

Helen Naylor has been teaching English to adults for over 30 years, and is a Cambridge ESOL examiner. She has written a variety of English Language Teaching titles, ranging from exam practice to readers, and she is also the main author of the brand new *Essential Grammar in Use* CD-ROM.

Helen, teachers and students either seem to love grammar or loathe it ... why do you think that is?

I think it depends what kind of brain you've got. If you have a more analytical approach to things, then you probably enjoy learning grammar. But I think most people recognize that it is the building blocks of language. Sometimes teachers and students may not feel like doing it, but, like medicine, you know it does you good.

There has been a lot of press coverage recently about the decline in native speakers' use of English grammar. Do you think it's a fair criticism?

I think it's guaranteed to raise people's blood pressure and get them writing to The Times about declining standards. The teacher side of me wants to address the confusion between 'less' and 'fewer' and the case of disappearing adverbs, but language is a living thing and there will always be developments. I suppose, as with everything, it's where we draw the line about what is acceptable.

So, tell us all about this exciting new CD-ROM that accompanies *Essential Grammar in Use*.

Well, it's fun and motivating. It reinforces all the grammar taught in *Essential Grammar in Use*, but there are games to keep things light-hearted, and it provides learners with a challenge, too.

Did you enjoy writing the CD-ROM? It must be very different to writing for a book.

It is. It's tighter. By that I mean it's a challenge working with the software designers and staying within the boundaries of the exercise types that they have created. Having said that, we've ensured that there is plenty of variety, and we've used lots of different exercise types, including re-ordering, matching, true/false, completion and text reconstruction, to keep things fresh and interesting. There are exercises for every single unit in the book - that's 115! - and all the exercises are recorded so students have the opportunity to hear native-speaker voices. We've also introduced a bit of listening comprehension: students - or teachers, if they are using the CD-ROM in the classroom - can play the recording and answer the questions about it in the exercise. But this is a grammar book, not a listening book, so we've introduced the facility of being able to look at the script and make a final choice before completing the exercise.

We've built in some secret, bonus exercises, too, that you can only access if you achieve a high score: They're interactive dialogues - learners participate by recording their own voice instead of either of the characters, and then they can click to listen to the whole conversation.

Technology in the language classroom is still quite a hot topic, and it seems that every new ELT publication has a CD-ROM or DVD attached to it ... what's your opinion of it?

Technology in the classroom can be great fun, provided that it is simple to use and not presented as the answer to all teaching or learning problems. We have to bear in mind that as learners become more used to dealing with technology outside the classroom, so they expect to find it used within the classroom environment, too. But it brings variety and can change the pace of a lesson, so it's good news really. I think that CD-ROMs can help with study outside the classroom, and since learners can work at their own pace, it can help to take the pressure off them to perform to the standards of their fellow students. In my opinion it should be another tool to help students learn, and not the answer to all teaching or learning problems. We have also included a whiteboard toolbar in the *Essential Grammar in Use* CD-ROM, so that teachers can take advantage of any exercises or games that appeal to them, although I imagine it will be widely used for self-study.

So what's your favourite bit of the CD-ROM?

I suppose that depends whether you're asking me in a pedagogical context or not! I really like the interactive dialogues that I was just talking about - I like the idea that students can join in an activity and hopefully, in this way, see that grammar is not just a mechanical exercise, but part of the real world and vital for everyday interaction.

I really like the games, too, especially Snake Catcher, which involves catching snakes with sentences on them and putting them in baskets according to grammatical categories, for example, 'for' and 'since'. If you make a mistake, you lose points, and you also have to contend with added distractions. There are different levels of difficulty and different environments - such as the desert, and the Amazonian rainforest - with a follow-up game for extra practice, where you can choose to practise the bits you found particularly difficult.

Other than that, the 'Create-your-own-test' function is rather wonderful. It lets you choose from a bank of over 600 questions, so that you only need practise the bits you find difficult and don't have to waste time on things that you already know. The built-in dictionary is pretty handy, too: you just click on a word to get a pop-up definition from the *Cambridge Learner's Dictionary*. It saves a lot of time!

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