

English for University: a selection of exercises for intermediate students – a book review

ISSN 2657-9774; <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2025.02.12>

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English for University: a selection of exercises for intermediate students is directed to Polish adult learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) who attend English courses at the intermediate level (B1/B2). Andrzej Fretschel-Hojarski, the author of the publication, is an experienced FL teacher working in the Institute of English Studies at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland. As the author states in the Forward section, the book “offers short grammatical explanations as well as activities ... intended as an ancillary resource for students and teachers studying or working externally” (Fretschel-Hojarski, 2022: 7). Taking into account the popularity of external forms of learning in Polish tertiary education and the limited number of classes devoted to teaching foreign languages, the textbook is a welcome contribution to the poor selection of teaching materials addressed to this group of learners available on the Polish book market. In relation to the ERL framework, the book addresses the topics discussed in the *Language and Schooling* strand. Additionally, this article aims to enhance our understanding of the active dimension of linguistic education, and more specifically various factors that implicitly and explicitly influence grammar instruction.

The structure of the book is very clear. The book consists of 22 chapters, each focusing on a different grammatical item. The following are discussed: Present Simple vs. Present Continuous, Future Forms, Present Perfect and Past Simple, Asking Questions, *For*, *Since*, Comparatives and Superlatives, Articles, Modals, Past Perfect, Passive Voice, Modals of Deduction, Reflexive Pronouns, First Conditional, Time Clauses, Second Conditional, Indirect and Direct Speech, Gerunds, Infinitives, Third Conditional, Quantifiers, Relative Pronouns. The last chapter offers review exercises covering all the grammar structures discussed in the previous sections.

Each chapter begins with a short presentation divided into *What*, *How* and *Why* sections. The *What* section names the grammar in focus, the *How* part is devoted to the form, i.e. morphology of the grammar item and the *Why* component discusses the rule of use, i.e. provides the most crucial information concerning how the grammar item functions in a wider communicative context. To make the material more motivating, each presentation section is accompanied by a quotation; e.g. the chapter devoted to modals of deduction starts with Hercule Poirot’s words: “The impossible could not have happened, therefore the impossible must be possible in spite of appearances.” Explanations are supported by sentences, time lines, tables and graphs, which act as clear illustrations of rules regarding the form and use of the grammar item in focus. Each explanation section is followed by a set of practice activities, logically sequenced from accuracy-oriented drills to more open-ended fluency activities.

To obtain a more insightful picture of the book, I suggest exploring the approach to teaching grammar adopted by the textbook. Thornbury, a well-respected teacher and teacher educator, claims that “[t]he role of grammar in the curriculum is hotly debated. How it should be taught is equally contentious” (2019: 8). In fact, the status of grammar in a FL syllabus has changed over the last decades along with the understanding of what grammar teaching should involve. Thornbury (2019) distinguishes two approaches to grammar teaching – the *scholastic approach* and the *natural approach*, which can act as extremes on the continuum of various perspectives on grammar instruction. The *scholastic approach* has the following characteristics:

- It is **academic** as it adheres to how classical languages, such as Latin and Greek, were taught. It favours a traditional structure of instruction, starting from explanation of rules conducted in learners’ L1 and followed by practice which involved translation out of and into the target language²⁵.

²⁵ These principles are implemented in the Grammar Translation Method, popular in the 40s and 50s of the 20th c.

- It applies **explicit instruction**²⁶, which entails direct explanation of grammar rules with the use of terminology and encouraging learners to develop metalinguistic awareness of the rules.
- It is **bilingual** - both presentation and practice require the teacher to use students' L1.
- It promotes **rule-learning**²⁷, which means advocating to the principles of a deductive approach. Teaching starts with the presentation of a rule and is followed by examples in which the rule is applied.
- It focuses on **written language**. Language in examples and practice activities reflects the grammar of written language.
- It focuses on **accuracy**. Teachers expect learners to produce error-free sentences; correctness is reinforced through drills and students' errors are corrected.

The other extreme, the *natural approach*, carries the following features:

- Grammar instruction is **experiential**; learners experience grammar by participating in meaningful communicative contexts.
- It promotes **implicit learning**²⁸. It requires the teacher to provide students with practice opportunities so that learners can develop the feel of the grammar without engaging conscious attention to the grammar items. In practical terms, this can involve "dealing with grammar items as they arise in the course of communicative activities" (Thornbury 2002: 23).
- It is **monolingual**; only the target language is used in grammar teaching and translation is rejected.
- It encourages **rule-discovery**. At the stage of presentation, the teacher adopts the principles of inductive teaching, which involves starting with some examples and guiding students to discover the rule.
- It focuses on **spoken language**. Communicative activities reflect real life situations and enhance learners' interaction skills. With the advent of language corpora, both teachers and learners gain access to examples of authentic spoken language, which can function as models in practicing communicative skills.
- It focuses on **fluency**. The main aim of instruction is to practice communication by means of communicating. Teacher feedback concentrates on learners' abilities to understand and pass messages. It may happen that learners become more fluent at the expense of accuracy.

