The Application of Situational Language Teaching in English Grammar Teaching in Junior Middle School ——A Case Study of “used to”

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Abstract:
Essential grammar should be in English learning. For many junior middle school students, grammar is a difficult and boring knowledge point. For many teachers, grammar is also difficult to explain to students, neither. Worse still, some teachers even don't spend much time on designing a grammar lesson plan at all. They just let students memorize it. Therefore, effective and interesting Situational Language Teaching can be considered in grammar teaching. An English teacher has to be familiar with the theories related to it and apply theoretical knowledge properly into practice. This study just takes one grammar structure in Unit 4 in the English textbook for grade nine of PEP edition as an example, so as to illustrate the application of Situational Language Teaching. To be specific, this unit talks about this structure——used to. It will be very different provided that the teacher teaches it through situations.

Key words: Situational Language Teaching; English Grammar Teaching; Music Situation; Thinking Situation; Story Situation; Game Situation
1. Introduction

1.1 Research background

In traditional English grammar classes, the teacher instills grammar items to students who will recite for many times. Then they consolidate grammar with practice (Fang Xue, 2019). Because grammar itself has a certain difficulty, it is not simple to explain the grammar knowledge points clearly, not to mention having a wonderful grammar class. Therefore, indoctrination education is not a rare phenomenon. To be honest, what counts is that students’ feeling and thoughts is totally ignored.

Situational Language Teaching was put forward by British applied linguists in the 1930s to the 1960s, and it is derived from the Direct Method. It means that teachers use music, video and other media for the purpose of making a real language environment where students can practice language points through games, dialogue and other forms (Fang Xue, 2019).

Du Xiaoshuang (2021) held the point of view that the reform of basic English curriculum requires English teachers in primary and secondary schools to change their teaching concepts. Teachers pay close attention to learning and subject competence instead of teaching and knowledge. The fact is that in the process of the new curriculum reform, teachers are facing certain difficulties, and it is difficult to properly use better teaching methods like Situational Language Teaching in the classroom. They lack the corresponding training, the support from all parties, and a change in thinking.

1.2 Research purpose

It is for training the teacher's teaching skills. Situational Language Teaching allows teachers to come out of the circle of old grammar teaching, and the teaching can also get twice the result with half the effort. Teachers deeply implement the concept of key competence, and integrate the fragmented knowledge into the situation. Finally, the teaching skills are improved.

It is for improving students’ grammar performance. By better integrating Situational Language Teaching into the English grammar classroom and fully mobilize their own cognition and emotions, students can enhance their grammar literacy and the pleasure of learning.

It is conducive to the implementation of the new curriculum reform. The curriculum reform of basic education is in full swing, which extremely emphasizes the change of teachers' thoughts. Teachers should apply professional knowledge to practice, actively adopt effective teaching methods, and reflect and improve. This is in line with the new requirements of the new curriculum reform.

1.3 Research significance

It is conducive to the creation of a good classroom environment. Grammar itself is a relatively difficult point in English learning. A boring grammar teaching makes the atmosphere lifeless, and both teachers and students feel uncomfortable. Situational Language Teaching can make the whole classroom full of laughter and positive energy.

It is better for the improvement of teachers' teaching ability. Through Situational Language Teaching, teachers walk out of their comfort zone and rack their brains about relevant teaching activities, which is a process of forcing themselves to grow up. In the continuous practice and reflection, the grammar teaching ability will go to a higher level.

It is propitious to improve students' English competence. Situational Language Teaching imperceptibly changed the way of learning and students can find the most effective way of grammar learning. Furthermore, the improvement of grammar performance will also affect other aspects of English learning accordingly.
2. Literature review 2.1 Definition

Situational Language Teaching refers to the method that teachers use vivid and specific situations and images as the main body in class, so as to make students to have certain attitudes, understand the teaching materials and develop psychological functions (Mi Junkui, 1990). Besides, Zhu Dianyong (2012) thought that Situational Language Teaching means that in the process of teaching, teachers should put language knowledge and questions into interesting situations, so as to make students find, discuss and solve problems in specific situations. It also cultivates students’ interest in independent learning and combines cognitive learning experience with emotional activities.

