A study of the teaching and learning of English grammar with special reference to the foundation course in the Norwegian senior high school

Burner, Tony

Abstract
What do we mean by "grammar"? How do we teach English grammar today, and why?

In this thesis, I deal with diachronic as well as synchronic aspects, and theoretical as well as practical aspects of the teaching and learning of English grammar. In the theoretical part of the thesis, I write about various types of grammar: theoretical, functional, and pedagogical grammars. Pedagogical grammars are grammars adopted for the purpose of teaching (didactics); I try to shed light on the relations between what we traditionally think is grammar and pedagogical grammars (Chapter 2). From when can we speak of a "method" or "approach" in grammar teaching? The Grammar-Translation Method is my point of departure (implemented from circa 1840). I investigate how and why grammar has been taught the way it has up to the present, and refer to Norwegian syllabuses where appropriate. This diachronic study makes us understand the legacy of current grammar teaching (Chapter 3). My claim is that grammar teaching is to some extent neglected today.

To what extent does grammar play a role in the teaching of English as a foreign language in the General studies’ foundation course (“grunnkurs allmennfag”)? I have attempted to answer this question by analyzing the books that are currently most used in the foundation course (Chapter 4), and by interviewing teachers in the foundation course (Chapter 5), with the aim of finding out how grammar is treated and teachers’ attitudes to it.

As for my main findings, the type of exercises and their quantity vary greatly in the textbooks, most significantly between Passage and Imagine versus Targets and Flying Colours. Furthermore, the treatment of grammar in the textbooks is unsystematic. Workbooks and grammar books are rarely used in current teaching, linguistic competence (in the syllabus from 1994; R94) is too little emphasized and interpreted differently by the teachers, and the practice of teaching grammar varies, both quantitatively and qualitatively, to a great extent from class to class. Moreover, the most striking finding was the disparities in attitudes and teaching practices between teachers with “hovedfag” and those without. Finally, this thesis is probably the first, if not the first, to bring forth teachers’ views on the forthcoming syllabus (in force from January 2006).