

## **Main Types of Grammar Theory:**

**Traditional Grammar** - analyses the parts of a well-formed sentence, focusing on surface structure, not meaning. It gives students a basic understanding of the building blocks of language, which can help in improving their writing skills.

**Prescriptive Grammar** - codifies and enforces rules governing grammar, mechanics, and usage

**Descriptive Grammar** - observes and records how language is used in function, and advocates teaching the function of grammatical structure

**Contemporary Linguistics** - are a collection of specialty areas and theories designed to correct problems with traditional grammar (ex. morphology [study of word structure], syntax [study of word order], semantics [study of intensive meaning in words and sentences])

## **Discussion Questions:**

- Where and how should grammar be taught (or should it be taught at all)?
- How are writing and cognition related and what implications does this have for grammar instruction?
- Current grammar theory advocates teaching grammar not in isolation, but "in writing:" what does this mean and how can we do it?
- How can we help students see that learning grammar can improve their writing (and is this true)?

## **Annotated Bibliography:**

Barron, Dennis. "Teaching Grammar Doesn't Lead to Better Writing." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49.36 (May 2003): 1-8.

-Professor Barron warns about the dangers of teaching grammar to test high school graduates on standard English usage for college entry. He claims that the dictum "Grammar teaching does no harm" is false, because teaching grammar in isolation leaves less time for (more) important writing instruction. He fears that testing for grammar and usage will allow teachers to think that students who use grammar correctly are good writers.

Elbow, Peter. (1973). *Writing Without Teachers*. New York: Oxford University Press [paperback].

-This book discusses backsliding as a normal part of the development of writing. Because we can't isolate the skills we use as writers (they are interrelated and can't be learned "one at a time"), when new skills or conventions are incorporated, writers will regress.

Leahy, Anne. "Grammar Matters: A Creative Writer's Argument." *Pedagogy* 5.2 (Spring 2005): 304-307.

-Professor Leahy is both a creative writer and writing instructor. He talks about writing as a source of control, and says that we can help students value precision and mechanical devices by showing them that when they don't make meaning and connections explicit, they surrender a level of control to the reader.

Breznack, Renee M. "Grouping Students to Teach Grammar." *The Educational Digest* (December 2003): 58-61.

-Composition teacher Breznack discusses the students teaching students approach to grammar instruction. She feels students learn better from each other, and learn better from teaching grammar themselves. She says that students who teach grammar lessons become "resident experts;" this allows students to continue using each other as resources throughout the class.

Fearn, Leif, and Nancy Farnan. "What is a Verb? Using Functional Grammar to Teach Writing." *Journal of Basic Writing* 26.1 (2007) 63-81.

-Asks the question, "Is there a way to teach grammatical structures that will satisfy high-stakes tests, as well as positively affect writing performance?" Suggested method teaches grammar in terms of function instead of classic IDD method. Authors are careful to point out that they are not questioning whether grammar should be taught in classrooms, but how it should be taught.

Kalkavage, Peter. "Student Writing and the Trouble with Grammar." *Educational Digest* 63.7 (March 1998): 1-8.

-Professor Kalkavage identifies the source of students' writing troubles as the chasm they feel between speech and writing. He talks about the common problem of students not using transitions appropriately and not getting their full ideas to the page. Students often think meaning and connections are implicit when they aren't. He says we need to get students to pay attention to what they're saying, claiming that the "precise task" of writing is to succeed in saying what one means and write one's whole thought.

Mulroy, David. "Reflections on Grammar's Demise." *Academic Questions* 17.3 (September 2004) 52-58.

-Professor Mulroy talks about the tension between high school and college curricula in terms of composition instruction. He cites studies on what each group respectively values in writing, and expresses his fear that high school teachers are locked into teaching grammar to tests, which causes new college entrants to be ill-prepared for the expectations of the freshman composition classroom.

Nunberg, Gragory. "The Bloody Crossroads of Grammar and Politics." *New York Times* 1 June 2003.

-Provocative discussion of the politicization of grammar instruction. Often more liberal teachers eschew grammar instruction, while more conservative teachers are "strict" and grade for grammar and usage in papers. Nunberg argues that the tension between the two schools of thought (whether or not grammar should be taught/graded) is apparent to students and leads them to regard the whole issue with a weary indifference; students see the debate as less about winning consensus and more about scoring, or winning points.

Oldenburg, Scott. "Grammar in the Student-Centered Composition Class," *Radical Teacher* 75.1 (Winter 2005) 43-44.

-Professor Oldenburg talks about students' widespread ignorance of grammar as a serious educational problem, claiming that grammar has not been neglected negatively, but that students have been taught positively that they don't need to know it. He discusses his term "higher illiteracy," saying that students are not only ignorant of how to analyze meaning, but are ignorant of their ignorance. This article also addresses the problems with "immersion programs."