

# Grammar Teaching- A bio-data experiment (Preposition)

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## 摘要

文法教學是所有英語教學中頗為爭議的議題，大多數的人主張以英語為第二外國語的學生應該要著重於文法學習。在實際的教學環境中，大多是老師先告訴學生文法結構，學生再從練習題中去記憶，此種歸納式的學習方式有利於大班教學卻無法兼顧個人的學習差異。而讓學生從實際使用的句子中去找出文法結構的演繹式教學，卻往往因時間，班級人數過多而不利於施行於教學現場。對於英語教師而言應該要採取歸納式教法還是演繹式的教法為宜？在本文中將以一個同樣以英語為第二外國語的亞洲學生（日本）的教學的實驗來探討。實驗分為兩部份，第一部份蒐集該生的文法（介系詞）錯誤，第二部份從寫作中選出該生最嚴重的文法問題，進而設計一個共有三單元的教學活動，從中檢視如果進行介系詞文法教學時，何種教學法對非英語系國家的亞洲學生較為適宜。

## 1. Introduction

Grammar teaching is always a controversial aspect of English language teaching. Whether teachers should teach grammar inductively or deductively, focus on form or focus on meaning is what English teachers concern. There are two parts in this article. In part I, I will provide the bio-data of the assigned student and identify and rank several grammatical problems from his writing. In part II, I will pick up the most problematic grammar point and design a series of activities around it in the three lessons. I will also provide a reflective account of what I as the teacher learned after each lesson and how I am going to use these approaches to teach my students in the future.

## 2. Part I

### 2.1 Target student

The target student, twenty one years old, is studying at Tokyo University of Agriculture. He has studied English for 10 years. He told me he used to be taught deductively. He has never been to any other English speaking country. He and his classmates are studying General English courses at Stirling University. The topic of his writing is about his life in Stirling. I asked him to write freely but no more than ten sentences. After checking his grammar mistakes, I arranged three lessons to teach him in A.K.D hall. While teaching, we only used English to communicate with each other. He is shy and polite and has high motivation in learning English.

### 2.2 Identifying-the-problem stage

#### 2.2.1 The errors (Table 1)

Errors
1. I'm having amazing time.
2. Come to here
3. Going to come back
4. At 3 <sup>rd</sup> Feburuary
5. at 7 <sup>th</sup> April
6. At near
7. We didn't know beer factory's place.
8. I looked for there a lot of time.
9. I couldn't eat everything too many Fish & Chips.
10. I wont to enjoy Stirling life.

Table 1 Errors from my student's writing (words not counted)

### 2.2.2 Types of Errors

It is impossible to teach a student about these errors one by one. As Thornbury (1999: 114) suggests, “once an error has been identified, the next step is to classify it.” According to their attributions, errors in table 1.1 can be categorized into two types (Table 2).

Category	Errors	Attribution
Lexical errors	4. Feburuary	Spelling
	10. wont	Spelling
Grammar errors	4. at 3 <sup>rd</sup> Feburuary	Preposition (time)
	5. at 7 <sup>th</sup> April	Preposition (time)
	2. come to here	Preposition (place)
	3. going to come back	Preposition (place)
	6. At near	Preposition (place)
	1. I’m having amazing time.	Articles
	7. We didn’t know beer factory’s place.	Indirect Question Sentence
	8. I looked for there a lot of time.	pattern(spend....V-ing) Sentence pattern
	9. I couldn’t eat everything too many Fish & Chips.	(Because....., ..)

Table 2 Two types of errors (words not counted)

### 2.2.3 Priority of the errors and the rationale

Now I know the errors made by the student, but what should I teach him in a short time? According to Thornbury (1999:8), we need a syllabus to tell the teacher what is to be covered and in what order. Therefore, before designing a series of activities, it is important to point out how many grammar points should be selected and in what order. In other words, how to select and how to grade the errors is crucial.

#### Selection Stage

Frequency and usefulness are two criteria for selecting the items (Thornbury, 1999:8).

From Table 1.2, there are 9 grammar errors in his writing. The most frequent errors are preposition of time, preposition of place, and sentence pattern. The second criterion is usefulness. From Thornbury's (1999:9) core grammar hypothesis, there is a checklist of items which are useful to beginners. Preposition of time and place are two of them. Although the sentence pattern error is not on the list, it is also selected based on my personal teaching experience.

### **Grading Stage**

As (Thornbury, 1999:9) suggests, we can use three criteria to decide their orders-complexity, learnability, and teachability. Without considering the natural order of language learning, he tends to conclude a principle - the simpler, the more learnable and also the more teachable. According to this principle, it is obvious that preposition of time and place are the easier ones among them. The errors I selected and graded are as the following order: preposition of time, preposition of place and sentence pattern.

