

The Application of Situational Teaching Method to English Grammar Teaching in Senior High School

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Abstract: High School English Curriculum Standard (experiment) points out that the curriculum reform should improve students' language skills. It is believed that language knowledge forms the foundation of language skills. However, as an essential part of language knowledge teaching, grammar teaching usually fails to reach the ultimate teaching goals to enhance students' language skills. Regarding situations as the platform, Situational Teaching Method tends to enable students to understand and use grammar knowledge in the context. Based on a critical review of literature in the related fields and a research conducted by the investigator in a high school, this thesis aims to offer some suggestions to optimize the use of Situational Teaching Method in grammar class and improve the students' learning results in grammar class.

1. Introduction

Grammar teaching plays an important role in English teaching since it is indispensable in language system. However, in some high schools, a number of teachers are likely to overemphasize the role of grammar. Adopting the teacher-oriented methods, they teach grammar by elaborate grammatical rules explanation with tremendous exercises. Students rote-learn grammar strenuously only for examinations. As a result, they lose interest in English learning; what's worse, many students do not know how to use what they have learned although they are able to do exercises. Gu Guanjie [1] puts forward: "Grammar is to language what the policeman is to the law--the servant of the law, not the law-maker." The students should not only bear the language rules in mind. There is a demand for teachers to find ways to teach grammar more effectively and improve students' abilities to use it.

Situational Teaching Method was put forward in middle of the nineteenth century by British specialists. When grammar is taught in the selected context, students are more likely to explore the new knowledge actively through the contextual elements. They are stimulated to master the grammatical rules by interaction with teachers, collaboration with classmates and through their own practice. Thus, numerous grammatical exercises convert into real contextual practice during the process of learning grammar.

This thesis ventures to investigate the current situation of the application of Situational Teaching Method to English grammar teaching in the senior high school through analyzing the questionnaire for the students and the interview of English teachers. This thesis consists of four sections. At the end, the investigator will offer some suggestions to both teachers and students based on the findings to facilitate grammar teaching and learning.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Grammar and grammar teaching

The term "grammar" is often used by non-linguists with a very broad meaning. As Jeremy Butterfield [2] puts it, "Grammar is often a generic way of referring to any aspect of English that people object to." However, "grammar" has many specific meanings given by linguists who have done numerous studies on it from different aspects.

Lyons' s point of view is on behalf of the traditional view of grammar. In his argument, the term

“grammar” is commonly understood as the description of language which accounts for the means that words are combined to form sentences. Likewise, Penny Ur [3] puts forward: “ ‘Grammar’ may be roughly defined as the way a language manipulates and combines words (or bits of words) in order to form longer units of meaning.” When grammar is regarded as a static form, language learners attach great importance to the structural rules governing the composition of clauses, phrases, and words. Therefore, complex syntax such as the long subordinate clause, can be analyzed clearly according to these rules.

In Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, Richards J. [4] defines the term “grammar” as the description of how words, phrases, language structures compose of sentences, including the meaning and function of these sentences in the language system. As is observed, grammar is no longer the static rule but is related to context, since the essence of the language is a communication tool. George Yule [5] proposes that grammar can be seen as a construction system, in which meaning, form, and usage are three correlated aspects and he puts forward the term “grammaring” and holds the view that grammar consists of form, semantics, and pragmatics. In light of this, the form and meaning of the language are based on speakers’ communicative context, and vice versa.

Since the eighteenth century, when different schools of pedagogy have carried out, the roles and status of grammar teaching have changed and developed. In China, the role of grammar in English class varies in different periods when teachers try to keep line with the national curriculum.

In the nineteenth century the Classical Method came to be known as the Grammar Translation Method. There was little to distinguish Grammar Translation from what had gone on in foreign language classrooms for centuries beyond a focus on grammatical rules as the basis for translating from the second to the native language [6]. In Grammar Translation Method, long elaborate explanations of the intricacies of grammar are given [7]. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Direct Method enjoyed considerable popularity as it was advocated that the second language learning should be more like first language learning--lots of oral interaction, spontaneous use of the language, no translation between first and second languages, and little or no analysis of grammatical rules [6]. Richards and Rodgers [8] summarized as “Grammar is taught inductively”. In the 1950s, the Army Method came to be known as the Audiolingual Method which was firmly grounded in linguistic and psychological theory. Although little grammar explanation is presented, grammar is taught by inductive analogy and students are expected to master grammar by dialogue practice and structural pattern drills. After 1960s, the role of grammar teaching was undermined when Communicative Language Teaching Method, the Natural Approach and some other teaching methods which emphasized on communication skills in the target language were put forward.

