

**COMPREHENSIBLE
GRAMMAR
AND OTHER OXYMORONS
LANGUAGE TEACHERS
CAN EMBRACE**

Dr. Amanda Lanier | Michigan State University

<https://lanier.commons.msu.edu>

INSTRUCTOR PROFILE

Dr. Amanda Lanier



CONTACT INFO

Michigan State University

MASTER OF ARTS



AND CERTIFICATE

MAFLT.CAL.MSU.EDU

linktr.ee/lanierlingvista

COMPREHENSIBLE GRAMMAR

AND OTHER OXYMORONS LANGUAGE TEACHERS CAN EMBRACE

As more and more world language teachers have embraced comprehension-based and acquisition-driven approaches, grammar instruction has become a bigger battleground. It's time to get past the discord and re-discover grammar. This session will explore why and how grammar belongs in your curriculum and ways of incorporating it that empower learners to communicate more effectively.

Slides and resources from this
and other recent presentations:

<https://lanier.commons.msu.edu/presentations>

WHAT LANGUAGE DO YOU TEACH? WHERE?

https://PollEv.com/free_text_polls/AkviktXbUfoEyW4lgJdsf/respond

WHAT CURRICULUM OR TEXTBOOKS DO YOU USE?

https://PollEv.com/free_text_polls/PTwx8WN3XBX77lswDhuZc/respond



WHERE WE ARE GOING

- Believing impossible things before dinner
- Comprehensible or not?
- What grammar really means
- Not telling, but guiding discovery
- Actionable steps to develop strategic learners and language users

LINGUISTICS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHERS

- What do language teachers really need to know about linguistics?
- How can I empower my teacher-learners to investigate language?
- What happens when there are 10 different target languages in a class?

The logo for MAFLT, featuring the letters 'MAFLT' in a bold, green, sans-serif font. The letters are filled with a grid pattern of small green squares. The logo is set against a white rectangular background, which is itself on a dark green background with a purple horizontal bar below it.

MAFLT

The course title 'FLT 845 Language Concepts' is displayed in a white, bold, sans-serif font. It is centered on a dark green rectangular background that is part of a larger graphic featuring a photograph of trees.

FLT 845
Language
Concepts

LEADING A WORLD LANGUAGE PROGRAM

- What does it take to coordinate and collaborate instruction in a large language program?
- What does running a language program look like when one teacher IS the whole program?



DISCORD IN LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

“Each teacher has their own style and their own way of doing things... It's one of the biggest challenges that we face as a large department. Because personalities vary incredibly within the teachers of the department. And it's hard to get people to even agree on what should be taught in particular levels.”
(World language supervisor, Interview, 2022)

HAVE YOU HEARD THIS ADVICE?

Stop teaching grammar

Get rid of the textbook

Also get rid of desks, and even chairs

Target language (L2 or FL) only in the classroom, all the time

Learners should understand everything they hear in class

This is the research-based method (the only research-based method)

Which of these have you tried?
Are these recommendations
serving us well?

Response link: https://PollEv.com/multiple_choice_polls/85oapPZ3ip1BYISrMjJT8/respond

PUTTING OUT THE OLIVE BRANCH

AMANDA: So now with that teacher who insists on giving a lot of high-stakes grammar tests, what are you going to do so you don't have to whisper?

INDY: I'm still the one who has to put out the olive branch. If I don't want this big drop in enrollment when they get to his class.

AMANDA: You don't think he'll meet you halfway?

INDY: Probably not. So I'm giving my students some grammar practice to take home, teaching them some metalanguage. At least I'm priming them for what's going to happen next year.

AMANDA: But you've been teaching grammar all along. They know the patterns.

INDY: Yeah, they've heard all this language before. They can use it. Now it's just organizing. Putting things in boxes. Knowing what to call it.

TO TEACH OR NOT TO TEACH...

**Don't teach
grammar.**

**Your students
have to know
the grammar,
so you have to
teach it.**

GRAMMAR IS LIKE YOUR NOSE



How much do you think about your nose?

When you can't breathe through it?

In yoga class?

If you have ever lost your sense of smell?



WHAT “DON’T TEACH GRAMMAR” MIGHT MEAN

Language without grammar is nonsense.

BUT...

Teaching grammar without connecting it to meaning is also nonsense.

- Don’t lecture about grammar.
- Don’t hold students accountable for (much) grammar terminology (metalanguage)
- Don’t make students master every aspect of a grammar point before you move on.
- Don’t pretend that grammar is one monolithic thing, used the same everywhere, unchanging - people use language very differently in writing and speaking, in different regions, and over time



DEDUCTIVE

DISCOVERING GRAMMAR

“Hmm. Do you notice this pattern in this text?
Why? What do you think is going on?”

