

Keith S. Folse, University of Central Florida  
Kate Brummett, University of Central Florida

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## PEDAGOGICAL GRAMMAR COURSES OFFERED BY MATESOL PROGRAMS IN FLORIDA

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*Written by a TESOL professor and an MATESOL student, this article offers a unique perspective on the potential role of a pedagogic grammar course within a teacher-training graduate program. In the United States, MATESOL programs are the primary producers of ESOL teachers; in Florida, no fewer than eight universities offer graduate degrees in TESOL or a closely related field. This article reports the results of a survey regarding the extent to which these eight programs offer a grammar course, which is considered by many to be an essential component in second language learning and therefore in advanced teacher training. Based on the results of this study as well as their experiences as MATESOL professor and MATESOL student, the authors discuss their rationale for suggesting that TESOL programs require a grammar course. The results of this study also include information regarding the various course materials and assignments, which could be adapted for use in K-12 in-service settings.*

With almost 300,000 non-native English speaking students (MacDonald, 2004), schools in Florida continue to face a shortage of qualified teachers who are knowledgeable about key issues in second language learning and thus able to educate this group of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students effectively (Stebbins, 2002). At the same time, schools face serious accountability pressures from the 1990 Consent Decree between the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the Florida Department of Education,

which requires that all LEP students receive equal access to programming that is appropriate to their level of English proficiency, and from No Child Left Behind, which mandates that students be retained if they do not satisfy state-established norms.

Just how serious is the situation for LEP students in Florida? In 2001, the retention rate for secondary level (grades 7-12) English Language Learners (ELLs) in Florida was a stunning 18.2%, which was one of the highest rates in the entire country (Kindler, 2002).

For comparison, the state of Texas, which also has a high population of ELLs, had a retention rate of 10.4%, which is about 43% less than that of Florida.

To improve the educational plight of ELLs, the Florida Department of Education guidelines, in direct response to the Consent Decree, requires that teachers of language arts and content areas, such as social studies and science, complete training in five key areas: ESOL methods, ESOL curriculum and materials, cross-cultural issues, applied linguistics, and ESOL evaluation. As Florida transitions to more inclusion classes for ELLs (Platt, Harper, and Mendoza, 2003), which would mean less direct emphasis on ESL issues, these areas and the amount of emphasis that each receives could be potential targets for reallocation.

While these five areas are certainly important in helping teachers understand how to teach ELLs better, we believe that a separate course in ESOL grammar is needed. Becoming familiar with ESOL teaching methods or testing procedures can empower content teachers who have had little to no previous training in second language education issues, but what is missing is a course that familiarizes these teachers with specific ESL grammar issues that make learning English or content through English so very difficult for ELLs. LULAC intended that content teachers comprehend why English is difficult for ESOL students and that the teachers develop not only empathy for the ESOL learners' plight, but also a knowledge base of the exact language problems and appropriate solutions. A course in pedagogical ESOL grammar—not a traditional grammar class of the eight parts of speech for native speakers—could play a pivotal role in achieving this goal.

Grammar can be taught directly or indirectly (Farrell, 2003; Master, 2003) and many people who have studied a second language acknowledge that grammar is a central component of any language. Because of the importance of grammar in second language acquisition and therefore, for teachers who work with students attempting to acquire English, the purpose of this article is to report on the availability and content of grammar courses in graduate teacher-preparation programs (i.e., MATESOL or similar) in the state of Florida.

## Grammar in Second Language Learning and Teaching

It is an understatement to say that second language methodologies have treated grammar quite differently over the years. In fact, within the context of learning a second language, the role of grammar has ranged at times from inconsequential to detrimental, to tangential to fundamental. Methods may come and go, but all methods deal with grammar in some way.

Methodologies such as grammar-translation and audiolingualism were derived from the importance of grammar and structural patterns. In the strong form of the Input Hypothesis, Krashen (1985) claims that the primary sole ingredient necessary for second language acquisition was comprehensible input. Though many have taken this to mean that grammar is not important, language that contains unfamiliar structures is not comprehensible and therefore cannot be input. However, teachers who are not aware of what ESL grammar points are will hardly be able to modify their language so that it can become comprehensible input. Other scholars, such as Swain (1993), note an important role for input, but went one step further to call greater attention to the role of learner output. Learner output can serve both as a language attempt by the learner as well as in input for others, especially if it is successful in its communicative purposes.

