

# Teaching Spoken Grammar at Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced Level in ELF Classes

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Language education has moved toward skills-based systems that stress communicative competency with the transition away from proficiency or competence. However, some ELT classes have completely ignored Spoken Grammar parts because of the challenges connected with teaching them. This article will discuss issues surrounding implementing oral grammar for students learning English as a second language. We have identified three viable options for integrating oral grammar into the ELF curriculum. We will explore how to present these options to students at different levels: (1) Filling and reverse passage at the novice level; (2) intermediate beginning and end activities; (3) advanced oral grammar activity unit. Teachers should consider combining traditional language-based methods with oral grammar concepts to ensure that students succeed in oral English learning.

**Keywords:** Spoken grammar, Oral competence, Skill-based system, IELTS

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Numerous scholars have investigated spoken grammar (SG)[1][2][3][4] because they recognized that it is fundamentally distinct from written grammar (WG). For instance, Haliard (2014) notes that words may be removed in SG to achieve more fluidity and efficiency in communicating, rather than utilizing well-formed sentences more typical of the written language.[5] Additionally, SG is becoming increasingly essential as a result of the educational paradigm change. As Carter and McCarthy (1995) illustrate, the emphasis on language education has shifted away from proficiency or competence and toward skills-based methods that emphasize the significance of developing learners' communicative competence.[1] SGT teaches students to "real-world conversation" rather than presenting English as an intricately constructed textbook language.

Hence, it can be said that learning SG is beneficial to learners to improve their communicative skills when participating in interpersonal interaction. However, SG has not yet become part of the daily syllabus of schools or institutions[6]. The reasons behind it vary with the environment and teaching culture. They also include assessing potential challenges for learners with SG characteristics, lack of authentic materials suitable for teachers and learners, and unfamiliarity with concepts.

This article will define the concept of SG and will study issues related to the implementation of SG functions in the classroom. In general, this article discusses what aspects of SG should be taught and how to use the IELTS speaking test as a benchmark to introduce learners to these aspects.

#### 2. DEFINITION OF SG

Over the last few decades, there has been a substantial and growing emphasis on SG among applied linguists, prompted by students' requirement to communicate naturally and successfully in the target language [7]. SG does not apply to organized oral texts in formal spoken genres like debates or speeches; rather, it pertains to informal syntax and conversational English [1] [2]. As Leech (2000) pointed out, speaking in this situation is usually spontaneous, and the phrase or pattern is poor.[3] For example, people rarely use well-structured sentences in conversations but prefer to use SG elements such as situational omissions, rhetorical markers, and heads and tails. The following section will outline the characteristics of SG.

Additionally, speech is highly interactive, requiring participants to possess contextual awareness, turn-taking abilities, the ability to negotiate to mean, and the ability to interpret others' contributions with an instant response to them[8]. Interactive discussion is a



purposeful and natural interchange of ideas in a complex and two-way knowledge flow between all sides.

#### 3. CHARACTERISTICS OF SG

Significant spoken language traits are almost certain to exist. They must be taught in EFL sessions where SG should be considered part of the broader communicative and pragmatic qualities students bring to foreign language acquisition. As a result, these features would become a subject of instruction in a language learning program that included spoken grammar units, such as ellipsis or heads and tails. The following paragraphs will discuss some of the significant characteristics of SG.

#### 3.1. Ellipsis

The ellipsis can be implemented in spoken and written English. This discussion will focus on the ellipsis in spoken English. McCarthy (1995) illustrates, that advanced language speakers frequently omit specific parts from utterances, such as the subject, auxiliaries, and so on, in real-world communication[1]. In contrast to scripting languages and written formats, the ellipsis means "to delete aspects that can be completely recovered from the language or context" [2]. Some scholars divide it into two categories: situational omission and textual omission.

First, the contextual ellipsis indicates a word or expression that lacks contextual hints or previous wheel hints. In addition, in spoken English, the situational omission is the deletion of apparent aspects, which is more common [5]. Carter and McCarthy (1995) described the situational ellipsis as a term not commonly used in written English, which led to the deletion of subjects and verbs in spoken English[1]. It often appears with a fixed phrase. Such as looks good, and it also appears; see you later. For example[5]:

"Do you have any questions?" (No-ellipsis)

"Any-questions?" (Ellipsis-subject and verb omitted)

Second, the textual ellipsis, which involves the omission of phrases in grammatically predictable sentence locations, is more closely associated with specific grammar rules. Examples include adverbial and relative clauses. Meanwhile, Carter and McCarthy (1995) defined the text ellipsis as retrieving information from the text (anaphora or tension)[1]. By contrast, structural ellipsis occurs when a purely structural feature is omitted (e.g., "I went to school and then to the bookshop"). While the second sentence, "I went", was omitted from this statement, it is also reasonable. Critical linguistic elements, such as the subject, verbs, and auxiliaries, have been excluded from the preceding example. However, these omissions would not affect the

definition because the context makes it sufficiently clear.