### **2.3 Rationale**

The reason why I put preposition of time and place in the first priority is not only the frequency of errors but also from the COBUILD corpus word frequency list given in Sinclair (1991: 143). Preposition is one of the ten most frequent words in English. Furthermore, the student is from Japan. The cause of his grammar errors might come from the gap between Japanese and English. In other words, the influence of his first language and his target language might cause preposition errors. In order to help him overcome the possible gap, I consider preposition of time and place the most serious problem and plan a series of lessons to teach him. .

### **3. Part II: Implementing-and-trying-it-out stage**

After identifying my student's grammar errors and prioritizing them, it is time to design a series of teaching activities and put them into practice. In the following paragraphs, I will provide the brief steps, my rationale of designing these activities lesson by lesson and the reflective account at the end.

I designed three lessons to teach my student about the notion of English preposition. I used different teaching methods and approaches over these lessons (Table 3). The reason why I used different methods and approaches in each lesson is that I want to compare

which approach and method is more effective for my student.

Lesson	Grammar focus	Approach or activity	Method
One	Preposition of time (at, on, in)	Inductive (C-R)	T-T-T
Two	Preposition of place	Deductive	P-P-P
Three	Preposition (mixture)		TPR

Table 3 Lesson schedule

### 3.1 Lesson One: Preposition of time

**Activities** (words not counted)

#### Step 1

Give the student a handout with some examples. He needs to tell me what he notices from the examples. (C-R) Then he tries to sort out the rule. (**Appendix 1**)

#### Step 2

Teach him the rule.

#### Step 3

Follow the first form and talk about himself. (**Appendix 2**)

#### Rationale

The approach I use is an inductive one. “An inductive approach starts with some examples from which a rule is inferred (Thornbury, 1999:29).” The student has to find the rule by himself. In this lesson, the method I use is T-T-T (Task- Teach- Task). I expect that he can generalize the rule by himself. As Harmer (1989) suggests, “To discover the grammar rules rather than be told them.” Then I give him feedback. Finally, he did the similar exercise again. I also used C-R (Consciousness-Raising) technique in step 1. It can guide the learner to make his own discoveries about grammar (Batstone, 1994:57)

### 3.2 Lesson Two: Preposition of place (at, on, in, near, at the front.....)

**Activities** (words not counted)

#### Step1 (Presentation)

Use a picture to explain the grammar rule. (**Appendix 3**)

#### Step 2 (Practice)

Give him some exercise to practice the grammar rule. (**Appendix 4**)

#### Step 3 (Production)

Identify all the prepositions (**Appendix 5**)

### **Rationale**

The teaching approach I use in this lesson is deductive. “A deductive approach starts with the presentation of a rule and is followed by examples in which the rule is applied (Thornbury, 1999:29).”It is a rule-driven path. I started teaching with explaining the rule and give him some examples to follow. There are three main reasons. First, it gets to the point immediately. Both my student and I know what we are going to learn in this lesson. Second, since my student is an adult, it may be a good way to use deductive approach to explain the rule of form to him. The method I use is P-P-P which is a popular and widely used method by many course books or teachers. By using P-P-P, initially, teachers can introduce a situation which contextualizes the language to be taught (Harmer, 2001: 80). Also, this method allows the teacher to control the content and pace of the lesson (Thornbury, 1999:128).

### **3.3 Lesson Three: Preposition of time and place**

#### **Activities (words not counted)**

##### **Step 1**

Tell him the aim is to introduce the things outside the A.K.D Hall.

##### **Step 2**

Show him how to introduce real things in front of A.K.D Hall.

##### **Step 3**

It is his turn to introduce the things for me.

### **Rationale**

The reason why I adopt TPR in the final lesson is that it might be easier for my student to remember those prepositions. As Asher J. J. suggests that TPR has three benefits - it provides high-speed understanding of the target language, it has no stress, and it is a long-term retention. The best way for a student to learn grammar is to make things interesting. TPR is interesting. It provides a real situation for my student to learn and he is also highly motivated. What I do is to make the connection from the classroom context to the real-life context. As Celce-Murcia and Hilles (1988:8) mention we need a realistic and effective contextualization of a single grammar point which can really help

students.

#### **4. Reflective account**

In the first lesson, I tried to teach him inductively and used C-R technique. However, I found he was a little confused when I asked him to do the task at the very beginning. The reason might be his unfamiliarity and learning habit. But after using C-R as an ice breaker to recall his memory, he seemed a little relaxed and started to participate actively. He understood what I was trying to teach him. But I still found some of his grammatical problems in the final task.