In the early stage of English teaching in China, Grammar-Translation Method was dominant, but affected by the developing second language acquisition theories, the emphasis on grammar teaching gradually desalinated. At the end of the 20th century, because of the influence of Communicative Language Teaching, grammar teaching was almost excluded in English teaching. The national compulsory high school English curriculum standard formulated in 2001 points out that the main task of English curriculum reform is to change the tendency that grammar and vocabulary are highlighted while communicative abilities are underdeveloped, which even threatened the role of grammar teaching [9]. While, in recent years, grammar teaching is re-emphasized when teachers find out the neglect of grammar will result in negative learning outcomes. Grammar objectives are important parts of language knowledge objectives in national English curriculum standard nowadays. The development of teaching method in China is twisted. Foreign language teaching is seeking a teaching method to balance the fluency and the accuracy of language [10] [11].

2.2 Situation and Situational Teaching Method

Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary defines “situation” as all the circumstances and things that are happening at a particular time and in a particular place [12]. The various circumstances and happenings will affect people’s communicative behavior. The words people talk and the ways people express are restricted by situations [13]. Malinowski first put forward the term “context of situation” in his article *The Problem of Meaning in Primitive*

Language written in 1923, which stresses the relationship between language and situations. To facilitate language learning, linguists and educationists make endeavors to develop the theories that introduce situations to language teaching.

During the 1920s to 1960s, Situational Teaching Method was put forward and developed by Harold Palmer, A.S Hornby and other British language teaching specialists. It is applied by teachers to intentionally introduce or create specific and vivid situations according to teaching contents, such as showing pictures or giving language description, which aims to arouse students' interest and activate their initiative. By Situational Teaching method, teachers play roles as "constructors" who build "cognitive bridge" for students to help them understand and obtain knowledge [14]. Influenced by structuralism, Situational Teaching Method is an approach treating language as a structure and a system of rules. The teaching materials should be arranged according to the grammatical structure and sentence patterns from easy to difficult [15]. It should be noticed that Richard and Rogers emphasized language should be taught in situations [8].

In the first systematic pedagogical work, *Magna Didactics* Johann Amos Comenius points out that the beginning of all the knowledge is sensory perception. His theory is well applied in Situational Teaching Method which absorbs this principle of intuitional instruction. Exposed to the concrete scenes, students are more likely to acquire knowledge actively rather than passively when they form their own recognition and awareness through hearing, seeing, feeling and practicing. It is likely to be in accordance with Constructive Learning Theory which believes that people can only understand things that constructed by themselves, because students tend to reflect on what they have known and construct the new content when they make use of the materials in specific situations.

Second, Situational Teaching Method makes it possible for students to learn to put language into use. The vivid communicative situations provide learners with opportunities to understand the authentic meanings of the language. In foreign language teaching, teachers should make use of the available teaching materials, creating supportive classroom environment to make up the lack of second language environment [16]. Besides, the theory of situated cognition believes that effective learning can only be conducted in certain situations. By combining English learning and settled situation, learners can understand the content in use. They are expected to make conversations, solve problems and be guided to form the habit of thinking in English. It ensures that students get better understanding of knowledge and it benefits students a lot in a long term of English learning.

Last but not least, Situational Teaching Method stimulates learners' interest of learning because of the vivid scenes. Compared to learning grammar by teachers' presentation of rules, students can be better motivated by the concrete situations. The direct and vivid situations can be inspiring as it is in accordance with cognitive process [17]. When interest is aroused, they are more likely to focus on class and be better involved in class, thereby obtaining the knowledge more effectively.