#### 3.2. Heads OR Left-dislocation

The heads and subsequent pronouns represent the grammatical encodings used in a dialogue. The literature uses a variety of names to describe this property. As a result, the head[9]is also called a left dislocation[10], and the noun phrase is placed before the noun phrase[2]. For example, "Is that the school across the street where you study?" In this case, the purpose of heads is to direct the topic to the audience. Before providing more specific information, the person in charge assists the speaker to introduce the topic. This feature allows both parties to have enough time to manage their discussions in real-time.

#### 3.3. Tails OR Right-dislocation

The term tails[1], alternatively referred to as right dislocations[11], specifies identifying the pronoun used previously. McCarthy and Carter (1995) provide the following excerpt: "And he is quite a singer, that fellow." [1]The phrase tails are important to maintain the symmetry established by the phrase heads. As seen in this example, the tail's function characterises a remark that expresses an attitude or view on the subject. It encourages the speaker to elaborate on or add a comment to their language. Additionally, it can serve as instant confirmation of what has been said or pertinent [12] and is frequently used while making a statement regarding the issue under discussion.

#### 3.4. Fillers AND Backchanneling

Fillers and back channels are employed in this category as a conversational "emergency kit" to avoid awkward pauses in a discussion. Speakers in real-world communication convey a filler while they consider ideas and need to fill time while thinking[13]. In this circumstance, they frequently use fillers to help or collect their ideas.. Fillers include the expressions um, um, umm, and well. Additionally, Cullen and Kuo (2007) divide distinct phrasal chunks into three categories: those that produce ambiguity (e.g., "kind of"), those that alter and demonstrate politeness (e.g., "a little bit"), and those that mark discourse structure (e.g., "you know").[4]The SG units discussed above can provide the speaker time to gather his or her thoughts and consider what to say next.

On the other hand, the backchannel means that the audience is analysing the context and expressing interest in the topic, for example, to motivate the speaker to continue speaking, as I see, it is indeed the yeah, uh-huh. If the listener can create reverse channel continuators such as mm-hmm in a naturalistic environment, then the spoken dialogue structure will be



more appropriate[14]. Without a response or feedback from the audience, the speaker may believe that their remark was misunderstood and requires rephrasing.

#### 3.5. Unit of SG

With explicitly specified main and subordinate clauses, people do not always use well-formed sentences. Instead, they tend to use units of SG. Carter and McCarthy (2001) group it into four units.[15]

- (1) indeterminate structure (e.g., "all looks great," "take that off")
- (2) phrasal utterance (e.g., "any problem," "oh, that")
- (3) incomplete sentences (e.g., "it was a bit," "a little bit")
- (4) subordinate clauses (e.g., "as soon as they here," "which is great").

In addition, Cullen and Kuo (2007) classified units similar to Carter and McCarthy's, dividing them into three categories: those that are ambiguous (for example, "kind"), and those that change and show politeness (for example, " A little bit"), and those that mark the structure of the discourse (for example, "you know").[4] Due to the burden of real-time language processing, organizing ideas takes time. As a result, speakers rely on a minimal number of fixed words and phrases to carry out basic grammatical operations[3]. The SG units discussed above can provide the speaker time to gather their thoughts and consider what to say next.

# 4. SHOULD WE TEACH SG IN ELF CLASSES?

In various EFL situations, especially in the EFL school environment, the tradition of using the WG standard (WG) to teach English to English learners has a long history. WG is regarded as more respected than spoken language in the literature and used as a correctness criterion. However, scholars and linguists have begun to focus on defining the characteristics of SG and question the wisdom of applying written rules and grammatical criteria to spoken English alone. The role of SG in language classrooms is becoming increasingly crucial, as pragmatic competence and authenticity are integral components of language learning and instruction. Due to the importance of SG in speech and the regularity with which corpus proof is used, numerous researchers have advocated that it be taught in language classrooms [4][16][17]. The next paragraphs will explain two key reasons why language learners should acquire SG.

