

## TEACHING GRAMMAR THROUGH LISTENING

(Inductive and deductive approaches)

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**Abstract:** *This article describes some ways of teaching grammar through listening skill. Additionally, this article analyzes some methods and approaches using listening efficiently to teach grammar easier.*

**Key words:** *grammar, listening, sentence puzzles, sentence builders, listening hunts.*

In linguistics, the grammar of a natural language is its set of structural constraints on speakers' or writers' composition of clauses, phrases, and words. The term can also refer to the study of such constraints, a field that includes domains such as phonology, morphology, and syntax, often complemented by phonetics, semantics, and pragmatics. There are currently two different approaches to the study of grammar, traditional grammar and theoretical grammar. The term "grammar" can also describe the linguistic behavior of groups of speakers and writers, rather than individuals.

A reference book describing the grammar of a language is called a "reference grammar" or simply "a grammar". A fully explicit grammar which exhaustively describes the grammatical constructions of a particular speech variety is called descriptive grammar. This kind of linguistic description contrasts with linguistic prescription, an attempt to actively discourage or suppress some grammatical constructions, while codifying and promoting others, either in an absolute sense or about a standard variety. For example, some prescriptivists maintain that sentences in English should not end with prepositions, a prohibition that has been traced to John Dryden whose unexplained objection to the practice perhaps led other English speakers to avoid the construction and discourage its use.

Of the four language skills, the one that is always neglected in grammar instruction is definitely Listening. In the typical grammar lesson, the target grammar structure is hardly ever practiced through the aural medium. This may not only negatively impact acquisition of that structure, but also listening proficiency development at large. Why? The answer refers to the so-called **parsing phase** of listening comprehension.

Listening proficiency is essential for second language success, but in the classroom, it has taken a back seat to the teaching of reading, writing, and grammar. In this interview, Stacy Hagen will discuss why listening and grammar are a natural fit, why listening instruction needs to focus more on helping students decode speech, and how by doing this in the grammar classroom, we can provide a much richer linguistic environment for our students. Although we don't usually associate listening with grammar, the two are actually a natural fit. Here we can see some activities to teach grammar effectively with the help of listening.

**Sentence puzzles**

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Sentence puzzles are a very effective way to teach grammar and syntax through listening. The students are provided a set of jumbled-up sentences to unscramble whilst the teacher utters them in the correct order. The task is for the students to re-write them correctly in the table/grid provided, placing each element of the sentence under the right heading. After completing the transcribing task, the students are charged with inductively working out the rule.

**Sentence builders**

Sentence builders take a bit more time to make, but they can be exploited in so many ways that their surrender value is more than worth the effort. The teacher makes and utters sentences using the various chunks of language in the table to demonstrate how the target structure works. Whilst the teacher models the sentences, the students write down their meaning on mini whiteboards. As a follow-up, the students are tasked with working out the rule inductively. Since you are modelling, not testing comprehension, the sentences should be uttered at moderate speed.

**Sorting tasks**

The teacher utters a number of sentences each containing a specific structure that s/he wants to draw the students’ attention to. As they listen, the students are tasked with categorizing the structure using a grid or table. The task requires the students to categorize the different verb forms employed in ten sentences uttered by the teacher to reinforce phonological and grammar awareness. Students enjoy sorting tasks; I do them in every single lesson of mine, often exploiting songs.

**Listening hunts**

In listening hunts, the teacher reads a short narrative and the students are asked to spot and write down as many instances as possible of the target structure(s) contained in the text. I usually tell the students in advance the number of occurrences of the target items in order to enhance their focus.

**Find your match**

This activity serves two purposes. Firstly, to practice decoding skills and pronunciation; secondly, aural processing of the target structure. The students are provided with cards containing simple sentences featuring the target structure(s). Each card contains four pieces of information about a person; each piece information on the cards has a match in four of the other cards. The task is to go around the classroom interviewing people in order to find the four persons whose cards match one’s own. This task is useful in that it elicits a lot of production and receptive processing of the target structure.

**Partial dictations**

Partial dictations are extremely easy to prepare and are very effective in focusing learners on the target structure. All one has to do is (1) create texts packed with instances of target structure use; (2) gap the texts where the target structure has been deployed; (3) read out the text whilst the students fill the gaps. Easy and highly effective. Tip: do not use one long text, use several short ones; it keeps the students more focused.

Grammar must be heard, read, spoken and written by our learners if we want them to fully acquire it. This multi-sensorial approach to grammar instruction is rarely implemented in language lessons. The skill that is most neglected in grammar instruction is undoubtedly Listening, regardless of the fact that the brain is naturally wired to acquire grammar acoustically. More effort must be put by teachers in this area of grammar teaching by integrating traditional activities with skill-based approaches to instruction which provide extensive receptive oral practice through Listening-As-Modelling activities and oral interaction.

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