



GRAMMAR TEACHING IN COLLEGE ENGLISH MAJORS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF GESTALT

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ABSTRACT

As a fundamental course for college English majors, the importance of English grammar is self-evident. Over the years, grammar teaching has long since been a hard nut to crack due to its rule-based nature and prejudices against it on the part of students from Zhaoqing University. The article takes into account this problem and makes a preliminary analysis into the problem on parts of both teachers and students from the perspective of Gestalt theory, in order to provide necessary reference and assistance for future teaching.

KEYWORDS: *Gestalt; Grammar Teaching; College English*

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of teaching English grammar is to cultivate students' solid knowledge of grammar theory. However, college teachers have found several obvious characteristics when correcting English major compositions: students' English compositions have very obvious traces of framework imitations, but the content is hollow and not very substantial; Students rarely use advanced vocabulary in the process of English writing. Even if advanced vocabulary appears, it is either due to improper use of words or spelling errors, or incorrect collocation with other words; The frequency of using "absolute construction" grammar knowledge point is almost zero, let alone incorrect use of prepositions, quantifiers, and other function words. As an English grammar teacher, the author feels at a loss for solutions when facing problems. Which link exactly went wrong? Is it due to the unreasonable arrangement of grammar courses and insufficient class hours? Is there a problem with the teacher's guidance? Or what.

According to the teaching syllabus of the School of Foreign Studies at Zhaoqing University in Guangdong Province, teachers are required to focus on the following three objectives when teaching English grammar (English major) courses. Firstly, the goal of grammar knowledge is: to understand the important role of English grammar in the teaching of English subjects in primary and secondary schools, in the learning and research of English language and literature majors, and in the professional development of English teachers; to master the English grammar knowledge system, basic concepts, and basic rules; preliminary understanding of the subject teaching knowledge, grammar teaching concepts, and methods required for engaging in English grammar teaching; a basic understanding of the professional knowledge, research ideas, and methods required for engaging in English grammar research. Secondly, the goal of grammar application is: to proficiently use the grammar knowledge system, basic concepts, and basic rules to understand and generate discourse; to consolidate grammar knowledge in the learning process of professional courses and apply grammar knowledge to solve related problems. Thirdly, grammar teaching objectives: to have the basic ability to carry out grammar teaching, that is, to be able to use English grammar knowledge and teaching concepts and methods under the guidance of teachers, based on the relevant requirements of the *Full-time Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards* and the *General High School English Curriculum Standards*, to develop grammar teaching plans, design grammar teaching processes, and conduct grammar classroom teaching in the form of micro lessons and to obtain a preliminary ability to conduct grammar teaching research under the guidance of teachers; In grammar teaching and research practice, it is important to adhere to the professional ethics of teachers and cultivate a sense of identity in the English education profession. It should be noted that the School of Foreign Studies aims to establish itself as a teacher-training major. The positioning of the School of Foreign Studies is to focus on cultivating middle school teachers of English with high ethical standards, a willingness to teach and a solid knowledge of English subjects, familiarity with relevant Chinese and foreign cultural knowledge, good English application ability, strong English teaching ability, and certain teaching and research ability, cross-cultural ability, self-learning ability, communication and cooperation ability, critical thinking ability, and innovative consciousness, and teachers are supposed to be capable of teaching English in basic education fields such as secondary schools and educational



institutions. Both the university and its subordinate secondary teaching units, such as the School of Foreign Studies, have put forward clear requirements and tasks for English grammar teaching. Simply put, teachers have high teaching requirements and students have a heavy task of meeting standards.

