

## Grammar Teaching Ditty

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# Grammar Teaching Ditty

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This light-hearted contribution, inspired by the tradition of doggerel or nonsense verse, employs an unlikely tone and text-type to play with (or perhaps send up?) the 'serious' topic of grammar teaching. It doing so, it grants the academy permission to gently mock itself and its preoccupations, with the aim of weaving play, humour and a healthy dose of self-reflection into academia's (arguably self-perpetuated and self-justifying) mythology of a 'weighty institution' which not only does not easily laugh at itself, but which can also on occasion rob its own *raison-d'être*, Intellectual Curiosity, of its two best friends, Laughter and Lightheartedness.

If you're into teaching grammar,  
You should check your teacher's toolkit;  
You'll need more than nails and hammer:  
You've gotta have the tools that fit.  
If the Oscars, and its glamour,  
Is the pinnacle of showbiz  
Then with language, in like manner,  
It's the grammar where the glow is.

So here's a quick and clicky ditty –  
A rhyme whose lines wind like spaghetti –  
About the teaching nitty-gritty  
Of words-in-combinations  
(If that's what 'grammar' means! For some  
A different def-in-i-ti-on  
Might be preferred. For them, here's one:  
'Syntactic operations').

Whatever colour grammar is,  
The language teacher central wish  
Is getting learners' minds to fizz  
And exceed their expectations.  
So, like those lovely mid-course trips  
Let's journey on, pick up some tips,  
Garner quips from scholars' lips

On grammar. Ah! Elation!

Way back when in times gone by  
When Latin was compulsory  
'*Amo, amas, amat*' we'd chant  
And then '*amamus, amatis, amant.*'

Rote learning now has quite a rep -  
It's rotting in the grammar skip!  
So if, dear reader, you agree,  
Let's jump to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

We'll kick off audio-lingually,  
In 1952 or -3  
(Or thereabouts, when tapes came out  
And headphones and recordings):

A stimulus and swift response  
(Made straightaway and more than once)  
Was meant to lead with ease and speed  
To grammar structures forming.

But language learning's quite complex;  
It needs more time and more context.  
So, Asher's TPR, for one,

And the Direct Method came along

With a bit more inter-ac-ti-on

And feedback on pro-duc-ti-on:

Personalising grammar learning

Gets the flame of knowledge burning.

Then the structured syllabus hits the stage

And straightaway it's all the rage:

Starting with the present tense

We lead the learners on a dance

To ever greater complexity

(Like negative conditionality)

And step-by-step they get it all

(Except they don't! Well, some – not all).

Notional-functional had its day -

And Dogme: let the students say

What grammar *they* want to learn today:

Unplanned planning, that's the way!

Let's not forget the wierdier:

Here's one: suggestopedia

'Breathe with the music; let's begin!'

And lo! the grammar floats on in.

And now its logical opposite:

Grammar translation - where we sit

For hours in sad monotony -

But at least we up our accuracy.

More fun is had with grammar games

Or boarding gap-fill grammar frames;

Endless models, endless claims:

Teaching grammar goes by many names.

So, there we go. We've paused and thought

About how grammar teaching ought

Or could or might or has to go

(And we've missed some methods as space is short);

But whatever approaches you have taught

And whatever your students have thereby caught

It's done 'em good, coz, as we know

'Any instruction's better than nought'.

But when it comes to me (and here's my final summary sentence)

Methods come, they hang around a while, and then they go;

So, in a first person, adverb-modified negative present simple tense,

On grammar teaching, all I'll say is this: 'I just don't know'.