How to Teach Grammar from Examples

I. Inductive Learning

As for the two ways to learn a language, you may think about deductive and inductive ways. Deductive approach is a rule-driven path. In other words, it is an up-bottom approach to learn a language. Learners should start from grammar rules at first. On the other hand, inductive approach is totally opposite to deductive approach. Speaking of inductive learning, it is a rule-discovery path for learning a language. That is, it is a bottom-up approach to learn a language. Learners study examples and from the examples get the understanding of the grammar rules. They do not need to meet the rule before doing the examples.

The inductive approach seems to be the way one’s first language is acquired. Induction, or learning through experience, can be seen as the natural way to learning, such as Direct Method and the Natural Approach. Both teaching methods which are called experiential methods are identified with second language instruction methods which model themselves on first language acquisition.

Natural language acquisition means that learning a language at an environment of non-intervention. Therefore, the best approach of experiential learning is that situates the learner at the environment which is full of our foreign language, and it is just as the acquisition of first language which is called Natural Approach.

As for Direct Method, it was designed to challenge the unnatural and intellectual procedures of Grammar Translation. The basic belief behind the Direct Method was that our first language is acquired through the process of developing both language and the real world. While teaching through Direct Method, for example, the teacher is about to teach the grammar of ‘present continuous’, and students are about to possess the input which is repeating examples for many times. When the teacher teaches
‘I-am-walking’, students should repeat both the sentence and actions after the teacher again and again. It could make students obtain the cognition of the grammar rule and create a generative situation.

Teaching through a generative situation is authentic and follows our real world. It is a situation which the teacher designs the materials in order to create and generate a real environment to make students experience like in the real life. Making students apply the language in the real situation is the most crucial. In other words, the purpose of learning language is to realize how to use it correctly in a right situation.

Also, there are two methods as inductive learning approach as well, discovery learning and concordance program. There is a saying of Pascal that is ‘People are generally better persuaded by the reasons which they themselves have discovered than by those which have come into the minds of others’. Indeed, once students have ever discovered or experienced what they have learned, they must feel much more authentic than obtain the input from the teacher all the time. The other one, concordance program, is a collection of the instances of a word or phrase, organized in such a way as to display its immediate linguistic environment. With the advent of large computerized databases of language, this approach has been amplified enormously. When you enter the keyword that you would like to learn more about its grammar, patterns or example sentences, the program will show you all the results which are related to the keyword which you look up. It can be done more reliably and much more rapidly rather than time-consuming as traditional looking-up a dictionary.

II. Pros and Cons of an Inductive Approach

Advantages of Inductive Approach:

- Grammar rules discovering by learners themselves are more likely to fit the mental structures which exist in their minds than the rules are purely
presented.

- The mental effort involved cognitive depth which ensures greater memorability.
- Learners are more attentive and motivated since they are more actively involved in the learning process rather than being simply passive recipients.
- Inductive approach favors pattern-recognition and problem-solving abilities which suggests that it is particularly suitable for learners who like this sort of challenge.

**Disadvantages of Inductive Approach:**

- Working out the rules by spending time and energy may mislead students into believing that rules are the objective of language learning rather than a means.
- It may be time-consuming to work out a rule by putting the rule to some sort of productive practice.
- Learners may hypothesize the wrong rule, or their version of the rule may be either too broad or too narrow in its application.
- Inductive approach frustrates learners who would prefer simply to be told the rule.

**III. Sample Lesson**

**A. Teaching Imperatives through Actions (Beginners)**

As the example ‘I-am-walking’ above, teaching grammar through actions is the procedure of Direct Method which borrows from the Total Physical Response (TPR) method. TPR is that learners learn best when they are totally engaged both physically and mentally in the language learning process.
Steps of teaching imperatives through actions are as following:

1. The teacher asks two students to come to the front of the class where there are three chairs placed in a row.

2. The teacher sits in the middle chair and the two students sit either side. Then, the teacher says ‘Stand up’ to the two students and the teacher also stands up at the same time.

3. The teacher says ‘Walk’, and walks across the room, and asks the two students to do the same.

4. The teacher asks the two students to do ‘Stop’, ‘Turn around’, ‘Walk’ and ‘Sit down’. The teacher acts out the instruction each time and the two students follow.

