Exploring China’s English Grammar Teaching Methods under Different Concepts and Perspectives in the New Era

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Abstract
This paper reports on the problems of English grammar teaching in China in the new era, and explores ways to propose improvements in response to the problems. First, it responds to the multiple controversies of English grammar teaching at present and emphasizes the importance of English grammar teaching. Second, the current situation of English grammar teaching in China is analyzed and the problems are pointed out. Immediately after that, the theoretical concept perspective is developed from constructivism and consciousness-raising methods, respectively. In addition, advanced foreign grammar teaching methods are briefly introduced, from which the parts that are worthy of learning and applicable to the current situation of teaching in China are found. Finally, specific methods and suggestions are provided for the improvement of grammar teaching in China, and it is emphasized that in the new era, we need to keep reflecting and exploring, and do our best to solve all difficulties.

Keywords
New era, English grammar teaching, methods, concepts

1. Introduction

1.1 The importance of English grammar teaching

“What do you think is the most difficult part of learning English?” I guess that most students and even teachers who are asked this question would not hesitate to answer grammar. This is why teaching English grammar plays a vital role in English language teaching.

There have been arguments and counter arguments among the ELT practitioners regarding the role of grammar in teaching English as a second language with the aim of developing communicative competence of the second language learners (Sanmuganathan, 2020). Despite many different views about the role of grammar in language learning, the importance of grammar cannot be denied. Grammar is the whole system and structure of languages. For example, Brown and Larsen-Freeman (Brown, 1994a; Larsen-Freeman, 1991) have commented that grammatical competence is essential for communication. Besides, Hinkel and Fotos (2002:10) argue that grammar teaching can enhance learner proficiency and accuracy and facilitate the internalization of its syntactic system.

1.2 Analysis of the current situation of English grammar teaching in China

After decades of efforts, English teaching in China has gradually become more student-centered, giving top priority to the comprehensive development of students' English competence, and presenting a brand new picture. However, there are still a number of problems with English grammar teaching in China.
First of all, some English teachers continue to follow the traditional teaching methods, in which English grammar lessons are based on teacher explanations, supplemented by students' memorization of grammatical rules and mechanical practice of basic sentence patterns. The teacher's isolated explanations of individual grammatical points out of context and requiring students to constantly analyze the grammatical items contained in sentences develop the habit of studying grammar rather than teaching grammar in a communicative context, which makes grammar instruction bland and boring. This traditional approach to teaching grammar is form-centered, teachers focus on grammar and neglect language skills, resulting in a lack of synchronization between teaching grammar and improving students' language skills.

In addition, theories of grammatical rules and single exercise designs are more explanations than exercises, which only serve as mechanical drills and studies of grammatical rules, ignoring the fact that the real purpose of learning grammar is for people to be able to communicate correctly and appropriately using language forms in specific situations and contexts.

These problems should be given great attention by English teaching researchers and front-line teachers, as they will inevitably lead to unsystematic and unstable grammatical knowledge of many students, who will be unable to express their thoughts accurately in written or oral form and realize their communicative intentions. Only under the guidance of advanced teaching theories, combined with the current situation of English teaching in China, can we improve English grammar teaching and lay a solid foundation for the further improvement of students' overall quality of English.

2. Theoretical foundation

2.1 Constructivism

Constructivism was developed by Swiss psychologist Piaget. The main idea of the theory is that the learner's understanding of new knowledge is actively constructed on the basis of existing background knowledge and experience. According to the pedagogical model of constructivism, the teacher is a facilitator, and the task of the teacher is to create as many contexts as possible for students to learn and use grammar in simulated real-life situations, thus fostering students' interest in learning. The students' learning potential is stimulated by their interest in learning.

2.2 Consciousness-raising

Consciousness-raising refers to "consciously drawing the student's attention to the grammatical features of the target language" in order to help the learner master the second language more effectively (Rutherford & Sharwood Smith, 1981).

The constructivism and the consciousness-raising have a high degree of compatibility in terms of pedagogical philosophy. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the role of consciousness-raising in English grammar teaching from the perspective of constructivism, which will provide useful reference for English grammar teaching in China.

