

The Application of English Grammar Teaching Based on the Thematic Contexts in Junior High Schools

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Abstract: Grammar is an important part of the language. It directly affects the accuracy and appropriateness of language comprehension and expression. English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition) offers suggestions for grammar teaching. Students are encouraged to explore grammar in the context based on their understanding of the theme. However, teachers may neglect the role of thematic meaning in grammar teaching, also they fail to create the context in teaching practice. As a result, students have difficulty applying grammar properly in their lives. Based on the concept of three-dimensional dynamic grammar and teaching examples, the paper explores the strategies and specific methods of grammar teaching in thematic contexts. Through relevant literature on the thematic context and the application of some progressive activities in thematic contextualization, it is made clear that the connotation of grammar learning is to perceive grammar forms, explore grammar rules, understand grammatical meanings and further express them in correct ways. The conclusions are summarized as follows. English grammar teaching based on the thematic contexts helps to stimulate students' interest in grammar learning, while students' ability to transfer knowledge, their cultural awareness and the quality of thinking are all enhanced.

Keywords: Grammar Teaching; Thematic Context; Progressive Activities; Three-Dimensional Dynamic View of Grammar; Junior High School English

1. Introduction

Larsen Freeman (2003) [1] proposed "Three-dimensional Grammar Framework", according to his elaboration, grammar teaching should be the unity of grammar forms,

grammatical meaning and its use. The Grammar form refers to all kinds of visible or audible language units, such as pronunciation, writing symbols, sentence structures, etc.; Grammatical Meaning refers to the original meaning of a language that is divorced from a specific context; Use of grammar means the intention expressed by the speaker while applying language in a certain context. According to the requirements for grammar content in the new curriculum standard, in the teaching of grammar, teachers should create a context that is connected with the real life and guide students to find out that the choice of grammar forms depends on the specific context on the basis of their understanding to the theme. Also, Emphasis should be placed on presenting new grammatical knowledge in the context, and students are instructed to observe and summarize the grammar they have learned. In thematic contexts, students learn to explore the rules of grammar as well as the functions of discourse. For example, in what contexts will the target grammar be used? What is its form of expression? And what is the underlying meaning of the grammatical expression? To explain further, Celce-Murcia points out that grammar instruction is much more effective when it is taught in a meaningful context, embedded in authentic or semi-authentic discourse, a state in which the teacher can help students reach the goal of learning by assigning them to do a suitable task.^[2] According to the actual situation of students, teachers need to choose and design different types of exercises and activities that both take different levels of students into account and emphasize the integration application to consolidate the grammar knowledge. In addition, teachers should guide students to learn to apply grammar knowledge in the context, accurately understand others and appropriately express themselves [3]. Based on the concept of three-dimensional dynamic grammar, teachers can organize

grammar teaching by grasping one main line (thematic context) and four key points (perception of grammar, exploration of rules, understanding and expression of grammatical meaning, transfer and application of grammar).

Now we take the fifth unit of ninth grade "What Are the Shirt Made of?" in Go For. It published by People's Education Press as an example to explore the specific operation of grammar teaching in the thematic context.

2. Grammar Teaching Practices in Thematic Contexts

According to Cheng Xiaotang, classroom teaching based on thematic meaning is centered around a certain theme to set instructional objectives and design the content and activities related to the theme.^[4] In this grammar lesson, the teacher has designed a thematic situation of visiting scenic spots in students' hometown, centering on the main line of tourism, the teacher led the students to visit the mountains and rivers in their hometowns and helped students to enhance the awareness of grammar and develop a systematic structure of grammatical knowledge and then further promote the use of grammar in a proper and flexible way. At the beginning, the teacher showed the students a travel guide, their first stop of tourism is Damushan Tea Plantation, a local famous attraction in their hometown. The tea garden scenic spot adheres to the concept of "fancy tea taste and healthy cycling", combined with the sightseeing, tea tasting, tea leaves picking, health resorts and other functions. Coincidentally, the activities in Tea Garden sightseeing attraction intersects with the contents in the textbook, which happens to mention the Chinese tea culture, involving the tea picking and the tea processing. Therefore, the main line of Tea Garden tour and the content of the textbook have intersected. During the class, the main role of the teacher is to help students to build a bridge to grammatical cognition.

2.1 Establish the Knowledge Connection, Initially Perceive and Explore the Grammatical Forms

Constructivism believes that learning is a process of meaning construction. Meaning is

built by learners through the repeated and two-way interaction process between new and old knowledge and experience [5]. In the introductory session, the teacher acted as a tour guide by presenting the photos of the scenic spots and led students into the Damushan Tea Garden. There are many distinctive artifacts placed along the scenic spot. Some of them are in the shape of animals, some are bicycle shapes, etc. The artifacts are made of different materials. Here, the teacher asked the students: "What is the artwork made of?" "Is it made of...?" The students reviewed the sentence pattern that appeared in the first lesson and then they responded "It is made of...". Based on what they observed about the materials.