5. The two students are asked to return to their seats and the teacher asks rest of the class to follow the instruction which has just been done by the two students.

6. The teacher teaches the names of various objects in the classroom by pointing to each one and repeating its name a few times to students. The objects may include ‘board’, ‘door’, ‘table’, ‘window’, ‘chair’, ‘floor’, ‘light’, and so forth.

7. Demonstrate the instructions ‘Point to...’, ‘Walk to...’, ‘Touch...’, ‘Open...’, and ‘Close...’, and use the objects which have just taught to students.

8. Then the teacher demonstrates the meaning of ‘Don’t...’ through Step 7, such as ‘Don’t touch the board’, and keeps repeating the pattern of ‘don’t’ imperatives.

As the mention above, using actions to teach imperatives which is the directness of the Direct Method is highly efficient since it requires little preparation, and the explanation and translation from actions offers the learners a direct way to process
language capabilities. Moreover, the principle of TPR is to ask students to repeat the commands rather than give students pressure to speak. Therefore, when students listen to the instruction from the teacher, students will develop their listening skills in advance and then oral ones. Through the procedures of TPR, the teacher just makes students understand the rules of imperatives instead of emphasizing the structures. All in all, TPR is particularly suitable for younger learners or beginners.

B. Teaching the Present Simple Using Realia (Beginners)

Realia is a term for introducing real objects into the classroom for teaching. As the steps below, there will be examples which are elicited of present simple for beginners.

1. The teacher shows the class a collection of objects that are found in a bag. They include such as a buss pass, a program for the current jazz festival, and empty glasses case, and so on.
   (Note that students do not know which object belongs to.)

2. The students are divided into pairs and given an object, and they are told that they should try to find some characteristics of the object’s owner.

3. Students study their object and then pass it to the pair on their left until they have a chance to look at them all.

4. The teacher asks the class ‘Do you think it’s a man or a woman?’ Depending on their response, the owner will be referred to as ‘he’ or ‘she’.

5. Based on their deduction, the teacher gets some sentences from students.

6. Necessarily, the vocabulary is provided and the teacher should write sentences which are shaped on the board. Therefore, the target form which is the present simple form of the relevant verbs will be display clearly.
   (There are ‘He likes jazz.’, ‘He wears glasses.’ And so forth.)
7. The teacher highlights the final –s of each sentence and asks students ‘Is this past, present or future?’ and ‘Right now or every day?’ to elicit them to answer.

8. The teacher rubs the verbs out, and asks students to complete them.

9. The teacher asks students to write some similar sentences about a person in the class and to guess who is being described.

For beginners, visual aids and realia are useful to avoid the need for translation. However, this may require the teacher to pre-teach the vocabulary of each object. At the same time, the problem is that only a limited number of grammatical structures that lend themselves to this approach. In contrast, adult learners may be wary of a teaching style which dates from the elementary school. Therefore, whether using realia to adult learners or not, it should be considered.

C. Teaching the Difference between Past Simple and Present Perfect through Minimal Sentence Pairs (Pre-intermediate)

Past simple and present perfect are easily confused structures. Learners generally know rules of both structures separately but they feel confused when they come together. For instance, ‘I went to the USA’ and ‘I have gone to the USA’. Here are steps of teaching both structures below:

1. The teacher writes three sets of sentences on the board, and each includes both past simple and present perfect tense.

2. The teacher asks students to identify the two verb structures in each set.

3. Students are asked to differentiate the meaning in each case.

4. The teacher gives students the definition of both tense.

5. There are two timelines to be drawn on the board and students are asked to
match them which tense it is.

6. The teacher gives students some exercise to practice both tenses.

The presentation of minimal pairs combines the features of an explanation-driven approach and discovery approach. The direct and inflexible grammar focus is suitable for adult learners who are not deterred by an analytical approach to language learning. Younger learners may think this approach makes them without motivation to learn.

D. Teaching Should Have Done Using a Generative Situation (Intermediate)

To overcome some shortcomings were mentioned above of relying only on demonstration, which is teaching by using realia, is called situational approach. By offering a context to the learner, it also avoids the problems which involved in either excessive explanation or translation. Here are some following steps of teaching grammar through creating a generative situation.