Because he is an adult from Japan where most teachers use deductive approach, I decided to use a deductive approach in the second lesson and P-P-P model. I discovered that using the deductive approach and P-P-P method was quite successful in the second lesson, because his answers were 100% correct. It seemed that teacher-fronted teaching was familiar with him. Therefore, he had less affective filter and learned more effectively. At the end of the second lesson, he told me that he can know the grammar rule. But when he tries to use it in the real world, he can not use them correctly. In order to help him with the problem, I used TPR in the third lesson. Thus, he had the opportunity to make connections between classroom instructions and the real context. It turned out that he successfully learned it without any difficulty.

After the three lessons, we discussed the reason why he thought he had difficulty in learning the preposition. He said maybe in Japanese there are few prepositions. At the end of the third lesson, he wanted me to check another writing of his. It was about his trip to Ireland last week. He tried to use the prepositions I taught him in his writing. The best feedback from the student is his autonomous learning. The successful teaching approach is a combination of deductive approach which incorporates with TPR. I will try to use them in my future teaching, because my students have the same learning background and they probably prefer learning by doing to learning by listening.

#### **5. Conclusion**

To sum up, I really learned a lot from these stages. As an English teacher, I need to utilize different approaches and methods depend on students' level. As Harmer (1998: 22) suggests it is important for teachers to bring new ideas and take them into the classroom.

## Reference

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## Appendix 1

### Lesson One

#### Preposition of time (at, on and in)

##### Task 1

Look at the following examples, try to find out the rule by yourself.

(Hint: try to compare the preposition before the time in each sentence.)

##### About Me

1. I was born in 1985.
2. I was born in August.
3. It was in the summer.
4. I came here on 3<sup>rd</sup> March.
5. I am leaving on 7<sup>th</sup> April.
6. I live in A.K.D. and I get up at 7:30 every morning.
7. I drink soya in the morning, it is really delicious.
8. I like playing TV games at night.
9. I got a PS3 at Christmas.
10. I have classes every day. So I usually go to the library on Friday afternoon..

##### Task 2

Which sentence is using the preposition “at”? \_\_\_\_\_

Which sentence is using the preposition “on”? \_\_\_\_\_

Which sentence is using the preposition “in”? \_\_\_\_\_

##### Task 3

**Notice the time after the preposition? Try to think the rule and write it down.**

Rule: at \_\_\_\_\_

on: \_\_\_\_\_

in: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 2**

### **Lesson One**

#### **Preposition of time (at, on and in)**

#### **Task 1**

Now, it is your turn to tell me about yourself. You have to use the three prepositions in the following sentences.

#### **About Me**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

## Appendix 3

### Lesson Two

#### Preposition of place (on, in, near, in front of.....)

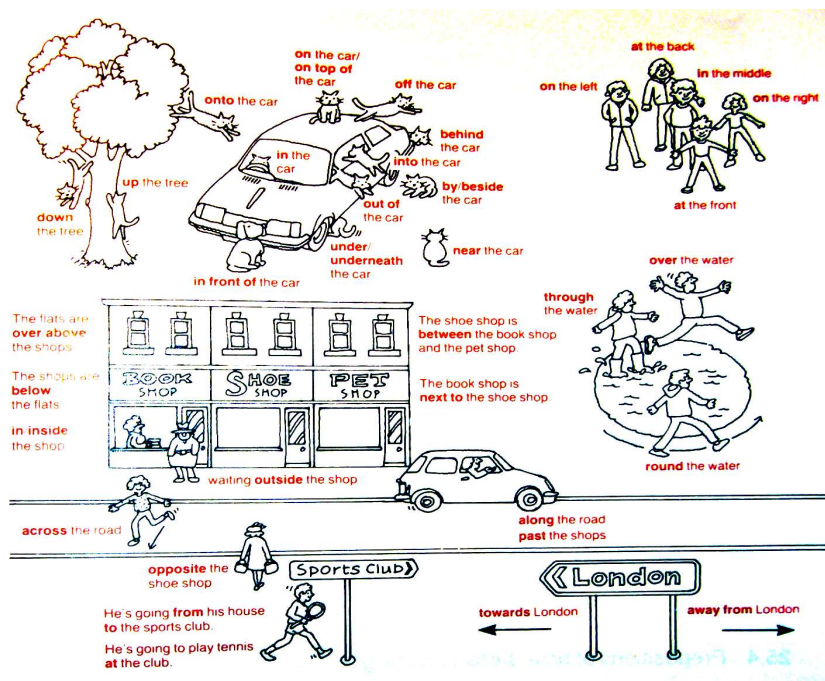
##### Task 1

Prepositions cannot be distinguished by any formal features. A list of prepositions will illustrate this point:

*across, after, at, before, by, during, from, in, into, of, on, to, under, with, without*

We can, say, however, that prepositions typically come before a noun.

