Describing and Explaining Grammar and Vocabulary in ELT, Dilin Liu. Routledge, New York (2014). xxii + 250 pp., ISBN: 978-0-415-63609-4 (pbk).

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Based on Dilin Liu's experience, reading, and research, *Describing and Explaining Grammar and Vocabulary in ELT* treats challenging usage questions through both theory and practice. Taking grammar and vocabulary as the two ends of one continuum in describing language for pedagogical purposes, the book is organized into a Preface, an opening chapter, and two parts that deal respectively with theory and practice.

Chapter 1, *Language Description*, mentions the changes in the scope of language description and discusses the importance of language description in what and how to teach, and in successful teaching. Liu highlights that, in describing the challenging issues, some principles (e.g., accuracy, clarity, and simplicity) and factors related to learners' knowledge and background have been taken into account.

Part I, *Key Theories and Approaches to Language Description*, contains four chapters that describe and evaluate linguistic theories/approaches and then discuss their contributions to language study and teaching. The first five chapters raise some questions for consideration and/or discussion at the end.

Chapter 2, *Prescriptive, Structural, and Generative Linguistics*, mentions that prescriptivism offers an approach with arbitrary rules rather than a linguistic theory, associated with grammar-translation teaching method. Structuralism rigorously focuses on form and has influenced language teaching more directly and significantly than any other theory through audio-lingual method. Generative grammar focuses exclusively on syntax as an autonomous innate system and ignores meaning and use of structures in context. Its influences in language teaching are Cognitive-Code Learning, UG

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hypothesis implications, and Krashen's (1981) Monitor Hypothesis. Though influential, the preceding theories/approaches overlook semantics and pragmatics.

Chapter 3, *Sociolinguistics and Systemic Functional Linguistics*, considers sociolinguistics as a linguistic branch and examines communicative competence, speech act theory, and pragmatics across languages. It then chooses Halliday's (see 1994) systemic functional linguistics for discussion. All this, Liu continues, contributes to (a) the shift of instruction from focus on form to meaning/communication, (b) inclusion of pragmatics in curriculum, (c) focus on discourse, and (d) emphasis on register and semantic function.

Cognitive Linguistics regards language as conceptual in nature and based on human experience, and as such motivated, not arbitrary. Meaning is central to language which consists of symbolic units/constructions, stored and accessed as a whole structure. These units are models to use to produce for communication. Thus, acquiring language relies on language input and use in meaningful context. For Liu, cognitive linguistics contributes to language learning and teaching at different proficiency levels in many ways, e.g. through presenting usages and structures as motivated phenomena, or using visuals and focusing on embedded experience.

Corpus Linguistics, Chapter 5, generates information on the behavior of words, phrases, and structures through concordancing, i.e., their frequency, collocation, colligation, distribution across registers, and comparison. Thus, it has influenced (a) language description through prefabricated expressions, semantic prosody, usage patterns, etc. and (b) language teaching, notably through using corpora in classroom, curriculum design, and material development.

Part II, *Putting Theory to Practice: Striving for Enhanced Language Description and Explanation*, includes nine chapters. Each chapter is organized into (a) describing a few challenging grammar and vocabulary issues, (b) the established useful practices in teaching these issues as a result of surveying seven existing ESL student grammar textbook series, class observation, and the author's teaching experience, and (c) 'Explaining/teaching the challenging issues with new insights', that offers practices backed by recent theories and research findings, including the author's studies. Chapters 6–14 end with suggested teaching activities to reinforce the ideas. However, Chapters 6, 7, 11, and 14 slightly vary in format. For instance, the last two do not include a section on established practices

Chapter 6, *Vocabulary Description*, touches on what it means to know a word in describing and teaching vocabulary, refers to how parts of speech and count/non-count nouns were historically defined, and mentions the challenges with these issues. However, Liu illustrates effective ways of coping with those challenges, inspired by different theories above.

Chapter 7, *Sentence Structure Description*, overviews sentence structure types (simple, compound, and complex), while describing the tasks and processes involved in the analysis. Using technical terms and diagramming are exemplar practices in their description and teaching. The challenges, such as (a) different verb structures, (b) participles, and (c) the dummy 'it' can respectively be facilitated by (a) explaining the reasons for usage differences, (b) describing where and how to use these structures, and (c) producing a more balanced structure.

Chapter 8 differentiates between the English *Tense and Aspect* and between grammatical aspect (*simple/progressive/perfect/perfect* progressive) and lexical aspect (*durative/punctual/stative*) of the verbs. The surveyed books use diagrams, generalizations or rules of thumb such as comparison and contrast, and lists of time words/phrases used with certain tenses/aspects. To clarify tense/aspect usage rules, Liu highlights "the role of discourse context and the speaker/writer's communicative purpose/viewpoint" (p. 127).

Chapter 9, *Articles*, defines *generic/non-generic*, *common/proper*, *count/non-count* nouns. To determine which article (*a/an*, *the*, or *zero*) the noun takes, Liu and Gleason (2002) suggest four non-generic uses of 'the' (*situational*, *textual*, *structural*, and *cultural*) to aid learners. Liu's survey shows these established practices: introducing the types of nouns and marked errors in article use, and teaching the articles within fixed expressions. To overcome the challenge, the author suggests we adjust teaching the articles to the learners' needs and in the right sequence/strategies; research points to the sequence of *situational*, *structural/textual*, and *cultural* use. Also, explaining the motivations for article uses and asking students to do a corpus search are effective practices.