#### 4.1 Improvement of fluency

By acquiring SG, students can more thoroughly obtain the standard participation model because it enables them to communicate naturally and effectively. Leech (2000) observed that, in contrast to written situations, conversations usually occur immediately[3]. For example, when individuals speak, they rarely use well-formed phrases, and they rarely evaluate whether clauses should be used or what elements should be included in the main sentence. Additionally, as Cullen and Kuo (2007) clarify, spoken English eliminated the possibility of pre-organizing and editing thoughts[4]. Speakers must be able to adjust to the pressures of "real-time processing," which results in speech being assembled "step by step." Thus, SG can assist students in developing a natural mode of communication by using brief, clear, and intelligible utterances in response to noises naturally and appropriately.

#### 4.2 Prevention of sounding like a textbook

By mastering the SG feature, speakers can improve their natural conversation fluency and avoid sounding like a textbook[5]. For instance, the situational ellipsis is one of the SG qualities that may assist speakers in avoiding textbook-like sounds. As Carter and McCarthy (2006) note, it may be required to employ situational ellipsis in some instances because the co-text was typically inserted informally in encounters[16]. For instance, McCarthy (2006) provided this example during an interview[19]. When someone says, "Hammer, please." Assume the audience is unfamiliar with the ellipsis in a situational context. How did they discern that the speaker wishes to be handed the hammer rather than struck with it? Otherwise, the dialogue begins with an extra well-formed line such as "Hello, could you kindly hand over the hammer?" Thus, it is critical to incorporate SG into dialogue. It enables learners to employ plain, simple, and understandable language.

This essay assumes that SG elements should be incorporated in EFL lessons in the present educational context because exposure to actual linguistic data is crucial for producing understandable utterances. Additionally, teaching SG helps learners communicate smoothly and natively in the target language, increasing learners' confidence in conversation. As a result, it is critical in the teaching of English. The following part will explore pedagogical difficulties and strategies for teaching SG to students of varying levels.

#### 5. PEDAGOGICAL ISSUES

There is no agreement among scholars who favour teaching SG features about the extent to which teachers should teach them and how to teach them in ELF lessons. As a result, teachers may encounter some



difficulties. To begin, Leech (2000) discovered that certain textbooks include fictional dialogues, obstructing students' understanding of SG[3]. This discussion is a typical fictitious example taken from a Chinese book[20].

Miss Li: "Hello My name's Miss Li. I'm a teacher and I'm Chinese. I'm from Wuhan. What's your name?"

Lingling: "My name's Lingling. I'm from Beijing. I'm twelve years old and I'm Chinese."

This sentence sounds like a textbook with harsh penalties that English professional users rarely use. In addition, the investigation of Cullen and Kuo (2007) shows that the material on the characteristics of SG is insufficient and incomplete[4]. Therefore, one of the problems of the EFL course is the lack of materials for teachers and students, resulting in a lack of necessary accurate materials, exercises and assessment resources in the course.

In addition, Brown and Yule (1983) believe that SG is concept-oriented to people and emotions[21]. In other words, it is centred on the speaker's shared context [3]. In addition, SG is impulsive, unplanned and attractive[4]. Considering all these possible variants and standards, Timmis (2005) pointed out that it is extremely complicated to formulate meaningful and easy-to-understand development norms for specific aspects of spoken language[22]. It shows that teaching difficulties in the EFL program are not surprising. Nonetheless, as previously stated, it is critical to educate SG characteristics. The following paragraph will address the suitability of specific features for pupils at various levels.

# 6. WHICH PARTS SHOULD BE INTRODUCED WHICH LEVEL?

Carter and McCarthy (1995, 2001) and other corpus linguists have established various regularly used grammatical characteristics that are rarely found in our regular teaching syllabuses[1][15]. Because SG characteristics can improve students' communicative abilities, it is critical to incorporate them into EFL language teaching and learning. However, due to the complexity of SG, different features should be taught to pupils of varying abilities.

This article discusses which SG elements should be taught using the IELTS speaking test as a benchmark. This is for three main reasons. The first reason is that the author is familiar with this setting. Secondly, the IELTS test has become more and more important in various situations and is regularly taken by many students. Finally, because it is challenging to deal with all possible conditions and types of students at a particular level, this article will focus on IELTS.

