Why I published an online course for teachers on spoken grammar

By Ken Paterson, UK

A few years ago, I co-wrote a textbook for EFL students, titled 'A Handbook of Spoken Grammar' (Delta Publishing, 2011). Our aim was to bring into the classroom a selection of the grammatical items highlighted in the corpus research of academics such as Michael McCarthy and Ronald Carter.

To give you a flavour, here are a few of the items we included:

a. *Heads* (changing the normal word order of a statement or question by placing the significant element at the front) as in: '**That new French restaurant on Park Street**, does it look any good?'

b. *Tails* (typically, expanding a pronoun into a noun phrase at the end of an utterance) as in: 'It's a great place for a weekend break, **Brighton**.'

c. *Vague category phrases* (phrases that refer to similar things without being precise) as in: 'She's gone for a walk **or something**.'

d. *Response tokens* (words used by listeners to engage with what the speaker has just said) as in: '…so just call me if there's anything else you need.' '**Brilliant**. **Perfect**.'

e. *Vocatives* (the use of names or substitutes for names) as in: 'Can we leave quietly, please, **everyone**?'

The reaction to the book was encouraging. (In 2013, it was shortlisted for a British Council ELTon award in the category 'Innovation in Learner Resources'.) As time passed, however, I also heard from teachers who were looking for more flexible ways of engaging with spoken grammar in their classrooms. Coming from a background in print publication, my initial response was to think of producing a book for teachers – until I realised that what I really wanted to do was 'talk' to colleagues, much as I do at conferences and workshops, rather than write for them. So, I decided to produce my first online course.

My aim, as far as possible, was to create a low-tech, classroom-style environment. I would film my talking head, and place it next to a kind of whiteboard, where I could show (and read out) language examples, short dialogues and suggestions for activities. Meanwhile, all the material shown on the whiteboard, as well as additional exercises, role plays and simulations,

would be available as a downloadable (and editable) text resource, allowing teachers to produce lesson plans to suit their own situations.

The transition from a student book to a teacher resource gave me the satisfying opportunity, after a four-year break from spoken grammar, to produce entirely fresh material, and to discover new items that we had overlooked in the earlier publication. One of these is the demonstrative *wh*-cleft, a very common feature in conversation, as Biber et al. point out in the 'Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English'. The typical pattern looks like this:

that's + what/why/how/where/when…+ dependent clause, e.g.:

A: So you normally go the market?
B: Of course. **That's where you always get the cheapest vegetables**.

I also had the chance to re-organise the 20 discrete units of the book into the five broad categories that I thought might appeal to teachers: word order and ellipsis; emphasis; vague language; marking spoken discourse; and response language.

The business of creating a 'home studio', on the other hand, in which to film and edit, was rather taxing for a digital immigrant like me. In the end, I found a platform – Udemy.com – that was user-friendly, and the course was launched in November 2018 as 'Spoken Grammar: a Guide for English Language Teachers: Techniques and materials for teaching new items of conversational grammar.'

In terms of learning outcomes, the course has the following:

- At the end of the course, you will be able to describe spoken grammar, and explain the reasons for teaching it.
- You will be able to teach 15 key items of spoken grammar that learners can use in natural conversations and online interaction.
- You will be able to design your own course in spoken grammar, using the materials and advice provided.

And as a requirement, it simply states:

- You should be a teacher of English as a Foreign or Second Language to students at intermediate level or above.

My hope is that the teachers who enrol, wherever they are in the world, will find the course not only useful and engaging, but also, as they shape the resources to their own circumstances, personal.

The link to the course is:
https://www.udemy.com/spoken-grammar-a-guide-for-english-language-teachers/

References

Paterson, K., C. Caygill & R. Sewell (2011) A Handbook of Spoken Grammar Delta Publishing

Carter, R. & M. McCarthy (2006) <u>Cambridge Grammar of English</u> CUP
Carter, R. & M. McCarthy (1997) <u>Exploring Spoken English</u> CUP
McCarthy, M. & R. Carter (1995) "Spoken Grammar: what is it and how can we teach it?" <u>ELT Journal</u> 49/3
The following article, updating research on spoken grammar, appeared after the publication of 'The Handbook of Spoken Grammar':
Carter, R. & M. McCarthy (2015) "Spoken Grammar: Where Are We and Where Are We Going?" <u>Applied Linguistics</u> 1/21
Biber, D., S. Johansson, G. Leech, S. Conrad & E. Finegan (1999) <u>Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English</u> Longman *(pages 961-3 for the demonstrative wh-cleft)*
Paterson, K. (2018) <u>Spoken Grammar: A Guide for English Language Teachers</u> Udemy.com

The Author

Ken Paterson has been a freelance writer of grammar materials for students and teachers of English since 2011. Before that he was director of the Centre for English Learning and Teaching at the University of Westminster in London, where he taught on a number of programmes, including EFL, a BA in English Language, and MAs in TESOL and Translation. He has a website at www.kenpatersonwriter.com