

The Practice of Teaching English Grammar in Middle Schools Based on the Three-Dimensional Dynamic View of Grammar

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Abstract: At the present stage, grammar teaching in junior middle school is mainly based on the explanation of grammar rules, focusing on the correctness of grammar form and ignoring the meaning and practical use of grammar itself; in addition, there are also the problems of low efficiency of grammar classroom and lack of motivation of students. In order to change this status quo, this paper combines specific teaching cases, takes language use as the guide, considers the form-meaning-use of grammar as a whole, and constructs a junior high school English grammar teaching model based on the three-dimensional dynamic view of grammar, i.e., presenting the target grammar with multimodal parts of speech, perceiving and grasping the three-dimensional system of grammar as a whole, internalizing the knowledge of grammar by progressive exercises, deepening the use of grammar rules by outputting them in communication, so as to improve the students' grammar awareness.

Keywords: Grammar Teaching; Three-Dimensional Dynamic View of Grammar; Middle School English; Form-Meaning-Use; Language Usage

1. Introduction

According to English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education, grammatical knowledge is a unity of "form-meaning-use", which is closely related to the knowledge of phonetics, vocabulary, parts of speech and pragmatics, and directly influences the accuracy and appropriateness of linguistic understanding and expression; the ultimate goal of grammar learning is to communicate with others by correctly and appropriately applying grammar knowledge in communicative situations. This shows that grammar teaching should not only emphasize

the form, but should also pay attention to cultivating students' comprehensive language use ability. The English Curriculum Standards for General Senior Secondary Schools also explicitly advocates the three-dimensional dynamic grammar of "form-meaning-use" which is oriented to language use.

At present, many teachers still fail to understand and implement this concept in depth, and the learning of grammar is mainly based on the teacher's extensive explanation of rules and the students' mechanical memorization and drilling. This mode of teaching makes students only focus on the correctness of grammatical forms, but have no idea why they should use this kind of grammar, and lack the active exploration of grammatical knowledge and the process of constructing meaning. Therefore, it is difficult to improve students' grammatical awareness and ability.

2. The Concept of English Grammar Teaching Based on the Three-Dimensional Dynamic View of Grammar

The three-dimensional dynamic view of grammar is derived from the three-dimensional grammatical framework of form, meaning, and usage [1]. It's proposed by Larsen-Freeman. She views these three aspects as a closely interrelated whole. Form, which includes a variety of visible or audible linguistic units: speech (or gestures in the case of sign languages), written symbols, inflectional morphemes, dummy words (e.g., of), and syntactic structures. Meaning, the basic indicative meaning out of context, is the meaning that can be found in a dictionary. Usage, is what people intend when they use language. The basic units of pragmatics are social functions (e.g., promises, invitations, agreements, objections, and apologies) and discourse patterns (e.g., those that facilitate discourse articulation). The framework looks at the communicative use of language as a whole and argues that grammar should be

studied in terms of three different dimensions: form, meaning and use. Larsen-Freeman sees grammar as a dynamic system in which these parts are interrelated and interact with each other. Larsen-Freeman argues that grammar is not just static rules, but rather it is a skill (grammaring), which is the fifth skill after listening, speaking, reading, writing and viewing in English learning, i.e. the ability to use grammatical forms and structures correctly, meaningfully and appropriately [2]. The Standard suggests that teachers should “present new grammatical knowledge in context, guide students to pay attention to the occasions, forms of expression, basic meanings and pragmatic functions of the grammatical items they have learned in context, consolidate the grammatical knowledge they have learned through practice and activities inside and outside the classroom as well as in real-life situations, and help students learn to use their grammatical knowledge to understand and express their meanings in context, so that students can be guided to continuously strengthen their ability and awareness of using language forms accurately, appropriately and decently.” Teachers should change the traditional teaching mode of grammar which is mainly based on rote memorization, not only emphasize the regular form of language, but also guide students to pay attention to the meaning and usage of grammar, and help students to establish a three-dimensional grammatical awareness [3]. Teachers should rely on the textbook text or extracurricular resources to create a thematic context, guide students to perceive, understand and summarize grammatical knowledge in the context, combined with the discourse, around the form-meaning-usage of grammar to design different types of meaningful learning activities, so that the students can take the initiative to explore and summarize the rules of grammar, to build the meaning of grammar, and to develop the students’ awareness of the grammar of the English language and the ability to use the language.

