

Inductive Approach: Its Pros & Cons

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Abstract

Nowadays the general idea is that grammar has a pivotal role to play in language learning and teaching. English grammar instruction is extremely important for the English learners. However, prescriptive and deductive approaches to English grammar teaching have proved ineffective and boring, because the grammar of a language is acquired not through imitation but through abstracting a set of grammatical rules from language data. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to introduce an inductive approach to English grammar teaching that will help the students to rediscover their subconscious grammar knowledge and bring it to their consciousness, and to show how it is applied in the classroom. At the same time the merits and demerits of this approach are discussed meticulously and elaborately to help the teachers to use this approach in an effective manner in the classroom.

Keywords: Inductive approach, English grammar, Teaching, Learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Among the effective approaches to the teaching of English grammar, Inductive Approach is one of the indispensable approaches to the teaching of English grammar. It is also called rule-discovery learning. It starts with the presentation of a host of examples. Then it is the endeavour on the part of the learners to elicit the rule from the examples given by the teacher. When grammar is taught inductively a teacher allows students to, on the basis of assumption, induce and formulate a rule by themselves. Namely, students produce rules indirectly, applying a rule to exercises from a text. The teacher's task is to provide the appropriate context for communication. This method of teaching grammar incorporates presenting several examples that illustrate a specific concept and expecting the students to notice how the concept works from these examples. No explanation is given beforehand, and the expectation is that the students will be able to recognize the rules of grammar in a more natural way during their own reading and writing. Discovering grammar and visualizing how these rules work in a sentence allow for easier retention of the concept than if the students were given the explanation that was not connected to the examples of the concept. The inductive teaching is mainly concerned with the retention of grammar concepts and here the teachers use the techniques that are known to work cognitively and make an impression on students' contextual memory.

SALIENT FEATURES

Nunan (1999) identifies inductive approach as a process where learners discover the grammar rules themselves by examining the examples. In an inductive approach it is also feasible to use a context for grammar rules. The learners explore the grammar rules in a text or an audio rather than isolated sentences. Thornbury (1999) notes that in an inductive approach the learners are provided with the samples that include the target grammar which they will learn. Then the learners work on the examples themselves. When the students derive the grammar rules, they practise the language by creating their own examples. An inductive teaching is based on the bottom-up theory which accepts the view that the language learners tend to focus on parts rather than the whole. For this reason the teaching process begins with a text, audio or visual in a context. Secondly, the learners work on the material to find the rules themselves. In the final stage, they give their own examples. However, in an inductive approach they are active as they are responsible for exploring the rules themselves. So the process of learning is experimental in this approach. According to Thornbury (1999), the class where the students are engaged in the lesson actively is quite reasonable since it gives more comfortable and motivating ambience for them. He also remarks that an inductive teaching supply more profound knowledge as the learners study cognitively in order to discover the rules. It has been pointed out that

when the learners take part in the learning process actively to discover the rules, they are able to develop their own skill which makes them good language learner. The inductive approach, in its turn, moves from specific to general. The learners are first shown many examples that contain grammatical structure in different contexts and they have to work out the rules by themselves. Next the learners apply the rules with various exercises and in different contexts to learn how they actually work in real language use. Yet here theorists have differing opinions about whether or not the rule should be verbalized at all. Some consider it to be helpful for the learners but others think it only disturbs the process of acquisition (Decoo, 1996). The rules are sometimes verbalized as a summary after the learners had a scope to discover the rules by themselves from the examples. This is done as some learners require some explicit rules to understand the concepts. This approach is often compared with the Audio-Lingual method that sees language learning as habit formation where, according to Shaffer (1989), learners will learn the structure through examples until it becomes automatic. He also opines that the students will not know what they are learning unless the teacher gives a detailed explanation to them. Grammar is presented here in context and the learners can consciously work with the language.

HOW TO USE THIS APPROACH

Now, let us present the basic ideas behind this inductive approach English grammar teaching, which can be roughly characterized as the following four steps:

- (1) Step 1: Students are given a set of sentences about an area of English grammar;
- Step 2: Students are asked to elicit the grammatical rule from the set of English sentences;
- Step 3: Students are asked to check and test the grammatical rule against new sentences about the same area of English grammar;
- Step 4: Students are asked to revise the grammatical rule to accommodate the new sentences.

Now, let us use the teaching of the English reflexive pronouns as an example to show how this inductive approach works. According to Step 1, students are given a group of sentences regarding the use of the English reflexive pronouns, as exemplified by (2):

- (2) a. Bipin won't commit himself.
- b. *Himself won't be committed.