“Here is the rule. Now practice it.
Then I’m going to test you on whether
you can use it accurately.”



INDUCTIVE

WHAT GRAMMAR WHEN?

This is your filter:

Communicate Better

Better Learners

Willing to Keep Learning

- Pop-up grammar
- Judicious feedback
- Terms that raise language awareness



WHAT GRAMMAR WHEN?

ACTFL Communicative Modes

(refer to the [Performance Descriptors](#) or the [Can-Do Statements](#))

Interpretive

- Aim to understand
- Mastering the form is not necessary
- Focus on forms that are unfamiliar or confusing

Interpersonal

- Aim to be understood
- Accuracy affects that – so you adjust
- Focus on forms that are needed for the task

Presentational

- Aim to present a clear and effective product
- Mastery helps convey meaning and create the right impression

DECISIONS WE MAKE WHEN WE PLAN

Choosing Materials

- Difficulty is right? What grammar patterns are in the materials?

Planning Tasks

- Clear goals and objectives? What language is needed to convey meaning?

Designing Assessments

- What do they really need to master in order to move on? Do I have to use a test?

Giving Feedback

- How can my feedback raise awareness and encourage further learning?

PUTTING OUT THE OLIVE BRANCH

AMANDA: So now with that teacher who insists on giving a lot of high-stakes grammar tests, what are you going to do so you don't have to whisper?

INDY: I'm still the only teacher in the school with this big drop in enrollment.

AMANDA: You don't


INDY: Probably the only teacher in the school who can take home, teaching... that's going to happen now.

AMANDA: But you've

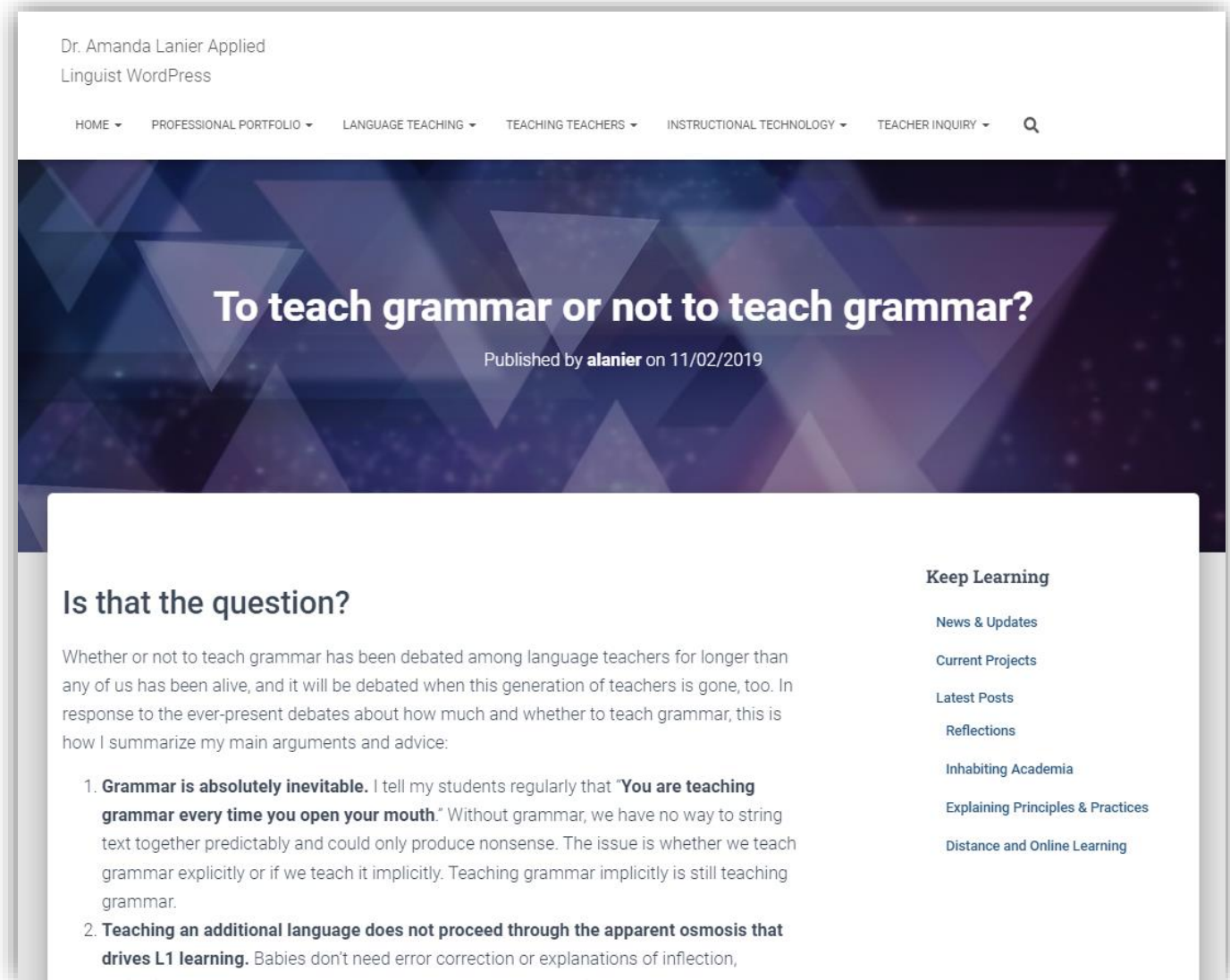
INDY: Yeah, they've heard all this language before. They can use it. Now it's just organizing. Putting things in boxes. Knowing what to call it.

