

POSITIONING STUDENTS AS LINGUISTIC AND SOCIAL EXPERTS

Teaching grammar and linguistics in the United States¹

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Abstract

Language study has traditionally been situated within the L1 classroom. However, the study of the structure of language – grammar – diminished in U.S. schools, beginning in the mid- to late-20th century, for a variety of reasons, some of which are summarized here. Because of the misunderstandings about what grammar is and the controversies surrounding its teaching in the L1 classroom, in the United States at least, it can be beneficial to focus on *linguistics* instead of *grammar*. In this article, I offer an overview of the ways in which the study of language has been incorporated into primary and secondary schools in the U.S. When the focus is on teaching “linguistics” instead of just grammar, narrowly defined, not only do students gain a great deal of grammatical knowledge, but there are also other benefits. Students may be empowered by their own unconscious knowledge of language; they learn to employ scientific methodology to analyze language data; they come to understand the systematicity of all language varieties; and they can work themselves to reduce the discrimination that comes with a focus on a privileged variety of standardized grammar.

Keywords: linguistics, grammar teaching, language variation, linguistic discrimination, scientific methodology, primary and secondary education

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1. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF L1 LANGUAGE STUDY IN U.S. SCHOOLS

Throughout the 19th century, students in United States' schools were taught grammar. The methodology was based on Latin grammar instruction, and rules of usage assumed that when there was variation in language, one form was established as the correct one. There was also a great deal of linguistic scholarship taking place at the beginning of the 19th century; historical and comparative linguistics was flourishing, and much was being discovered about how languages were related to each other and what motivated language change. More accurate descriptions of individual languages were emerging. However, this work had little to no effect on what was taught about language in American schools. For example, an understanding of the ways that English had changed did not affect the resistance to similar changes in the current language. Despite some scholars' attempts (such as Fries 1927) to demonstrate that many prescribed rules are not based on logic, and that attitudes towards variations are based, rather, on custom had little effect. Certain rules came to be the ones in the usage guides and grammar handbooks and have remained markers of status and education for more than a century. Alongside learning of prescriptive rules of "educated" usage, students also analyzed and diagrammed sentences, thereby learning about parts of speech, phrases, and clauses, and the ways in which they relate to each other. The activity known as "parsing" involved breaking down texts into their component parts, the traditional parts of speech, and labeling the functions (subject, predicate, etc.); this task was also sometimes accompanied by explanation of other functions of the words (as modifiers or complements, for example) and their relationships to each other. This method of instruction focused on visual representation of sentences prevailed in schools in the late 18th century and continued throughout the 19th and most of the 20th centuries. The information about grammar and the methods used to teach it were so entrenched that American primary schools were called grammar schools. However, language instruction in the schools was stagnant, relatively uninformed by the advances in the study of language and from the burgeoning field of linguistics. Despite the emerging research on and interest in language by early 20th century linguists and grammarians, there were challenges that slowed the integration of such study into schools, which are elaborated on below.

Beginning in the 1940s and continuing through the 1950s, as part of a more general educational reform that attempted to consider why students were taught certain subjects, and why teachers taught in the way that was traditional, as well as a national governmental effort to maintain supremacy and attempt to keep up with the global leaders, the teaching of many subjects, including language and grammar, came under scrutiny. The new approach to the study of the English language showed great promise for use in schools, going beyond rote memorization, sentence diagramming, and learned usage rules, allowing students to explore their own language and make their own discoveries, and also to aid in reducing, or at least recognizing linguistic discrimination. Throughout the 1960s, English meetings and conferences were filled with presentations on linguistics and its potential effects on the field of

English Studies. Study centers were established around the country, with linguists, teachers, and teacher educators working together to develop materials on language and rhetoric. Textbooks for use in high schools emerged from this, including Kitzhaber (1970), Dolive (1967), Postman and Morine (1963), and Roberts (1967). See too an overview of the reasons for the failures of the national collaborative venture Project English in O'Neil (2007). However, there was also unease about exactly what teachers should be learning about; focus within linguistics and in teacher education was on transformational grammar in the mid 1960s, but there was not consensus on which aspects of the new approaches to language should be introduced to primary and secondary teachers and their students. And for many teachers, especially those not involved in the 1960s workshops or institutes, there was a lack of understanding about why linguistics was important, especially given the apparently conflicting information coming out of composition and rhetoric about grammar study in the English classroom, which I turn to below.