According to Step 2, students are asked to produce or generalize a grammatical rule from the group of sentences to account for both its grammatical and ungrammatical sentences. Based on their grammatical judgments about the two sentences in (2), students would formulate a tentative grammatical rule

which governs the use of the English reflexive pronouns in the following manner:

A reflexive pronoun does not have independent reference, and must take its reference from an antecedent.

Under this rule, the sentence in (2a) is grammatical because the reflexive pronoun himself can take its reference from its antecedent Bipin. However, the sentence in (2b) is ungrammatical because the reflexive pronoun himself does not have an antecedent to refer back to.

According to Step 3, students are asked to check and test the rule against new sentences involving the use of the reflexive pronouns, and to find out whether this grammatical rule can apply to new sentences. For example, the sentences in (3) can be used for students to check and test the rule:

- (3) a. Bipin won't commit themselves.
- b. Bipin won't commit itself.
- c. Bipin won't commit myself.
- d. Bipin said that Rina won't commit himself.

The result of such a check and test shows that the rule cannot account for the ungrammatical sentences in (3), even though an antecedent is available for the reflexive pronoun in each of them. In other words, based on students' grammatical judgments about these sentences in (3), Bipin cannot serve as an appropriate antecedent for the reflexive pronouns themselves, itself, myself and himself respectively: that is, in (3a) Bipin does not agree with themselves in number; in (3b) Bipin does not agree with itself in gender; in (3c) Bipin does not agree with myself in person; and in (3d) Bipin and himself are not in the same clause. Thus, the inadequacy of the rule calls for its revision, which will lead us to Step 4.

In order to accommodate these ungrammatical sentences in (3), students are asked to revise the grammatical rule, which may end up as follows:

A reflexive pronoun does not have independent reference, and must take its reference from an antecedent that agrees with the reflexive pronoun in number, gender and person.

The revised rule does not only account for the sentences in (2), but accounts for these ungrammatical sentences in (3) as well. In this way the Inductive Approach may be used in English grammar classroom effectively.

PROS AND CONS

In fact, consciousness raising is seen as an important feature in language learning as it focuses on the learners' attention actively on a grammatical structure through examples and guides them to work

out the rules of the target language themselves, instead of giving them everything ready and waiting (Ruin, 1996). This approach also involves the learners in a more active, participation and as they require to figure out the rules by themselves, the learners will remember and acquire then better than just by hearing them from the teacher. Despite the advantages of the inductive approach, it might not always be a good way to approach a grammar item. Firstly, it can be very time consuming as the teacher has to create the many examples needed to demonstrate the rules well enough and it might also take much time for the learners to actually discover the rules. The time taken for the discovery of the rule might not leave enough room for exercises and in that case the learners could only depend on their own conclusions. Secondly, the learners might hypothesize the rules wrong which might lead to incorrect assumptions of the grammar item (Thornbury, 1999). Now, if the rules are not verbalized at all, it might be very difficult later to unlearn what the learners have originally acquired and, thus, it could lead to bad habits in real language use. Again, the researchers are not completely satisfied with the method although many have found it functional. Here the learners get to participate more but, on the other hand, this participation might lead to incorrect knowledge about the language and also take time from actually practicing the rules.

CONCLUSION

The significance of this inductive approach lies in the fact that it actively involves students in their English grammar learning process because they have to formulate grammatical rules by themselves and to check, test and revise these rules, rather than to memorize them without understanding why, and that it will reform the traditional way of teaching English grammar by bringing a fresh perspective into this field to develop and enhance students' English grammar competence and skills. The effectiveness of the inductive teaching method is to be measured. Hence, there is the need for the teachers to popularize the importance and promote the use of the inductive teaching in the classrooms. Below are some of the importance of using the inductive teaching approach:

- I. Inductive teaching is learner – centred and helps to promote effective learning.
- II. Students hardly forget grammar structures that they learn.
- III. It helps learners fish out information themselves.
- IV. It helps to motivate the students to learn the structures they are introduced to.
- V. The grammar structures are learnt in real life situations and this situational learning encourages students to use the language in a real life situation.
- VI. It helps teachers to avoid long definitions they make students memorise.
- VII. It helps students to learn from the known to the unknown and this really helps students to understand structures by blending the old and the new knowledge.
- VIII. The mental effort involved ensures a greater degree of cognitive depth which, again, ensures greater memorability.
- IX. Students are more actively involved in the learning process, rather than being simply passive recipients: they are therefore likely to be more attentive and more motivated.

All these important aspects of inductive approach should be kept in mind while using this approach to the teaching of English grammar to make this approach more fruitful and more effective.

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