Now what? How can you put out the olive branch?





TO TEACH OR NOT TO TEACH GRAMMAR... IS THAT THE QUESTION?



Dr. Amanda Lanier Applied
Linguist WordPress

HOME ▾ PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIO ▾ LANGUAGE TEACHING ▾ TEACHING TEACHERS ▾ INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY ▾ TEACHER INQUIRY ▾ 🔍

To teach grammar or not to teach grammar?

Published by **alanier** on 11/02/2019

Is that the question?

Whether or not to teach grammar has been debated among language teachers for longer than any of us has been alive, and it will be debated when this generation of teachers is gone, too. In response to the ever-present debates about how much and whether to teach grammar, this is how I summarize my main arguments and advice:

1. **Grammar is absolutely inevitable.** I tell my students regularly that **"You are teaching grammar every time you open your mouth."** Without grammar, we have no way to string text together predictably and could only produce nonsense. The issue is whether we teach grammar explicitly or if we teach it implicitly. Teaching grammar implicitly is still teaching grammar.
2. **Teaching an additional language does not proceed through the apparent osmosis that drives L1 learning.** Babies don't need error correction or explanations of inflection,

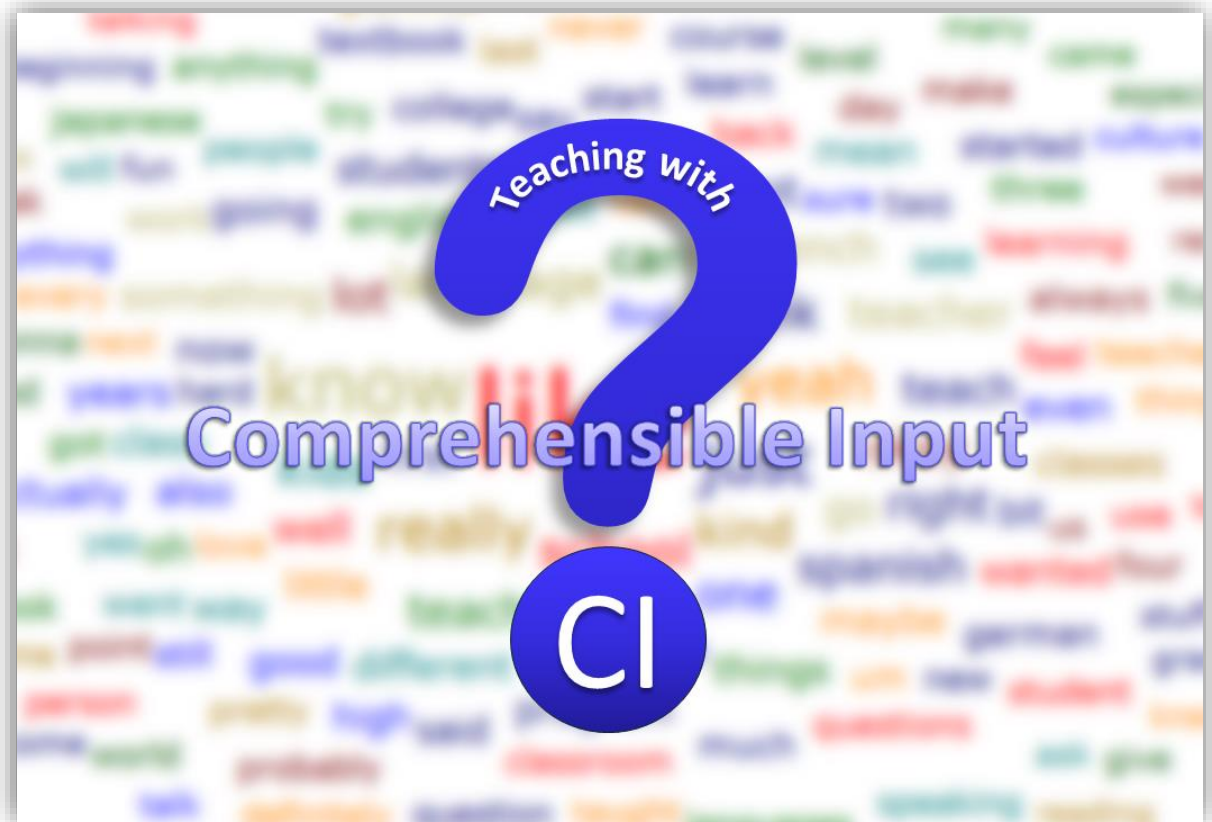
Keep Learning

- News & Updates
- Current Projects
- Latest Posts
- Reflections
- Inhabiting Academia
- Explaining Principles & Practices
- Distance and Online Learning

- <https://lanier.commons.msu.edu/principles-practices/2019/to-teach-grammar-or-not-to-teach-grammar/>

WHAT IS THE OPPOSITE OF COMPREHENSIBLE INPUT?

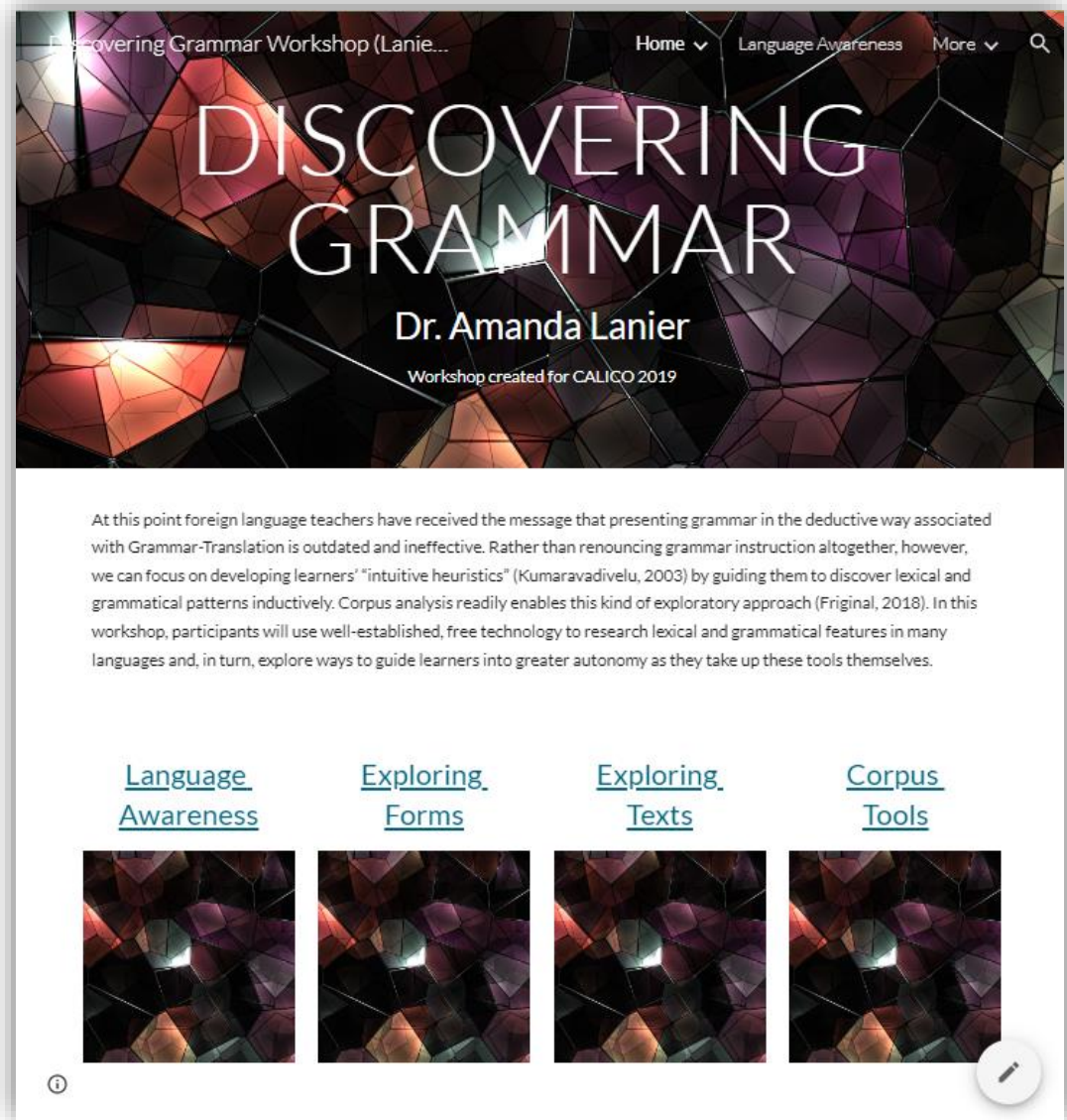
- **INcomprehensible input?**
- **Comprehensible OUTput?**
- **Teaching WITHOUT comprehensible input?**
- **Teaching grammar, vocabulary, and “thematic units” all the time?**





