
Grammar in Action 2: An Illustrated Workbook

Review by Ronald R. Corio, Ohio University

GRAMMAR IN ACTION 2: AN ILLUSTRATED WORKBOOK. Barbara H. Foley with Gretchen M. Dowling. New York: Newbury House, 1990, pp. ix + 147.

Grammar in Action 2 from Newbury House is the second of a three-book series of grammar workbooks for young adult and adult ESL/EFL students. The series progresses from the beginner level in Book 1 to the low-intermediate level in Book 3. Book 2 is geared for high beginning level students and for those unfamiliar with formal grammar.

Grammar in Action 2 is divided into 24 units. Each unit focuses around a picture of an everyday scene or activity and uses this focus to address a particular grammar point. There are approximately eight exercises in each unit; half of them are designed as vocabulary and oral response exercises, the other half as written exercises. In the final exercise of each unit the target structure is used in a reading passage.

Unit 5, "The Backyard," for example, addresses the future "will" and focuses on a drawing of a couple standing on the back deck of their house—he with his fishing gear and she with a list of house and yard chores which are obvious from the picture. She doesn't appear to be too happy and he has a sheepish look—no doubt because his buddies who are waiting for him are witnessing him being lectured. In the first exercise the learner must select a word or

phrase from four groups to form sentences like "I won't mow the lawn today." In the next exercise the learner chooses "it" or "them" from a sequence like: "The lawn is high. David will cut (it them)." Two similar exercises follow in the vocabulary and oral response section of the unit. In the first of four writing exercises the learner is given ten verbs and must use the "will" future with one of them to complete a sentence like: "David _____ the back steps tomorrow." These exercises expand until the learner is writing full-sentence responses. The questions in the final exercise are based upon a short text.

Each unit ends with grammar summary charts that show the target structure and give examples. Some of these charts provide references to specific exercises. An appendix of 33 past tense verbs is provided.

Each unit is self-contained and independent of the others. Teachers concerned about the order of presentation of grammatical structures can use the units of *Grammar in Action 2* in whatever sequence they prefer. The order of grammatical structures in the book follows that of Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982: 208) acquisition hierarchy model with the exception of the possessive, which is presented much earlier in *Grammar in Action 2*.

The use of a picture about an everyday scene or activity gives a thematic approach

to the target grammar structure. This contextual focus gives the exercises a unity and coherence that makes them more effective. Context alone, however, is not enough to motivate and interest learners. They become interested when the context has meaning for them and lamentably that is absent in *Grammar in Action 2*. The communicative language teacher will be challenged to give meaning to these contexts.

Since reference to the picture is needed for many of the exercises, a constant flipping back to the picture is annoying. Foley and Dowling have addressed this problem in some units by providing additional illustrations. The grammar summary charts at the end of each unit—the strong point of *Grammar in Action 2*—are well laid out to provide a helpful reference, including examples, for the target structure. Students will appreciate this feature.

From the learner's point of view the major problem with *Grammar in Action 2* is the repetitive drill work. The oral and written patterned responses lack the meaningfulness required to motivate learners. A case in point is a writing exercise in Unit 1 in which the learner chooses from the prepositions *in*, *on*, and *at* to complete ten sentences about the occupants of a cutaway view of a

five-story office building. A creative teacher can easily develop an exercise with the students and the classroom setting to accomplish the same objectives in a more meaningful and more interesting way.

The communicative approach to language teaching of the seventies and eighties was in part a reaction to the rote learning aspect of audiolingualism. "Meaningful" and "authentic" have become methodological buzzwords, and classroom activities have become more interesting. Newbury House touts the *Grammar in Action* series as providing grammar practice for the "active learner-centered classroom" (*TESOL Newsletter* 24:2, April 1990, p. 12) and as motivating student discussion. The communicative language teacher looking for these features will be disappointed in *Grammar in Action 2*.

Reference

Dulay, Heidi, Marina Burt, and Stephen Krashen. (1982). *Language two*. New York: Oxford University Press.

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