

Book Review

English Grammar In Use (4th edition)

Raymond Murphy
Cambridge University Press, 2012

By San Shwe Baw

'English Grammar in Use' (4th edition) by Raymond Murphy, which contains 380 pages in total, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2012. The book is in its 9th edition of printing (2014) and is printed by Markono Print Media Pte Ltd in Singapore. Due to the writer's vast experience in EFL teaching before becoming a full-time writer of ELT materials, coupled with the fact that the book has been printed multiple times since it was first published in 1985, it is necessary to review this book in order to find out its practical uses for learners and teachers who use it for learning and teaching grammar.

The book is intended mainly to use as a self-study reference and practice book for intermediate level students who want to master select sentence structures suitable for their level. In fact, there have been countless number of grammar books on self study and subsequent practice work available in the market, yet 'English Grammar in Use' is one of the most-popular books among those who

teach grammar to EFL learners. A thorough study of the way the units are structured, the explanation given for the grammar points, and the style of the practice exercises should help us to evaluate the usefulness of the book, for both the EFL learners and teachers.

Covering 145 grammar points, the book explains each grammar point on one page and relevant exercises are provided on the opposite page. In other words, the pages are designed with explanations and examples on the left-hand side, followed by with practice exercises on the right. In addition, students can correct their own answers by looking at the answers provided in the back of the book. A typical unit might look like this:

- Name of structure and example e.g. *Present continuous* (The water is boiling)
- An example situation, often with an illustration
- The formula for forming this structure, e.g *The water + is + boiling*

*San Shwe Baw is an Asst. Professor at the Institute for English Language Education (IELE), Assumption University, Thailand. He is also the supervising editor of the ABAC Journal, an international Journal published two times per year by Assumption University. Six of his English language teaching articles have been published in America – three by the English Teaching Forum and three by Essential Teachers.

- An explanation of the circumstances when the structure is used
- A timeline that is used for showing the sequence of events
- A comparison with other similar structures, e.g. the difference between *It is raining* and *it rains*
- Exercises with controlled and/or semi-controlled practice of the structure at the back of the book

Since every unit follows the same structure, there is no need for the learner to worry about the layout. The whole book is laid out in numbered units and the 'Contents' refers to these units rather than to page numbers. Beginning with the use of tenses, the book further deals with sections on modals, conditionals, passives, reported speech, articles, nouns, pronouns, relative clauses, adjectives and adverbs. Some grammar points that have been previously introduced in different units, that need to be reviewed are presented again in a section called 'Appendices', with reference tables of regular and irregular verbs, spellings, further comparisons between tenses and some grammatical differences between British and American English. Afterward, a set of additional exercises that combine different structures are provided. Perhaps the most important section, 'Study Guide', helps learners decide which unit or units they feel like they need to review. The book ends with 'Key to Exercises' Section.

The grammar points are arranged in the study of tenses as they are in the order in which students are most likely to learn them. However, some teachers, especially those who support Nunan's article 'Teaching Grammar in Context,' where he disapproves a strictly linear approach to language learning, may not

be quite willing to follow the same order. Nunan has plainly stated that we do not acquire language in the step-by-step, building block fashion suggested by the linear model. Nevertheless, if a learner begins this book with the 'Study Guide' section, which contains mixed exercises which test all of the points covered in the book, this controversy can easily be solved because the learner can approach the book freely from beginning to end. Taking the form of a multiple choice quiz with answers at the end, this section is really useful for individual students who are not sure which areas they need to review most. Since each question has a unit reference, the learners can work out which pages they need to look at in order to assess wrong answers.

Sandwiched between the 'Appendices' and 'Study Guide' section is a set of additional exercises that combine different grammatical structures. More advanced students who know the different forms but need to know which are used in certain circumstances may benefit from these activities. It is a more authentic form of language practice because students cannot complete the missing parts without fully understanding how, when, and why a structure is used. Repeated practice in this section may prove useful for learners who are weak in the syntactic structures of the English language.

However, some of the exercises in the book do not require much thinking and are a bit repetitive. Probably, the author may have designed those exercises that way on purpose. My assumption is based on the fact that applying some grammatical rules periodically in some real life situations or semi-real life situations may help the learners to gradually attain grammatical accuracy. Learners, who find themselves practising some grammar points repetitively will become more familiar

with those grammar points, and will eventually be able to use them confidently. Undeniably, most of the exercises in the book are well-planned have a clear format, but I suspect that working through the whole book may be a rather tedious task for some adult students due to its lack of variation. In this case, they might like to use it more as a reference book for revision purposes rather than as a self-study book.

One particular point I feel that this book does not adequately address is 'Noun clause,' which many intermediate EFL learners find difficult to use in writing. When equipped with the structural knowledge of how to form three clauses, namely, adjective clauses, adverb clauses and noun clauses, a student may well be able to write any sentence he has in mind so long as his vocabulary is sufficient to express his ideas. This book explains how to form adjective clauses under the topic 'Relative Clauses' and also how to form adverb clauses under the topic 'Conjunctions and Prepositions,' though the writer does not use these exact terms (i.e; Adjective clause, Adverb clause). Explanation on how to write sentences containing a noun clause are conspicuously missing. Therefore, I feel that the inclusion of a grammar point on the use of these clauses may enable learners to become more structurally proficient.

In sum, this book deserves credit for the clarity of the grammar points it attempts to explain. Needless to say, any intermediate level student who gives a sufficient amount of attention to the study of those grammar points will understand them. Given the simple formatting style and the precise explanations, intermediate students, as well as lower level EFL students, can use this book to practice grammar at home in order to supplement their

English language learning. Since most lessons are related to verb tenses, this book can also be a great resource for those learners needing help in this area of study. Overall, this book is extremely user-friendly, and both teacher and learners will find it useful as a reference book.

References

Nunan, D. (1998), Teaching grammar in context. E.L.T Journal. (pp. 101-109)