DISCOVERING GRAMMAR

Workshop on tools for teaching grammar inductively



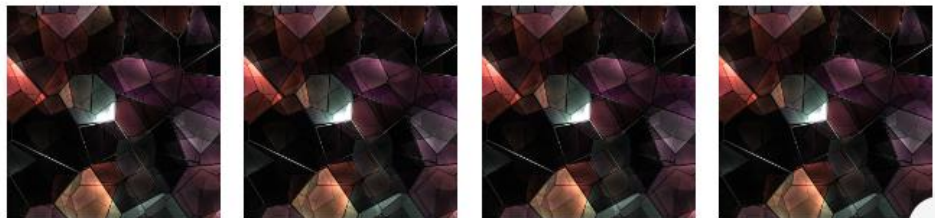
Discovering Grammar Workshop (Lanie... Home Language Awareness More

DISCOVERING GRAMMAR

Dr. Amanda Lanier
Workshop created for CALICO 2019

At this point foreign language teachers have received the message that presenting grammar in the deductive way associated with Grammar-Translation is outdated and ineffective. Rather than renouncing grammar instruction altogether, however, we can focus on developing learners' "intuitive heuristics" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) by guiding them to discover lexical and grammatical patterns inductively. Corpus analysis readily enables this kind of exploratory approach (Friginal, 2018). In this workshop, participants will use well-established, free technology to research lexical and grammatical features in many languages and, in turn, explore ways to guide learners into greater autonomy as they take up these tools themselves.

[Language Awareness](#) [Exploring Forms](#) [Exploring Texts](#) [Corpus Tools](#)



<https://sites.google.com/msu.edu/discoveringgrammar-calico19/home>

WHERE WE HAVE GONE

- Believing impossible things before dinner
- Comprehensible or not?
- What grammar really means
- Not teaching, but guiding discovery
- Actionable steps to develop strategic learners
and language users



DEBATABLE...

Grammar is comprehensible

Thematic units can be relevant

Proficiency might not be your most important goal

Staying in the target language all the time can be a problem

More planning does not mean better lessons

Your textbook is an asset

It's a good idea to talk about yourself (sometimes)

What teachers teach is not always what learners learn

You DO have time for reflection and even research

Response link: <https://PollEv.com/discourses/CNugfVUf1kJd9RqnE3MwK/respond>



Dr. Amanda Lanier

linktr.ee/LanierLingvista

THANK YOU!



ONLINE GRADUATE PROGRAMS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

MASTER OF ARTS

Virtual learning
environment

Real world
relevance



AND CERTIFICATE

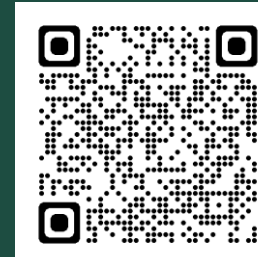


MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

ONLINE GRADUATE PROGRAMS



FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING



Request Info
Prospective Students



Subscribe
Program News List

Virtual learning environment. Real world relevance.