Later, through a video, the students entered the center of Damushan Tea Garden. Looking through the beautiful tea gardens, students found many tea pickers. The teacher guided the students to review the content of Section A 2d by asking "How is tea produced?" and gave the answer with the target language: "Tea plants are grown on the sides of mountains. When tea leaves are ready, they are picked by hand. Then tea leaves are sent for processing. After that, the tea is packed by workers. Finally the tea is sent to many different countries."

At the same time, the teacher asked the students to work in pairs to transform the passive voice to the active voice. Here are sentences in which the students made the conversion.

People grow tea plants on the sides of mountains.

When tea leaves are ready, people pick tea leaves by hand.

People send tea leaves for processing.

After that, workers pack the tea.

The factory send the tea to many different countries.

Through the following two questions, the teacher guided the students to initially explore the grammatical form of passive voice as well as its grammatical meaning.

1. What is the sentence structure of the passive voice?

2. What are the differences between passive voice and active voice?

In the course of learning process, the teacher organized students to explore forms of grammar as well as its implied meanings. Also,

cultivate students' ability to observe, analyze and summarize. It not only helps stimulate students' interest in grammar learning, but also improves their participation in classroom activities. In the practice of sentence patterns, students found the passive sentence form: be + the past participle of the verb by somebody, where "be" changes with the change of the subject. At the same time, students also found that when the active voice is converted into the passive voice, its original subject and the object are swapped, sometimes the original subject can be omitted.

2.2 Establish a Link between Grammar Teaching and Daily Life, Understand the Meaning of Grammar in the Context

According to the three-dimensional dynamic view of grammar, grammar consists of its form, meaning and usage as a whole. In addition to understanding the form of grammar, students also need to know figure out the meanings grammar expresses [6]. Teachers should keep it in mind that the ultimate goal of students' acquisition of grammar is that they learn to use language units correctly in different contexts, and students also need to understand why the grammar is used in this way. Therefore, grammar teaching based on thematic context plays a decisive role in students' understanding of linguistic meaning, which can help students use grammatical structures correctly, establish the correlation between the linguistic form and meaning and finally internalize grammatical knowledge effectively [7]. In this section, teachers will design the following progressive drills under the thematic context to pave the way for the students' comprehensive use of grammatical knowledge.

2.2.1 Single-sentence controlled drills

In the next stage of the tour, the teacher led the students to the Visitor Center. The Visitor Information was shown on a big screen in the Visitor Center. The teacher asked the students to complete the Visitor Information with the passive voice sentence pattern.

1. Visitors _____ (require) to keep the tea garden clean.
2. No cars _____ (allow) to drive into the tea garden.
3. Visitors _____ (not allow) to smoke in the tea garden.
4. Young children must _____ (accompany) by an adult.

5. The artwork can't _____ (draw).

2.2.2 Semi-open-ended grammatical fill-in-the-blanks

Grammar learning should not be confined to the single-sentence level, but also reply on the discourse to construct semantic functions. Therefore, teachers should integrate textbook texts or supplement extra-curricular texts to expand thematic resources, fully explore the textual information to realize the presentation of the target grammar in the discourse [8]. For students, they are guided to generalize the forms and meanings of grammar in discourse, and manage to express communicative meaning in context through grammar drills and application [9].

The following teaching practice, the teacher asked students to work together to complete the introduction of Damusan Tea Plantation. By completing the discourse containing passive voice, students will focus their attention on the target grammar, which will help them better understand the function and meaning of passive voice.

China is famous for green tea. It _____ (know) that Chinese are the first people to have _____ tea. Now, _____ Tea _____ widely _____ (drink) around the world. Among them, the green tea in Songyang plays very important role in tea market.

Damushan Tea Garden _____ (locate) in Songyang, the tea garden covers an area of 80,000 mu, which is known as "the largest tea garden in China" most of the tea _____ (grow) in Damushan Tea Garden. Every year, 81,700 tons of tea _____ (trade). The tea leaves usually have a bright color and pleasantly fresh smell. Now Songyang green tea is on the world stage and it _____ (love) by people all over the world.

After finishing the grammar drills above, the teacher guided the students to continue to explore: In which situation is the passive voice used? Students built connections between the language form and its meaning through collaborative group discussions and independent inquiry. From the tourist notice, students concluded that if the active voice is used, the sentence will sounds like an order, which is easy to make people feel uncomfortable. For the sake of politeness, we sometimes avoid using the passive voice when we say the mandatory will of the action executor. At the same time, from the

introduction of Damushan Tea Garden, students observed that in order to emphasize the need of sentences, the passive voice is used when highlighting the receiver of actions. For example, in the sentence “81,700 tons of tea are traded.”, the emphasis is placed on the total trade volume of tea as well as the role of tea plantation in Songyang, so the receiver of action is placed at the beginning of the sentence as the subject. Through inquiry, students also noticed that when they do not know the performer of an action or it is unnecessary to point out who the performer is, they usually use the passive voice. Just as the following sentence shows, Tea is widely drunk around the world. In addition, students discovered that there are passive sentence patterns with “It” as their formal subject, such as It is known that /It is said that .../ It is reported that... Etc. Through analysis and induction, students can conclude that the passive voice serves as many functions, such as emphasizing information, easing tone and shifting focus. The teacher reminded students to pay more attention to the implication of passive sentences in their regular reading.