3. Design of Teaching Activities Based on the Three-Dimensional Dynamic View of Grammar

Now we take a grammar lesson in the first lesson of unit9 in the second book of the

eighth grade of Humanistic Version of Middle School English as an example to discuss how to create a thematic context and carry out grammar teaching based on the three-dimensional dynamic view of grammar. The grammar teaching content of this lesson is present perfect tense. The lesson focuses on the interesting museum experience. Through this lesson, students can master the form, meaning and usage of the present perfect tense, and can distinguish the difference between the present perfect tense and the general past tense in expressing past experiences. At the same time, students can use the present perfect tense to describe interesting places they have been to. The three-dimensional grammar theory emphasizes that grammar is an organic dynamic system, and the three aspects of form-meaning-usage are interrelated and interact with each other, so they can’t be separated for explanation and training. This paper will be based on the discourse, create a thematic context, integrate these three aspects of learning, which is conducive to students’ understanding of the grammar items as a whole. Larsen-Freeman put forward the principle of challenge, that is, there is always one of the three aspects of the language is the most difficult to learn, the most time-consuming, and the teacher should be based on the mother tongue of the students as well as the level of learning of the target language to focus on the teaching. Based on this principle, the author will use meaningful activities to focus on the learning difficulties.

3.1 Presenting the Target Grammar in Multimodal Discourse

In the session of students’ initial perception and acquisition of grammatical knowledge, teachers should create meaningful and attention-grabbing activities that can bring students into grammar learning naturally and stimulate their desire to explore. Teachers can use multimodal discourse introduction to present the target grammar. “Compared with purely textual modal discourse, multimodal discourse is more vivid and effective in creating thematic contexts, conveying cultural meaning, and stimulating students’ interest” [4]. Multimodal discourse mainly includes dialogues, pictures, videos, songs, audios, etc. Using this approach for grammar teaching can concretize abstract grammatical content, which

is conducive to students' understanding of grammatical knowledge. It can also mobilize students' multiple senses to observe and learn the target grammar as well as initially perceive the application of the target grammar in specific contexts [5].

Teaching clip 1: In the introductory part of this lesson, the teacher takes the past vacation as the topic and shows the students their vacation activities with the help of pictures, introduces to them where they went, what they did and what kind of feelings they had. In the process of answering, the teacher consciously corrected the students to answer in the general past tense. The teacher then showed a video that focused on the experiences of several friends who had been to which museums. Before the video began, the teacher reminded students to pay attention to the form and use of the new grammar. In this way, students would consciously observe and think about the usage of the target grammar to pave the way for the next activity [6]. The teacher then presents the key sentences from the video on the PPT, the sentences are as follows:

Luna and Lily have been to the film museum.

Frank has already been to the space museum.

Anna has just been to the art museum.

Jall has been to the history museum once.

The teacher guided the students to observe the sentences and asked them several questions. The questions are as follows:

1. Did they go to the museum in the past?

A. No. B. Yes.

2. Do we know about the time? A. No. B. Yes.

3. Did they come back? A. No. B. Yes.

After the students' answers, the teacher asks them how they know the answer, and the students mention the presence of "have been to" in the sentence, after which the teacher explains the phrase, and then the teacher mentions that when the third person is the subject, it is necessary to use has. Finally, the teacher guides the students to summarize the grammatical rules here and the meaning of the sentence.

Design intention: The teacher first stimulates students' interest by creating natural and interesting introductory questions, so that students can enter the lesson with curiosity. The teacher helps students review the usage of the general past tense by some questions and then presents the tense of the present perfect tense in the form of a video, which not only

enables students to distinguish between the two tenses, but also promotes students' understanding of the target grammar. Instead of presenting the sentences of the target grammar directly, the teacher created a thematic context with the help of a video related to the theme of the unit, and then used questions to guide the students to find out the meaning of the sentences in the target grammar.

3.2 Overall Perception and Mastery of the Three-Dimensional System of Grammar

Larsen-Freeman suggests that when teaching and learning grammar, we need to consider not only whether students can produce correct grammatical forms, but that form is only one aspect of the triad of language (form, meaning, and usage), and that all three of these aspects affect grammatical skills which partly reflects the complexity of grammar in some degree. When teachers teach grammar, they should change the teaching model that focuses on grammatical forms, but should consider the content of the teaching in the context of these three aspects [7]. Teachers choose the discourse of Section A of this unit to help students perceive grammar in the discourse context.

Teaching clip 2: The teacher presented the first paragraph of the text, which focused on this student's experience of going to the museum. The teacher asked the students to identify the sentences that used the general present tense, the general past tense and the present perfect tense respectively. After that, the students were guided to tell the meaning of the tenses used in each of these sentences. The text is as follows:

Ken: The most interesting museum I've ever been to is the American Computer Museum. They have information about different computers and who invented them. The old computers were much bigger. It's unbelievable that technology has progressed in such a rapid way! It could play chess even better than humans. I wonder how much more computers will be able to do in the future.

