

Institution: University College London		
Unit of Assessment: UoA27 - English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Informing and improving grammar teaching in English schools and beyond: the free web-based Englicious platform		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Professor Bas Aarts	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of English Linguistics	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 1989 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p><i>Englicious</i> is a free online platform which contains a library of original English language teaching resources sourced from corpora developed at the Survey of English Usage (SEU; a research unit based in the UCL English Department) that is accessed 438,000 times per year. The resources empower teachers of Key Stages 1-5 pupils to teach grammar in accordance with new requirements introduced in the 2014 National Curriculum for England. An associated programme of CPD workshops and INSET courses (online from April 2020) trained 800 teachers, leading to improvements in professional capacity to teach grammar to KS1-KS5 pupils. Income generated from the programme (GBP15,000 - 20,000 per annum) was re-invested into the <i>Englicious</i> online platform, contributing to a 100% increase in teachers subscribing to access free teaching resources since 2017. Beyond its main national focus on teachers in England, the <i>Englicious</i> website has achieved global impact through the provision of English teaching resources for over 14,000 registered users (including 9,700 teachers); the website is used in 227 countries, predominantly the UK, Indonesia, India, the US and the Philippines.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>The Survey of English Usage at UCL carries out research in English grammar and usage. The SEU has created two language databases (corpora): the <i>British Component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-GB)</i> (www.ucl.ac.uk/english-usage/projects/ice-gb) and the <i>Diachronic Corpus of Present-Day Spoken English (DCPSE)</i> (https://www.ucl.ac.uk/english-usage/projects/dcpse/). These corpora are fully tagged and grammatically analysed which allows for the retrieval of grammatical patterns. Researchers at all levels can conduct searches of the corpus with the innovative exploration software ICECUP (International Corpus of English Corpus Utility Program) which was designed and developed at the SEU. They are indispensable data-mining resources for anyone interested in the grammar and linguistic features of the spoken and written word. In 2002 SEU staff published <i>Exploring Natural Language: Working with the British Component of the International Corpus of English</i>, a comprehensive handbook to ICE-GB/ICECUP corpus and software that contains full references and concordance alongside six detailed usage case studies [R1]. The research underpinning the creation of the corpora was supported by ESRC grants to Professor Bas Aarts and Sean Wallis, who were both working at UCL during the research period.</p> <p>From 2010-2014 the SEU embarked on a new research project which uses the spoken and written English in the corpora to develop the <i>Englicious</i> website (www.englicious.org) with the aim of helping teachers teach English grammar at primary, secondary and sixth form levels [R2, R3]. Specifically, illustrative materials (such as example sentences) that are used in exercises, lessons, projects, etc. are taken from the corpora, which means that pupils work with authentic, age-appropriate language materials, rather than artificial materials that do not appeal to them, as</p>		

is often the case in printed textbooks ('The cat sat on the mat.'). The corpus technology that was developed at the SEU allows the platform to source examples dynamically over the web.