II. GESTALT THEORY

Gestalt ^[1] is a German lexicon, meaning a complete form, which means entirety. The Gestalt theory holds that human understanding of objective things is a perceptual understanding, as well as an experiential perception, and the Gestalt is the entirety of experience. "The whole is not equal to the sum of its parts, and conscious experience is not equal to the simple collection or sum of sensory elements... The meaning of the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; the whole determines the nature and meaning of its parts. Only in the whole can the parts show their due meaning, and without the whole will the overall meaning be lost"^[2]. A beautiful symphony is not an individual solo, but rather a harmony between individuals, an accompaniment, and a collaboration. Even for a beautiful piece of music, the composer's work still requires the perfect performance of the performer and the attentive appreciation of the audience. Composers, performers, and audiences are all essential elements. Any mistake or deficiency in any aspect may result in the failure of the work. Regarding Gestalt psychology, there are the following important organizational principles: (1) the principle of the relationship between figures and backgrounds (figure ground). When we observe, we may think that some objects or shapes are more prominent than the background; (2) The principle of similarity. When the physical properties such as shape, size, color, and intensity of stimuli are relatively similar, these stimuli are easily organized to form a whole; (3) The principle of continuity. If certain parts of a graphic can be seen as connected together, then these parts are relatively easy for us to perceive as a whole.

III. GESTALT AND GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION

The Gestalt theory has important guiding significance for grammar teaching. Many scholars have made preliminary explorations on grammar teaching guided by Gestalt theory. Cao Yixuan and Zhang Xuhong ^[3] have explored the inevitable connection between Gestalt transformation and the formation of positional alternation and grammaticalization, revealing that language comes from "social practice" and "life experience", and the mapping relationship between human mental activities and language use is likely the key cause of the grammaticalization pattern. Ai Qinghua ^[4] has analyzed the application of Gestalt theory in blank-filling part of College English Test Band 4, and explored the problem-solving skills of this question type, in order to help students master this question type. In the "Theme" entry of China National Knowledge Infrastructure, after typing in key words of Gestalt and grammar, it is revealed that the earliest article discussing Gestalt in China was published in 2004 by Chen Jiansheng and Wu Shutan in the Journal of Sichuan University of Foreign Languages. The article^[5] argues that Langacker's cognitive grammar draws on many Gestalt psychological principles and proposes the hypothesis of imagery meaning. Based on its relevant arguments, the article goes on to explain and analyze the role of structural prominence in the translation process, which is one of the hypotheses regarding the meaning of imagery. Imagery meaning refers to the speaker's ability to construct the thought scene in different ways mentally. The theoretical basis of the article is cognitive grammar, not formal semantics, which makes its argument different from similar articles in the past. Kang Kai^[6] proposed from the perspective of Gestalt that writing classes should be combined with reading, listening, speaking, translation, and online media. Zhu Dongmei and Liu Xingpei ^[7] analyzed and explored English vocabulary teaching using Gestalt theory. It can be said that the research on using Gestalt theory to guide English grammar practice teaching in China is not abundant, and the reasons behind it are unknown. From the perspective of Gestalt theory and its related principles, this article proposes the following opinions from the perspectives of both teachers and students. Firstly, teachers need a specific and comprehensive grammar knowledge system; Secondly, teachers pay attention to the guidance of theory and practice in the teaching process. Students must go through several steps in learning English grammar, including previewing, listening, reflecting, and asking questions; Secondly, students should view grammar as a bridge connecting various English major courses, fundamentally reversing the "discriminatory" attitude towards English grammar courses: that is, correcting the wrong belief that grammar is an optional course and "whether or not to learn it doesn't matter". Finally, teachers and students should work together to link the teaching and learning of English grammar with real life, so that English grammar can be integrated into daily life, because what is learned and applied is the most meaningful and valuable.

IV. "TEACHING" IN GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION

Considering the schedule of English grammar classes (the first semester of freshman year), students do not systematically learn English grammar in a single course during high school. Therefore, in the first section of English grammar teaching, the teacher should impart the importance and fun of grammar to students. A key task about grammar teaching is to solve the problem of "biases" on the part of students towards grammar in learning, while the fun teaching is to stimulate students' interest and enhance mutual trust between teachers and students.



These two points are not insignificant and must be given due attention. According to the principle of the relationship between graphics and background (figure ground). When we observe, we may think that some objects or shapes are more prominent than the background. The relationship between importance and interest is like the relationship between graphics and backgrounds. The importance of English grammar goes without saying, but often we focus on its importance. In terms of classroom organization and arrangement, teachers tend to output too much knowledge, or students tend to practice grammar too much. Over time, the fun of learning grammar has been worn down. Students cannot feel the joy of learning English, and their enthusiasm and initiative for learning are greatly reduced. In the end, teachers feel that it is difficult and unrewarding. They have put in so much effort, but it cannot be exchanged for students' recognition and gratitude for their teaching abilities. After a second thought, the problem is clear-cut: teachers have overlooked the important aspect of "background" - interest.