This activity will help students gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of the target grammar in comparison. Finally, the teacher guides the students to summarize that the present perfect tense can be linked to the past and the future. It mainly means that an action has begun in the past, has continued up to the

present, and may continue into the future. The teacher then provides a passage for students to choose the tense of the word. The text of the passage is as follows:

Report on Michael Harris Michael Harris spoke with me yesterday about serious headaches. He (1) (has had) /(a) has (b) had (c) has had/these headaches for two months. His previous medical history is good. His previous medical history is good. He (2) (didn't have any) /(a) doesn't have (b) didn't have any (c) hasn't had/ serious illnesses. In 1973, he (3) (has been)/(a) is (b) was (c) has been/ in the hospital for three weeks, when he (4) (broke)/(a) breaks (b) broke (c) has broken/ both legs in a car. has broken/ both legs in a car accident. he (5) (doesn't smoke) (a) doesn't smoke (b) didn't smoke (c) has not smoked /now; he (6) (stopped)/(a) stops (b) stopped (c) has stopped / ten years ago, and he (7) (hasn't smoked) /(a) doesn't smoke (b) didn't smoke (c) hasn't smoked/ since that time. He 8(wore) /(a) wears (b) wore (c) has worn / glasses when he (9) (has worn) /(a) wears (b) wore (c) has worn/them since 1987.

After leading students analyze this question, the teacher adds some phrases to help students understand further in view of the occurrence of since and for in the text. The phrases are as follows: (a) for two weeks. (b) for ten years. (c) for five minutes. (d) since 1985. (e) since my birthday. (f) since I turned 40. (g) since Monday. The teacher guides the students to summarize that for is used to show length of time (how long the period of time was?), Since is used to show when a period of time began.

The teacher next provides a table for students to discuss in groups to summarize the present basic components of the perfect tense, general questions and answers and signifiers (e.g. Table 1. Grammatical rules for the present perfect tense). Teachers provide forms as scaffolds to help students fully grasp the forms of the target grammar and make connections between form and meaning.

Table 1. Grammatical Rules for the Present Perfect Tense

Tense	Present perfect
Basic sentence	Subject + have/has + past participle
Negative sentence	Subject + have/has +not+ past participle
Yes-No question	Have/Has + Subject + past participle?

Signal words	Already, yet, just, never, ever, before, since
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After the summary is finished, the teacher organizes the students to have a dialogue, which is about inviting classmates to go out for a trip. Take the sentences in Section A 1a-1c as an example, use the target grammar and have a free exchange at the table.

Design intention: First, the teacher guides the students to read the fragments containing the target grammar, and highlights the target grammar by observing and comparing the differences and connections between the present perfect tense and the general present tense and the past tense. After students perceive the meaning of the target grammar, the teacher asks them to choose to fill in the blanks to strengthen their understanding of the grammar, deepen the collocation of grammatical forms and meanings in their minds, and understand how to use the target grammar in sentence contexts. Some students are weak in analyzing and summarizing grammatical rules. Here the teacher provides students with a summarization table, which provides a directional guide to the target grammatical knowledge that students need to master, so that the students' inquiry activities are more focused and effective. After summarizing the grammar rules, the teacher creates a communicative activity, which is in line with the theme of the unit and close to students' lives, to help students use the target grammar in real contexts. These activities in this session consider the three aspects of grammar in an integrated way, which is conducive to students' comprehensive understanding of the target grammar and correct use of grammar [8].

3.3 Progressive Exercises to Internalize Grammatical Knowledge

Larsen-Freeman suggests that practice activities must be meaningful and able to capture learners' attention. "In order for students to consolidate their grammatical knowledge effectively, teachers should design meaningful training activities based on thematic contexts to help students use grammatical rules correctly in the process of comprehending the thematic discourse and expressing semantic meanings, establish the connection between linguistic forms and meanings, and realize the transformation from

linguistic knowledge to competence” [9]. In the design of grammar activities, teachers should design teaching activities according to the actual needs of students, focusing on the three aspects of form-meaning-use. At this stage, a variety of grammar output exercises are needed to help learn to use the target grammar better. In addition, a large amount of language input is needed. Teachers can integrate resources inside and outside the classroom to supplement the language materials related to the theme that contain the target grammar, and carefully design diversified practice activities.

Teaching clip 3: The teacher provides five sets of dialogues and asks the students to write the correct form of the verbs on the lines. The dialogues are as follows:

1. A: Do you want(come) to come to the space museum? B: No, I’ve already (be)been to there three times.

2. A: Have you (see) seen the robots at the science museum? B: Yes, I(go)went there last weekend.

3. A: Let’s (spend) spend the day at the zoo.
B: Well, I’ve already happy (be)been there a couple of times, but I’m happy (go)to go again.