Nevertheless, when learners are expected to construct knowledge in situations, the analysis and the explanation of the language are sometimes overlooked. An appropriate amount of explanation in mother language is necessary. Also, Situational Teaching Method focuses on the procedure of learning, while in Chinese education system, the result of learning--the score is normally put into priority. Therefore, the application of Situational Teaching Method in high school grammar class needs some adaptation to the current education system.

3. Research Design

This research attempts to investigate the current situation of grammar teaching and Situational Teaching Method used in senior high schools. The research mainly discusses the following questions:

- 1) What are students' attitudes and understanding about English learning and English grammar learning?
- 2) What are teachers' teaching methods implemented in grammar class?
- 3) What are the teachers and students' opinions towards the application of Situational Teaching Method?

The subjects of this research are students and teachers from Grade 1 and Grade 2 in a senior high school. There are 12 classes in each grade, with around 40 people in each class. Grade 2 students are divided into arts and science class. Classes' overall English levels are relatively similar at the same grade. This research covers 6 classes of students in Grade 1, 3 classes of art students in Grade 2 and 3 classes of science students in Grade 2, a total of 475 students. Their English teachers (in total six) whose teaching experiences vary from 5-25 years are all involved in this research.

The data is collected by the questionnaire for the students and interview for English teachers. The questionnaire includes three parts. In part one, six items aim to investigate students' attitudes towards English learning and English grammar learning. Part two consists of four items, which focus on English grammar class, including students' expectation and performance in grammar class. Part three includes three items which analyze students' attitudes towards the application of Situational Teaching Method in English grammar class.

Likewise, the interview for teachers also consists of three parts: teachers' attitudes towards grammar teaching, teachers' teaching methods implemented in grammar class, and teachers' views on Situational Teaching Method.

Four hundred and seventy-five copies of the questionnaire were handed out and four hundred and fifty-one valid copies were taken back. The six English teachers were interviewed respectively face-to-face after. The following tables and analysis will illustrate the results of the data and some analysis tends to be given.

4. Results and discussions

4.1 Results of the questionnaire

Table1 Students' attitudes towards English learning and English grammar learning

Item \ Choice	A	B	C	D
1	53.2%	15.5%	10.4%	20.9%
2	12.6%	35.5%	43.7%	8.2%
3	13.2%	28.8%	46.7%	11.3%
4	12.5%	32%	31.3%	24.2%
6	30.2%	45.6%	11.7%	12.5%
12	16.5%	31.1%	42.2%	10.2%

Table 1 shows that over half of the students think they learn English for better test results. In spite of this, only 8% students take no interest in English although those who are really interested in English also account for a small amount. Compared to English learning, English grammar is less favored by students with 47% students mildly interested in English grammar and 11% students disliking it. Item 4 shows that students' attitudes towards English grammar is closely connected with teachers' teaching abilities and teaching methods; only 24% students think their interest in grammar comes from themselves. From item 6, it can be seen that 46% students always concentrate on taking notes and only 12% students have active interaction with teachers in class. 30% students claim they can complete the tasks given by teachers but nearly 13% students admit they are often absent-minded in grammar class. When it comes to making progress in English grammar, item 12 shows that personal endeavor plays most essential role, with only 17% students claiming grammar class is the the key.

It can be seen that for most students, they learn English mainly for the examinations. They do not have strong passion nor disgust in English and grammar learning. Maybe it is because they have

adapted to learning it for the tests they have to take. Students' enthusiasm for English grammar learning is believed to be largely affected by teachers but their improvement in English grammar made by their own efforts. Students performance in English grammar class reflects the lack of interest in grammar class and teachers' teaching methods need to change to some extent.

Table 2 Teachers' teaching methods implemented in English grammar class in students' minds

Item \ Choice	A	B	C	D
5	25.6%	56.7%	14.9%	2.8%
7	10.2%	12.2%	68.6%	8.8%
8	14.2%	32.5%	45.8%	7.5%
9	47.1%	17.8%	26.7%	8.4%

It can be seen that the most common teaching method implemented in English class is teachers giving instructions. Around 26% students claim that their teachers are the centers of the class to present knowledge and they are busy with taking notes. Only 15% students think their teachers usually introduce situations in grammar teaching, while 68% students expect their teachers to do so. Item 8 shows that although most of the teachers do not explain grammar by introducing situations. 46% students think their teachers may create some situations occasionally to help understand and 32% students say their teachers usually do that. Those who never introduce any situations account only for about 8%. Nearly half of the teachers use situations in lead-in and 27% may introduce situations for students to practice.