2.2 Theoretical basis

2.2.1 Input and Output Hypothesis Theory

According to Krashen’s Input Hypothesis, acquisition can only occur when the learner is exposed to comprehensible language input, then he can focus on the understanding of meaning or information rather than the understanding of form.

Swain proposed Output hypothesis in 1985. Language output has noticing function, hypothesis-testing function and conscious reflection function. And Chen Fenglan (2017) claimed that Output Hypothesis is a complement and refinement of Input Hypothesis.

2.2.2 Situated Cognition

Brown, Collins and Duguid (1988) thought that in methods of cognitive apprenticeship, teachers deliberately deploy the embedding circumstances of knowledge to help students construct robust understanding. And Chang Haichao (2012) said that Knowledge is situational. It is a part of activities, background and cultural products. In addition, it is often developed in activities, situations and culture.

2.3 Study at home and abroad

2.3.1 Study at home

In China, there are few studies on the application of Situational Language Teaching in English grammar teaching in junior middle school. Some scholars researched Situational Language Teaching in college. Zhang Xiuping (2017) thought that the implementation of Situational Language Teaching in college English has to follow the principles of subjectivity, interaction, inquiry and experience. In order to propose a targeted measure, Wang Tingcai (2020) deeply analyzed the significance, process and problems of using Situational Language Teaching to higher vocational English teaching. Besides, Bu Bing (2019), Li Fengxiang (2021) and Li Li (2016) all combined Situational Language Teaching with case analysis but without specific data which can be found in some master's thesis.

2.3.2 Study abroad

As for the study abroad, there are not many relevant studies, but it can be seen that Situational Language Teaching is also regarded as a good teaching method and people can use it to teach a variety of knowledge. Zhao (2009) found that the application of Situational Language Teaching in Business English contributes a lot to the satisfaction of target needs and learning needs. Huang, Yang and Hwng (2010) thought that Situational Language Teaching is an effective instruction paradigm for English teaching in terms of providing vocabularies and sentence patterns with their frequent situations through learning materials. Huang Yang and Liaw (2012) said that the instruction paradigm of Situational Language Teaching impacts language courses and teaching activities by its continuous use today. Smith and Loewen
(2018) said that SLT was known for introducing second language grammar and vocabulary in natural situations and for emphasizing oral and aural skill development prior to focusing on second language literacy. Masna, Dahliana, and Martaputri (2020) reported that the advantages of using Situational Language Teaching method in teaching vocabularies are enhancing students’ motivation, and creating an effective teaching-learning process.

3. A Case Study

3.1 The analysis of the textbook

According to the English textbook (The People's Education Press, 2014), it is for grade nine which is published by the People's Education Press. And the case analyzed is the grammar knowledge in Unit 4 where the topic is about how people have changed, the function is to talk about what people used to be like and the structure is “used to”. A whole unit is divided into Section A and Section B, and the part “Grammar Focus” is just in the end of Section A. With regard to the part “Grammar Focus”, the core is to use the new structure to write statements and negative sentences, general questions and answer them, and tag questions and answer them. In addition, there are several new nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and prepositional phrases. Through this target language, the function above can be achieved.

3.2 Lead-in based on a music and thinking situation

The teacher opens the music player on the computer and plays a song called Used to whose singer is Daughtry. When students listen to the song, the teacher should present the lyrics. After listening, the teacher asks students that which phrase appeared the most frequently. They will absolutely answer “used to”. Then, the teacher continues to ask students that if “used to” can be translated into the meaning of using something in the past and how they understand it. Finally, the teacher guides students and tells them that the singer is recalling something he often did with another person in the past. So students guess that the structure means usually doing something once upon time.