Alongside these concerns about which aspects of linguistics to teach and also of the challenges of how linguistics could improve teaching about language, there was also the big question of how language study affects writing and the teaching of writing. There had long been an assumption that the direct study of language, of grammatical structure in particular, would lead improve students' writing. Earlier studies, from the 1920s, '30s, and '40s had begun to investigate the role of language study with respect to writing, but studies began to emerge out of the new field of composition/writing studies about the effect of language study, and of the study of grammar in particular, on the teaching of writing. A report commissioned by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) reviewed "what is known and what is not known about the teaching and learning of composition and the conditions under which it is taught" (1). This report, by Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer (1963), reviewed five studies on composition, only one of which was about the effects of explicit grammar teaching, an experiment by Harris (1962). Harris's study compared two classes of students in five London schools; one class in each school had instruction in "formal grammar," the other in "direct method." Those studying formal grammar "followed a logically organized program of traditional grammar instruction 'through the parts of speech, with stress on the function of words' and employed the traditional grammatical terminology in classroom teaching and in correcting compositions" (70-71). Those studying Direct Method "used no textbook or grammatical terminology but considered the elements of 'sentence building and structure' which came to the teachers' attention as they read the children's writing, treating common errors in the classroom and in composition 'by means of example and imitation, instead of by the abstraction and generalization of the approach through formal grammar' which did not itself, of course, exclude the use of examples" (71). Harris concluded that there was a "lack of effective tie between a relatively high grammatical score and improvement in the measured items of the essay" (82-83). And from that, we get a sentence from Harris, cited in Braddock et al, that has been repeated over and over again over the last 50 years. Harris writes, "It seems safe to infer that the

study of English grammatical terminology had a negligible or even a relatively harmful effect upon the correctness of children's writing in the early part of the five Secondary Schools" (qtd in Braddock, 83). The impact of this has been significant; the Braddock report, Eaton (2003) suggests, "arguably began the decline of grammar instruction in the US" (79).

The 1966 Dartmouth Seminar was a large-scale collaborative attempt (organized by the Modern Language Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the British National Association of Teachers of English, with participants from the UK, New Zealand, Canada, and the US) to better determine the role of English studies in higher education. Muller (1967) notes the consensus emerging from the conference was that (traditional) grammar teaching was "a waste of time" (68). Myhill and Watson (2014) connect the ensuing "widespread abandoning of grammar" during this time directly to the Dartmouth Conference. Locke (2010) provides a comprehensive overview of the debates about grammar in the English classroom in much of the English-speaking world; Locke writes of the 1966 Dartmouth Conference, "[L]inguists found it hard to argue for the utility of linguistic knowledge but wanted to defend it as a humanistic activity" (183-84). Locke (2009) is a more succinct overview of the history of grammar and writing. Composition studies in general and the Braddock report and Dartmouth Conference in particular contributed greatly to the failure of more direct integration of language study into schools. Despite the critiques of the methodology and significance of the Harris study, promoted by Braddock et al (for example Kolln and Hancock 2005, Brown 2009, Myhill and Watson 2014), and later in Hillocks (1986), the study is still cited with great frequency as an anti-grammar teaching touchstone.

Thus, despite the initial successes of integrating into primary and secondary English classrooms more linguistically informed approaches to language in the 1960s and early 1970s, replacing the outmoded approaches and attitudes was challenging, as was preparing teachers to teach the new material. Many English teachers, uncertain of how to teach about language and grammar, quite understandably, avoided teaching about it. And the specific history of language and grammar teaching within English classrooms, coupled with the lack of certainty about how linguistics should inform that teaching, meant that the direct study of language in school and grammar study of any sort all but disappeared in the US, as it has in some other countries. Over the last couple of decades, therefore, English teachers have generally had no linguistically-informed study of language either as students nor in their teacher preparation programs. Their own conscious knowledge of grammar is thus generally minimal and there are few mechanisms in place to incorporate language study, linguistically-informed or not.

