguistics

Book of abstracts

Workshop organizer

Kristin Bech (University of Oslo)

Teaching English Grammar pre and post (and during) covid

Kristin Bech, University of Oslo

At the University of Oslo, students studying for a BA degree in English are required to take a number of obligatory courses in literature, area studies and linguistics. One of the linguistics courses is *English Grammar*, which is taught every autumn. This is not a practical course aimed to improve the students' own writing, but rather a theoretical course focusing on linguistic structures. The students encounter this course in their first semester, which is the very first semester at university for many of them. Hence, the course comes as a bit of a shock for some, since they have had little linguistic training in the school system. As a consequence, the fail rate for this course is higher than for other courses.

In 2017 we revised the lectures of the course, as we were allowed to teach more hours, which the students had signalled for years that they wanted. The course is now taught through a two-hour lecture (previously just one hour) + two-hour group seminars for 13 weeks, i.e. the students get four hours of teaching per week. The lectures, for which all the 240 students are present (ideally, but not in practice), give an overview of the topics for every week, focusing on the material in the syllabus book. In the seminars, each with 25–30 students, the focus is on understanding the theory through practical exercises.

In this talk I report on what we did in the revision of the lecture part of the course in order to help the students manage it better. We devised exercises which can be done during the lectures to break the monotony and let students interact with each other and with us. We also use quizzes, both during the lecture, and on the student platform, for the students to do at their leisure. In addition we invited various "guests of the month", who were previous students, colleagues, and people from outside, e.g. school teachers, as many of our students go on to become teachers.

We were quite happy with the development of the course, but then the pandemic struck, and we were forced to teach online via Zoom. I will talk about how that went, and also about what I suspect will happen to the course after the pandemic has subsided.

Teaching World Englishes at the interface of linguistics, language education and classroom practice

Marcus Callies, University of Bremen

The worldwide spread and diversification of the English language, and the large number of people who learn and speak English as a second or foreign language, has implications for the adequate coverage and integration of language variation in the curriculum for future English language teachers. Despite the persistent, exclusive exonormative orientation towards standard British and American English in EFL teaching contexts, monolingual, inner-circle native speakers (and the corresponding cultural norms) are no longer the (only) adequate target interlocutors for today's learners. The linguistic plurality of the varieties and functions of English should be reflected in English-language curricula, teaching materials and classrooms if students are to be educated for successful global communication.

While we are witnessing the first signs of a paradigm shift towards Global Englishes Language Teaching (Rose & Galloway 2019) and Teaching English as an International Language (Rose et al. 2020, Matsuda 2017), the pedagogical implications of the globalization of English are rarely implemented in the curricula for the teaching of English linguistics. Moreover, students in teacher training programs often report a perceived fragmentation of disciplines and disciplinary knowledge. They tend to question the relevance of specific disciplinary content knowledge for their teaching career and their actual teaching practice. This also applies to English linguistics.

In this talk I report on an innovative teaching model at the interface of English linguistics, language education and classroom practice that introduces the linguistics of World Englishes into the curriculum for future teachers of English at a university in the northwest of Germany. During the course of one semester, teacher students learn about World Englishes and develop small teaching projects on selected varieties of English for the classroom which are then implemented in a subsequent practical phase at local schools. The teaching model aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice and promotes an awareness of the diversity of Englishes, increases exposure to such diversity, and helps future teachers to develop an awareness of the pedagogical implications of global spread of English to make informed classroom decisions.

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Getting used to usage: On the benefits of teaching usage-based linguistics early on

Robert Daugs, Kiel University

Berit Johannsen, Kiel University

With the growing interest in usage-based linguistics (Bybee 2010), Construction Grammar (Goldberg 2006; Hilpert 2019) and cognitive language didactics (Rosche & Suñer 2017) over the past two decades, we think it timely to pass some of the fruits of that labor on to the students; moreover, we propose that this can already be done successfully at the undergraduate level.