According to students' answers, students' favorite grammar teaching method is exactly the one teachers adopt the least. They seldom explain grammar in vivid situations. Instead, they normally present the learning points directly; therefore, what students do most is either taking notes or doing exercises in grammar class. While it doesn't mean that concrete setting never appears in grammar class since many teachers create situations in lead-in or practice process.

Table 3 Students' attitudes towards the application of Situational Teaching Method in grammar class

Item \ Choice	A	B	C	D
10	41.8%	28.2%	23.3%	6.7%
11	38.5%	18.2%	23.6%	19.3%
13	20.2%	40.7%	27.6%	11.5%

It can be seen from Table 3 that the majority of the students are favor of Situational Teaching method. 30% students oppose the application of Situational Teaching Method in grammar class and it is mainly because they think it can be time-consuming. The reasons for the Situational Teaching Method are various: more engagement in class and better understanding of knowledge account for 40% and 24% respectively. From item 13, we can see that about 61% students think the application of Situational Teaching Method can benefit the performance in examination.

The result of the questionnaire implies the lack of interest and effectiveness in the current grammar class. Students expect the application of Situational Teaching Method as it not only brings more interest but also helps them master the learning points, although some of students realize Situational Teaching Method may cost much more time.

4.2 Results of the interview

The interview for teachers mainly covers the following three parts: teachers' attitudes towards

grammar teaching, teaching methods implemented in grammar class and teachers' views on Situational Teaching Method.

Through the interview, it can be known that teachers think grammar plays an essential role in English learning as a system. In college entrance examination, the multiple-choice testing students' grammar abilities only accounts for 10 marks, but students tend to have big problems in cloze and writing if they are not good in grammar. In a long term, students could not use English without the foundation of grammar.

In Grade 1, most teachers spend almost half lesson hours focusing on grammar and teachers in Grade 2 even spend more lesson hours on that. One teacher said grammar teaching takes up much time not only because it is important, but also because teaching grammar can be an effective way to improve students' level. It is believed that grammar knowledge can be learned immediately in class teaching although exercise consolidation after class is necessary. Besides, grammar exercise explanation class is efficient to solve students' problems. However, it cannot be denied that students' levels vary. That's why some students think personal effort is the determinant of learning results. Two teachers pointed out it is unnecessary to spend too much time on some oddly complex grammar exercise.

The teachers said the grammar learning points are usually introduced by the reading passages in textbooks, so the grammar learning points are often led in by situations given by textbooks. Teachers usually give more examples structured by that grammar to inspire students to find out the rules, followed by the detailed introduction of the new learning points. If the target grammar is complicated, they may give students hand-out with outlined rules. Therefore, it is common for students to be busy with taking notes and doing exercises in class. One teacher complained about the students' performance as they are reluctant to respond in class. One teacher said although students take lots of notes in class, a few people spend time on revision after class, which means that they still do not grasp the knowledge well.

As for the ideal teaching methods, most of the teachers think a great number of interactive activities should be designed in grammar class, such as creating more situations for students to understand and practice. However, similar to students, some teachers think setting up situations in class is time-consuming. At the same time, techniques of solving difficulties in exams can be introduced when teaching grammar through exercises.

One teacher said that in all types of classes, she liked creating situations by giving examples relating to students, while some teachers create situations occasionally. For example, the grammar focus is V-ing form as predicative, attribute and object complement. One teacher led in the grammar class by an English song with many words with V-ing form. Students were asked to fill in the blanks when they listened to the song. All of the blanks they need to fill in were the words of V-ing form. This kind of music situation managed to attract students' attention and they would know the target grammar naturally. In this case, Situational Teaching Method obviously benefits class.