Grammar is important in teaching ELLs of all ages, not just K-12 ESOL. For example, grammar remains a core course in many university and adult intensive ESL programs, it is a central topic in the teaching of composition at all levels, and it is used to determine the readability of texts for ESL learners, especially K-12 textbooks. Therefore, teachers should know not only the basics of English grammar (e.g., nouns, past perfect tense, dependent clauses) but also pedagogical grammar, which refers to both the teacher's knowledge and the learner's developing knowledge of the structure of English (Wang, 2003).

## MATESOL Courses

In the United States, MATESOL programs are the primary producers of ESOL teachers. Each state has different requirements for ESOL teachers, and these requirements are reflected in the courses offered in MATESOL programs in that state. In Florida, the Department of Education requires courses (or in-service training) in only five areas: methods, curriculum and materials, culture, applied linguistics, and evaluation. As expected, these five courses form the backbone of most of the MATESOL programs here in Florida.

In addition to these five state-mandated courses, however, MATESOL programs require other courses to give teachers a more complete picture of the second language acquisition process. Some MATESOL courses offer perspectives on theory (e.g., a second language acquisition [SLA] course) or experience in the classroom (e.g., a practicum course). A perusal of the five MATESOL teacher-training programs in Florida that are listed on the Sunshine State TESOL website ([www.sunshine-tesol.org](http://www.sunshine-tesol.org)) reveals that the programs offer courses in second language research, teaching composition, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), computer-assisted language learning (CALL), sociolinguistics, teaching reading, and grammar.

## Improving MATESOL Preparation Programs

The importance of considering learners needs in second language classrooms is well-established (Ferris, 1998; Kumaravadivelu, 1991; Nunan, 1988a, 1988b; Rao, 2002; Rifkin, 2000; Spratt, 1999), and surely this same consideration must be given in parallel fashion to “learners” in MATESOL programs, i.e., graduate students. Teacher training programs are most effective when they offer courses that are meaningful to teachers’ actual teaching contexts. Unfortunately, many graduate programs—including MATESOL programs—have traditionally focused on research. Not surprisingly, notable scholars in our field, such as Richards (1991), have criticized this traditional top-down approach in many teacher education programs where teaching is seen as an

extension of research, instead of vice-versa. Cook (1999) provides a good rationale for a judicious look at research and its potential, yet limited, role in actual teaching methodology. Clearly, it is important to remember that TESOL begins with a T for teaching, not an R for research.

Fortunately, a growing interest exists among scholars in improving graduate TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages ) programs (Amores, 1999; Mullock, 2003; Murphy, 1997; Porter & Taylor, 2003; Ramanathan, Davies, & Schleppegrell, 2001; Reichelt, 2003; Richards, 1998; Wang, 2003). Richards (1998), for example, laments the fact that university faculty in TESOL rely on traditional lectures and large group teaching in second language teacher preparation courses despite the push for alternative teaching methods, including reflective teaching.

Examining challenges in teaching SLA courses in MATESOL programs, Gorsuch and Beglar (2004) called for a greater awareness of faculty development in TESOL and applied linguistics as well as a new view of SLA teachers and students as stakeholders in SLA. Their interviews with current SLA professors revealed that the growth in the SLA field has meant diversification of research areas, which in turn makes it difficult to decide which of these topics should be covered in an SLA course. Graduate students in the survey noted that their SLA course is not user-friendly; students in the survey complained that the academic prose of SLA research was conceptually unclear, extremely detailed, and mired in technical jargon. (For a review of current options in SLA textbooks, see Ortega, 2001).