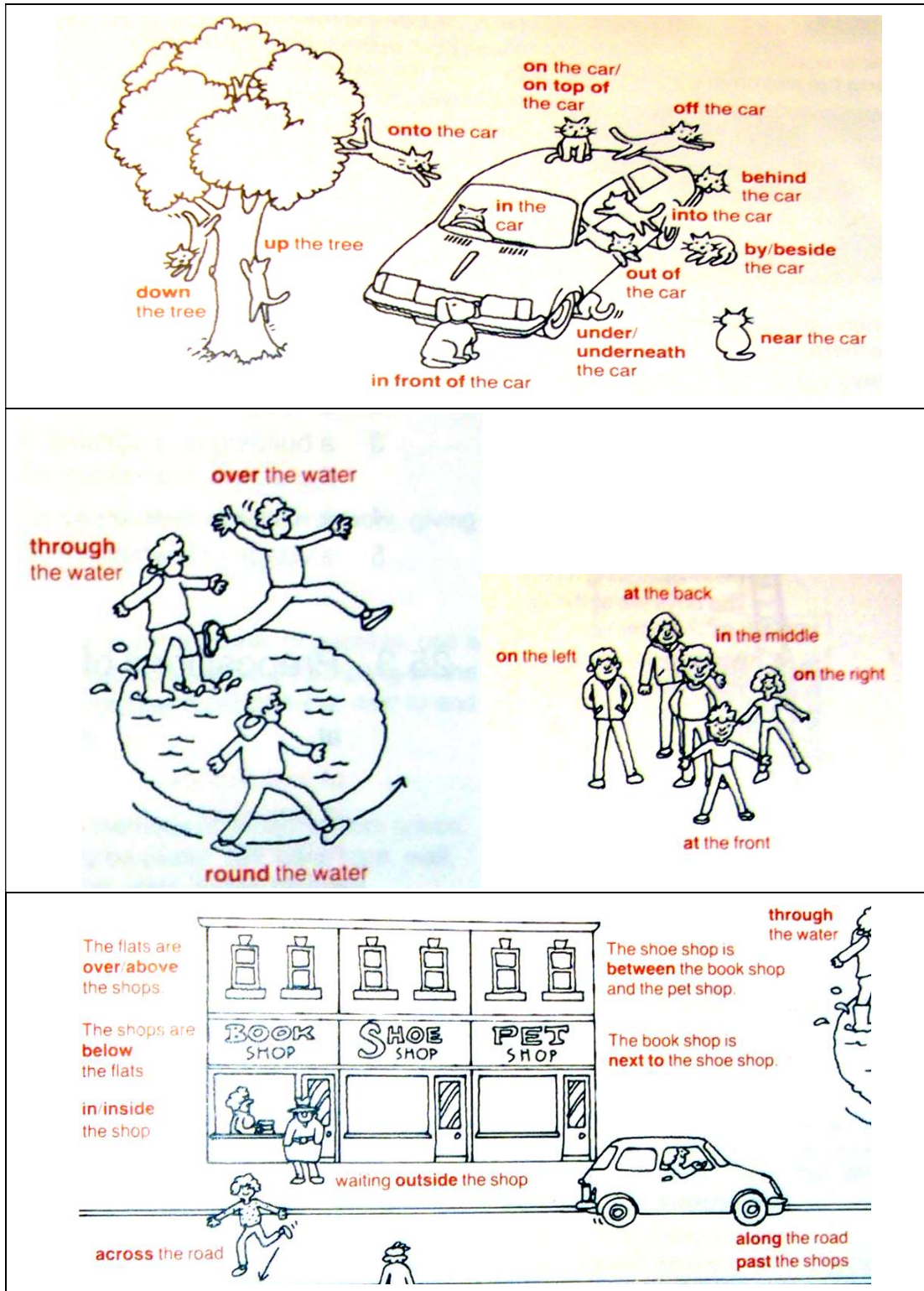
<i>across</i> town	<i>for</i> lunch
<i>after</i> class	<i>in</i> London
<i>at</i> home	<i>on</i> fire
<i>before</i> Tuesday	<i>to</i> school
<i>by</i> Shakespeare	<i>with</i> pleasure



## Appendix 4

### Lesson Two

Fill in blanks with prepositions



## Appendix 5

### Lesson Two

#### Identify all the prepositions

Identify all the prepositions in the following extract.

Dorothy Gilman attended the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts from 1940 to 1945, the University of Pennsylvania, the Moore Institute of Art, and the Arts Students' League from 1963 to 1964. She worked as an instructor of drawing in adult evening school for two years at the Samuel Fleisher Art Memorial. She has also worked as a switchboard operator for the American Bell Telephone Company, and as an instructor in creative writing at Cherry Lawn School, Darien, Connecticut, from 1969 to 1970.