The lack of study of language and grammar in U.S. schools over the last 50 years means that although most English teachers in U.S. primary and secondary schools (often termed K-12, to refer to kindergarten through grade 12) are not generally coming in to their own classrooms having engaged in any direct study of language

themselves, they also have very few preconceived notions, thus allowing for language study to be introduced, informed by linguistics. (The preparation for teachers in linguistics varies greatly by state. In my own state of Washington, for example, secondary English education teachers are required to have linguistics coursework, but in the majority of states, this is not the case.)

It should be noted, however, that teachers have little to no motivation to engage in the study of language since it is so absent from the curriculum, and mastery of some mythical standardized form of English is still assumed to be an educational goal (and is assessed and tested). Teachers remain under pressure to teach students to master some perceived prestige variety and teaching about language can be reduced to this. Knowledge of linguistics is a critical component to resisting fallbacks into prescriptive notions of language. Richard Hudson has long espoused such a view in the UK; see, for example, Hudson (2004) and Hudson and Walmsley (2005), and van Rijt, de Swart, and Coppens (2019)'s recent literature review. A wider scope of focusing on linguistics or language study in classrooms (at all levels) allows for more opportunities to integrate into the school curriculum in a variety of ways and knowledge about language can once again become a focus in curriculum development in the English (or L1) classroom.

2. LANGUAGE STUDY AT THE PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL

Some of the barriers to smooth integration of linguistically-informed instruction do not arise in primary school classrooms, thus positioning them well for such work. As discussed in Denham (2007), Carlson (2010), and Pippin (2010), for example, there are more opportunities to integrate the study of language into a primary school classroom because typically, at this level, a single teacher is teaching multiple subjects, so it is less necessary to categorize the lessons by discipline. Because of this, the lessons can connect to virtually any classroom topic. In Denham and Pippin (2019), we demonstrate this flexibility with the study of syllables, exemplifying how this investigation into language can be incorporated into existing studies, alongside lessons on spelling, poetry, fiction, or history and geography throughout the year with grade 5 students (ages 10-11). While investigating topics as diverse as the invented child language game Pig Latin, a Native North American language Lushootseed, or an Appalachian English verbal prefix, which may all seem like diversions from more central topics, the students' knowledge of syllables builds, their unconscious knowledge is revealed, scientific methodology is practiced, and consequently language clearly becomes an object worthy of investigation. Building on work by Honda (1994) and Honda, O'Neil, and Pippin (2004, 2010), focus is on building scientific knowledge and methodology through data collection, hypothesis formation, hypothesis testing, and hypothesis reformulation.

As an example of this kind of lesson plan, consider the following. Students consider data from Lushootseed, a Salish language of Washington State (adapted from Hess and Hilbert 1995):

ʔá†	<i>fast, quickly</i>	ʔá†á†	<i>hurry up</i>
dʔáq'	<i>fall, topple</i>	dʔáq'áq'	<i>stagger, totter</i>
čǎǎ	<i>split</i>	čǎǎǎ	<i>cracked to pieces</i>

They then make hypotheses about how the second column of words is formed, based on the first column. Teachers can offer students a prompt to describe the process: “My hypothesis is that in order to make the ‘out of control’ form of a word, you....”, and students might come up with something like “Double the last two letters/sounds.” But upon considering more data, they will discover the need to reformulate the hypothesis (that the “end” of the first syllable – the rime – is what is in fact reduplicated).

yubil	<i>starve</i>	yububil	<i>tired out, sick</i>
gʷədil	<i>sit down</i>	gʷədədil	<i>sitting for lack of anything else to do</i>
saxʷəb	<i>jump, run</i>	saxʷaxʷəb	<i>scurrying about ineffectively</i>

Teacher notes are provided with this lesson, since working with unfamiliar data and conducting linguistic analysis can be intimidating. This type of lesson allows for reformulation of hypotheses; allows further insight into syllable structure; allows exploration of a local, endangered language; and connects to other aspects of the curriculum (history and culture). While such investigation may not seem to have immediately applicable components for “grammar” study, more narrowly defined, it does take language as an object of study, which leads to other kinds of fruitful linguistic (and other) explorations. Pippin finds his students delve eagerly into linguistics investigations, and he is able to use syllable exploration as a reference point throughout the year. Also, the exploration of languages other than English can be not only a way of expanding inclusivity, but can also reveal important grammatical features that shed light on the language of study. Ginsburg, Honda, and O’Neil (2011) demonstrate how use of students’ own varied native language data benefits everyone in an English as a Second Language class focused on English mastery.

