

# Inductive Teaching of English Grammar

—Potential Teaching Materials Collected from Daily Life in Hawaii—

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## Abstract

This paper presents the English Grammar samples taken from the signs and signposts in an English-speaking country. The samples which include grammatical features can be useful teaching materials. A recent shift in English education in Japan calls for more effective ways to teach English so that the learners will be able to communicate using English, rather than only having grammatical knowledge which cannot be used in communication. Using the language samples in signs and signposts can lead the learners to understand how certain structures or words are used in contexts. The author discusses how teachers can make use of these potential materials in their teaching.

## Introduction

Grammar teaching has always been a central component of foreign language teaching. It is particularly true in the countries where a structural syllabus is predominantly employed as in Japan. In this kind of teaching context, grammar has traditionally been taught deductively using a teaching procedure known as PPP (Presentation-Practice-Production): Teachers first present and explain a grammatical feature to be learned in the lesson, followed by some practices such as drills or excises, and, then the students are to produce the grammatical feature in more communicative activities.

The major issue here is that the last stage, “production,” does not work as is expected. There is an unfortunate reality that teachers often do not have enough time to move to the production stage (Izumi, 2009). Also as Takashima (2005) points out, the activities provided in the classrooms at this stage are, in fact, not essentially different from the ones at the previous stage “practice”. In other words, they are not communicative enough in the sense that the learners can realize and experience the functions of the grammatical features. As a result, students have not been able to use their supposedly learned structures in real communication through this approach.

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In this paper, the author proposes an inductive grammar teaching as part of grammar instruction in order to facilitate learners' deeper understanding of the targeted grammatical structures. For inductive instruction, learners must be provided with language data. The data were collected during the author's sabbatical stay in Hawaii from late 2020 to early 2021.

### Grammar Dimensions to Teach

Larsen-Freeman (2003) argued that there are three dimensions in grammar: Form, Meaning, and Use. It is claimed that learners should understand all these aspects in order to be able to use grammatical features accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately. In actual teaching, however, it is often the case that teaching of Use is missing. This can be easily understood when you think of the PPP procedure described above: The class does not reach the final stage "production," where the students are to understand when and why the structure is used (*i.e.* Use) and experience the function of the structure in producing the target language.

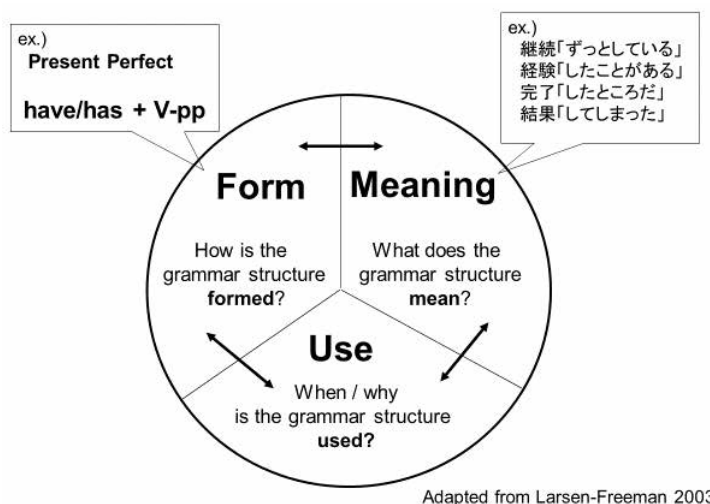


Figure 1. Grammar Dimensions: Form, Meaning, and Use

In a typical English classroom in Japan, at least up to the high school level, the Use of a grammatical structure is presented in a dialog or in a reading passage in the textbook, and teachers explain the Form and the Meaning of the structure in details. The Use might be briefly mentioned by teachers, but it is usually the learners who are expected to understand or process how a certain form can be used in a context, judging from the situation described in the exemplar setting in the textbook. Even if the teacher's explanation is clear and the learners' understanding is excellent, it has

to be taken into account the well-known fact (to name a few, Ebbinhaus 1885; Mondria et al. 1994) that learners tend to forget almost 50% of what they learned in a lesson as soon as in the next day. Therefore, it is inevitable for learners to come across a grammatical structure to be learned in a meaningful context more than once.