In short it is such a music setting that relaxes students' mind and body, and equips them with the basic knowledge of this grammar class. Bu Bing (2019) said that combining teaching content with creative thinking situation helps students to think deeply on the basis of perceptual materials. They can still grasp the essence and laws of content.

3.3 Create a story situation

Suppose that two friends called A and B meet each other after many years. They are so surprised by the changes in them. At this time, two comparison pictures of the past and the present of A and B appear on the PPT. Such a story situation is a good choice to practice the structures “used to”, “didn’t used to” and some previous words, such as tall, short, outgoing, shy and so on. Then, the teacher continues to present the story. A asks some questions about B's changes. B answers. The conversations can be—— Did you use to wear glasses? Yes, I did. /No, I didn’t. At this point, general question and its answers are naturally introduced. Next, B also has his own questions about the changes of A, but B uses a tag question. There are the dialogues——You used to be serious, didn’t you? Yes, I did. /No, I didn’t.

The teacher ought to lay emphasis on some difficult points. There are some tips. In the tag questions, if the first half of a sentence is positive, the second half has to be negative. On the contrary, if the first half of a sentence indicates a negative, the second half must tell a positive. Besides, when answering a tag question, no matter what the question is, if the fact is positive, the most important thing is that you should answer yes.
And if the fact is negative, you should answer no. Finally, teachers need to show the new sentence patterns as well as old and new words on the PPT.

3.4 Create a game situation

This part enables students to transform the grammar knowledge they have just learned into practical communicative ability. Teachers need to assume a real situation. Specifically, students who had not seen each other for many years met at a reunion, and they were surprised at their changes. At this time, the teacher requires students to practice the dialogues in groups. Important words, phrases and sentence patterns should be shown on PPT to give students tips. Then each group acts on the platform. They have to be judged by language accuracy, fluency, richness, and appropriate expressions and actions. Finally, the winning group will get a reward.

Moreover, students can also play the solitaire game. A asks B a question and B answers. Then B asks C a question, and so on. This way can focus students’ attention and activate the atmosphere. But it ought to be noted that tag questions should be promised in this game because it needs more practice.

3.5 Summary

Students may get confused and tired after music and thinking situation, story situation and game situation. As a result, the teacher had better do a short summary of this grammar lesson. For example, the teacher lists the main knowledge points learned in this class on the blackboard and takes the students to review them together. Furthermore, Chen Zexuan (2020) reported that a mind map can be used to consolidate the lesson so that students will systematically grasp the knowledge of grammar. Mind maps are presented in pictures. So students can understand the framework of the grammar at a glance.

After that, the teacher assigns some homework, for example, students complete the exercises from the book or write down sentences based on the grammar patterns learned today.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Results

Grammar is of great significance in Students’ learning. But as for teachers, grammar is relatively hard to teach. How to make the boring combination of language and law become vivid still needs to be discussed. In grammar class, it is a good choice to integrate grammar teaching with Situational Language Teaching whose basis the surrounding environment and core is to stimulate students’ emotions. Before creating the situation, the teacher must have a deep understanding of the textbook and find the connection between the textbook, such as the status and function of the textbook, the content of teaching objectives, and the content of key and difficult points. Junior high school students are in adolescence and they are full of curiosity on the whole. Therefore, when designing the situation, the teacher should connect each class with a main line in the light of the students’ real life and cognitive rule. In this case study, music and thinking situation, story situation and game situation were used and students are emotionally educated. Although Situational Language Teaching is a good method, it is not everything. All these need teachers to keep learning, keep reflecting, and keep innovating.

4.2 Limitations

Although the case study of this research focuses on Situational Language Teaching, it is not applied to the specific English classroom in junior middle school. Many statements are just imaginary effects. Due to the lack of real classroom practice, there is no real feedback and concrete data, which is not conducive to reflection and further research. In order to enrich the use of situations, perhaps the content is too complex. It
can’t be promoted that the students can accept it, which is also a problem. So the author hopes this research will be practiced in an English class in the future.

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