The SEU's publications based on this research contend that the teaching of grammar is at its most effective if it is taught using technology that young children are familiar with, such as smartphones, tablets and the internet [R3], findings which have been applied to the development of both the *Englicious* website and *Grammar Practice Key Stage 2* mobile app [R2]. Bas Aarts et al argue that grammar should be taught in a contextualised way, by making reference to engaging, age-appropriate texts such as songs, poems and stories. They found, by testing *Englicious* materials in the classroom, that it is beneficial for children to see 'grammar in action' using interactive resources, and in that way to appreciate how authors create texts and make different grammatical choices that affect the meaning of a story, poem, etc. As an example, authors often re-order sentence elements ('Chocolate I love' instead of 'I love chocolate') to highlight or emphasise particular units. The *Englicious* team has designed interactive resources that make children aware of this in a playful way [R4]. The book *How to Teach Grammar* provides subject knowledge and a detailed description of this pedagogical rationale [R5]. A chapter in *Applying Linguistics: Language and the Impact Agenda* has demonstrated how *Englicious* opens up new ways for linguistics academics to engage with and benefit learner communities outside of universities [R6].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- R1** Gerald Nelson, Sean Wallis and Bas Aarts (2002) *Exploring Natural Language: Working with the British Component of the International Corpus of English*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. <https://iris.ucl.ac.uk/iris/publication/26461/1>
- R2** Seth Mehl, Sean Wallis and Bas Aarts (2016) Language learning at your fingertips: deploying corpora in mobile teaching apps. In Karen Corrigan and Adam Mearns (eds.) *Creating and Digitizing Language Corpora. Volume 3: Databases for Public Engagement*. Basingstoke: Palgrave (Springer). 211-239. <https://iris.ucl.ac.uk/iris/publication/1413936/1>
- R3** Sean Wallis, Ian Cushing and Bas Aarts (2019) 'Exploiting parsed corpora in grammar teaching', *Linguistic Issues in Language Technology* (LiLT) 18.5. 1-36. (DOI is not available for this online publication.)
- R4** Ian Cushing and Bas Aarts (2019) 'Making grammar meaningful: grammatical subject knowledge and pedagogical principles for grammar teaching', *Teaching English* 19. 2019, 52-54. (DOI is not available for this online publication.)
- R5** Bas Aarts, Ian Cushing and Richard Hudson (2019) *How to Teach Grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://iris.ucl.ac.uk/iris/publication/1634770/1>
- R6** Bas Aarts and Ellen Smith-Dennis (2018) Using corpora for English language teaching and learning. In: Dan McIntyre and Hazel Price (eds.) *Applying Linguistics: Language and the Impact Agenda*. Abingdon: Routledge. 163-175. <https://iris.ucl.ac.uk/iris/publication/1459215/1>
- Bas Aarts. *Creating a Web-Based Platform for English Language Teaching and Learning*. Arts and Humanities Research Council, Grant AH/H015787/1. 1 February 2010 – 30 November 2011. GBP357,417. Peer-reviewed project.
 - Bas Aarts. *Extending the Englicious Platform for Primary English*. Arts and Humanities Research Council, Grant AH/L004550/1. 1 September 2013 – 28 February 2014. GBP88,400. Peer-reviewed project.
 - Bas Aarts. *English Grammar Videos for Teachers of English in Primary and Secondary Schools*. EPSRC Impact Acceleration Fund, Grant EPO/K503745/1. 2015. GBP10,000. Peer-reviewed project.
 - Bas Aarts. *Improving School Children's Literacy: Making Grammar Accessible in the Classroom and Relaunching Englicious*. Higher Education Innovation Fund. Period: 2017-2018. GBP13,928 + GBP14,022. Peer-reviewed project.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)**English grammar in the National Curriculum: a problem area**

The 2014 National Curriculum for English requires the teaching of grammar in primary and secondary schools to a specialised level. Pupils must acquire “an understanding of grammar and knowledge of linguistic conventions”, including technical terminology such as *determiner*, *adverbial*, and *subjunctive*. There has been considerable discussion in the educational literature and the media about the difficulties that these new requirements pose for teachers, because many have never been taught grammar, and because they feel anxious about having to teach it. Bas Aarts publicised this issue, explaining in a *Times* article that the tests demanded more knowledge of grammar than many teachers possessed and that ‘many teachers feel uncomfortable with grammar and don’t know how to use it formally’ (4 October 2013, circulation 391,643 at the point of publication) [A].

The web-based platform for English language teaching, *Englicious*, addresses the practical teaching and learning needs in schools. It uses authentic language materials which are sourced from the research databases (corpora) developed as part of SEU research – the ICE-GB and DCPSE [R1]. Aarts and Wallis and their team developed the platform (with feedback from teachers at various stages), and created guidance and teacher-training materials, which were then tested in schools. *Englicious* makes available to schools a wide variety of innovative teaching materials (lesson plans, interactive exercises, projects, videos, glossaries, etc.), as well as subject knowledge for teachers [R3, R4, R6], and it helps pupils and teachers to prepare for the Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling tests at primary level, and for GCSEs and A-levels, where competent use of language is now part of the assessment.