More recently, Larsen-Freeman (2015; 2020) proposed a different way to think about grammar: She claimed that grammar is not a collection of static rules, but a dynamic process, *grammaring*. Inspired by Chaos/Complexity Theory and Complex Dynamic Systems Theory, which is applicable from biology to applied linguistics, she contended that grammar practices should be “iterative,” not “repetitive” when grammar is viewed as a dynamic process. She suggests that “if we can give our students opportunities to encounter more or less the same grammar construction over and over again in different context [emphasis added], their learning of the construction will be facilitated”(Larsen-Freeman 2020: 105).

In the PPP procedure described above, students are often required to repeat a grammatical structure at the first two stages: presentation and practice. I suggest that teachers should provide more iterative examples and practices rather than presenting only one example in the textbook or the typical “repeat after me” kind of practices. When Japanese learners of English learn words or grammar, they are often instructed to memorize them. Learners are usually given quizzes or tests for the teachers to check their memorization, and they tend to have explicit knowledge about the words or grammar only in one-to-one relationships. Taking an example of the word “available”, I myself memorized it as 利用できる (can be used) , which is the literal translation/meaning in the dictionary. It was not until I came across this word in so many signs in different places in English-speaking countries, such as “TAKE OUT AVAILABLE” (Figure 2) in New York, “CHILLED BEER & WINE AVAILABLE IN STORE” (Figure 3) in London, and “PARKING AVAILABLE” (Figure 4) in Melbourne, that I realized and fully understood the Use of this word. It is useful and practical for the learners to know how versatile this word “available” is. You will not be confused when you are asked if you are available, wondering how you will be used by the person who asked the question.



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

## Inductive Grammar Teaching

Letting learners process the Use of the language by giving iterative examples is the opposite way from the traditional rote memorization of language learning. While teaching grammar requiring memorization is strongly associated with a didactic option of explicit instruction, the way asking the learners to analyze the language data is a discovery option of explicit instruction (Ellis 2005).

This inductive way of teaching grammar can be an alternative or supplementary way of didactic and deductive grammar instruction. From a student perspective, analyzing language by looking through the signs and signposts which are in daily use in the English-speaking countries can be interesting activities in a language class, certainly more interesting than just memorizing the list of the words and phrases.

As a practitioner as well as a researcher, I have been collecting the English language samples/data which can be used as teaching materials for over 20 years and I have been implementing this teaching an activities in the classes. I've also been promoting this inductive grammar teaching to the local high school teachers in seminars. The method proceeds as follows:

- (1) Distribute sheets of photo including the target item (preferably three sheets/photos each so that they have enough data to analyze and discover the rules).
- (2) Make groups of 3 to 4 people and let them discuss the photos (where the photo was taken, what the message is, and which grammatical/lexical item is crucial in the photo).
- (3) Sort the photos if there are more than 2 items despite the form is the same (*e.g.* Form “-ing” shares three kinds of parts of speech; Progressive, Gerund, and Present Participle).
- (4) Have students report their discovery of the rules in front of the class.

Figures 5 through 10 are some of the samples I have collected and used in my classes. Each photo contains Form “-ing”, but their parts of speech are different.

Both students and teachers seem to find this activity quite enjoyable. I keep



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

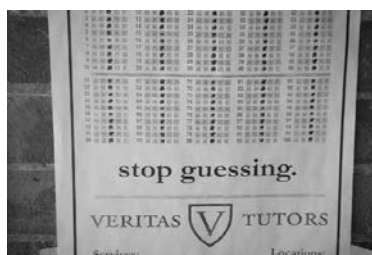


Figure 10

getting positive feedback although some teachers have pointed out that this activity is not feasible in their classes because it is time-consuming. While this activity is amusing, its ultimate purpose is for learners to process the form-meaning mapping and to realize the Use of the target structure/word, which seems sufficiently effective. Inductive grammar teaching is worth trying.

### Teaching Grammar Inductively Project (T.G.I. Project)

Inductive grammar teaching requires ample data samples for learners to process and discover rules. To meet the end, a project of collecting the language samples, named Teaching Grammar Inductively (T.G.I.) Project, was launched in December 2020. It ended in February 2021. During the two and a half months, over 400 samples which have potential value as teaching material were collected in the cities and towns on the island of Oahu in the State of Hawaii.