Thornbury (2019) notes that nowadays the two perspectives can be blended, depending on a number of factors such as the age of learners, the intensity of instruction and the aims of the course. Which type of approach is adopted in *English for University*? Below a checklist to evaluate the publication is presented.

Table 1: Checklist to identify the approach to teaching grammar adopted by *English for University*.

Features of instruction	Yes / no (the presence or absence of the feature)
academic	yes/no
explicit instruction	yes
bilingual	yes
rule-learning	yes
written language	yes
accuracy	yes
experiential learning	yes
implicit learning	no
monolingual	no

²⁶ Another term for *explicit instruction* is *overt grammar teaching*. The two terms are often used interchangeably.

²⁷ *Rule-learning*, *rule-driven instruction* and the *didactic approach* are the terms often used interchangeably.

²⁸ Another term for *implicit instruction* is *covert grammar teaching*.

rule-discovery	no
spoken language	yes
fluency	yes

The findings of the analysis indicate that the publication is an example of a synergy of the two philosophies of teaching grammar, with more features typical for the scholastic approach.

As regards the **academic criterion**, *English for University* adopted a traditional sequence, i.e. explanation followed by practice activities. However, unlike in the classical approach (and the Grammar Translation method) rules are explained in a foreign language (English) with certain words translated into students' native language (Polish). For example, in the chapter devoted to Past Perfect (p.34) two terms occur: "past participle" and "III forma czasownika", in the lesson concerning Passive Voice (p.38) "subject" and "podmiot" ; in the rule of use of Reflexive Pronouns (p. 44) "reciprocity" and "wzajemność". Translation is also a technique used in practice activities. In Activity 6 p. 24 the learner is asked to translate a text about Kornel Makuszyński from Polish into English, thereby practicing the use of Past Simple and Present Perfect. Whereas Activity 4 p. 70 requires the student to transform English sentences from active into passive voice, and then translate them into Polish, which can facilitate learners' understanding of the use of passive voice as well as differences between the role of passive voice in Polish and English²⁹.

The textbook applies the principles of **explicit instruction**, which involves direct explanation of grammar rules with the use of terms, some of which translated in Polish. An undeniable advantage of this systematic way of exposing students to short texts about the grammar of English is creating an opportunity that can enhance learners' metalinguistic awareness of the English language and the rules that govern it.

The textbook encourages **rule-learning** (i.e. deductive learning); explanation sections present rules along with examples that illustrate the rules. There are no attempts to stimulate students to infer rules on the basis of given samples of the language.

As for the focus on **written/spoken language**, it seems that although written language is the dominant mode in both presentation sections and practice activities, spoken language is not totally neglected. Learners are exposed to the written form of spoken language, e.g. samples of everyday talk. Additionally, in practice activities students are instructed to produce or complete short dialogues, getting involved, thereby, in everyday conversations and understanding the communicative functions of the grammar structures explained earlier.

The textbook caters for both **accuracy** and **fluency**. Drill-like activities require students to attend to the form, e.g. in traditional exercises learners complete sentences with the correct forms. Open activities engage learners in real life communication, encouraging their creativity.

The exercises promote **experiential learning**. Despite its visible focus on the academic manner of teaching grammar, *English for University* provides learners with plenty of opportunities to experience learning grammar. In the explanation sections, students analyze grammar structures, practicing the use of metalanguage, i.e. terms used to describe grammar structures and explain grammar rules. Practice activities offer a variety of exercises, e.g. drills (focus on accuracy of form), interactive tasks (pairwork or groupwork), personalization (students relate particular grammar items to their personal life), games, quizzes, translation. Learners are exposed to a number of authentic examples of the use of grammar, such as songs (the one by Adele), e-mails, postcards, newspaper headlines, limericks.

There are some other advantages of this publication which make it worth recommending. An undeniable merit is the fact that the textbook seems to be well-suited to adult learners. It capitalizes on certain features adults possess, such as their ability to deal with the abstractness of rules and longer attention span, which allows them "to focus on isolated linguistic features, as required when grammar structures are introduced"

²⁹ Translation "can be used as an invaluable tool" (Tabakowska 2013: 174). See Tabakowska (2013) for a more detailed discussion of the merits of this technique in language instruction.

(Pawlak 2015: 46). Since adult learners value corrective feedback and self-evaluation (Pawlak 2015), the book would seem more complete if it contained the answer key in reference to drill-like activities. The author may like to consider adding this useful component to the next edition of the publication. There is one more aspect of the book that I would like to point out – the use of terminology in explanation sections. There might be some terms that learners are not familiar with due to insufficient metalanguage. This should be taken into consideration when recommending the book to students as a self-study resource.

In summary, *English for University* is a fairly successful textbook, providing interesting material for traditional classes as well as self-study. Its greatest merit is presenting grammar not as an isolated aspect of foreign language competence or a list of complicated rules but as a useful ability integrated with other language skills, indispensable in real life meaningful communication. I hope it will be welcomed by both students and teachers, and will make their EFL lessons more enjoyable and effective.

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