This talk reports on two bachelor's classes that introduced students to subfields of linguistics from a usage-based perspective, namely *Usage-based morphology* (2nd year) and *An introduction to Construction Grammar* (3rd year). Our understanding is that such classes help students (i) understand linguistic phenomena of different degrees of complexity, (ii) become more sensitized to authentic language use and (iii) develop and strengthen cross-disciplinary skills, such as analytical thinking and problem solving. Furthermore, since usage-based linguistics forms a natural liaison with corpus linguistics (Gries 2017), submitting to the principles of the usage-based framework invites students to explore linguistics from both a theory-based as well as an empirical angle. We will also address how specific, research-driven assessments, e.g. group research projects conducted over the course of a semester and presented within a conference-like format, are not only motivating for the students but also represent an engaging, communicative and easily implementable alternative to other more traditional forms of performance review. Finally, we will discuss the shortcomings we have encountered and provide some suggestions on how to overcome them in future classes.

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Stairways to HEL. Or, learning by doing in the digital age

Marina Dossena, University of Bergamo

The history of English (HEL) is an intriguing subject for students, both at undergraduate and at postgraduate level. Typically, undergraduates know that English varies across space, medium and social milieu, but their knowledge of diachronic variation is often rather sketchy. Moreover, the causes of language change are largely ignored, although historical events that had an impact on the external history of the language, such as the Norman Conquest, are relatively familiar.

However, teaching the history of English cannot simply be a comfortably linear tale, in which key turning points resemble dramatically significant episodes in TV series. There has never been a long march towards the rise of 'Standard English', in spite of the fact that for most of the twentieth century this is exactly what textbooks assumed as they presented a progression that typically centred on Southern English forms.

Nowadays it is both possible and methodologically more appropriate to discuss the history of English in a more encompassing perspective, shedding light on the history of different varieties of English thanks to the broader range of resources to which scholars have had access since corpora began to circulate in the late Eighties, and which have increased dramatically since libraries and archives began to digitize documents and make them available online. In addition, when such digital materials are made accessible to students, this enables them to see for themselves how primary sources are employed in the study of historical phenomena.

My previous research on the use of digital repositories in HEL classes at both BA and MA level (Dossena 2019) found that students profit from work with authentic materials, not only in relation to course contents, but because such activities offer them a behind-the-scenes perspective and therefore increase their interest in historical linguistics per se. In addition, the use of digitized manuscripts improves the students' awareness of the complexity of the discipline and its methods, by providing them with the kind of meta-competence that enhances linguistic analysis.

In this presentation I intend to expand my discussion of such earlier work; more specifically, I will move from the problematization of transcription activities and the importance of interdisciplinary cooperation with lecturers in other subjects (notably, History and American Studies), to the ways in which students' participation in crowdsourced initiatives may result in innovative project work for their own dissertations; finally, I will discuss how this hands-on approach to English Historical Linguistics may lead to interesting ideas for outreach activities also at a local level, and may therefore enhance the students' employability.

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English linguistics for the non-native millennial: grammar teaching in Modern Languages undergraduate degrees

Maria Freddi, University of Pavia

Against the backdrop of English as an International Language and linguistic globalization, English linguistics is subject to extensive rethinking on the part of educators in non-English speaking countries and Universities. With this contribution I aim to address some of the questions raised by the "Imparting Knowledge" Workshop in light of two decades of teaching English grammar to undergraduates in Modern Languages degree courses in Italy. Among the issues I will be addressing are: the role of explicit grammatical instruction and language proficiency development, the balance between specialized metalanguage and grammatical (i.e. syntax and morphology) contents with learners of English as a foreign language not necessarily majoring in English Linguistics (cf. Meyer 2012), the attractiveness of the Hallidayan functional model of grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014, Downing 2015) with millennial student cohorts, and successful/inadequate modes of assessment. The discussion will be informed by a comparative syllabus analysis of two courses imparted over the years, titled respectively, "English Grammar Between Text and Context" and "Making Sense of Text" and by a critical reexamining of assessment formats. Students' feedback obtained through questionnaires will also be considered as a source of further insights into the needs of younger generations of learners.