3. Advantages of foreign grammar teaching methods

Each grammar item is given a relevant topic as a chapter title, and the entire chapter is organized around this topic, including activities, examples, vocabulary, and exercises (Wang Weiying, 2010), which emphasizes that the teaching of grammar is not the aim of itself, but a service to the development of language skills.

Communicative activities are designed to be interesting, diverse, and relevant to students' lives, allowing students to subconsciously acquire grammar and internalize grammar knowledge so that learners can understand both the meaning and function of language forms, learning to use language appropriately for authentic communication.

Grammar instruction should be based on drills, supplemented by explanations. The teacher's explanations and some necessary communicative exercises are followed by a series of semi-open or open communicative grammar activities with language points.

4. Improvement of English grammar teaching methods in China

In the teaching of English grammar under the guidance of the new curriculum reform concept, it is important not to stick to a particular form, but to consider the teaching content, context and students' characteristics to choose different teaching methods (Yang Ling, 2011).

4.1 Combining deductive and inductive methods to teach grammar

The deductive method relies on reasoning, analyzing and comparing. However, in the inductive method, the teacher provides learners with authentic language data and induces the learners to realize grammar rules without any form of
explicit explanation.

Both methods have their advantages and disadvantages, and it is best to combine them in a reasonable way. For instance, the inductive method is used in grammar teaching where the emphasis is on listening and speaking; if the emphasis is on reading and writing, the deductive method is chosen. The two methods are used interchangeably to complement each other, differentiated according to the purpose of learning and the level of language difficulty.

4.2 Teaching grammar in context

Teaching grammar in a static form and having students memorize it by rote will only create a short-term memory that cannot be used in a dynamic way. This is why many Chinese students get excellent grades, but when they communicate with others, they appear to have "dumb English". Therefore, it is essential to design different contexts according to the specific content and its characteristics in teaching, so that students can explore and discover grammar rules in the context.

4.3 The context should be closely related to students’ life

The teacher designs the teaching context in such a way that students are in a relaxed atmosphere and actively accept and grasp the grammatical meaning. In addition, it takes skill to let students talk in a particular situation. For example, when teaching grammar related to comparatives, you can design a sports meet; when teaching future tense expressions, you can assume a recruitment fair. In short, the goal is to give students something to say. Of course, the teacher plays an important role in this process. The teacher should not only undertake the role of an organizer and a listener, but, more importantly, become a participant. Only then can education truly happen.

4.4 Make full use of multimedia teaching means

Images, audio, and video can provide concrete contexts of language use and communication for learning and teaching grammar rules. It makes the boring grammar knowledge interesting and mobilizes students' initiative and motivation to learn. By creating simple animations or showing short scenarios related to the teaching content, we recreate actual communicative scenarios and let students use grammar rules repeatedly in the simulated situations, thus achieving complete grasp of grammar knowledge.

4.5 Teaching grammar in discourse

Starting from the form and content of the discourse, we help students understand and master the discourse in the context of pragmatics. In order to acquire knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, students will also learn about cultural differences and broaden their knowledge through the study of CBI (Content-based Instruction) mode related to social culture and history.

Overall, different grammar teaching modes can be used for different teaching objectives, contents and objects, but the core concept remains the same: students should not only master language knowledge, but also learn to use the language in practice, to achieve the unification of language knowledge and language ability.

5. Conclusion

Teaching grammar is not only the aspect of second language and the sole focus of second language teaching. Instead, it should be taught along with the language skills to achieve the communicative competence of the second language learners (Sanmuganathan, 2020).

Grammar rules are relatively static, while the use of language is dynamic. The mode of teaching English grammar in the new era should be one of intensive lecture and practice, reflecting the principle of combining practicality, knowledge-based and fun. The grammar theme is introduced in the story topic, the grammar meaning is perceived in the game context, and the grammar rules are applied in the life context, fully mobilizing the enthusiasm of both teachers and students. In particular, it reflects the main position of students in the teaching process and the leading role of teachers, so that the form, function and meaning of grammar knowledge can reach a harmonious unity, thus fundamentally solving the problem of flexible use of students' grammar knowledge.

References