Prepositions are frequent, ubiquitous, and also challenging because of their multi-functionality, polysemy, figurativeness, etc. The books surveyed use pictures for spatial meanings, exercises, and preposition list based on meaning and fixed prepositional phrases for memorization. However, Chapter 10, *Prepositions, Prepositional Adjectives/Adverbs, and Particles*, introduces activities for detecting semantic and usage differences, pattern finding of close but contrasting pairs of prepositions (e.g., 'behind' vs 'after'), and using embodied experience based on cognitive linguistics.

Structural Alternation first discusses the placement of the direct and indirect objects, based on the discourse rule that the old information is given first and new information last. We should take into account conceptual meaning, discourse, and communication purpose in using the object in separable phrasal verbs. Second, the chapter indicates the difficulty of permissibility patterns in English subject deletions to Spanish learners and object deletions to Chinese learners. However, the limited happening of null subjects and objects in English should be contrasted with the pairs of sentences in the respective languages for Spanish and Chinese learners to learn the appropriate patterns in English. Third, Liu mentions the factors affecting the selection of active or passive voice and the contexts wherein the passive voice is used. Unlike the other chapters, Chapter 11 focuses on new insights, excluding established practices.

Word Meaning and Usage addresses polysemy, synonymy, and culturally-loaded and register-specific words. Understanding the core, extended, and figurative meanings in polysemous words, and identifying the semantic/usage differences among synonymous words would help learners differentiate between synonymy and polysemy. Chapter 12 mentions the following practices in teaching them: using context and dictionaries for polysemes and synonyms, focusing on core and then extended meanings, using visuals, comparing and contrasting L1 and L2 in polysemy, introducing the dominant member of a synonymous set, and analyzing semantic and functional features and so on in synonymy. Liu's findings suggest that cognitive analysis in polysemy and

corpus analysis in synonymy would work, and it helps to discuss denotative versus connotative meanings and word use in different registers.

Chapter 13 overviews *Word Collocations* and argues that collocations are not arbitrary, but generally motivated. Collocations are taught through memorizing fixed units and pattern finding. However, new insightful findings emphasize corpora search to help and engage learners through identifying collocations and collostructions along with explaining "why the lexical items in a collocation are collocated the way they are" (p. 197). To that end, Liu illustrates the conceptual motivations behind these collocations (*do/have/make/take*), mentioning the challenges involved in the process.

The final chapter on *Multi-Word Expressions* merely defines multi-word units, describes their functions, and discusses effective ways of explaining and teaching idioms, phrasal verbs, and lexical bundles. It classifies idioms into subcategories based on semantic motivation and structure, and mentions that idioms could carry out various functions, e.g. ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Then it discusses the ubiquity of phrasal verbs and register-specificity of formulae/lexical bundles. Empirical new research supports noticing, retrieving, and generating (Nation, 2001) in teaching them. Chapter 14, therefore, emphasizes teaching the use and functions of formulae/lexical bundles directly.

In Part II, a reader will notice the emphasis on certain suggested activities. For instance, in many chapters, it is repeatedly asked why an issue in grammar or vocabulary is used the way it is done. Liu believes that exploring and understanding the motivations of the use of a challenging grammar or vocabulary issue would help learners grasp it better. He backs this suggestion with empirical research, conducted by himself and other researchers, and offers many illustrative examples.

Discourse markers/conjunctions/connectives (e.g. however, nevertheless, yet, although, in contrast, likewise, whereas) connect the pieces of language together. They facilitate reading comprehension and writing organization (Akbarian, 2001). However, EFL learners get confused in their learning and use, even at advanced levels, maybe because EFL teachers do not pay due attention to them in EFL contexts despite their significance in structuring a piece of discourse. Given that, a chapter on describing and explaining 'conjunctions' would help raise the awareness of EFL teachers on teaching them efficiently.

Despite this limitation, the volume offers several benefits to the reader. First, there is a need to reconsider the practices in teaching English vocabulary (Gardner, 2013) and grammar. This volume systematically responds to it by presenting the content in a detailed, organized, and classified manner that readers would follow with ease and comprehension. Next, Liu provides brief, clear, and informative content on linguistic theories and approaches in one volume that would equip language teachers with some effective instructional options. These options would help language teachers in instructing learners efficiently or adjusting the instruction to their proficiency level and/or needs. Furthermore, familiarity with different linguistic theories would provide us with different options to better deal with different types of learners or contexts; more specifically, Liu reiterates that a certain linguistic theory might suit certain contexts or people with specific characteristics whereas another theory would be more appropriate to use with learners studying a certain field or genre.

Also, questions for consideration and/or discussion (Chapters 1–5) and suggested activities (Chapters 6–14) summarize and develop the conceptual ideas and empirically-based findings purposefully. Another accessory is an 'Annotated List of Free Online Resources for Grammar/Vocabulary Learning/Teaching' and a 'Glossary' of the terms used in the book. Thus, such a book is recommended for current and prospective language teachers, researchers and (post)graduate students in applied linguistics, and materials developers.

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