RESEARCH ON ENGLISH MAJOR GRAMMAR TEACHING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CROSS-CULTURAL INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

In the new era, amidst the trends of curriculum ideological and political education, new liberal arts construction, and telling China stories well to the world, how traditional English grammar courses can break free from constraints such as being boring and tedious, seize opportunities, and make breakthroughs is a new challenge and opportunity facing university English teachers. This paper explores three paths — content-based, situation-based, and authentic-materials-based — to integrate cross-cultural international communication with university English major grammar teaching. Through combining English, grammar, discourse, culture, ideological and political education, and international communication, it is significant to cultivate international talents with Chinese depth, global breadth, and humanistic height, as well as cross-cultural communication leaders while solidifying students' grammar foundation.

KEYWORDS: *English Major, Grammar Teaching, New Liberal Arts, Cross-Cultural Communication, International Communication*

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the vigorous development of curriculum ideological and political education has injected new momentum into university English grammar courses. President Xi Jinping pointed out that each discipline and course should carry the banner of ideological and political education, and university English grammar courses are no exception. President Xi has also repeatedly emphasized the need to "tell China's story well to the world". University students are the main force in telling China's story and spreading Chinese culture through cross-cultural international communication. Keywords such as English, grammar, discourse, culture, ideological and political education, and international communication have achieved integrated convergence in the context of the new era and new liberal arts construction. Wang (2021) believes that under the background of new liberal arts construction, foreign language education should be based on the new needs of the times, actively exploring new majors/directions, new training models, new curriculum systems, and new theoretical constructions through self-intersection, internal intersection, internal-external intersection, and external-internal intersection forms, highlighting the characteristics of "new", "cross", and "culture" to promote innovative development of foreign language education and play an important role in new liberal arts construction.

Under current circumstances, there is an urgent need to cultivate international talents with Chinese depth, global breadth, and humanistic height, as well as cross-cultural communication leaders, to promote China's better integration with the world and help the world better understand China. Based on this, this paper explores combining cross-cultural international communication with university English major grammar teaching as a new attempt for the so-called boring grammar teaching.

2. CROSS-CULTURAL INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Cross-cultural international communication includes cross-cultural communication and international communication. Samovar et al. (2000) defines "cross-cultural communication": In the most general sense, cross-cultural communication occurs when a member of one culture produces information for consumption by a member of another culture. More specifically, cross-cultural communication refers to communication between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are sufficiently different to alter the communication event. The term cross-

cultural communication is often used to refer to communication between people from different cultures. Factors affecting cross-cultural communication can be divided into emotional issues, attitude issues, and translation issues. These specifically include anxiety and uncertainty, assumed similarity, ethnocentrism, stereotypes, prejudice, racism, and translation issues (Yan, 2009, p. 127). The influence of one culture in cross-cultural communication depends on its similarity to another culture. The more similar the two cultures are, the less impact on communication and the less information change. Misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication often arise from this (Hu, 2006). Qualified communication competence is a social ability, referring to appropriate communicative behavior that can meet situational expectations and requirements, and is also a personal ability, including behaviors and skills to control individual social environments. Cross-cultural competence refers to the ability to understand and adapt to other cultures without ignoring one's own culture, and includes sensitivity to cultural diversity. Cross-cultural communication competence refers to the ability to effectively and appropriately complete cross-cultural communication when communicating with people from different cultures (Yan, 2009, pp. 319-320).