In a seminal study of the teaching of phonology in MATESOL programs, Murphy (1997) surveyed the content, objectives, and learning tasks of phonology courses offered through 70 MATESOL programs in the U.S. He reported details of the course design, including the focus, activities and tasks, and required texts and readings, as well as suggestions from the instructors themselves regarding ideas for improving their courses. His research highlights important weaknesses in how phonology is (or is not) dealt with in MATESOL programs, ultimately urging increased faculty assistance with helping MATESOL

candidates to apply key concepts to actual teaching, which makes the course material more relevant to classroom teachers.

Jones (2004) examined the role of a research course in an MATESOL program in Australia. This study details how three teachers progressed from novice researchers to teacher-researchers. The study provides an account of the transformation of these students into researchers, showing how their individual research projects were both relevant to the researcher's professional future and useful to the EFL teachers who participated in their studies. Clearly, these projects were often practical applications of language issues, that is, a combined focus on how to teach and what to teach.

In a particularly compelling discussion of how poorly U.S. MATESOL programs prepare students to teach abroad, Govardhan, Nayar, and Sheorey (1999) cite the real-world needs of classroom teachers. They unambiguously call for more emphasis on practical courses and less emphasis on theory. At the top of their list of suggestions for MATESOL programs is the necessity of "a general unit of courses in descriptive linguistics and English linguistics that would develop an awareness of the nature, structure, and functions of language in general and modern English in particular—including a course in pedagogic and functional grammar" (123).

An influential paper by Ellis (1998) provides an excellent overview of the benefits of combining both grammar teaching and grammar research. The wording in the title of the article, "Teaching and Research: Options in Grammar Teaching." Placing the word *teaching* before *research* is intentional. While Ellis's article is based on SLA research, this research is organized in teaching categories, which he calls "instructional options." As Ellis notes, "Teachers require and seek to develop *practical* knowledge; researchers endeavor to advance *technical* knowledge" (39).

Wang (2003) reports on the results of a survey of pedagogical grammar courses in the United States and Canada. An analysis of 39 questionnaires and 23 course syllabi provides indispensable information about the content and emphasis of these courses. This

analysis sheds light on how pedagogical grammar is defined in current TESOL training programs, not just through the course description on the syllabi, but more importantly through an analysis of the tasks and assignments required in these courses.

Porter and Taylor (2003) detail how one of the oldest and largest MATESOL programs in the United States successfully blended theoretical knowledge about grammar with practical experience through the inclusion of a practical teaching component in their pedagogical grammar course, which precedes their actual teaching practicum course. Porter and Taylor urge faculty in other TESOL programs to adopt this pre-practicum teaching experience. Farrell (2003), Larsen-Freeman (2001, 2003), and Master (2003) offer detailed accounts of suggestions for specific types of activities to be used in MATESOL pedagogical grammar courses, activities that help connect current theory with actual classroom teaching.

In a more general study comparing MATESOL students' actual needs with MATESOL course offerings and assignments, Reichelt (2003) interviewed graduates at one MATESOL program to gather feedback for evaluating and potentially revising the program. Though generally positive about their overall education from the program, participants state a clear preference for a stronger practical component, including how to teach grammar.

## Research Questions

To learn more about the depth and breadth of attention that Florida MATESOL programs give to grammar courses, we conducted a survey to document the availability, status, and content of such courses, focusing on the following five questions:

1. To what extent do MATESOL programs in Florida offer a grammar course?
2. What is the status of these courses within the program, i.e., required or elective?
3. How often is the grammar course offered during the year?
4. What materials are used in these courses?
5. What specific tasks or assignments are required in these courses?

## Method

To determine which universities could be included in this study, both paper and electronic resources were reviewed. A search in Directory of Professional Preparation in Programs in TESOL in the United States and Canada: 1999-2001 (Garshick, 1998) found six Florida programs. This information was then cross-referenced with information gleaned from an extensive Internet search, including the current list of schools posted at the Sunshine State TESOL website ([www.sunshine-tesol.org](http://www.sunshine-tesol.org)). This second step added two more schools to bring the potential study sample size to eight. Individual websites were visited for each school for contact information and a preliminary search of courses offered. Telephone calls were placed to those schools for which the respective websites did not list a specific contact person or there was some question as to the degree level of the program.