Another example of a lesson that I and others have used at all levels, from primary through university, which is detailed in Denham (2007, 2014, 2015) and Denham and Keyser (2014), and is also found in many introductory linguistics texts, including Denham and Lobeck (2013), encourages analysis using made-up words in sentences such as the following:

The *dorling* *bardons* *snorfed* the *groomlins* with *frelundity*.

Students as young as six years old are able to determine the categories of words like *dorling* (adjective), *bardons* (noun), *snorfed* (verb), *groomlins* (noun), and *frelundity* (noun). This lesson is more clearly aligned with traditional notions of grammar study

(than syllable study is), and it leads students to understand that meaning is not the only way we understand lexical categories; we also use syntactic and morphological knowledge. Importantly, it also positions students, simply because they are language users, as the experts.

Most primary school teachers likely do not have the experience with linguistics to develop lesson plans such as the Lushootseed one above, and even if they do, they will likely need to demonstrate how such study meets existing educational standards and/or how it fits into the established curricular framework. Similarly, even with a lesson such as the analysis of nonsense words, teachers may lack confidence about their own knowledge of language and be uncertain how to demonstrate its connection to the curriculum. The teacher preparation students we have worked with over the last several decades acknowledge the uncertainty they feel teaching about language. Giovanelli's (2015) study also address the anxiety many teachers feel.

Developing partnerships between teachers and linguists is one way to navigate the uncertainty and the knowledge gap. And even when teachers have some linguistics background, partnerships can be an important component. A Middle School Linguistics blog (with the Strands Grammar, Conventions, and Morphology), <http://middleschoolling.blogspot.com/>, grew out of a weekly collaboration between Kristin Denham, Beth Keyser, and Keyser's students. (See also Keyser 2019.) Empowerment of students through drawing out their intuitions via guided questions is a common refrain in Keyser's work, as is being satisfied with not immediately having the answers: "One thing I've learned about teaching grammar this way is that I need to get used to saying 'I don't know' a lot. But I usually find an answer with a little help from my friendly linguist." (Keyser 2014)

Bateman (2019) offers ways she and partner teachers have integrated linguistics into a Project-Based Learning curriculum at the middle school level (grade 8), connecting to a variety of topics that may not appear to lend themselves to the integration of linguistics at first glance. They also demonstrate how to work within approaches adopted by many American schools (such as Project-Based Learning curriculum). Bateman offers ideas and lesson plans for incorporating the study of language into classroom topics as diverse as homelessness in America and the human food chain, and she does so using an innovative curricular model embraced by teachers and administrators.

Since the materials, textbooks, and curricula that teachers are often asked to use do not incorporate the advances made by linguists about language study in schools, and since linguistics is unfamiliar to most teachers, the various state and national standards can provide a launching pad for such integration. In Denham (2015), ways teachers at the primary and secondary levels can use the standards as an entree to linguistically-informed language study are offered. Consider the following for grade 3 from the Common Core State Standards, adopted by the majority of the states:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.1a: Explain the function of nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs in general and their functions in particular sentences.

This very broad standard provides an opportunity to study language and to do so in a way informed by linguistics. The exercise described in the previous example, for example, using a nonsense word sentence, would be a perfect opportunity to have students practice meeting this standard.

With both primary and secondary students, connecting to standards is an important way for teachers to gain confidence that the language study they are incorporating will satisfy multiple goals. The Exploring Language website (<https://www.explorelanguage.org/overview-6-12>) I created in collaboration with primary and secondary teachers connects to the Common Core State Standards, in use by a majority of states in the U.S. The lessons focus on grades 3-8, though many of the lessons are easily adaptable for other grade levels. School administrators, curriculum directors, or other teachers who may be wary of “grammar study” or linguistics can be reassured that such lessons connect to educational standards and benchmarks. McNulty (2010) also connects language study to the Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) for her middle school students in creative ways, not found in the suggested teaching materials used in the school district. Most of the teaching materials and resources targeted at primary school teachers are not informed by the advances of linguistics; however, there are some exceptions. Wilde (2012), for example, talks directly and convincingly about language privilege (“Language variation is a social justice issue just as much as racial identity is” (96)), while also engaging upper elementary and middle school students in analysis of grammar, including those that interact with conventions and usage – and tying lessons to the Common Core State Standards.