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Teaching English linguistics in different undergraduate study programs

Ilka Mindt, Paderborn University

The teaching of linguistics at universities in Germany is typically aimed at two groups of students: those who study English linguistics as their major subject and those who study it as one of two majors within a Bachelor of Education program with the aim of becoming a school teacher in the future. This in itself means that some courses can be part of both programs

whereas other courses need to be specifically designed to fit the needs of the students in only one of the two programs.

The balance between introducing basic linguistic knowledge and letting students participate in research-oriented seminars is a challenge in the development of a curriculum of both study programs. I would like to share the approach adopted at Paderborn University in this workshop. It is essentially a three-level approach: after introducing very basic linguistic skills in both programs, students have the choice between various core areas within the main branches of English linguistics (such as syntax, morphology, lexis, semantics, pragmatics, variation, sociolinguistics, text linguistics etc.). The difference between the two programs is a quantitative one: education students only take one course of their choice whereas students in the other program take more than ten courses from different branches. On a third level, students are asked to develop a research project which they present to an audience during a student's conference on "Exploring Linguistic Worlds" (https://kw.uni-paderborn.de/anglistik-amerikanistik/elw/). Besides this, compulsory courses on English phonetics and phonology as well as on the History of English need to be attended.

In addition to teaching linguistic content, the question of how to teach this in university courses to students is also of great relevance. Inverted classroom models (ICM) (e.g. O'Flaherty & Philips 2015; Schmidt & Mindt 2020) can be an approach to work more effectively together with students on linguistic topics. The ICM has been used successfully for almost three years now in a phonetics/phonology seminar. The concept of student engagement (Fredricks et al. 2004; Kuh 2009; Persike 2019) is also of relevance as it focuses on students and teachers and tries to bring both views together in order to improve teaching, learning and commitment. I have also tried to implement this concept into my teaching of English linguistics at Paderborn University and will report on advantages and disadvantages of the concept of student engagement.

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A Game of Tongues? Engaging diverse student types in sociolinguistics

Beck Sinar, Norwegian Study Centre, University of York

In this paper, my latest undergraduate-level module '*Game of Tongues: A song of Variation and Change*' is used as a case study to illustrate some of the diverse methods which were successfully employed to engage and enthuse a diverse group of international students with English historical and sociolinguistics in Autumn 2019 (Mathieson 2015; Biggs & Tang 2011).

The cohort was an almost equal split of English discipline students, and in-service teachers/teacher trainees; the latter group were particularly keen to focus on skills for their current/future employment as teachers, where the former wanted to focus on academic study of human society, culture and language. One third of the cohort had not taken modules in linguistics before, and of the two thirds who had, most did not have prior positive associations with the subject, meaning motivation levels were generally low.

The main strategies to encourage these students to learn to love linguistics were:

- Using popular culture and literature (Game of Thrones) as multimodal source material for original research and illustration of key themes and concepts (caters to different learning styles and strategies i.e. Gardner 1983; Fleming & Baume 2006).
- A range of primarily student-led activities which ensure different learning styles are catered to: question and answer, group work, peer-teaching etc.
- An informal and lively teaching style, making frequent use of humour.
- A 'one-stop-shop' course-pack containing lots of information about transitioning to study in the UK and studying linguistics.

Given the diverse backgrounds and needs of the individual students, it is not surprising that they did not all end at exactly the same level by the end of the course. However, there was evidence of learning and increased motivation and interest in linguistics from all students. End of course evaluations further strengthen this impression:

- 100% satisfaction rating for the module. 62% said they were very satisfied.
- 100% said they would recommend the module to a friend. 85% would strongly recommend it.
- 100% said their interest in the subject had been stimulated. 62% said very much so.
- 100% said they were more motivated to study linguistics in the future than they were prior to the module. One student even wrote:

"Linguistics is not my favourite subject, but you have made me like it more. I might now even consider studying linguistics as a postgraduate which I would never have done before this module."

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