Table 1. Collected Example Categories and Sample Number

Grammatical	Number	Lexical	Number	Cultural	Number
Progressive (-ing)	37	Available	6	Hawaii specific	122
Gerund (-ing)		-able	5	COVID-related	136
Present Participle (-ing)		-free	17	Organic	9
Past Participle	44	-friendly	0	Vegan	9
Present Perfect	9	-logy	0	Halal	0
Comparative/Superlative	38	Too...to...	1	Kosher	0

Three students at Hawaii Pacific University participated in this project, contributing eight samples, each of which reported the date, source, and the focused structure. Most of the samples were the photos of signs or commodities' packages while some of them were taken from Web. advertisements or TV commercials. Upon asking for the contribution, some samples which had been collected and used were presented so that they could see what kind of data are requested to collect. The data could have been grammatical, lexical, and cultural. The list of the items which need to be collected was presented with examples and explanation. As shown in the Table 1, some of the items were not found during the data collection period.

### Progressive (-ing)

This item is the most recognizable among the three functions of *-ing* words. Both Figure 11 and Figure 12 are the examples of progressive-*ing*, which means some action is in progress. Figure 11 is a sign in front of a café in Kailua in December 2020. It was about time when eatery started to reopen with some restrictions such as limited number of customers in a party. It was clear that they needed helping hands. Figure 12 is from a TV commercial. It was striking that this delivery service was universal even the line; "Tonight, I'll be eating local".



Figure 11

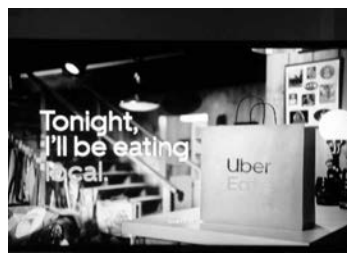


Figure 12

### Gerund (-ing)

This use of *-ing* form is dominant in signs which prohibit activities. Figure 13 is a sign on a street which shows the action of dumping is not allowed. Figure 14 also asks the visitors on campus not to eat or drink.



Figure 13



Figure 14

### Present Participle (-ing)

Compared with the other two *-ing* examples; progressive and gerund, the present participle *-ing* whose function is adjectival is much scarcer. Figure 15 is a photo of a restaurant in Waikiki. Above the entrance, there is a sign which says “EATING HOUSE”. It seems a little strange for a restaurant’s name because people do eat there. Figure 16 is a sign in an elevator in a condominium in Waikiki. It must be a warning for the residents who use the roof-top pool in the building.



Figure 15



Figure 16

### Present Perfect

The English present perfect is one of the most difficult structures to learn for the Japanese learners of English. The form of this structure “have/has + V-pp (past participle of a verb)” has four meanings in Japanese translation as shown in the Grammar Dimension pie chart in Figure 1; 継続, 経験, 完了, 結果. The plurality of the form’s meaning adds the difficulties in understanding this structure.

Figure 17 is a sign which was put at a shopping mall in Peal City. The store is welcoming the customers who are coming back for shopping after a few months of COVID-19 lock down.

Figure 18 shows souvenir mugs at Starbucks. They are “BEEN THERE” Series mugs, which have city’s icons and landmarks painted all over the surface. This Present Perfect represents experience of going to the city.



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19 is a screen capture of TV news reporting on the January 6<sup>th</sup> Riot in the Capitol Hill. The images of people storming the Capitol were disturbing enough, but the shout of a policeman “WE’VE LOST THE LINE!” was even more shocking. It was the moment I deeply understood the Use of present perfect: It refers to what is happening in a present situation.

Figure 20 is a sign of a TV network company informing the customers that they do not have the shop where they used to any more. For native speakers/users of English, there is no doubt for using the present perfect “We’ve moved,” never the past tense “We moved” in this case.



Figure 19



Figure 20

### Comparative/Superlative

TV commercials are full of good examples for comparative or superlative structures by their nature because they often compare their commodity to the similar products of other company or their own older version of the products (cf. Figure 21, Figure 22).



Figure 21



Figure 22

### Suffix *-able*

The suffix “-able” is versatile. Once you learn that it adds the meaning “to be able to” to its preceding verb, you can guess or even coin the *-able* words. In this example (Figure 23), this cream cheese is not too hard to spread on a beagle, but easy to spread or spreadable.



Figure 24 is a package of a mask. In describing its features of the fabric mask, five *-able* words; comfortable, adjustable, washable, reusable, and replaceable, are shown.