### *Participants*

Only programs leading to a Master's in TESOL (i.e., MATESOL) or a Master's in Education (or related field) with a concentration in TESOL were included in this study. The following eight schools met this criterion: Barry University (BU), Florida Atlantic University (FAU), Florida International University (FIU), Florida State University (FSU), NOVA Southeast University (NSE), University of Central Florida (UCF), University of Florida (UF), and University of South Florida (USF).

### *Instrument*

A short survey (see Appendix A) was emailed to each of the contact faculty members at these eight schools. The survey asked whether or not the program had a grammar course, whether the course was required or elective, how often the course was offered, which materials were used, and what kinds of assignments were required. The response rate for this survey was 100%.

## Findings

Per the inclusion guidelines of this study, eight schools were eligible to participate in this study. What follows are the survey data as they relate to each of the five research questions.

*Question 1: To what extent do MATESOL programs in Florida offer a grammar course?*

Of the eight schools in the study, five (63%) have a separate course for grammar. The three remaining schools gave no indication that they have plans to add a grammar course. In fact, several programs, including those that have a separate grammar course, indicated that grammar issues are covered in existing courses.

*Question 2. What is the status of these courses within the program, i.e., required or elective?*

At all five schools that offer a grammar course, the course is an elective. One school indicated that its grammar course will change from an elective to a required course by fall 2006, and another program indicated that it is considering making its existing grammar course a requirement.

*Question 3. How often is the grammar course offered during the year?*

Four of the five schools offer the course once per year; one offers it twice per year. At one school, the grammar course is also offered year-round as a correspondence course.

*Question 4. What materials are used in these classes?*

The five programs that have separate grammar courses utilize a variety of resource materials, including required textbooks or course packets, recommended textbooks, websites, and handouts for their grammar courses. Table 1 lists the required texts; Table 2, recommended texts; and Table 3, recommended websites. Books by Azar; Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman; and Firsten & Killian appear on more course syllabi, either as required or recommended books.

**TABLE 1**  
**Required Textbooks**

Textbook Author and Title	Number of Programs
Celce-Murcia, M. & Larsen-Freeman, D. (1999). <i>The Grammar Book: An ESL/EFL Teacher's Course</i> (Second Edition). Boston: Heinle.	2
Firsten, R. & Killian, P. (2002). <i>The ELT Grammar Book: A Teacher-Friendly Reference Guide</i> . Burlingame, CA: ALTA.	2
Azar, B. <i>Understanding and Using English Grammar. (The Series)</i> . White Plains, NY: Longman-Pearson.	1
Gilbert, J. B. (2005). <i>Clear Speech: Pronunciation and Listening Comprehension in North American English</i> (2nd ed.) (Student's Book). New York: Cambridge University Press.	1
Hinkel, E. & Fotos, S. (eds) (2002). <i>New perspectives on grammar teaching in second language classrooms</i> . Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.	1
Williams, J.D. (2005). <i>The teacher's grammar book</i> . (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.	1
Original course packet	1

**TABLE 2**  
**Recommended Textbooks**

Textbook Author and Title	Number of Programs
Azar, B. (1998). <i>Understanding and Using English Grammar</i> . (3rd ed.). [3 levels] White Plains, NY: Longman-Pearson.	1
Celce-Murcia, M. & Larsen-Freeman, D. (1999). <i>The Grammar Book: An ESL/EFL Teacher's Course</i> (Second Edition). Boston: Heinle.	1
Murphy, R. (2000). <i>Grammar in Use</i> . [4 levels]. London: Cambridge.	1
Swan, M. & Smith, B. (Eds.) (1987). <i>Learner English: A teacher's guide to interference and other problems</i> . New York: Cambridge University Press.	1