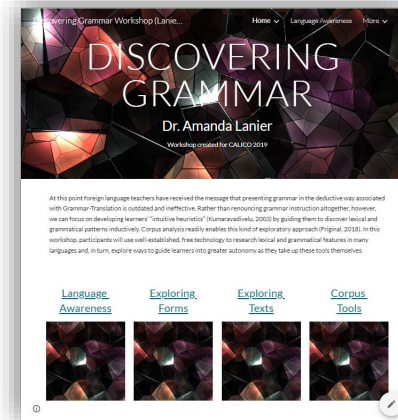
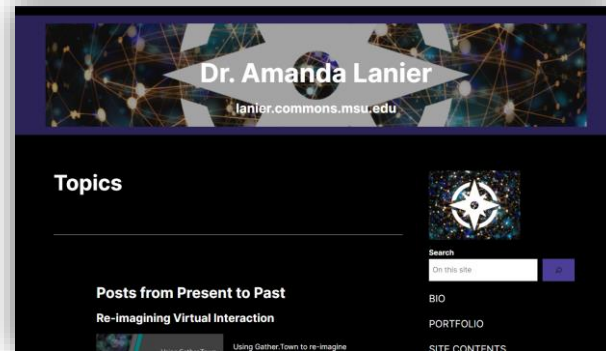
➤ **MAFLT Events**

➤ **Careers in FLT**

REFERENCES & RESOURCES

- American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. (2022). *Guiding principles for language learning*. <https://www.actfl.org/resources/guiding-principles-language-learning>
- American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. (2017). *NCSSFL-ACTFL can-do statements*. <https://www.actfl.org/resources/ncssfl-actfl-can-do-statements>
- Ellis, R. (2006). Current issues in the teaching of grammar: An SLA perspective. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1), 83–107. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40264512>
- Friginal, E. (2018). *Corpus linguistics for English teachers: New tools, online resources, and classroom activities*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315649054>
- Krashen, S. (2013). The case for non-targeted, comprehensible input. *Journal of Bilingual Education Research & Instruction*, 15(1), 102–110.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2003). *Beyond methods: Macrostrategies for language teaching*. Yale University Press.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2015). Research into practice: Grammar learning and teaching. *Language Teaching*, 48(2), 263–280. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444814000408>
- Lichtman, K. (2018). *Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling: An Input-Based Approach to Second Language Instruction*. Routledge. www.routledge.com
- Lortie, D. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. University of Chicago Press.
- Nieto, S. (2015). *Why we teach now*. Teachers College Press.
- Reppen, R. (2010). *Using corpora in the language classroom*. Cambridge Univ Pr.
- Savignon, S. J. (2007). Beyond communicative language teaching: What's ahead? *Journal of Pragmatics*, 39(1), 207–220. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2006.09.004>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



My Website > lanier.commons.msu.edu > Topics and related websites

Tools for Analyzing Language

- Discovering Grammar Workshop site: <https://sites.google.com/msu.edu/discoveringgrammar-calico19/>
- Routledge Frequency Dictionaries (about 15 languages) at [Routledge RFD](#).
- Voyant Tools for Text Analysis (free – web-based): voyant-tools.org.
- Corpus Analysis Software (free downloads): www.laurenceanthony.net.
- Large corpora from Mark Davies: www.english-corpora.org OR www.corpusdelespanol.org (formerly located at corpus.byu.edu).

EXAMINING THE CASE FOR COMPREHENSIBLE INPUT AS AN APPROACH: EVIDENCE FROM REFLEXIVE TEACHERS

AAAL CONFERENCE 2019



PRESENTED BY
DR. AMANDA LANIER
CENTER FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

At this point foreign language teachers have received the message that presenting grammar in the deductive way associated with Grammar-Translation is outdated and ineffective. Rather than renouncing grammar instruction altogether, however, we can focus on developing learners' "intuitive heuristics" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) by guiding them to discover lexical and grammatical patterns inductively. Corpus analysis readily enables this kind of exploratory approach (Friginal, 2018). In this workshop, participants will use well-established, free technology to research lexical and grammatical features in many languages and, in turn, explore ways to guide learners into greater autonomy as they take up these tools themselves.

[Language Awareness](#)



[Exploring Forms](#)



[Exploring Texts](#)



[Corpus Tools](#)



Dr. Amanda Lanier Applied Linguist WordPress

HOME PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIO LANGUAGE TEACHING TEACHING TEACHERS INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY TEACHER INQUIRY Q

To teach grammar or not to teach grammar?

Published by [alanier](#) on 11/02/2019

Is that the question?

Whether or not to teach grammar has been debated among language teachers for longer than any of us has been alive, and it will be debated when this generation of teachers is gone, too. In response to the ever-present debates about how much and whether to teach grammar, this is how I summarize my main arguments and advice:

1. **Grammar is absolutely inevitable.** I tell my students regularly that "You are teaching grammar every time you open your mouth." Without grammar, we have no way to string text together predictably and could only produce nonsense. The issue is whether we teach grammar explicitly or if we teach it implicitly. Teaching grammar implicitly is still teaching grammar.
2. Teaching grammar explicitly is still teaching grammar.