Provision of free resources supporting English language teaching and learning

The number of users signed up to *Englicious* reached 15,000 in January 2021, over 10,000 of whom were teachers, around 2% of the total number of teachers in the UK [B]. The number of annual page views grew from 216,000 in the first year to 457,804 during 2020. Google Analytics shows that the website has been used in 227 countries, predominantly the UK, Indonesia, India, the US and the Philippines [B]. Our research results show that the use of *Englicious* has had a measurable impact on the community of schoolteachers using the platform. A survey of 56 users [C] indicated that 94% of teachers like *Englicious* for its accuracy and its use of interesting and relevant examples. Teachers have used the site to support their lesson plans. 81.5% of respondents agreed that *Englicious* ‘gives me confidence in the classroom’, while 76% agreed that it gives students confidence in using grammatical language. 78% said that activities are engaging and interesting to students. Two focus groups comprised of Primary, Secondary and Further Education professionals found that teachers welcomed the link to the National Curriculum and highlighted the lesson plans as particularly useful for their teaching: “I like the *Englicious* link to the National Curriculum”; “I think the lesson plans are really useful. With my A-level students they’re very, very useful ...”; “You’ve got [a lesson plan] on structure that I think is really good. And I thought to myself when I saw it, that’ll be brilliant for doing the structure question.” The site caters for children of all abilities. One teacher said: “I am currently using *Englicious* with a group of low attaining Year 7s. They love the activities, particularly those that require them to move words around on the interactive whiteboard. Thanks for creating this fantastic resource” [D]. Fundamentally, the platform has empowered teachers, providing resources to support their professional practice by demystifying the subject: “Despite reading numerous grammar books over the years, I felt lost in a morass of unintelligible terms and rules until I found *Englicious*. It is not an exaggeration to say that I wept tears of joy and relief when I looked at the website for the first time. Now I love, rather than fear, grammar” [E].

Englicious supports teachers with printed materials linked to the website that are designed by the SEU team and with the app *Grammar Practice Key Stage 2* [R2], both of which draw upon corpora [R3, R4, R6]. Since July 2017, over 3,000 ‘knowledge organisers’, wall posters and flashcards summarising key National Curriculum grammar terms have been sold [I]. The knowledge organisers can be used by teachers in their lesson delivery, and the posters and flashcards can be used as everyday reminders of grammatical terminology in the classroom.

The income generated by these resources (over GBP8,000 between July 2017 and July 2020) has been reinvested to help to support the *Englicious* website.

Aarts's blog, *Grammariansism* (launched 2015) and podcast 'Grammar Explainers' (launched on Soundcloud in 2019 and linked to from *Englicious*) provide further free teaching and learning resources. The posts on the former discuss elements of grammar that are of specific interest to teachers of English. The blog had 97,890 views in 2020 and garnered comments that attest to its benefits: "As a year 6 teacher, I will be looking to your blog for answers again as it seems to be hard to find decent explanations!" [B, F]. The podcast episodes – six 'Basic Explainers' for NQTs and teachers with very little grammar training and nine 'Advanced Explainers' – provided bite-size answers to common grammar questions, attracting over 6,000 listens between November 2019 and the start of 2021 [G]. In addition, the book *How to Teach Grammar* [R5] served as a valuable resource for teachers: a teacher confirmed, "I found this enormously engaging with dozens of inventive ideas to engage learners" [G]. Aarts' online video on grammar teaching is used at the UCL Institute of Education as part of its PGCE programme and can be freely viewed by anyone (485 views by 8/1/21) [G]. @EngliciousUCL has 5,059 followers on Twitter (8/1/21) and users have frequently attested to the benefits of the resource in supporting teaching and learning: "@EngliciousUCL is my go-to for all grammar related things (plus has teaching resources!)" ; "Take a look at the entry on determiners in the National Curriculum glossary. *Englicious* is, as always, very helpful on this too" [F].