**TABLE 3**  
**Recommended Websites**

Website Address	Number of Programs
<a href="http://www.english.uiuc.edu/cws/wworkshop/grammar_handbook.htm">http://www.english.uiuc.edu/cws/wworkshop/grammar_handbook.htm</a>	1
<a href="http://www.eslgold.com/site.jsp?sk=lkYinXAXGaIT6RN1&amp;resource=pag_ex_resources_links_grammar">http://www.eslgold.com/site.jsp?sk=lkYinXAXGaIT6RN1&amp;resource=pag_ex_resources_links_grammar</a>	1
<a href="http://www.eslpartyland.com/teachers/nov/grammar.htm">http://www.eslpartyland.com/teachers/nov/grammar.htm</a>	1
<a href="http://www.gsu.edu/~wwwesl/egw/index1.htm">http://www.gsu.edu/~wwwesl/egw/index1.htm</a>	1
<a href="http://www.longman.com/ae/azar/grammar_ex/materials/index.htm">http://www.longman.com/ae/azar/grammar_ex/materials/index.htm</a>	1
<a href="http://www.longman.com/cws/index.html">http://www.longman.com/cws/index.html</a>	1
<a href="http://www.ohiou.edu/esl/teacher/grammar.htm">http://www.ohiou.edu/esl/teacher/grammar.htm</a>	1
<a href="http://www.ompersonal.com.ar/omexercise/contenidotematico.htm">http://www.ompersonal.com.ar/omexercise/contenidotematico.htm</a>	1
<a href="http://www.sitesforteachers.com/">http://www.sitesforteachers.com/</a>	1

*Question 5. What specific tasks or assignments are required?*

The participants were asked to identify which of the eleven listed tasks or assignments were required in their grammar courses. Space was left for participants to note any other tasks or activities not in this original list of eleven.

Table 4 identifies the eleven tasks and how many of the programs include the required tasks in their respective grammar courses. Only one task is common to all of the surveyed programs—students are required to develop an ESL grammar lesson plan. Four programs require students to do some micro-teaching and evaluate textbooks.

In the category “Final project”, three programs gave details about their project requirements. At one program, students complete exercises in the grammar

textbook [or workbook] and submit a fully developed lesson plan. At another program, students write a reflection paper based on the insights the various activities have given them through the course. At the third program, the final project requires students to analyze writing samples of ESL students, identify grammar errors, and develop treatment plans.

Only one program indicated something in the category “Other”. In this program, the students complete descriptive grammar activities (i.e., “grammar detectives”) where they gather data from the real world (e.g., comic strips, TV commercials, ads, overheard conversations, talk shows) to see how the grammar rules in a typical book do or do not apply in reality. They look at the effect of discourse and pragmatics on grammar.

**TABLE 4**  
**Required Tasks and Assignments**

Task or Assignment	Number of programs
Develop ESL grammar lesson plans	5 (of 5 programs)
Micro-teach in the MATESOL grammar class	4
Evaluate ESL grammar textbooks	4
Observe a grammar class	3
Interview an ESL student	3
Develop materials to teach ESL grammar	3
Complete a final project:	3
Write a research paper	2
Evaluate ESL grammar websites	2
Micro-teach in an ESL class	1
Tutor an ESL student	1
Other	1

## Discussion and Conclusion

With the high return rate (100%) of surveys in this study, we feel confident that the information presented in this article has captured an accurate picture of grammar courses in graduate programs within Florida.

Information was presented on the importance of grammar teaching in learning a second language. Grammar teaching, or the teaching of any subject matter, can only occur to the degree that the teacher knows the material and is comfortable enough with both the material and techniques for teaching.

Previous research reports on grammar courses in MATESOL teacher-preparation programs were reviewed as evidence that there is a need for more attention to grammar—whether in a separate course or integrated well into existing courses. Previous research also found that programs seem to assume that grammar is already well integrated into existing courses, but recent graduates report inadequate training in this area.

Based on this information, we believe that the question that we now face is not *whether* to offer a grammar course, but rather what should be included in this course. Through this statewide survey and

in follow-up email correspondence, we were able to compile a significant list of possible grammar course assignments. These activities cover the entire gamut of possible types, from linguistic analysis of actual written texts or speech excerpts to actual teaching of a grammar lesson to graduate student classmates or to ESL students.

Because this research report was written by a TESOL professor and an MATESOL student, it offers a unique perspective on the current question of grammar courses. Based on the information in this article as well as our individual experiences with a graduate grammar course from both sides of the coin, our conclusion is two-fold. One is related to language, the other to teaching.