From the perspective of communication studies, international communication ability refers to the ability of cross-cultural information exchange and communication through mass media across national boundaries with strong political attributes (Lu, 2020). Wen (2022, p. 17) defines international communication ability as: the ability of governments or mass media or self-media representing national will to use discourse as the main means to introduce to the world the country's culture and history, theories and practices of state governance, innovative scientific and technological knowledge, etc., with the purpose of safeguarding national interests, enhancing international discourse power, international status and international influence. Hu (2016) believes that China's international communication includes two aspects: First is communicating factual information, taking China as the communication object, focusing on reporting China's economic, political, and social changes and rich Chinese culture to meet the world's cognitive needs of contemporary China. Second is communicating subjective information, taking China as the communication subject, independently explaining and clarifying Chinese events and international information with Chinese perspectives and voices, expressing China's views and propositions. Li (2024) proposes that the core competencies of international communication talents include political literacy, broad-minded literacy, humanistic literacy, knowledge integration, and practical ability. Among them, political literacy, broad-minded literacy, and humanistic literacy are the key capabilities for international communication, implying the value orientation and fundamental cognition required by international communication talents. Knowledge integration and practical ability constitute the external manifestation of international communication talents, manifesting in their cross-cultural communication practices and determining the methods and effects of cross-cultural communication practices by international communication talents. Knowledge integration mainly includes political theory knowledge, comprehensive professional knowledge, and cross-industry knowledge, while practical abilities include discourse expression ability, cross-cultural communication ability, and information communication skills. Wen (2022, p. 17) believes that cultivating international communication talents should be an important mission of foreign language majors. To successfully complete this mission, it is recommended to adopt a "dual-drive" strategy and adjust teaching content to organically integrate "language education" with "communication education". Ye (2024) discussed the teaching of "Advanced English" courses based on international communication ability under the background of new liberal arts, suggesting improvements in three aspects: expanding teaching materials to enhance cross-cultural ability; innovating teaching models to adapt to information age requirements; and integrating multiple courses to cultivate comprehensive language application ability. She believes that international communication ability is a comprehensive language application ability, and qualified international communication English talents should possess multiple skills such as cross-cultural communication, Chinese and English writing, foreign languages translation, and discourse expression. Therefore, "Advanced English" courses must be combined with writing, listening, speaking, translation, and other courses to achieve multi-dimensional cultivation of international communication ability. This has commonalities with the goal of the grammar course teaching from the perspective of cross-cultural international communication discussed in this paper.

English major students should first possess cross-cultural communication ability and global vision, placing themselves in an international multicultural environment while learning grammar and English. At the same time, as the future of the country, contemporary college students should possess international communication ability to tell China's story well to the world.

3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INTEGRATING CROSS-CULTURAL INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION INTO ENGLISH MAJOR GRAMMAR TEACHING

A recent questionnaire on problems and expectations in English grammar learning conducted in the author's freshman English major class finds that students' problems can be divided into micro and macro aspects. Micro aspects generally include some common grammatical key points and difficulties, such as tenses, subjunctive mood, various clauses, conjunctions, and phrases. There are also many minor grammar points like word formation, imperative sentences, prepositions, infinitives, emphatic sentences, non-finite verbs, determiners, indefinite pronouns, interrogative sentences, singular and plural nouns, third person singular verbs, synonym discrimination, part of speech conversion, passive voice, apposition, collocation, prefixes and suffixes, sentence patterns, etc. Macro aspects are manifested in: unfamiliarity with grammar terms, too many grammar points, lack of systematicity, difficulty in identifying grammar test points, difficulty in flexible application, etc. Students' expectations mainly include: hoping to flexibly apply learned grammar, improve grammar issues in writing, write advanced complex English sentences, speak grammatically correct sentences, analyze long and difficult sentences in articles to understand them. In a word, they hope to achieve grammar improvement in basic English skills such as speaking, reading, writing and translation. Some also expect to master scientific and correct grammar learning methods and learn grammar in a relaxed and pleasant class atmosphere.

From the questionnaire results, we can see that the English grammar learned by students in high school is fragmented, mainly focusing on vocabulary and sentence pattern. Their grammar foundations are not solid enough. Influenced by exam-oriented education, their flexible application ability is relatively weak, and grammar integration into discourse has not received enough attention. English grammar learning has also been traditionally considered boring. In Professor Zhang Zhenbang's A *New English Grammar Coursebook*, the English grammar concept advocated and implemented is Grammatical Hierarchy. Hierarchy is the essential attribute of language, and English hierarchy is manifested in five levels in grammar: morpheme, word, phrase, clause, and sentence; in discourse structure, it is manifested in three levels: sentence, paragraph or sentence group, and discourse. Zhang (2022) particularly emphasizes the importance of connecting grammar with discourse, believing that as a pedagogical grammar, it should not only impart grammar knowledge but also be conducive to readers' appropriate use of grammar knowledge. The quality of a sentence is determined not only by whether its grammatical structure is correct but also by whether it is appropriate in specific usage contexts. He tends to break through the barriers of sentence structure and enter the field of discourse analysis in grammar teaching.

Integrating fragmented English grammar points into discourse teaching can effectively prevent students from "seeing the trees but not the forest" throughout the grammar learning process and is also conducive to improving their foreign language practical application ability. The appropriateness of discourse selection will also affect the effectiveness of grammar teaching. When selecting discourse, comprehensive consideration should be given to era characteristics, international environment, national needs, student English level and preferences, etc. Liu & Rao (2022) believe that under the unprecedented changes in this century, ideological and cultural exchanges are more frequent globally, and competition in soft power between countries is more intense. Therefore, strengthening our country's international communication capacity, telling China's story well, and spreading China's voice well are not only the inherent requirements for enhancing national cultural soft power and creating a good international public opinion environment for our country's development but also the necessity for deepening exchanges and mutual learning between civilizations and promoting the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind. In view of this, to better serve national strategies and accelerate the construction of Chinese discourse and narrative systems, China's higher foreign language education urgently needs to actively respond to changes and innovate knowledge systems, curriculum systems, and textbook systems.

