

# *English Grammar Teaching for High School Students based on the combination of contextual grammar and literary classics*

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**Abstract:** Because of the complexity and importance of English grammar teaching in high school English education, this paper is to provide detailed information about the concept of contextual grammar advocated in grammar teaching. Teachers can guide students to sense and appreciate the grammatical usage in the created contexts displayed in the literary classics. It is easier for students to learn and apply grammatical rules in the concrete context, which can improve their own comprehensive language proficiency.

## **1. Introduction**

Grammar is mostly defined as a set of rules which govern the configurations that the morphology and syntax of a language assume (Celce-Murcia, M. & Hilles, S., 1988).[1] Most Chinese students think that it is so boring to learn grammar, just because English teachers simply list and explain the grammatical rules which are isolated from the context, and then do rote exercises. Students are required to learn and recite the isolated grammatical rules. Teachers concentrate on the form of language and neglect the functional meaning of language. The uniform grammatical rhythms—grammatical forms, examples, and exercises keep students in a boring learning environment that they want to escape. This causes to students' disliking grammar learning and lacking the motivation of grammar learning, even English learning.

“General Senior High School Curriculum Standards”(abbreviated as “Curriculum Standards” in the following)has pointed out the grammatical knowledge and grammatical ability that students in senior high schools should have. At the meantime, Curriculum Standards displays the requirements of grammatical knowledge and gives the detailed information about grammar. English grammar knowledge includes morphology and syntax knowledge. Morphology concerns the morphological changes of words, such as the number and case of nouns, the tense and aspect of verbs, while syntax concerns the structure of sentences, such as the constituents of sentences, word order, and type of sentences. The relationship between morphology and syntax is very close. In language use, grammar is a unity of form, meaning, and use, which is closely related to phonetics, lexicon, discourse, and pragmatics, and directly affects the accuracy and appropriateness of understanding

and expression. The study of English grammar in senior high school is an extension and continuation of grammar learning at the compulsory education stage. Students should further consolidate and properly apply the grammar knowledge at the former stage through various contextualized English learning and practicing activities. Students should try to understand and apply the new grammar knowledge in contexts so as to further develop English grammar awareness. [2] This shows the importance of grammar teaching to English teaching and learning.

## 2. The Application of theory

Teaching grammar has a long history, even teaching schoolboys grammar also dating back to Greece in the second century B.C. What's more, the primary aims of teaching grammar at school include two: one is to discipline and train the mind; the other is to teach grammatical forms and word usages that were considered correct or socially prestigious. [3] But how to judge it is right or it is acceptable is still a question. For example, most of the Chinese students just get the idea that the word "happening" can't be used in progressive tense. In some specific contexts, happening is accepted. A commentator is talking passionately about how the players on the football field cooperate to score a goal. Unluckily, the opposing goalkeeper misses the goal by a fraction! Then the commentator guides the audience to notice how the lost team has reacted. Such a sentence can be used—but what is happening down at the other end of the field. Therefore, teaching grammar isolated from the context should be avoidable.

### 2.1. Grammar, grammaring, contextual grammar

Teaching grammar centers on remembering grammatical knowledge—— mainly a set of rules or the ability of applying rules in different contexts... Therefore, great changes have taken place in grammar teaching methods: from early translation method, the direct method, listening and speaking method, cognitive method——focusing on separated or isolated language form, to communicative method——transforming to semantic understanding. However, Larsen-Freeman stated that grammar is dynamic and language is surely dynamic. At the meanwhile, Freeman used grammaring instead of grammar. Grammar includes both implicit and explicit grammars, universal and language-specific grammars, the way that language ought to be used and the way it actually is use, theoretically exclusive grammars and more eclectic ones, etc. Grammaring refers to the ability to use grammar structures accurately, meaning fully, and appropriately as the proper goal of grammar instruction. "Ing" to grammar means to suggest a dynamic process of grammar using. Student must practice meaningful use of grammar in a way that takes into account transfer-appropriate processing.[4] Teaching grammar is to focus on the transferring ability of applying the set of rules in the similar contexts and different contexts. In most cases, languages can not be free from contexts. It is inclined to refer to the approach of teaching and learning grammar within the context of real-life situations and authentic materials. It emphasizes understanding how grammatical structures are used in actual communication, rather than just memorizing a set of rules rotely and lonely.

### 2.2. Literary classics

Literary classics are timeless works of literature that have stood the test of time and continue to be celebrated for their artistic merit, cultural significance, and enduring relevance. They often serve as benchmarks for literary excellence and are studied for their contributions to the development of language, themes, and narrative techniques. Literary works are products of The Times. They come from life but rise above the life. Literary works are inspired either by life or by fictional storyline.