4. A: How about (go)going to the art museum? There are some special German paintings there right now. B: Sure. When do you want(go)to go?

5. A: Have you ever (visit)visited the history museum? B: No, I’ve never (be) been there.

After this exercise is completed, the teacher shows a video introducing Disneyland and asks the students to watch it and then complete the parts of speech about it with the appropriate verb forms. The parts of speech are as follows:

Most of us (see)have seen Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and other famous Disney characters in cartoons before. But have you ever (be)been to Disneyland? Disneyland (be)is an amusement park with a special theme-Disney characters and movies. There (be)are many exciting rides, lovely restaurants and fantastic gift shops there. You can also (see)see the Disney characters walking around the park.

Design intention: the first exercise helps students to repeat the training of the form of the target grammar in a sentence context, and also to understand more about the connection

between the form and the meaning of the grammar. The teacher chose a context related to the theme museum experience of the unit for the content of the exercise, which echoes the effect of the previous activities. In the second exercise, the teacher used multimodal discourse to create a meaningful situation [10]. with the help of a video introducing Disneyland, which could attract students’ attention and help them complete the next exercise task with more interest. This situation is also related to the theme of the unit, and it is more difficult than the previous exercise. The practice activities are progressive so that students can fully understand the three dimensions of the target grammar.

3.4 Output in Communication to Deepen the Use of Grammar Rules

According to Larsen-Freeman [11], the goal of grammar teaching is to enable learners to actively use grammar to accomplish communicative tasks. Output tasks for communicative purposes can increase learners’ fluency, accelerate automation, and free up attentional resources. It can also elicit knowledge reorganization, revision and restructure of internal representations. Teachers can create meaningful communicative activities to guide students to creatively output language in communication, deepen their understanding of the target grammar, and thus improve their English grammatical awareness and comprehensive language expression ability. Taking the task setting of the output session of present perfect tense as an example, from the perspective of the three elements of grammar teaching, the learning difficulty of the target grammar lies in its usage, especially its difference in usage with general present tense and general past tense. In the output link, in order to enhance students’ ability to communicate effectively using the target grammar in specific contexts, the author set up a role-playing interview activity using the traveling experience as the context.

Teaching clip 4: The teacher sets up an interview activity that focuses on the interviewee’s traveling experience. The teacher also provides some places to visit, such as the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace, the Terracotta Warriors and Horses, etc., to help the students better complete this interview task.

The teacher asks students to pay attention to the use of tenses during the interview, especially the application of the present perfect tense. Group discussion to complete the interview task, students can use the vocabulary and sentence patterns in this unit to better achieve communication. The following is the communicative text produced by the students under the guidance of the teacher:

Interviewer (I): Good morning, thank you for joining us today. Could you please share with us one of your most memorable travel experiences?

Interviewee (Interviewee, E): Good morning. I'd be happy to. The trip to the ancient city of Xi I have traveled quite a bit within my country, but the trip to the ancient city of Xi'an is worthful to visit.

I: That sounds fascinating. What did you do there?

E: I have visited many historical sites in Xi'an, including the Terracotta Warriors and the Ancient City Wall. I have also tasted the local cuisine, like the famous Meat Buns and Cold Noodles.

I: It sounds like a wonderful cultural experience. How long did you stay in Xi'an?

E: I have been in Xi'an for five days, and it has been a fantastic journey. The city has a rich history and culture that has left a deep impression on me. The city has a rich history and culture that has left a deep impression on me.

Design intention: By setting up meaningful communicative activities, the teacher helps students pay attention to grammatical forms in communication, enhances students' sensitivity to grammatical forms, and skillfully connects grammatical forms with meanings. Under the specific and real communication activities, students will be aware of the use of target grammar, and create conditions for the automation of target grammar use, so as to achieve the ultimate goal of grammar teaching.

4. Conclusion

The theory of grammar teaching based on the three-dimensional dynamic view of grammar allows students to learn the form-meaning-use of grammar in context. Teachers should choose appropriate discourse according to students' actual level and needs. The choice of discourse is not limited to textbooks, but can also be selected from extracurricular reading materials.

By designing a variety of meaningful language practice, students can better perceive and summarize grammar rules under the guidance of thematic meaning, deepen the connection between form and meaning in their minds, internalize grammar knowledge, so that they can use grammar correctly, appropriately, and meaningfully for communication. Meanwhile, the three-dimensional dynamic view of grammar teaching can also develop students' grammatical awareness and comprehensive language use ability, and gradually improve students' core literacy in the subject of English.

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