



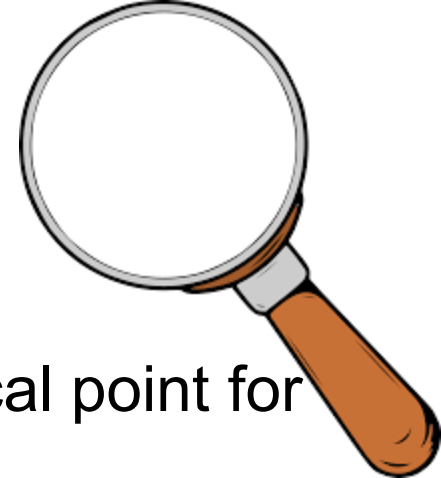
Teaching Grammar in the ELT Classroom: Teachers' Challenges and Perceptions

Dr. Antonella Valeo
York University, Toronto, Canada

*Innovation in Language Learning
International Conference*

Florence, Italy, November 2025

Focus on Grammar...



Central to second language teaching and a focal point for textbooks, TESOL education, and research.

Yet, much research has focused on the effects of theory-driven grammar teaching interventions on learning outcomes – *how to teach*.

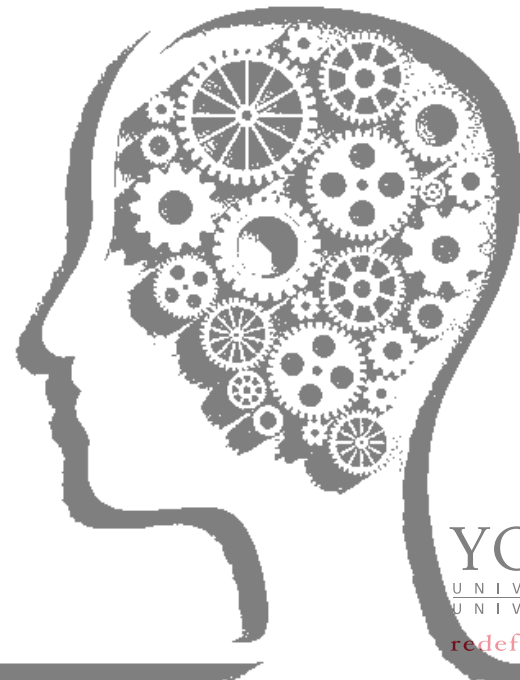
➡ ***How do teachers make decisions about teaching grammar? Why do they do what they do?***

Focus on Teachers

Teachers are rational professionals who “make judgements and carry out decisions in an uncertain and complex environment “ (Shavelson & Stern, 1981, 456)

Teaching is a process by which “curriculum is interpreted and acted upon” (Clark & Peterson, 1984, 1).

Teacher Cognition - *what teachers know, believe, and feel influences their classroom practice and that **context** is a powerful mediator of the influence of teacher cognition on teacher practice* (Borg, 2015).



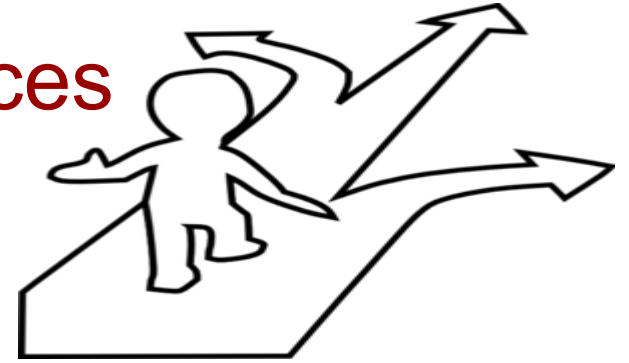
What teachers know – knowledge about grammar



The link between grammatical knowledge and classroom practice is complex and non-linear, overlapping with beliefs and assumptions on a spectrum (Wood, 1996).

Awareness and perception of grammatical knowledge influences teacher confidence and influences teaching approaches (e.g., Borg, 2011; Nazari & Allahyer, 2012) 1996).