Figure 23

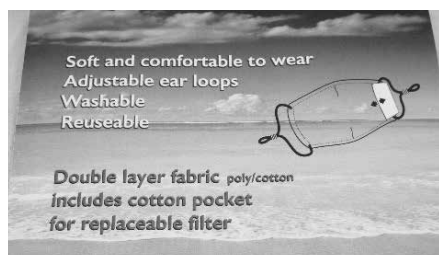


Figure 24

### Suffix *-free*

It is confusing for Japanese learners of English to know the difference between the meaning of “free”. Since the meaning “for free” (no need to pay, or without being captured as in “freedom”) is the first meaning they learn, they tend to misunderstand “Smoke Free Campus” as a campus where anyone can smoke freely.



Figure 25



Figure 26

Figure 25 is an example of “free” as an adjective. It says that if you join the membership, you will get a free card every month.

Figure 26 shows suffix *-free* as in “Guilt-Free”. Dream Pops are 100% plant-based popsicles. Since they do not use dairy product which is normally used to make ice cream bars and instead they use dairy-free product alternative such as soy milk, you don’t have to feel guilty when you eat this popsicle even when you are on a diet.

### Culture: Hawaii Specific

Anything related to the ocean, beach, and surfing is naturally very popular in

Hawaii. You might find sign boards which declare like, “The ocean is where I belong,” “All we do is beach,” “Take me to the Beach or lose me forever,” “I’d rather be lost at the beach than found at home,” and simply “Life is better in Hawaii”. You might find your favorite shop is closed with a sign at the door, “Out to sea!”(Figure 27). It seems that every boy should be able to surf in Hawaii. Otherwise, the girl whose boyfriend cannot even surf will cry in grief as in Figure 28.



Figure 27



Figure 28

### Culture: COVID-related

Hawaii was under strict control of COVID restriction in December 2020. Masks were required everywhere and you were not allowed to ride on the bus without wearing a mask (Figure 29). On the bus, there were posters which showed people in different age, ethnicity, and gender giving messages on their masks (Figure 30 ~ Figure 33). The “No mask, No Ride” campaign appeared to have been successful.



Figure 29



Figure 30



Figure 31



Figure 32



Figure 33

In Hawaii in the winter of 2020/2021, when you turn on TV, it was impossible to avoid the state government's constant messages, "Do your part. Fight COVID," "Mahalo for supporting local!," and "We are all together in this". These messages were always combined with a monologue of local people. They talked about how their lives suddenly had changed because of COVID and how they felt about it. It hurt listening to a young man who was going to a college but it was canceled, a yoga instructor who had lost her job, a young mother with children who did not have a job. It was certainly a successful campaign to make majority of people feel that they had to do their parts. FedEx was also sending a message, "We are doing our part to deliver the COVID-19 vaccine. Do your part." Here, "Do your part" means "Stay home and do not spread the virus."



Figure 34



Figure 35

## Conclusion

With the recent development of corpus or concordance, and their utilization in language teaching, language data have become increasingly accessible. However, when you search for a word or a phrase in a concordance, the results on the PC screen seem rather overwhelming to look into: it is an enormously long list of the sentences which includes the word or the phrase you are searching for. Unless you are an analytic linguist-type learner, especially at younger age, the lists might not be very

appealing. I would argue it is mainly because the lists lack the context. Data in the form of the photos as shown in the language samples collected in Hawaii in this paper can compensate this shortcoming and can appear more attractive to the learners. In a foreign language teaching, selecting and using authentic materials which interest the learners can be a powerful way of teaching.

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帰納的英文法指導  
—ハワイでの日常生活で収集した潜在的教材—

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要旨

日本の英語教育は現在、大きな変換期を迎えている。最新の学習指導要領では、英語のコミュニケーション能力の伸長を大目標として、小学校から高等学校まで一貫性のある段階的な目標が設定されている。中学校、高等学校の英語の授業においては、コミュニケーション能力の伸長を促す言語活動は十分に実施されていない一方で、必ず行われているのは文法指導である。

本稿では、伝統的な演繹的手法による文法指導に対して帰納的な文法指導の視点を提案し、教材として使うことができる言語材料を提供する。教師が一方的に説明をする文法指導ではなく、学習者がデータを分析して文法を発見するプロセスは、言語習得を深化させる方法として有効である。ハワイでの生活の中で収集したオーセンティックな言語材料は、写真の形態で提示することで、文法構造や語が使われている文脈が明らかであり、従来の文法指導に欠けているとされるUse（使われ方）を学習者が理解しやすくなると考えられる。また、文化的な側面を教える教材となりえることも示唆している。