

***English in Education* Book Review** by Urszula Clark

Title	<i>Knowing About Language: Linguistics and the Secondary English Classroom</i>
Editors	Marcello Giovanelli and Dan Clayton
Publisher	Routledge
Date	2016
ISBN	978-1-138-85623-3(pbk)

This edited book provides a much needed, timely acknowledgement and discussion of the value of linguistics in the secondary and post-16 curriculum for English. As Ronald Carter says in his forward, the relationship between linguistics and secondary English teaching has come a long way in the last few decades and this book shows the ways in which it has done so clearly and lucidly. It also signals that the ideological debates surrounding the teaching of grammar and knowledge about language that began in the late 1980s and once were so heated, appear to be waning. Teaching grammar and about language more generally is coming increasingly to be seen as ‘a good thing.’ Particularly, the book illustrates the ways in which pedagogic approaches to teaching and learning about language can be done in new and exciting ways, underpinned by advances in linguistics. The authors of the various chapters are all leading experts in the field of linguistics, English teaching or both. As such, they marry contemporary linguistic theory with practical approaches that can be used in the classroom.

The book’s strength lies in showing some of the ways in which linguistics can be integrated into the various parts of the curriculum for English across Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 that will help both beginning and experienced teachers as well as teacher educators and those concerned with continuing professional development. It is organised in three parts: the first part considers language and linguistics in relation to theoretical, historical and research-based perspectives on the English curriculum; the second upon applying linguistics in the classroom and the third upon linguistics, teacher knowledge and professional development. Its authors draw upon research and methods from various linguistics subfields such as cognitive linguistics, conversation and discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, literary linguistics, forensic linguistics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics and systemic functional linguistics. Moreover, they show how such topics can be interwoven into every aspect of the contemporary secondary and post-16 curriculum for English. Other chapters, amongst others, consider linguistic influences upon developing reading and writing; the study of literature and language variation and change; the use of technology; the ways talk is organised in the classroom and considering both sounds of English and the ways we learn to speak in the light of the most recent research. The book also includes chapters on teacher education, continuing professional development and the transition from A level to English in higher education.

If there is one key unifying factor between linguistics and secondary English teaching that this book makes clear it is the notion of language study as *discourse* and *discursive practice* or *practices*. In much contemporary linguistics, the unit of study goes beyond that of the clause or sentence to a text, whether spoken, written, virtual, complete, incomplete or fragmented. Linguistics can thus provide both a metalanguage and methods of analysing texts in ways that complement existing pedagogic practices associated with the curriculum for English. Another unifying factor between linguistics and the literary aspect of secondary English teaching is paying attention to grammar, also called syntax. Adrian Quigley, for example, writes that: 'The more I reflect on language and literature, the more I realise that being able to know, control and manipulate syntax is *the* master skill for all writers. It is therefore, in my view, essential to teaching and learning. It is an essential 'threshold concept.'" As Marcello Giovanelli argues in the first chapter, the value of linguistics to the English teacher, particularly in relation to reading and studying texts, is in the dimension it can bring to the *critical* study of language. In Part Two, different aspects of linguistics as outlined above are discussed in relation to how they can be applied in the classroom, and illustrate ways in which developments in linguistics can be integrated into the study of virtually all aspects of the secondary curriculum for English.

Debra Myhill, in her chapter in Part One of the book, makes clear the importance of developing students' metalinguistic understanding. Her research, alongside that of others, points to a growing body of evidence that signals real benefits to students of explicit grammar teaching when it is grounded in and integrated with the curriculum for English. Margaret Berry's chapter in Part Three of the book explains clearly an approach to teaching grammar drawn from systemic functional linguistics. Particularly, she sheds light on the complexity of sentence structure, and especially in relation to linguistic choice, that in turn relates to the audience, context and purpose of any act of speech, writing or, indeed, textual analysis in general. This, in turn, relates to concepts of style or register. Teaching grammar and about language also allows students to gain control over their expression and thoughts. As long ago as 1818, William Cobbett, better known as a social reformer than a grammarian, wrote the first and subsequent editions of his grammar that: 'The actions of men proceed from their thoughts. In order to obtain the co-operation, the concurrence, or the consent, of others, we must communicate our thoughts to them. The means of communication are words; and grammar teaches us how to make use of words (1818: 17).' Wittgenstein, too, has observed that: 'The limits of language (of that language which alone I understand) mean the limits of my world (5.62).'

Whilst the digital, multimodal and visual dimensions of secondary English teaching have received much deserved attention and influenced its development over the past two or three decades, we must not forget the central place reading and writing – as well as speaking and listening - still have in the secondary curriculum for English. Nor forget the fact that much assessment takes place through writing and, given recent changes at both GCSE and A level, in the guise of formal examinations that still require handwriting. Developing control over verbal expression, whether digital,

oral or written, allows for clearer expression of thought as Cobbett says so clearly, and metalinguistic understanding has a large part to play in this regard.

The chapters in Part Two of the book provide different linguistic perspectives about language that can also be integrated into mainstream secondary English teaching not only in relation to literary texts through Andrea McRae's chapter on stylistics but also in developing pragmatic competence in spoken communication skills, as discussed in Billy Clark's chapter. Willem Hollmann in his chapter on forensic linguistics shares materials devised in relation to authorship attribution that can also support the teaching of grammar and social and regional variation in English.

In their introductory remarks at the very beginning, Giovanelli and Clayton state that their aim for the book was to show '...the powerfully enabling nature and inherent value of language study and linguistics in secondary and post-16 curricula.' The chapters clearly indicate that they have fulfilled this aim, by showing the inherent value of such teaching through providing a range of practical ideas that are supported by up to date theoretical underpinnings.

References

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