First, grammar is important and truly merits being covered in a separate course. As noted earlier in this paper, other researchers have complained that it is too easy for MATESOL graduate courses to turn into linguistic analysis, at times along the lines of a particular professor's own research agenda or teaching preferences. In a separate grammar course, however, this prospect is less likely. The professor in a specialized course in grammar is more likely to know both theory and classroom ESL grammar. Our survey indicated that some programs assume that grammar is covered in other courses such as applied linguistics, which is a basic MATESOL course often taught by a variety of professors who may or may not have much experience in actual ESL classroom teaching. Since the professor in a separate grammar course is likely to appreciate the nuances of teaching, learning, and using grammar, the professor is more likely to have a background of both knowledge and experience.

Second, a pedagogic grammar course should cover not only information about grammar (i.e., linguistic analysis) but also, and more importantly, techniques. A pedagogic grammar course should include general information about teaching grammar, such as deductive versus inductive presentations, ways of handling grammatical errors, or even a list of common ESL grammatical errors and why they occur. However, it is also important to cover specific techniques for teaching specific grammar issues,

some of which may vary according to the learners' first language.

For example, consider present perfect tense. How should teachers teach the present perfect? It is certainly not enough to know the form of this tense (have eaten). French speakers have the present perfect form but no longer use simple past in everyday conversation, so they might overuse the present perfect in English. Spanish speakers have the present perfect form, but its usage does not overlap exactly with English, so that Spanish speakers might use a present tense form instead of present perfect (e.g., *I have five years here*\*). The complicating teaching issue is that present perfect tense actually has several distinct usages in English. It can be used for actions that are still true in the present (e.g., *I have lived here for five years*) and it can be used for actions that are completely finished, as in *I have already eaten*. This obstacle then demonstrates the need for specific activities to help teach these points, but the activities hinge on the teacher knowing that this grammar point is indeed a problem for ELLs.

Clearly, it is not sufficient to know the name and function of the twelve verb tenses in English in this case. Linguistic knowledge is not the same as pedagogic information. For MATESOL graduates to be able to teach well, including helping their students with reading, writing, and speaking, knowledge of pedagogic grammar is crucial. Our research indicates that a majority of the MATESOL programs in Florida offer a grammar course. What we would advocate is that all programs have a required pedagogic grammar course combining both language and pedagogy with due emphasis on the T in TESOL.

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## The Authors

**Keith S. Folsie** is Coordinator of the MATESOL program at the University of Central Florida. Dr. Folsie is the author of thirty-eight books, including *The Art of Teaching Speaking: Research and Pedagogy for the ESL/EFL Classroom* (2006) and *Vocabulary Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching* (2004).

**Kate Brummett** is a recent graduate of the MATESOL program at the University of Central Florida. She has presented on designing a service-learning conversation course at Sunshine State TESOL and interactive tasks at Central Florida TESOL.

## Appendix A

Thank you for participating in this brief descriptive study of "Pedagogical Grammar Courses in MATESOL programs in Florida."

To keep this process as simple as possible, just hit reply and answer the 8 questions here in your reply email.

1. Does your TESOL program have a course in pedagogical grammar? \_\_\_\_\_

(If no, go to #2.)

(If yes, go to #3.)

2. If your program does not have such a course, why is this the case?

(go to #8 )

3. If yes, what is the name of the course?

4. Which textbook(s) and/or other materials are used in the course?

5. In a calendar year (3 semesters), how often is this class offered? (i.e., how many sections per calendar year)?

6. Does your course require:

observation of a grammar class

micro-teaching in the MATESOL grammar class

micro-teaching in an ESL class

writing a research paper

evaluating ESL grammar textbooks

evaluating ESL grammar websites

developing ESL grammar lesson plans

interview an ESL student

tutoring ESL student

developing materials to teach ESL grammar

completing a final project (if yes, please describe here)

Other features of your grammar course not covered in #6

7. What aspects would you change/add to make the best possible grammar course for MATESOL students?

8. These results will be submitted for consideration to be published in the Sunshine State TESOL Journal. Would you like to receive a summary of these results before the article is published?

Thank you for your participation!