Building teachers' professional capacity to teach grammar through CPD

The *Englicious* team designed two Continuous Professional Development (CPD) courses which train teachers face-to-face (and online since April 2020): *English Grammar for Teachers* (EGfT) and *Teaching English Grammar in Context* (TEGiC). These have generated an annual income of GBP15,000 – 20,000, which has been reinvested in *Englicious*. Between August 2015 and summer 2020 approximately 700 teachers were taught at UCL or online, plus approximately 500 more in schools as In-Service Training (INSET) days. *Englicious* courses have made a real difference in the way that teachers perceive grammar. Before taking the course they often view grammar negatively ("Did not think that a lot would be taught to us"). After the course they feel empowered to teach grammar in a new way – "This course exceeded my expectations: I thought I would just be taught how to use *Englicious* as a resource, but I was able to improve my grammatical knowledge too. I have improved my own knowledge of grammatical terms which will help me explain them to my pupils" – and inspired to bring new resources into their classroom: "I am going to re-plan my schemes of work to include more starter exercises from the website" [E]. Joanna Woodhouse (Literacy Coordinator at a National Teaching and Support School linked with 35 Nottinghamshire schools) attests to the value of *Englicious* grammar training being "based on robust research" and linked to the National Curriculum, describing the immediate impact on teachers: the session "gave us lots to take away for the classroom [...] we've all gone back into the classroom with more confidence". Regarding the longer-term benefits for embedding *Englicious* within CPD she notes: "I deliver training in schools so will be passing on the learning. I've now spoken to all staff and students in A level English language classes in our school and demonstrated *Englicious* as a resource so they're all using it" [E]. Aarts has also run seminars and workshops on the *Englicious* project, which have further contributed to teachers' professional skills development, most notably at the 2014 and 2016 English Grammar Days at the British Library aimed at the general public and at teachers (around 220 participants on each day) and at the ResearchED Conference 'English and Modern Foreign Languages' at the University of Oxford in 2017.

Informing English language assessment in primary schools

Aarts advised the Department for Education on the compilation of the SATS tests as a member of a Test Review Group (TRG) in 2015 and 2019 [J]. His input has resulted in changes being made to the questions on KS1 and KS2 tests to make them grammatically accurate, fair and do-able. In the words of the DfE, the purpose of the TRG "is to allow senior or experienced teachers, subject or curriculum experts and markers (as required) to review and discuss the national curriculum assessments during their development, and to identify where the materials (questions or mark schemes) could be improved to better meet the purpose of the tests" [J].

The *Englicious* website and its offshoots (printed resources, mobile app, blog, podcast, CPD courses and book [R5]), have therefore significantly enhanced English language teaching practice for thousands of primary, secondary and further education teachers in the UK and globally, directly and indirectly providing research-based learning materials for students of all ages to improve their understanding of English grammar and its usage.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- A** Oliver Moody, 'Teachers "don't know enough grammar to teach curriculum"', *The Times* (4 October 2013): <https://bit.ly/3tbh7Rv> Circulation figures: <https://bit.ly/2Orezji>
- B** User statistics for www.englicious.org via Statcounter and Google Analytics show an average of 1.2K page views per day (pdf sample supplied). See also <https://bit.ly/3rDfIZ6>. *Grammarianism* visitor analytics (pdf supplied).
- C** Survey conducted online by the SEU (spreadsheet supplied).
- D** Confidential feedback data from a focus group conducted at UCL (pdf supplied).
- E** Confidential feedback forms for our CPD courses at UCL (pdf sample supplied) and Joanna Woodhouse's blog about INSET teaching: <https://bit.ly/3vfWfud>
- F** Comments on Twitter feed (@EngliciousUCL) and on the *Grammarianism* blog.
- G** Englicious podcasts: <https://bit.ly/3rFYXXx> and IoE intro film: <https://bit.ly/2PMt15O>
- H** Amazon customer review of Bas Aarts, Ian Cushing and Richard Hudson (2019) *How to Teach Grammar*.
- I** Sales figures for knowledge organisers etc. (spreadsheet on request) and product listing <https://bit.ly/2PJUTYf>
- J** Department for Education emails confirming contribution to Test Review Group supplied.