They provide the background of the story and the process of development. That's to say, they provide the special context of language usage. In that case, it can be got that literary works and grammar teaching is closely intertwined, with literary works serving as a rich resource and effective tool for grammar instruction. Through reading literary works, students can gain consciousness of grammar and improve their ability of applying grammar.

### 3. The relationship between grammar teaching and literary classics

It is obvious that reading literary works can help language learning. It also benefits grammar teaching. Literary works can offer authentic contexts where languages are used for teachers, which help students understand how language is used in real context in which stories took place. This context is more vivid and practical than the artificial examples found in textbooks. Reading literary works can enhance students' sensitivity to language, including grammatical structures, vocabulary choices, and stylistic nuances. Because of vividness given by literary works, they can stimulate students' interest, making grammar teaching and learning more engaging and enjoyable. Moreover, literary works include a variety of grammatical structures and usages, which can serve as examples for explaining and practicing grammatical points. Take *the little prince* as an example in terms of grammar teaching.

After teaching simple past, the teacher can designate the novel to students as a reading task, with the purpose that students are going to learn about the stories and formation of the novel, because the novel is not difficult for students to finish the task in terms of vocabularies or grammars. Compared with simply memorizing grammatical rules, reading novels is much more interesting, which leads to grammar learning not so boring. Students unconsciously have learned the use of simple past. Next, students are required to retell the contents or share their own ideas about the novel in their own words. The designing intention of this step is to demand students to use the appropriate past tense to retell the experiences of the little prince. After finishing the novel, it can be concluded that the novel has five parts: the pilot's statement—foreshadowing, the encounter and interaction between the pilot and the little prince—development, the experiences of visiting six asteroids for the little prince—climax, the sufferings of the little prince on the earth—fall and the disappearance of the little prince—disaster. [5] The author narrates these events that have already take place to the readers in a gentle and detailed manner, so the main tenses are simple past and present perfective. Present perfective also emphasizes the thing happened in the past. The foreshadowing part tells readers about the pilot's own experience on different ideas of the same picture between he himself the grown-ups when he was six years old. The development part describes the little prince and the pilot's meeting and their acquaintance during which the pilot knew more and more about the little prince through the little prince's narrations... Each part for different narrators, it is about the passed experience, so it centers on simple past tense.

What's more, teachers are apt to remind the students of the narrative perspective of the novel. The narrative perspective of the novel changes with the changes of the narrative structure. It concludes five parts from the beginning to the ending: the first person, the coexistence between the first person and the third person, the third person, the coexistence between the third person and the first person, the first person. In some parts, the author also refers to the second person. [5] The author uses the different persons to display their own stories. It is also related with grammatical rules, such as subject-verb concord and the person and number consistence at the discourse level... In terms of grammar, teachers had better guide students to appreciate the changes of persons in different context and to know the importance agreement on subjects, verbs, pronouns ... in number, person, gender.

What can be got that grammar teaching and literary classics are two distinct fields, but they can

complement each other to enhance the abilities and literacy of language learners. The purpose of grammar teaching is to help learners understand and use the language correctly. Through grammar teaching, learners can understand the basic structures of the language, such as sentence construction, tense, aspect, voice, etc. To some degree, students can reduce errors and improve the accuracy of the language by way of grammar teaching. If they master grammar rules, it is much easier for them to express their thoughts more effectively and understand others. Luckily, literary classics can provide a specific literary context for learner to learn grammar, which is easier and more interesting for students to understand and remember grammatical knowledge than abstract grammar rules. In addition, literary classics provide more complex and advanced scenarios of language usage and students have more chances to meet and practice advanced grammatical structures. As a matter of fact, literary classics also provide opportunities for students to appreciate the charm of the culture of the target language more deeply through teachers' teaching grammar. Literary classics have attracting plots and profound themes, which stimulate students' interests and motivation of learning grammar.

#### 4. Implication in English language teaching

It is acknowledged that literary classics have a close relationship with grammar improvement, but it is cautious for English teachers to choose English original literary classics. The difficulty a little above students' ability is enough. After the students finish reading the designated classic, such tasks can be chose by the English teachers, which combine grammar teaching and literary classics, such as grammar cloze, role-playing and writing exercises. Teachers leave blanks on purpose excerpts from classics for students to fill in with the correct grammatical forms (repetition of the grammatical points), which is to test students' familiarity and mastery of the grammatical structures in the classic. Students act as characters from classics. It is natural for students to imitate the characters' tone and engage in dialogues, using specific grammatical structures. At last, teachers can ask students to write a review or sequel to a classic. In that case, students would apply what they have learned about the grammar in the classics. Only in the way of combining grammar teaching and literary classics, can they complement each other? More important, students can make great progress in language use.

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