Moreover, students are able to know how to apply what they have learned if they can practice grammar in situations. Thus, appropriate situations promote learning outcomes. However, all of the teachers claim that the grammar rules instruction and exercises should be the main part of the class due to its efficiency.

4.3 Pedagogical implications

From the research and analysis above, the creation of situations is conducive to solve some problems faced by students and teachers in English learning and teaching, such as the lack of interest and interaction. As students' motivation in English grammar learning correlates to teaching methods, teachers are likely to make a difference to students' performance if they can adjust their teaching methods. The common teaching methods adopted by some teachers make students lose enthusiasm in grammar class, and separate the language skills from grammar learning. With the help of those appropriate situations which can arouse students' interest, a good class atmosphere can be activated; moreover, students' learning outcomes will be enhanced.

Situational Teaching Method was put forward in the middle of nineteenth century. Considering

the changed classroom situation and the guide of the current curriculum standard, it is necessary to update some specific teaching techniques and apply Situational Teaching Method in a new way. The application of Situational Teaching Method should be conducted to achieve teaching goals. When and how to introduce situations have considerable influence on the effectiveness and efficiency of the class.

4.4 Suggestions

This thesis aims to offer some suggestions to optimize the use of Situational Teaching Method in grammar class and enhance the quality of grammar class. Here are the suggestions for both teachers and students based on the results of the research.

English teachers are expected to know that class is co-constructed by teachers and students. When the teacher takes an obvious dominant role, students tend to study negatively and ineffectively. In some class, teachers only demonstrate knowledge and students are expected to master the knowledge after class. That's why many students think personal effort is more useful than grammar class. Instead, teachers can encourage students to take their initiative to participate in class by giving students opportunities to practice what they have learned in certain situations.

Although teachers may teach the same contents for many years, the students and happenings are changing. It is advisable to update what they use as situations, since the situations they introduce can be current affairs or things relating to students themselves. The class is likely to be more attractive if teachers can integrate class contents with what can catch students' eye. Teachers should explore students' interest and view things from students' perspectives so that they can find ways to create situations that students expect.

Moreover, in view of the time constraint, it is unrealistic to use Situational Teaching Method through the whole class and worth emphasizing that the situations are made use of to better achieve teaching goals. Teachers should not sacrifice situations creations for more teacher speaking time, nor introduce some situations not serving for facilitating grammar understanding. In a word, teachers should maximize the value of situations in the limited time. As Penny Ur (2009:4) puts it, "In a formal course of study, there is very much less time available, and often less motivation, which means that learning time has to be organized for optimum efficiency."

As for the students, to begin with, they need to form proper attitudes towards English learning and English grammar learning. They need to keep in mind that the purpose of English learning should not be restricted in preparation for examinations. At the same time, the purpose of English grammar learning is not just for the 10 marks multiple-choice. The basic grammar must be mastered for better language skills, so that English can be used in effective communication. Therefore, it is more advisable to practice the learned grammar knowledge in corresponding situations, instead of being buried in particularly complicated grammar exercises. It also should be noticed that numerous students take notes in class but hardly review their notes. If they can apply the grammar in situations during class time, they are more likely to learn actively and may find memorize the grammar rules easier.

Since class is constructed by teachers and students together, students should become more initiative and participate in teacher-student interaction actively and voluntarily. Concentrating on note-taking instead of interacting with teachers sometimes is not that effective. Teaching procedures sometimes can be adjusted according to the actual circumstances and teachers can be stimulated by students' reaction. In a word, students should cooperate with teachers to build up the better grammar class.

5. Conclusion

According to teachers and students' actual performance in grammar class, and attitudes towards grammar teaching and Situational Teaching Method, the research seems to show that the application of Situational Teaching Method in English grammar teaching has positive implications, which reflects on students' interest in grammar learning and the level of mastery. However, it is noteworthy that the situations should be selected cautiously. Only when the situations introduced

are closely related to grammar points and students, can the situations function effectively to help students master the knowledge and achieve the ultimate teaching goals.

Although some conclusions can come out on the basis of the questionnaire and interview research, the conclusions will be more convincing if classroom experiment can be carried out in different classes. Further study can be conducted on optimizing the application Situational Teaching Method to English grammar teaching in senior high school.

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