2.2.3 Sentence transformations in the active and passive voice

As a guide, the teacher continued to introduce the entertainment activities of Damushan Tea Garden to the students. Here are tips for visiting scenic spots.

The tea garden provides fun activities for us. The government holds the cycling race every year. As you can see, visitors ride bikes around the tea garden. Some children fly kites happily, other children study tea leaves carefully. When you are tired, you can rest in the tea house, taste different kinds of tea and enjoy the tea art performance. There is also a workshop. You can make soaps with tea leaves by yourself. At the end of the trip, each child will get a small gift.

In this part, the students were asked to turn sentences in the active voice into passive voice.

For example,

The government holds cycling races every year.

Cycling races are held by the government every year.

Since the textbook does not provide a rich variety of grammar extension exercises, It's teachers' job to use their pedagogical

intelligence to design a thematic situation. That is visiting the tea garden, a famous local attraction. The themed contextual activity incorporated what the tourists saw when they were in the tourist center and what they experienced in the tea plantation. During the exploration to the tea garden, the teacher asked the students to use the target language to complete the passive voice grammar drilling activities. These activities were designed to progress step by step, from the single-sentence controlled practice to the semi-open-ended discourse filling in the words, and from the active voice to the passive voice sentence transformations. The activities not only help students internalize the grammar knowledge of the passive voice, but also improve their understanding of what the passive voice means. Not only that, while consolidating the target grammatical knowledge, students learn more about Chinese tea culture as well as the famous attraction in their hometown, which stimulates the beautiful emotion of loving their hometown.

2.3 Construct Dynamic Contexts and Transfer the Application of the Grammar

According to Gong Yafu and Luo Shaoxi, the output activity of grammar teaching is language application. Teachers should provide learners with clear and authentic linguistic information in the task design, so that learners can experience the language learning and master its use in a natural, authentic or simulated real-life situation [10]. Teachers should also design comprehensive, situational and authentic communicative tasks based on thematic contexts to guide students to integrate the grammar forms, meanings and its usage. At the same time, students are expected to use relevant language expressions they have learned to complete language practice activities. The teaching session on the use of target grammar is actually a process in which students use the target grammar to express meaning appropriately, accurately, and decently in a new context, and finally enhance students' competence into literacy [11]. The learning experience also aims to promote the language transfer and learning innovation, help students realize a leap in the improvement of language skills and their perception of the theme value.

In this session, four students worked as a

tourist group. Among them, a student acted as a tour guide. Students presented comprehensive utilization of the target language in a group activity. At the beginning, the tour guide led the tourists to visit Damushan Tea Garden or other places of interest in their hometown and the tour guide needed to introduce the basic information including the geographical location of the attraction, instructions for tourists, recreational activities and so on. The tourists were free to ask the guide questions if they were interested in the attraction. During the activity, the points that the teacher needed to focus on were whether the students covered the grammar they learned in class and whether the passive voice was used appropriately in the group discussion and class presentation. Based on the performance of the students, the teacher should make reasonable suggestions in time and give them some necessary guidance and feedback. Meanwhile, other students should also be involved in the evaluation of the activity. With the help of previous activities, the students were able to use the passive voice to describe things in new situations. The students were also happy about publicizing their hometowns and eager to promote their hometown in English. These learning activities help to stimulate students' interest in grammar learning, while students' ability to transfer knowledge, their cultural awareness and the quality of thinking are all enhanced.

After the group activity, the teacher continued to ask: "After the trip, could you tell me what you think of Damushan Tea Garden? What impresses you most? The teacher first gave the model responses, I think The Tea Garden is worth visiting, I am impressed by the tea art performance in this way, Chinese tea culture is spread. Teachers guided students to make full use of the information obtained in class, express their true ideas boldly and put forward reasonable suggestions to the scenic spot through the tourist mailbox.

"To attract more visitors, what do you think needs to be improved in the tea garden. Your advice is needed to improve the tea garden." (The passive voice here emphasizes the suggestions from tourists, giving them a sense of being valued.) This activity is designed to cultivate students' divergent thinking and their ability to solve problems in English. Here are some suggestions from students. In order to

solidify grammar knowledge again, students also try to give suggestions in the passive voice with the teacher's prompting.

I think more seats can be provided for visitors, because they may be tired walking through the tea garden.

I think signboards are needed, some people may get lost in the large tea garden.

I think English-speaking guides are wanted, because there are some foreign visitors.

3. Conclusion

Teachers should get rid of the misunderstanding that grammar is fragmented and grammar teaching mainly focuses on its form. Actually, Grammar is not just taught to prepare students for exams, but also to cultivate students' abilities to core literacy. Whenever students are in the new situation, they are able to express linguistic meaning appropriately, accurately and appropriately. What teachers need to do is to change the concept of grammar teaching, take the theme context as the main line and connect grammar teaching with students' daily lives. By creating some multi-level teaching activities, students' grammatical awareness are cultivated, their comprehensive language skills are also improved, which ultimately contributes to the development of students' core English literacy.

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