4. PATH ANALYSIS OF INTEGRATING CROSS-CULTURAL INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION INTO UNIVERSITY ENGLISH GRAMMAR TEACHING

Integrating cross-cultural international communication into university English major grammar teaching can start from three paths: content-based, situation-based, and authentic-materials-based, achieving comprehensive integration. The following is a specific analysis combined with the author's teaching experience:

4.1 Content-based Path

Traditional grammar teaching pays excessive attention to language form while neglecting the content carried by language. In the latter half of the 20th century, the reform and innovation movement in the field of language education promoted the formation and development of CBI (Content-Based Instruction), which advocates "organizing teaching around the content or information students need to acquire (rather than around language or other forms of syllabus) to achieve mutual promotion and joint improvement of content teaching and language teaching (Chang, 2014, p. 24). Chang (2014, p. 24) believes that CBI advocates the integration of content and language. Meaningful knowledge content, new knowledge information, and students' personal needs are all concerns of CBI. In practice, teachers can try finding connection points between two or more courses and textbooks, making their knowledge content accessible, striving to achieve the integration of grammar and discourse, simultaneous development of ideological and political ability and English competence, and internal and external integration of Chinese culture and global vision.

In the teaching process, the author breaks through the gap between courses and textbooks. Taking Zhang Zhenbang's *A New English Grammar Coursebook* as the main textbook for grammar classroom teaching, the author uses Liu Moxiao and Rao Qiaoying's *An English Course for Cross-cultural and International Communication* as the main book for students' after-class self-study, supplemented by a series of reference books on cross-cultural communication such as: *Communication Between Cultures* (Third edition) (Larry A. Samovar, Richard E. Porter, Lisa A. Stefani, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, Thomson Learning Press, 2013), *Foundations of Intercultural Communication* (Guo-Ming Chen, William J. Starosta, Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2007), etc. The clever combination of *A New English Grammar Coursebook* and *An English Course for Cross-cultural and International Communication* makes them no longer separate. *A New English Grammar Coursebook* covers all grammar points of English learning, including 40 lectures, with many sub-topics under each lecture, totaling 497 pages, which is very suitable as a reference book but too complex as a one-semester teaching material. Therefore, based on Zhang Zhenbang's grammatical hierarchy concept of book compilation, the author carefully selects chapters related to students' demands at the beginning of the semester, and comprehensively considered the difficult points and key examination points among all the grammar points, finally determining 13 chapters for the course, namely: Introduction, Lecture 1 Grammatical Hierarchy, Lecture 2 Clause Structure and Basic Sentence Patterns, Lecture 3 Clause Components, Lecture 13 Verb Tense and Aspect (1), Lecture 14 Verb Tense and Aspect (2), Lecture 15 Future Time Expression, Lecture 17 Hypothetical Meaning Expression, Lecture 22 -ING Participle, Lecture 23 -ED Participle, Lecture 32 Subordinate Structure, Lecture 33 Conditional Sentences, Lecture 40 From Clause to Text. The rest is left for students' extracurricular self-study. Based on the fact that students have basically learned all English grammar in high school, the knowledge and ability teaching objectives of the grammar course for college English major mainly include: systematizing all grammar, filling knowledge gaps, consolidating and strengthening knowledge base, familiarizing with grammar terminology in Chinese and English, analyzing grammatical components in a sentence by using English terminology, understanding some grammar concepts and theories not covered in high school, understanding deeper reasons behind grammar, improving English competencies in listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation, and enhancing analysis and comprehensive application, so as to prepare for examines and qualifications like TEM-4&TEM-8, teaching qualification examinations, graduation thesis, academic writing, etc. *An English Course for Cross-cultural and International Communication English* includes six unit themes, both ancient and modern, namely Chinese traditional culture, poverty alleviation, Beijing Winter Olympics, fighting COVID-19, addressing climate change, and building a community of shared future for mankind. Based on these six themes and considering that students have altogether 13 weeks of classes in one semester, corresponding to 13 grammar points, the author particularly adds 7 new themes: Chinese cuisine, cultural heritage protection, Chinese medicine, China's new energy, red culture, Chinese education, Chinese elderly care, and Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area(GBA). These include both Chinese traditional culture and various aspects of China's development that foreigners are more concerned about. Because Zhaoqing University, where the author works, is located in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the GBA theme closely related to students is specifically chosen for cross-cultural international communication.

