



Photograph by Celia Bartram

Dear ESL/EFL colleagues,

I once met a teacher who had recently used one of my texts in her class. At the end of the term, one of her students said to her, “Thank you for teaching me the secrets of English.”

I still smile when I think of that comment. Of course, we know there are no “secrets,” but I think I understand what the student meant—that it’s sometimes helpful to understand what’s going on underneath the surface of a language. A second language can seem so dizzying and random. A little information about its patterns can help students make sense of it and give them a foundation for language growth.

The first book in the Azar series was published in 1981. It was the blue book, *Understanding and Using English Grammar*, which grew out of many years of creating my own materials for my own classes. I then wrote two other texts, the red and the black, creating *The Azar Grammar Series*.

All of the texts have undergone revisions over the years with many evolutionary changes, especially in the use of more interactive and communicative activities. But throughout this time, the original vision remains as stated in the very first book: the goal is the development of all usage skills from a grammar base by giving clear grammar information and employing a variety of practice modes, from controlled response to open communicative interaction.

When I published the first book, I hoped maybe a few other teachers might find the textbook useful, too. In all honesty, I never imagined there were so many teachers like myself who found a grammar-based skills approach to be effective and appropriate for their students. It turns out we are legion.

During the naturalist approach heyday in the 80s and into the 90s, when advocates of zero grammar held sway, grammar instruction largely disappeared from school curricula for native speakers of English. But because of teacher support for grammar-based materials like mine, grammar teaching did not disappear from curricula for second language learners.

Because of you, grammar is today a viable and vigorous component in the ESL/EFL classroom—much to our students’ benefit. A great deal of current research shows that many if not most of our students benefit greatly from a grammar component blended with other approaches in a well-balanced program of second language instruction. Together we have served our students well.

My hat is off to you.

Betty Azar
Whidbey Island, Washington
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