The language proficiency of learners will be divided into three groups, based on the standard of the IELTS Speaking Band description (see Appendix1) and the Common European Framework of Languages (CEFR) (see Appendix2). In particular, learners will be grouped into three categories: beginner-level (IELTS 4-5; CEFR B1), intermediate-level (IELTS,5-6.5; CEFR B2), and advanced-level (IELTS 6.5+; CEFR C1) ranks. Moreover, in the following paragraph will discuss one element (units of SG, heads and tails, fillers, and backchannels) of SG features for each student group.

#### 6.1. Beginner levels

Due to the lack of consistent language usage and sufficient language input, beginners may not speak naturally in the IELTS speaking test. Therefore, they need to be more exposed to language by filling SG elements and the reverse channel. In addition, they are expected to improve dialogue input by memorizing and practising basic and short filler words, blocks, collocations, and back passages to lay the language foundation for the exam and avoid doing nothing. Some examples are detailed in the next section.

#### 6.1.1. Fillers and Backchannels Activity

This task is divided into three sections:

- Interacting without the use of SG features
- Introducing SG features
- Practicing with the former and comparing it to the latter

To begin, the teacher assigns pupils to work in pairs to produce a brief dialogue in their native language. Next, teach the concepts of filler words and backchannels and descriptions of their functions and examples to improve learners' understanding of their use in dialogue. Afterwards, students were asked to find a set of terms as fillers or back passages from the professor's examples and revise their first written conversation after the presentation. Additionally, students contrast well-formed sentences with natural ones that have fillers and backchannels. Following the discussion and comparison, students should consider increasing their fluency by incorporating SG elements into their dialogues.

#### 6.2.Intermediate Levels

For learners at the intermediate level, introducing SG characteristics will help them develop their productive language skills through heads and tails. At this level, they have a certain amount of verbal input. Thus, to achieve a good score on the IELTS speaking examination, individuals must also demonstrate their language proficiency by expanding their ideas using these elements. Because heads and tails provide two distinct pieces of a longer phrase, learners may respond



to each question with a more detailed and topic-related statement.

#### 6.2.1. Heads and Tails Activity

To begin, teachers should show students the positive and negative concepts, provide examples for learners, and then ask them to distinguish between sentences with positive and negative elements and sentences without head and tail elements. The majority of students at the basic level will have rapid and easy responses. For instance, when the examiner said, "Are you satisfied with your major?" "Yes, I do," the majority of intermediate pupils will respond. (sans tails) However, if a participant wants to get a good score in the IELTS speaking test, they should undoubtedly explain their statement in detail, for example, "I do; my major is sound art; it is something I am enthusiastic about." (There is a tail ) In the previous case, it is evident that incorporating specific SG characteristics into the language English when taking the oral test may lead to higher scores because it can speak for a long time and present a diversified grammatical structure to meet the IELTS speaking standard.

Following that, students must construct a discourse concerning the topic assigned by the teacher. If student A begins the sentence with a head, student B must complete it by providing further details about the issue. The same procedure applies to tails. Once both learners have completed the conversation, they should write down what they learned and then practice it with various other themes and questions to acquire fluency.

#### 6.3. Advanced Levels

One of the most challenging tasks for advanced level pupils is to avoid sounding like a textbook.

#### 6.3.1. Units of SG Activity

begin, learners must interpret communicative unit and categorize them appropriately. They can be encouraged to learn new phrases, practising and memorizing shorter communicative units rather than entire sentences. After that, class activities will focus on two or small group discussions on IELTS related topics, such as sports and music, friends and family, lifestyle and leisure time. In group assignments, learners can incorporate these units into discussions to practice answering IELTS questions and then discuss with their partners whether using these units is appropriate. Students can use the stable accumulation of relevant dialogue units to produce more effective output in the discussion.

#### 7. CONCLUSION

The development of communicative competence is a critical pedagogical goal for EFL programs, as the goal of learning a target language is to communicate in it in conversation. Unlike one-way communication strategies such as reading books or watching television, spoken English is a two-way street. To avoid sounding like a textbook, learners should communicate spontaneously and incorporate some SG elements, including discourse markers, fillers, and ellipsis[5]. In language learning and teaching, it is essential to point out the combination of these SG qualities[4].

However, due to teaching difficulties, some ELT courses completely ignore the SG element. As Leech (2000) believes, some textbooks contain false conversations that may disrupt SG learning[3]. In addition, a survey conducted by Cullen and Kuo (2007) showed that the actual language materials are insufficient and incomplete[4]. In short, it is recommended that teachers incorporate the concept of SG characteristics into daily teaching to increase learners' awareness and improve their communicative skills. However, the best way to incorporate them into language courses requires additional research.