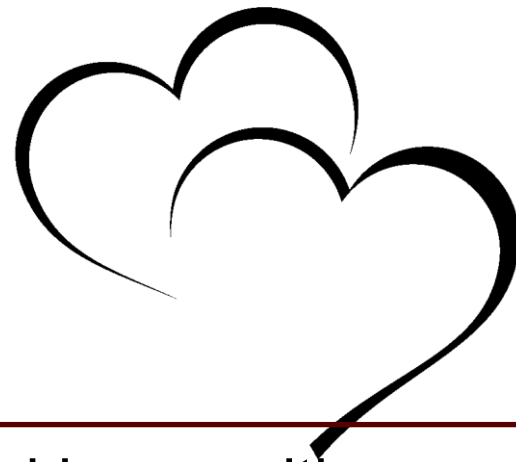
What teachers believe – teacher beliefs and preferences



Beliefs and classroom practices often misalign (e.g., Adhikari, 2017; Sato & Oyanedel, 2019).

Prior learning experiences and daily teaching influence beliefs more than formal teacher education (e.g., Jeurissen, 2012; Liviero, 2017);

What teachers feel – affect and emotion



Overlooked in research dominated by cognitive models of language teaching and learning, yet integral to teacher beliefs and decision-making - positive emotions (confidence, passion) and negative (anxiety, frustration). (Richards, 2022).

Few studies highlight how emotions like anxiety affect grammar teaching (e.g., Watson, 2012).

Study Design & Goals

Exploratory approach and in-depth interviews asking 10 teachers to:

- describe practice and share what they consider when making decisions about teaching grammar, and
- discuss education, learning histories, and professional and personal experiences

Today's focus -

(1) How do teachers *perceive* the challenges of grammar teaching in the classroom?

(2) How do these *perceptions* have an impact on their practice and decision making?

Context and Participants

- ❑ Largest province in Canada with nearly 40% of Canada's population; provincial professional association over 4500 members
- ❑ Teachers taught across five different programs and context – settlement, EAP, ESP, Workplace, tutoring,
- ❑ 8/10 multilingual
- ❑ Ages ranged from 25 to over 60; more than half over 50
- ❑ 4/10 had graduate degrees; 3/10 had education degrees; 3/10 international teacher credentials
- ❑ 6/10 international teaching experience

1) Context matters – “it depends”



- **Compromise:** Time constraints and rigid structures force teachers to make choices – “crunched for time...didn’t teach it well”
- **Adapt:** shifted approaches – “reset”
- **Resist:** Some embedded grammar creatively despite rigid curricula – “snuck in a few things..”

2) Knowledge – “If you fake it, they will know”

- essential to teacher identity – *“losing credibility in front of the class”*
- vital for building student trust. – students *“lose respect for you if you don’t know your stuff”*
- Anxious about answering student questions, avoided unfamiliar grammar topics so they don’t lose credibility – stay on *“safe grammar”*
- Want to teach different levels to push themselves to learn new grammar – *“hungry”* for new grammar



3) Teacher education – “teach myself”

- TESL programs don't fully prepare them to teach grammar in all contexts
 - “so many *English structures*” ...
- Ongoing self-study a professional responsibility - always have to “*brush up*”
- Little focus on strategies over form or assumed teachers already knew the grammar
- Learned more from classroom experiences; mentors, curriculum design, and diverse teaching contexts.



What does this tell us?

- Grammar teaching is perceived as *inherently stressful and emotional*.
- Individual teachers' perceptions of the same context create *affordances and constraints* in unique ways.
- Teaching grammar a core responsibility and *important dimension of teacher identity*.
- Teacher cognition an *interconnected system of perceptions*

What does this mean?

TESOL programs

- raise awareness of diverse teaching contexts and address affective dimensions of grammar teaching

Professional associations

- support independently learning across careers stages; provide forum for professional community building

Employers

- orientation and support for teachers navigating change within and across contexts.

Researchers:

- investigate teacher cognition as dynamic and emergent rather than stable and predictable.

Next steps...

- What aspects of program context influence teachers' cognition more extensively or profoundly than others?
- What personal and professional experiences mediate this influence?



*Questions, Comments,
Suggestions?*

Diagramming

Sentence
Types

Sentence
Purposes

Parts of
Speech

Sentence
Parts

Phrases &
Clauses