Authentic Materials Analy...

Home Authentic Materials Corpus Analysis Explore with Us Explore Further Resources Q

- Keep Learning
- News & Updates
- Current Projects
- Latest Posts
- Reflections
- Inhabiting Academia
- Explaining Principles & Practices
- Distance and Online Learning

Making Authentic Texts Comprehensible with Corpus Analysis Tools

ACTFL 2019 - Workshop - Friday, November 22

Website for our presentation:
<https://sites.google.com/msu.edu/comprehensible-authentic-fl/>

Interactions

PollEverywhere

Where do you find authentic materials?
What language do you teach?

Full Workshop Description

POLLS

maflt.cal.msu.edu/interactions-alanier

lanier.common.msu.edu/instructional-technology/virtual-interaction

30



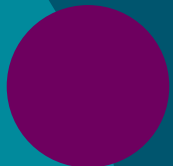
POLLS – ANYTIME RESPONSES

- Language you teach? https://PollEv.com/free_text_polls/AkviktXbUfoEyW4lgJdsf/respond
- What curriculum? https://PollEv.com/free_text_polls/PTwx8WN3XBX77lswDhuZc/respond
- Heard this advice? https://PollEv.com/multiple_choice_polls/85oapPZ3ip1BYISrMjJT8/respond
- Debatable... <https://PollEv.com/discourses/CNugfVUf1kJd9RqnF3MwK/respond>
- Grammar or not? Have you ever said...
https://PollEv.com/multiple_choice_polls/TaloZDzxOlZxgnAawGOAI/respond

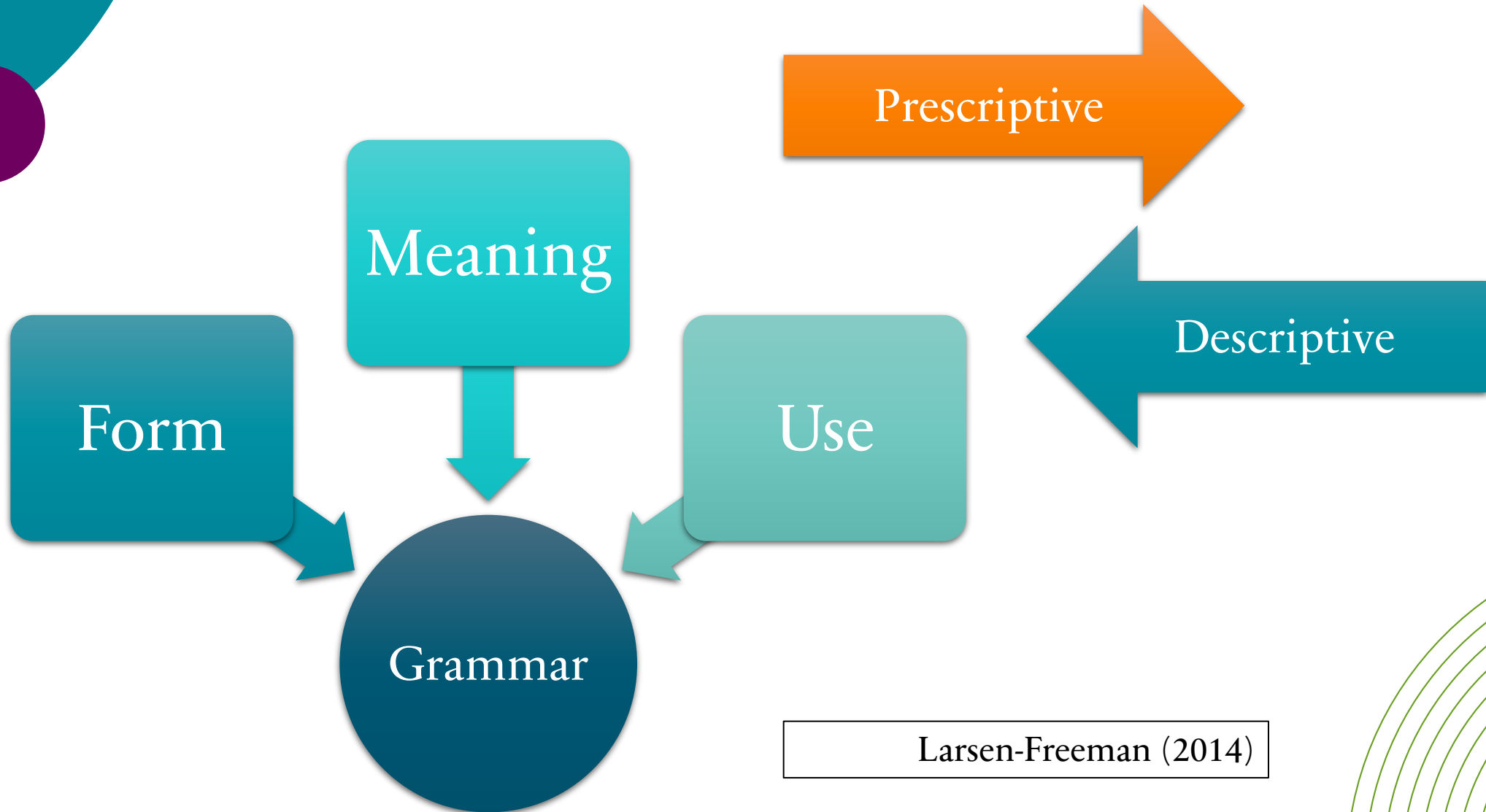
WHAT IS GRAMMAR?