To cultivate students' grammar application skills through progressive development from vocabulary to sentence structure and ultimately to discourse-level proficiency, the author implements the teaching concept of "learning by using" and "using while learning" that emphasizes language practice, taking "telling China's story in English" as the

content of personal sharing in grammar class. Assignments are arranged in advance, requiring students to download the *China Daily* App on their phones, read related theme articles extensively before class, then summarize and retell in their own words, adopting an English mindset and targeting an English-speaking audience, write a 150-200-word English short story, and try to incorporate the grammar points learned that week. After-class writing assignments are arranged for students on a online writing platform to expand the English stories shared that week. Students need to gradually increase their word count from 150 to 300, 500, 800, and 1000. In allowing their abilities in English writing, thinking, expression, expansion, etc. to be fully exercised in this process, students also improve their grammar competence.

4.2 Situation-based Path

American educator John Dewey believes that "situation" is the environment in which things exist, including social environment and natural physical environment, and is also the comprehensive background in which experience is generated. An isolated object, event, or series of objects and events do not have meaning in themselves; to make them effective, they must enter the scope of the situation (Hou, 2019). Situational teaching has important significance for grammar learning, which has always been considered boring, and also meets students' expectations for a lively and interesting classroom atmosphere. At the same time, going out of campus after class to combine grammar knowledge with social practice and integrate knowledge into situations, is more conducive to the internalization and application of knowledge. A combination of grammar knowledge, social situations, and cross-cultural international communication can better achieve the knowledge objectives, ability objectives, and ideological and political objectives of this course.

In the first class of the semester, the author divided all students into 12 small groups according to the number of weeks in the semester for weekly English presentation and communication of Chinese culture. The theme can be about Chinese traditional culture, hometown culture, or culture that the group is interested in. The PPT presentation in English can incorporate videos, audios, pictures, etc. Students are encouraged to conduct field investigation and interview for first-hand information. The English text written requires the integration of grammar points learned that week. Some cultural themes chosen by the groups involve Chaoshan local culture, Foshan local traditional culture, Henan local traditional culture, etc. These themes are the result of students' combination with their hometown life, personal experiences, and field research. When discussing Chaoshan culture, the group introduced food like red peach cake, Chaoshan beef balls, Yingge dance, Chaozhou opera, Han Wengong Temple, Guangji Bridge, etc. When discussing Foshan culture, the group introduced food like Sanshui plain boiled chicken, blind man's cake, Qinghui Garden, Foshan Ancestral Temple, Foshan kungfu culture, etc. When discussing Henan culture, the group introduced food like Heluo noodles, Luoyang tri-colored glazed pottery, Luoyang palace lanterns, etc. Instead of using those well-worn major cultural themes, each group focused on choosing niche and unique materials, spreading local traditional culture internationally, and emphasizing the communication of hometown culture, which reflects a deep-rooted sense of loyalty to both nation and home. It is a challenge and also an opportunity for students to translate these cultural materials with relatively few English references, but they do need this type of material to improve and prove their capabilities as English majors.

When providing feedback, the teacher requires students to consider factors such as foreign audiences, cultural differences, and value disparities throughout the presentation creation process, emphasizing that external publicity should not be conflated with the domestic one. Students are encouraged to identify similarities between foreign cultures and Chinese culture to establish common ground. They need to flexibly and effectively present China's stories to help the world better understand the country. Each group submits their draft report to the teacher one day before class for check. After class, the teacher shares it in a self-created QQ class group, inviting all students to collectively review, discuss, and revise grammatical and pragmatic problems. Finally, the teacher offers revision suggestions, thereby integrating the pre-class, in-class, and post-class with both online and offline activities to achieve blended learning, enabling students to enhance their grammatical and discourse competencies through practical application. Additionally, students are encouraged to transform their revised group reports into short videos incorporating personal narratives, then upload them to domestic social platforms like Bilibili, Douyin, Kuaishou, Xiaohongshu and international social platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter（X）and TikTok. This facilitates authentic cross-cultural international communication, allowing foreign audiences to experience the unique charm of Chinese culture in real-world contexts.