3. LANGUAGE STUDY AT THE SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL

The secondary school classroom presents some distinct challenges because of the history of grammar teaching in the U.S. in secondary schools, outlined previously, and because of the disciplinary separation that is typical in secondary classrooms. Teachers generally teach single subjects, so they cannot integrate language across various subjects as easily as teachers of primary students can.

3.1 Teaching about Language in L1 Language Classrooms

The legacy of the lack of grammatical study in U.S. high schools over the last several decades, coupled with a focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math), means that most high school English teachers are not likely to find the English classroom generally conducive to grammatical study, especially when separated from the foci of literature and writing. However, we have begun to see some very successful integration of linguistically-informed language study into the secondary English classroom. Importantly, this occurs when the teachers have had some linguistics training. Roh (2010), Pippin (2010), Denham and Keyser (2014), and Keyser (2019) discuss some of the ways that they integrate various kinds of language study

into their English Language Arts classrooms, alongside the traditional study of literature and practice of writing. For example, Roh discusses a wide range of linguistic explorations connected to the works of Langston Hughes, an African American writer from the early part of the 20th century. Pippin (2010) and his students also analyze the unique literary style in an early 20th century text. These author-teachers offer examples of ways to simultaneously engage in literary and linguistic analysis.

There are a growing number of linguistically-informed books and resources for use in secondary school English/Language Arts (the term widely used for L1 language, literature, and culture) classrooms that meet teachers and students on familiar ground, discussing usage and conventions, and applications to writing and literature, while also exploring language acquisition and the history of prescriptive attitudes (Schuster 2003), language change (Wilde 2012), and inflectional and derivational affixes (Benjamin and Oliva 2007), for example. See also Anderson (2005), Brown (2009), Ehrenworth and Viton (2005), and even more recently Crovitz and Devereaux (2020). Other recent work focuses on the linguistically diverse classroom, including Adger, Wolfram & Christian (2007), Reaser & Wolfram (2007), Wheeler & Swords (2010), and Charity Hudley & Mallinson (2010, 2013). Myhill and colleagues' work on the effect of linguistic instruction on writing lends further support to such approaches, rebuilding the trust undone by earlier attempts to integrate linguistics into the teaching of writing. See, for example, Jones, Myhill and Bailey (2012), Jones and Myhill (2013), Myhill (2014).

The anti-grammar legacy has had real effects on teaching about grammar in U.S. high schools, and the reticence to incorporate linguistics, given the failures of attempts to do so in the 1960s and 1970s, is understandable. However, lesson plans and curricula that are informed by linguistics and high school teachers who have had linguistics coursework are having positive effects in the high school English classroom. Grammar study is not limited to the English classroom, however.

3.2 Teaching about Language in "Social Studies"

Because of the controversies about teaching grammar in secondary English classrooms, some linguists have turned to other areas of the high school curriculum to integrate language study. Teaching about language in the context of social studies (history, geography, and culture) rather than English has proved fruitful. Reaser and Wolfram (2007) developed a curriculum adopted by the state of North Carolina for use in middle school (ages 11-14). Kristin Denham and David Pippin have developed curriculum and lesson plans on language for use by Washington State social studies middle school students. (See Denham, Lobeck, and Pippin (2011), Denham and Pippin (2011), and Denham and Pippin (2014). As Denham and Pippin write in the overview of the curricular project the goals are:

"to develop an understanding and appreciation for the linguistic patterning of all languages and, in particular, the diversity of languages in the Pacific Northwest and Canadian West Coast; to establish the link between historical events and language change;

to address misconceptions and identify changing views about language over time; and to promote linguistics literacy by engaging students in scientific inquiry about language.

Students in the Pacific Northwest are required to know how to read their language, how to write in their language, but are not required to know about their language. They should. Language awareness has an important place in the social studies, where the topics of cultural identity, class differences, geographic placenames, sovereignty, and civil rights are naturally intertwined with more specific topics of linguistics. Central to all of the featured languages are the people of the Salish Sea who have made important contributions to language awareness. We have designed the lessons to be taught by someone with little or no formal training in linguistics. It is our hope that by using the resources contained in the curriculum, teachers will be able to extend their learning and model the curiosity that should be central to any education. (<https://www.voicesofthepnw.net/overview/>)”

Classes focused on issues related to history, geography, and anthropology provide an excellent platform for the introduction of linguistics and grammar study.