On the other hand, teachers should take into account the actual needs of students in the teaching process and should not teach just to complete tasks. An important question type in the TEM4 English major exam is grammar and vocabulary. During the teaching process, teachers can arrange a combination of theoretical chapter lectures and past TEM4 professional CET-4 exam questions to teach. In this way, teachers' lectures will make students feel more valuable and meaningful, and students will also feel that they can apply what they have learned, which can prepare them for the next year's TEM-4 exam. In fact, in English teaching, the central subject position of students and the guiding role of teachers are a pair of graphics and backgrounds. In recent years, teachers and students have been able to recognize and practice the concept of "student-centered" education in teaching practice, breaking the previous teaching mode of "one-man classroom" and "cramming". Teachers guide students to discover and solve problems, return the classroom and problems to students, give full play to and motivate students' learning interest and enthusiasm, and achieve positive and constructive results. A clear feature is that the roles of students and teachers have changed, with students transitioning from being "passive" to "active". They have more "things" to do in class, more content and homework to prepare outside of class, and more presentations to do in class. However, the strength of the reform is still not significant, and most students are still unable to apply English to their daily lives. Students have not developed a natural habit of speaking English. For example, they speak English only in the classroom. When outside of class, they pick the "low-hanging fruits"—meaning they choose their mother tongue for communication purposes. The atmosphere of speaking English has not yet formed. If English majors cannot develop a good habit of "learning English, speaking English, and using English", the difficulty of non-English majors in learning English is easily expected.

V. "LEARNING" IN GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION

Grammar includes both lexical and syntactic aspects. The word class includes both content words and function words. Taking verbs in content words as an example, verbs are divided into notional verbs, link verbs, auxiliary verbs, and modal verbs. The notional verbs are divided into transitive verbs and intransitive verbs. Among them, transitive verbs are divided into single object transitive verbs and double object transitive verbs (such as give, send, buy, etc.). Based upon the similarity principle in Gestalt theory, when stimuli have similar physical properties such as shape, size, color, and intensity, they are easily organized to form a whole. In English learning, students should learn to compare the similarities and differences between Chinese and English languages. With the help of the principle of similarity, they should be good at discovering and summarizing the similarities and differences between Chinese and other foreign languages. For example : the basic word order in both Chinese and English is subject+predicate+object (SVO), such as "我(I)读(read)书(book)" in Chinese and "I read a book" in English. However, the Japanese word order quite special, which is subject+object+predicate (SOV), such as "私(I)は本(book)を読む(read)". At the same time, they should also summarize and generalize the characteristics of English language, such as the rich changes in English verbs and the structural requirements of subject verb agreement. To achieve accuracy in the English language, grammar must be given due attention. To make language vibrant, it must be brought into the context of daily life. Any experience in life can be compiled into a rich and interesting English story. In the classroom learning process of English grammar, students will be exposed to the learning of vocabulary classification, including the use and transformation of parts of speech such as nouns and verbs. The course will also involve the study of sentence structure, such as how to form simple sentences, coordinate sentences, and compound sentences, and master different tenses, voices, and moods, as well as consistency between subjects and predicates. Through continuous practice, such as correcting mistakes, sentence construction exercises, etc., students can strengthen their understanding and application of grammar rules. Teachers will also point out easily confused grammar points and common errors to help students avoid making mistakes in daily use. The classroom is not only about imparting theoretical knowledge, but also focuses on students' practical application abilities. Through activities such as role-playing, writing exercises, and oral practice, students can apply the grammar knowledge they have learned to real-life situations, truly mastering and flexibly applying English grammar.



VI. SUMMARY

This article combines Gestalt theory and its organizational principles to explore the teaching and learning of college English grammar from the perspectives of both teachers and students, in order to provide assistance and reference for subsequent grammar teaching.

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