4.3 Authentic-Materials-based Path

According to situational cognition theory, learning possesses characteristics such as situationality, practicality, authenticity, inquiry, initiative, and interactivity (Liu & Gao, 2010). Learning is best done in authentic environments, and the knowledge thus acquired is profound and meaningful because the learning process is a continuous process of constructing meaningful knowledge (Wu & Cheng, 2007). The most effective way to improve cross-cultural communication ability is direct contact with heterogeneous cultures and direct communication with native speakers who have that cultural background (Hu, 1999). English has been a major international language for a long time, and the internet today brings great convenience to English teaching and learning. According to statistics, over 90% of current international information on networks is presented in English. The abundant online information can help foreign language teachers and students fully utilize authentic, first-hand and native English materials produced by English native speakers, allowing them to fully immerse in authentic English usage situations while experiencing diverse cultures. It can also help them stay globally connected, creating opportunities for cross-cultural international communication.

When preparing lessons, teachers can fully utilize the international version of Bing official website and other online resources to find authentic lesson preparation materials provided by English native speakers. The mind maps there, for instance, systematize and organize many fragmented and complex grammar points, while the visual effects of pictures and colors, vivid and interesting examples, and unique layout all help students understand, learn, and remember. For example, when teaching the seven basic sentence patterns, the author extracted a relevant picture from Bing. The picture intuitively demonstrates the characteristics of these seven sentence patterns and methods for quick differentiation through memory-friendly cognitive categorization layouts, vivid examples, and striking color contrasts. In grammar classroom teaching, the traditional unimodal presentation of large chunks of text, regardless of which language, are not conducive to the holistic learning and mastery of obscure and difficult grammar points, and will also weaken students' classroom enthusiasm and engagement. The effectiveness of English grammar teaching can be greatly improved by using the international version of Bing official website and other online resources in searching extensively, converting from previous text-dominated unimodel to multimodel featured by color-rich pictures, charts, animated characters, symbols, and even short teaching videos supplemented with text. For example, when teaching the introduction part about "What is grammar?", the author captured a segment of the teaching video of Khan Academy grammar course from the Bing official website, which simply and clearly answered the above question, leaving a deep impression on students and helping them learn about the internationally renowned Khan Academy. Students can watch teaching videos made by the Academy free of charge together with people from different cultural backgrounds around the world, facilitating future online grammar self-learning. Khan Academy, founded by Bangladeshi-American Salman Khan, is an educational non-profit organization aimed at providing free high-quality education to learners of different ages and stages worldwide through online short videos (360 Baike, 2024).

Students are encouraged to utilize English as a tool to surf the internet during their self-study of challenging grammar points. They can proactively search and read related English articles on international online platforms like Bing and Wikipedia to resolve questions, broaden their knowledge, stay updated on global English grammar trends, deepen linguistic understanding, and cultivate English thinking patterns. They can also explore foreign English-language websites to analyze how international media narrate China's stories. This helps them study authentic writing styles, vocabulary usage, grammatical structures, and discourse patterns. They can even apply intercultural communication concepts learned in the textbook An English Course for Cross-cultural and International Communication, such as cultural awareness, ethnocentrism, stereotypes, and collectivism vs. individualism, to critically examine cultural differences and their underlying roots in foreign media reports. Furthermore, they can employ journalism concepts from the textbook, including false balance, out-of context photos or videos, double standards, media frame, and labeling, to cultivate critical thinking and enhance intercultural communication competencies while scrutinizing foreign media content. This approach strengthens their analytical skills and prepares them for effective global engagement.

5. CONCLUSION

In the new era context, the trends of curriculum ideological and political education, new liberal arts construction, and telling China's story well to the world have put forward new requirements for the training of compound foreign language talents. This paper explores English major grammar teaching from the perspective of cross-cultural international communication, suggesting that traditional English grammar teaching can be combined with cross-cultural international communication to achieve a leap from sentences to discourses. Specifically, it can follow the three paths proposed in this paper: content-based, situation-based, and authentic-materials-based. In terms of content-based approach, the gap between courses and textbooks can be broken through to find connections between two textbooks, striving to achieve the integration of grammar and discourse. In doing so, students' ideological and political awareness and English competence can be simultaneously developed, and their internal and external integration of Chinese culture and global vision can be achieved. In terms of situation-based approach, grammar knowledge, social situations, and cross-cultural international communication can be combined to meet knowledge objectives, ability objectives, and ideological and political objectives of this course through students' in-class and out-of-class practice. In terms of authentic-materials-based approach, students are encouraged to visit websites from English-speaking countries, fully immerse themselves in authentic English situations while experiencing cultural diversity, stay globalled connected, and create conditions for cross-cultural international communication.

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