3.3 Teaching about Language in Linguistics Courses

A third place in which language study is finding its way into secondary schools is in stand-alone linguistics classes. Suzanne Loosen, a high school English teacher with a masters degree in linguistics, began to offer a high school linguistics course in 2010. She details this course in Loosen (2014). Others have followed suit, and more linguistics classes are offered every year throughout the country. The Linguistic Society of America (LSA), the primary professional organization for linguists, has a growing number of high school teachers who attend, present, and share their work. This kind of collaboration between linguists and secondary teachers is an important indicator of how interest and collaboration are growing and yielding important results. The LSA also has a committee working to develop an Advanced Placement (AP) Linguistics class. AP is a national program that allows high school students to take classes in high school that can count for university credit. A national exam for each subject is given every spring. The first step to developing AP Linguistics is to have 250 linguistics courses in high schools to demonstrate that there is sufficient interest and that there are enough teachers prepared to teach the subject matter. (After an AP course is established, the College Board, the organization responsible for administering the AP courses and exams, will help provide workshops for teacher training in the subject matter and course, as they do for many other fields and topics.) See Larson, Denham, and Lobeck (2019) for an overview of the AP initiative. Mulder (2010) discusses a collaboratively developed secondary school linguistics project in Victoria, Australia. Dick Hudson and Graeme Trousdale have been involved for years in developing an A-Level in Linguistics in the UK: <https://dickhudson.com/a-level-linguistics/>. These stand-alone linguistics courses demonstrate the continued reach of language study and linguistics in secondary schools.

4. DISCUSSION

Grammar study is language study; guiding students to engage with many aspects of language, encouraging them to collect language data, and talking with them about how grammar fits within a larger framework is critical to not only learning grammar but also understanding the larger context in which it exists.

When the study of grammar is expanded – both in terms of the kinds of topics addressed and in which kinds of courses those topics are studied – students at all levels demonstrate not only a better conscious understanding of grammar, but also a clear understanding of the linguistic discrimination that is inherent in many traditional corrective models of grammatical instruction and a desire to not perpetuate those ideas or methods. They learn that prescriptive rules and rules of standardization often arise where there is variation, and that those rules often have to do with power differentials. As noted above in some of the recent materials for high school that grapple with variation (Anderson (2005) and Schuster (2003), for example), rather than avoid discussion about variation, and focusing instead on some standard form, teacher and students together can acknowledge and analyze a wide variety of syntactic constructions. This invites students to analyze the data and then to understand *why* the variation exists, thereby offering a portal into broader discussions of grammar as it exists in the world. For example, students consider variation in verb forms, such as these past tense forms:

They had drank/drank the beer.
We've lighted/lit the lamps.
They screenshot/screenshotted the image.
I've dreamt/dreamed about that before.

They then analyze the reasons – both internal/linguistic and external/historical – for the variations. Such examples encourage students to focus first on linguistic forms and understanding their morphology and syntax; social judgments are separate. See Adger, Snow, and Christian (2018), Devereaux and Palmer (2019), Lobeck (2019), Denham and Lobeck (2018), for recent examples of work that confronts linguistic discrimination in teaching grammar.

Reflections from students reveal evidence of the success of this approach. Writes a university student and future secondary education teacher:

“Really, when you focus on the ‘mix-ups’ and ‘mistakes’ we make in grammar, you find that these are often natural corrections of irregularities in our language that came about for other weird historical reasons, such as saying you was instead of the irregular you were. By saying you was the speaker has made the application of the past tense pattern more uniform. And when people discover this, they not only understand the ‘error,’ but they’re more likely to remember it, and they have learned something about grammar and verb paradigms and subject-verb agreement along the way.”