Bonus Slides!

These slides are adapted from my course
FLT 845 Language Concepts
in the Foreign Language Teaching
curriculum at MSU.



WHAT IS GRAMMAR?



Larsen-Freeman (2014)



FORM, MEANING, AND USE

Forms that usually don't translate directly or have different forms for different contexts:


It is... and There are...

Future “tense” –
form and
meaning

Passive voice
and reflexive
verbs

Question forms
– which one
when?

Conditionals –
verbs in each
clause



EXPRESSING THE FUTURE IN ENGLISH

New plan

Plan

Strong plan

Plan with itinerary

Modal – obligation

Non-finite form

Which one is the right form?

- I will leave for the conference on Thursday.
- I am going to leave for the conference on Thursday.
- I am leaving for the conference on Thursday.
- I leave for the conference on Thursday.
- I should leave for the conference on Thursday.
- I have decided to leave for the conference on Thursday.

It is raining.

www.reverso.net/translationresults

French

Fact: Londoners have 101 ways to say that it is raining...
↳ Les Londoniens ont 107 façons de dire qu'il pleut.

Italian

Imagine a cold wind, when it is raining.
↳ Immaginate un vento freddo, mentre sta piovendo.

Russian

I couldn't go out because it was raining.
↳ Я не мог выйти на улицу, потому что шёл дождь.

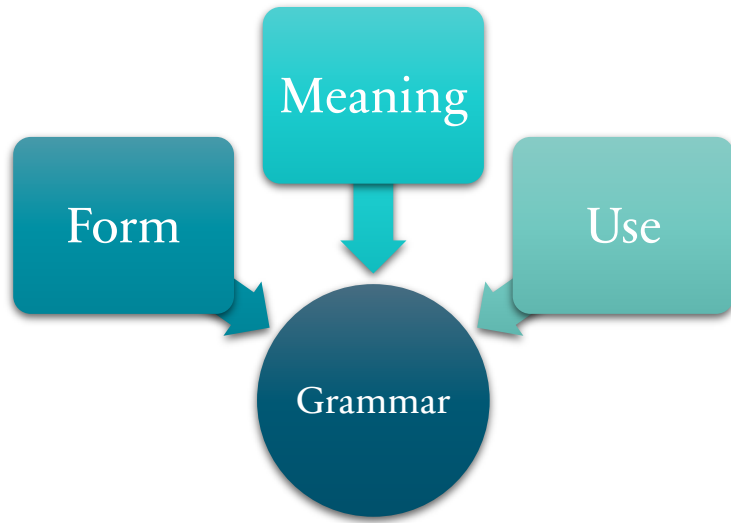
Arabic

Whether the weather is rainy or sunny
↳ سواء كان الطقس مشمس أو ممطر

Japanese

If it is raining, I won't go out tonight.
↳ 雨が降っていたら、今夜は外出しない。

WHAT IS GRAMMAR?




- Morphemes (inflection)
- Functions (tense, aspect)
- Phrases and phrase structure
- Sentence-level syntax (word order)
- Constructions like:
as ___ as a ___ ; je ne ___ pas

TEACHER KNOWLEDGE OF GRAMMAR

Should not be
true of *you*!

“what teachers lack is an understanding of how their own language works, let alone others, including interlanguages. Their metalinguistic awareness is limited to a set of labels plus an ordinary native speaker’s sensitivity to ungrammatical constructions, with a very limited capacity to explain why they are ungrammatical or what the logic behind grammaticality is”
(Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 179)



“ Grammar is a system of lexicogrammatical patterns that are used to make meaning in appropriate ways ”

(Larsen-Freeman, 2014, p. 258)