#### **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

Xiang Ji conceived of the presented idea and performed the results. Lu Li encouraged Xiang Ji to investigate the appropriateness of TBLT in the Chinese context and supervised the findings of this work. All authors discussed the results and contributed to the final manuscript.

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## **Appendixes**

## **Appendix 1: IELTS Speaking Rubrics**

# **IELTS**

### **SPEAKING: Band Descriptors (public version)**

Band	Fluency and coherence	Lexical resource	Grammatical range and accuracy	Pronunciation
•	<ul> <li>speaks fluently with only rare repetition or self-correction;</li> <li>any hesitation is content-related rather than to find words or grammar</li> <li>speaks coherently with fully appropriate cohesive features</li> <li>develops topics fully and appropriately</li> </ul>		<ul> <li>produces consistently accurate structures apart from 'slips' characteristic of native speaker speech</li> </ul>	uses a full range of pronunciation features with precision and subtlety     sustains flexible use of features throughout     is effortless to understand
0	speaks fluently with only occasional repetition or self- correction; hesitation is usually content-related and only rarely to search for language     develops topics coherently and appropriately		<ul> <li>produces a majority of error-free sentences with only very occasional inappropriacies or basic/non-systematic errors</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>uses a wide range of pronunciation features</li> <li>sustains flexible use of features, with only occasional lapses</li> <li>is easy to understand throughout; L1 accent has minimal effect on intelligibility</li> </ul>
	speaks at length without noticeable effort or loss of coherence     may demonstrate language-related hesitation at times, or some repetition and/or self-correction     uses a range of connectives and discourse markers with some flexibility.		uses a range of complex structures with some flexibility     frequently produces error-free sentences, though some grammatical mistakes persist	shows all the positive features of Band 6 and some, but no all, of the positive features of Band 8
	<ul> <li>is willing to speak at length, though may lose coherence at times due to occasional repetition, self-correction or hesitation</li> <li>uses a range of connectives and discourse markers but not always appropriately</li> </ul>	and make meaning clear in spite of inappropriacies  generally paraphrases successfully	limited flexibility  may make frequent mistakes with complex structures though these rarely cause comprehension problems	<ul> <li>uses a range of pronunciation features with mixed control</li> <li>shows some effective use of features but this is not sustained</li> <li>can generally be understood throughout, though mispronunciation of individual words or sounds reduces clarity at times</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>usually maintains flow of speech but uses repetition, self correction and/or slow speech to keep going</li> <li>may over-use certain connectives and discourse markers produces simple speech fluently, but more complex communication causes fluency problems</li> </ul>	uses vocabulary with limited flexibility  attempts to use paraphrase but with mixed success	<ul> <li>produces basic sentence forms with reasonable accuracy uses a limited range of more complex structures, but these usually contain errors and may cause some comprehension problems</li> <li>shows all the positive features of Band 4 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 6</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>produces basic sentence forms with reasonable accuracy uses a limited range of more complex structures, but thes usually contain errors and may cause some comprehensic problems</li> <li>shows all the positive features of Band 4 and some, but n all, of the positive features of Band 6</li> </ul>
4	cannot respond without noticeable pauses and may speak slowly, with frequent repetition and self-correction     links basic sentences but with repetitious use of simple connectives and some breakdowns in coherence	basic meaning on unfamiliar topics and makes frequent	sentences but subordinate structures are rare	uses a limited range of pronunciation features     attempts to control features but lapses are frequent     mispronunciations are frequent and cause some difficulty for the listener
-	speaks with long pauses     has limited ability to link simple sentences     gives only simple responses and is frequently unable to convey basic message	has insufficient vocabulary for less familiar topics	attempts basic sentence forms but with limited success, or relies on apparently memorised utterances     makes numerous errors except in memorised expressions	shows some of the features of Band 2 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 4
	pauses lengthily before most words     little communication possible	only produces isolated words or memorised utterances	cannot produce basic sentence forms	Speech is often unintelligible
	no communication possible     no rateable language			
	does not attend			

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## **Appendix2: Common European Framework of Languages**

PROFICIENT	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
USER	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
INDEPENDENT	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
USER	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
BASIC	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
USER	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

 $\underline{https://www.coe.int/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-com}\\ \underline{mon-reference-levels-global-scale}$ 



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