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Review of Edgar Schuster's *Breaking the Rules: Liberating Writers Through Innovative Grammar Instruction* (2003)

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Abstract. *Breaking the Rules: Liberating Writers Through Innovative Grammar Instruction* (2003) is a book on teaching English Grammar, composition, and practicing language rules efficiently in a more independent and individualistic sense away from old approaches of Grammar- Translation Method that have been used since ages. Edgar Schuster is a well-known author for his great interest in studying and exploring English Grammar and mastering structures. He is also known for his influential and important works that contributed much to educational development and innovation. He has published several articles and textbooks related to Grammar instruction, language planning, and writing and composition. Schuster has a broad and long experience in teaching English in secondary schools and colleges for more than forty years, and has won many awards for his distinguished teaching and research. He has been a master teacher at Harvard university, and an author of many important and significant books On Grammar and sentence structure, such as *Sentence Mastery: A Sentence-Combing Approach Level B*, (1989), *Grammar: Usage and Style* (1965), *American English Today: The tools of English* (1977), and many other significant books including the name of this book reviewed in this paper.

Keywords. Innovative, Grammar Instruction, Edgar Schuster, Composition, Mastery

Breaking the Rules: Liberating Writers Through Innovative Grammar Instruction (2003) is a book on teaching English Grammar, composition, and practicing language rules efficiently in a more independent and individualistic sense away from the old approaches of Grammar- Translation Method that have been widely used since ages. Edgar Schuster is a well-known author for his great interest in studying and exploring English Grammar and mastering structures. He is also known for his influential and important works that contributed much to educational development and innovation. He has published several articles and textbooks related to grammar instruction, language planning, and writing and composition. Schuster has a broad and long experience in teaching English in secondary schools and colleges for more than forty years, and has won many awards for his distinguished teaching and research. He has been a master teacher at Harvard university, and an author of many important and significant books On grammar and sentence structure, such as *Sentence Mastery: A Sentence-Combing Approach Level B*, (1989), *Grammar: Usage and Style* (1965), *American English Today: The*

tools of English (1977), and many other significant books including the name of this book reviewed in this paper.

Edgar Schuster, in this specialized and informative book, encourages teachers, instructors, and educators to avoid the old Grammar-Translation Method, which relies heavily on teaching grammar through mere imitation, rote learning, translation, and classical tests. The book invites the readers, language practitioners, experts, and specialists to reconsider the way English grammar should be taught for students. The book calls for new and modern techniques and methods for teaching English grammar which he considers an essential part of our changing world. Instruction is always a demanding process that necessitates the use of variety and diversity inside the classroom, which leads to stimulating student's interest and motivation, and thus creates an influential and unconventional learning environment, especially when it comes to teaching grammar. Schuster's *Breaking the Rules* innovates new approaches in teaching grammar far from the traditional and typical methods that instructors and teachers used to apply in classrooms. Inspiringly, Schuster employs the methods of communicative interaction that make learning and teaching grammar more than easy and interesting. Besides the variety and abundance of novel and creative approaches in teaching English Grammar, he brilliantly suggests provocative questions and methods which unravel the mystery of English Grammar that makes it accessible and approachable by the second language learners, which certainly constitutes the central point in this fruitful book.

The title of Schuster's book is suggestive and indicative, but we believe it is not a matter of breaking the rules rather it is more of building and creating new approaches towards a breakthrough in teaching grammar. The author deals with the grammatical aspects as lively beings which need to be reformed and brought back to life with new implications, modifications, and changes. Moreover, he suggests new teaching methods that guide both the learner and the teacher, particularly when dealing with the sentence as an important grammatical unit that holds both the structure and the constituents of the language itself. The book contains new instructional procedures that facilitate the process of teaching grammar as an essential and inseparable part of the language. It gives more subtle details about each grammatical element of the sentence by stating the conventional way of understanding it and then presenting and explaining a novel way of dealing with it. In fact, the book combines instructional procedures with intended goals towards achieving a full understanding of the grammatical rules that show us the differences between the traditional way of teaching and the new suggested ones.

Schuster in this book offers hundreds of grammar activities which simulate real life situations that learners face in their everyday life. However, the writer does not diminish the role of the theoretical approach in teaching grammar rather he stresses both the practical usage and the theory, thus he uses a unique way that creates more enthusiasm and excitement which, in turn, paves the way towards challenge and success. Moreover, he continues to propose solutions that enable both the teachers and the learners to analyze and solve potential problems whenever they happen in different contexts. Despite the fact that the author of this book has given plenty and various activities on each grammatical concept, he explained thoroughly through examples all possible ways of understanding each grammatical rule. His book contains comprehensive exercises that give sufficient and thoughtful feedback on every certain instance. Such a book would certainly fit for all levels due to its rich variety of carefully selected topics.

With an interesting sense of professional and profound understanding, Schuster adds a lot of his accumulative knowledge of his own educational experience to avoid conventionality of teaching grammar; he criticizes the usage of traditional methods and procedures used by teachers and educators to teach grammar referring to these rules as “myth rules”, saying, “there

too often, students are taught myth rules. " (p. 6). Schuster asserts that using the correct way of teaching grammar is the essence of language learning process which leads to success and accomplishment, emphasizing the idea that grammar is prone to change and development like language itself.

The book's simplicity in demonstrating grammar is mixed with a relative complexity and sophistication, a thing, which makes it prone to more reflection and consideration. In addition to that, the book has substituted the conventional ways of teaching with much more reflective and thought-provoking techniques. Schuster is offering much freedom of choice towards instruction and emphasizing the role of the students in grammar instruction. He stresses the importance of the student-centered approach through interactive and communicative techniques that give more flexibility and freedom to students to express and form grammatical patterns without fear and anxiety that hinder their ability to learn grammar. In a more critical and inquisitive sense, Schuster offers thrilling and provocative activities which encourage and motivate students towards learning through raising questions, using intellect, and more importantly challenging grammar, he says "most important, they will encourage students to examine rules and to break them. Why? because the unexamined rule is not worth keeping." (p.6)

From an educational and didactic perspective, we think that Schuster's *Breaking the Rules* is a suitable and successful book for all learners who wish to have more knowledge on how to understand English grammar in a more thrilling and exciting way that combines together the essence of simplicity, spontaneity, naturalness, and critical thinking. The book challenges the stereotypical rumors about grammar and syntax as being complex, rigid, and difficult to understand. It can greatly help students and teachers unravel and clear up the mysteries and misconceptions related English grammar instruction on all levels.

References

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