Another student offers: “When you come to understand the basic principles behind linguistics, then you simply use these to show that negative reactions to certain

dialects and languages are not founded in linguistic truth, but in social stereotypes.” Another student puts it succinctly: “Grammatical knowledge is useful as a tool of equality.” These students who are soon to be teachers learn to always consider the reasons behind “errors,” in order to be able to decide whether or not such variations need feedback and which kind of feedback will be fruitful and empowering. In most cases errors are not random but are instead indicative of systematic features of knowledge and use of language. Broadening grammatical investigation to include a variety of approaches to language study offers a context for students to understand attitudes towards language. They learn that grammatical variation is just data and engaging with that data allows them to fully understand the systematicity of all varieties. They can then work to eradicate the discrimination that comes with a focus on a privileged variety of standardized grammar.

These pre-service teachers are not simply learning grammar so they can then teach grammar; instead they primarily learn to ask questions about grammar, and they learn to analyze and become language scientists. Some of their testimonials reveal these transformations. Writes one university student planning to be primary school teacher:

“I finally understand what science really means – that it’s not biology or chemistry, but it’s a method of inquiry. And it’s been so exciting to discover that using language data! I wish everyone could do this - and could do it early, when they’re a kid! I can’t wait to do this with my students!”

And another typical summary from a student:

“I find it far more useful and beneficial to allow students to discover how words and sentences are formed according to syntactic and morphological rules of language instead of teaching them traditional ‘grammar,’ which, especially when taught independent of any other subject can seem like a set of so many arbitrary and nonsensical rules ...Understanding things like affixes, word formation rules, and sentence-level syntax - and also aspects of phonology - helps students better understand spelling and grammar since they are not memorizing sets of letters and rules, but are rather studying how language itself works.”

Even in a “traditional” L1 grammar class, which might include, for example, discussion and discovery of lexical categories, phrases, and clauses (see Lobeck and Denham 2013, for example), there are also important opportunities for conversations about other aspects of language. For example, discussion of slang can open up investigation into lexical categories, open and closed classes, category shift, and so on. Or discussions about the conventions of texting or other electronically-mediated communication can lead to debate about standardization, intuitions about meaning, the speed of language change, and other topics that contextualize for students that grammar study is linguistics and that linguistics is grammar study. Van Rijt, de Swart, and Coppen’s (2019) overview of linguistic concepts used in L1 grammar education provides insight from non-U.S. concepts on similar endeavors, and van Rijt et al. also show how students can improve their linguistic reasoning abilities via L1 grammar teaching.

Also, it is always beneficial to bring in data from other languages, as noted above, especially those used by the students or that they have some connection to. The basic research method of comparing and contrasting grammatical systems can reveal systematic patterns and is a convenient way to expand students' ideas of what language is and how it can vary.

5. CONCLUSION

In the U.S., where the term "grammar" comes with various stigma and unhelpful associations, focusing on linguistics rather than grammar can be beneficial. In other places, where "grammar" does not come either with the prescriptive connotations nor with the historical baggage it has in the U.S., perhaps focusing on "linguistics" may carry its own concerns (it's not relevant, it's too theoretical, etc.). See, for example, van der Aalsvoort and Kroon (2015)'s discussion of the controversial attempt to introduce linguistics in Dutch secondary schools. Regardless of the terminology used, I advocate for broadening one's approach to language study. Almost any aspect of language that comes up in a classroom with any age or level of student will be useful and relevant. Engaging in discussion of Lushootseed syllable structure, for example, in primary school, or in discussion of regional lexical differences in secondary school, may seem to stray too far afield to be grammar study, but in fact is exactly the kind of investigation that can allow students to discover the importance of linguistics and its relevance in their own lives and can offer students insight into language attitudes and how they are intertwined with societal power. Such conversations and investigations will also inevitably connect to more traditional aspects of "grammar."

In sum, in the U.S. where the study of *grammar* has a somewhat fraught history and comes with the baggage of upholding standardized varieties, an approach that advocates for teaching about language anywhere you can, informed by the scientific study of language conducted by linguists, is gaining ground. Doing so makes language an object worthy of study and that study creates a body of knowledge that students can continue to build on. All of these kinds of investigation of language that might come into a classroom at any level can employ scientific methodology, allowing for a better understanding of what science is, using easily accessible language data. Students then can come to better understand how language works and that it is a dynamic system, always changing. With this knowledge of language change and variation, they then come to understand the powers at work in linguistic subordination and discrimination. And finally, this kind of broadened understanding of grammar as linguistic investigation is empowering. Students come to understand they already have inherent knowledge of the complexities of language, and students and teachers can work together to reveal that knowledge.

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