1. Through a picture from a magazine and putting it on the board and the teacher introduces a character named Andy. Then, the teacher draws a rough map of America, where Andy will travel, which is placed next to a picture with a four-wheel vehicle.

2. The teacher elicits the ideas about how the pictures are connected, and creates a situation.

3. The teacher elicits the sort of preparations a person would need to make for a journey. Students suggest that Andy would need a map, lots of water, and so forth. Then, the teacher selects some of the ideas, and writes them on the board.

   (To do this kind of journey, you should: take a map, take water, and so on.)

4. The teacher explains that Andy made no preparations. Then, the teacher asks
students to use their ideas to construct a story just like the teacher.

(The teacher’s story: Andy set off, got lost, got very thirsty, set off in search of help (leaving his vehicle behind), got trapped by sudden flood waters. The police set out in search of him but couldn’t find him because he had abandoned his vehicle and left no note.)

5. The teacher asks students ‘Well, what do you think of Andy?’ and elicits them to answer like ‘He was stupid’. Teacher asks ‘Why?’ At this point, students may try to create sentences like ‘He must take a map.’ Through establishing the idea of disapproval of past actions, the teacher models the sentence ‘He should have taken a map.’ and repeats it two to three times. Students repeat the sentence together and then individually.

6. The teacher reminds the students of the disapproving concept by asking ‘Did he take a map?’ Students respond ‘No.’ The teacher asks ‘Was that a good idea? Students answer ‘No.’ Teacher says ‘So…’ Students respond ‘He should have taken a map.’

7. The teacher repeats the process and models another sentence ‘He shouldn’t have traveled alone’. Students are asked to add further sentences about the situation.

8. The teacher asks students to create a dialogue when the police find Andy, and to do role-play to practice the dialogue

Still, there are some problems in a generative situation:

1. What if the students don’t ‘get’ the rule?

2. What if they get the wrong rule?

3. Wouldn’t it have been easier to explain it from the start?

4. If students are in the wrong mind-set they are unlikely to do the kind of
cognitive work involved in the induction of grammar rules.

This kind of teaching approach is also time-consuming. Therefore, the generative situation loses points in terms of its economy. It should be used cautiously with learners who are in a hurry.

E. Teaching Verbs that Take Both Infinitive and –ing Forms, Using Concordance Data (Upper Intermediate)

Verbs which are followed by infinitive and –ing form (or the gerund) are sort of headache for English learners. The complicated problem is that there are a number of verbs that can take both forms but with different meanings in subtle. In the following steps, the teacher will use concordance data to guide students towards discovering the differences for themselves.

1. The teacher divides the class into three groups and gives each group (A, B, and C) a different set of concordance lines which includes ‘remember’, ‘forget’, and ‘stop’ in each group.
2. Students are told to study the lines and asked to divide them into two patterns which are infinitive and –ing forms. Then, they should try to work out the differences in meaning between the two patterns.
3. All three groups are re-grouped, so that every student is in each of the new groups.
4. Each group should explain to each other the patterns of form and meaning that they have found for their particular verb.
5. Students are asked to work out a general rule that holds for three verbs, and then report to the class.
6. The teacher summarizes the three verbs by timelines.
7. To check whether students understand the rules or not, the teacher hands out discrimination exercise to them.

As other rule-discovery approaches, it is necessary to balance the losses and gains. One loss may be the amount of time taken to work out the rules, but the gains will be the consequent improvement in terms of understanding. Adopting this approach will depend on the teacher having access to concordancing software and sufficient database to apply it to. Therefore, learners who are comfortable with computers, and are sufficiently motivated, might find that concordance data is a useful tool to learning.

IV. Conclusions

As the mention above, we have looked at a number of approaches of presenting grammar which are designed to engage learners’ inductive reasoning processes, namely, direct method, natural approach, creating a generative situation, discovery learning and concordancing programs. According to those approaches we have just seen, they are designed to offset the perceived weaknesses of deductive approach. However, those approaches above should vary markedly in terms of the role in which they cast both learner and teacher. In TPR approach, the learner is relatively passive and non-intellectual on one hand, while there is the extremely teacher-independent and cognitively demanding approach through using concordance data on the other. Therefore, it would be better if the approaches keep themselves in a balance way of the roles between learner and teacher.

References