

Original Paper

Contextual Teaching Strategies in the Grammar Instruction of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of globalization, the international status of the Chinese language has been increasingly elevated. However, its unique grammatical features pose significant challenges to non-native learners. Traditional grammar instruction focuses on the impartation of grammatical rules, neglecting the application of language in authentic contexts, which affects the accuracy of learners' Chinese communication. This paper analyzes the theoretical basis and practical application of contextual teaching strategies, demonstrating their significant advantages in improving the effectiveness of Chinese grammar instruction: they can promote the internalization and transfer of learners' language knowledge and enhance their cross-cultural communication skills. By analyzing the current implementation of these strategies, the paper profoundly analyzes the challenges faced in teaching, including the limitations of existing textbooks, the difficulty of teachers' preparation, and the constraints of classroom teaching time. It also proposes corresponding countermeasures and suggestions to support the practice and research of Chinese grammar instruction.

Keywords

Contextual Teaching Strategies, Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language Grammar Instruction, Cross-cultural Communication

1. Research Background and Significance

With the continuous deepening of globalization, Chinese, as one of the working languages of the United Nations, has seen its international status increasingly elevated. The rapid economic development of China and its unique and charming culture have attracted an increasing number of non-native speakers to learn Chinese. As an analytic language, Chinese has significant differences in grammatical structure compared to many other languages, presenting substantial challenges to

non-native learners. Traditional Chinese grammar instruction tends to focus on teaching form and rules, neglecting the practical context of language use. This results in learners needing help to apply their knowledge flexibly and accurately in real communication scenarios.

Contextual teaching strategies enhance the relevance and practicality of instruction by creating authentic or near-authentic contexts where learners can study and use Chinese within specific cultural backgrounds and communication situations (The Paper, 2021). Moreover, these strategies also help to stimulate learners' interest and motivation, fostering the development of cross-cultural communication skills. In teaching Chinese as a foreign language, ideological and political education within the curriculum is equally important. It imparts language knowledge and disseminates Chinese culture and values, enhancing learners' understanding and identification with Chinese culture. Contextual teaching strategies facilitate the organic integration of ideological and political education with grammar instruction, promoting mutual enhancement. Therefore, researching and implementing effective contextual teaching strategies holds significant theoretical and practical importance for improving the effectiveness of Chinese grammar instruction and promoting the international dissemination of the Chinese language.

2. Purpose and Significance of Chinese Grammar Instruction

2.1 Objectives of Chinese Grammar Instruction

The primary objective of Chinese grammar instruction is to provide learners with an effective tool for linguistic thinking and expression, enabling them to master the grammatical rules of Chinese and to apply these rules accurately in language communication. (Baidu, 2023) In teaching Chinese as a foreign language, the quality of grammar instruction directly impacts students' comprehension and application abilities. Therefore, grammar instruction should impart grammatical knowledge and cultivate students' ability to communicate in Chinese, allowing them to express their thoughts and viewpoints fluently and accurately.

2.2 Significance of Chinese Grammar Instruction

Grammar is the skeleton of language, determining the rationality of sentence structure and the clarity of language. Mastering grammatical rules helps learners to use Chinese more accurately and naturally in communication. Moreover, grammar instruction is inferential and scalable, assisting learners in enhancing the efficiency and accuracy of language learning. The significance of Chinese grammar instruction lies in helping learners construct a comprehensive and systematic grammatical framework, which is key to mastering any language. (Hao, 2023) Effective grammar teaching can help learners to have a deeper understanding of the inherent rules, structural features and characteristics of Chinese, and more accurately grasp the form and function of word classes, grammatical means, the combination of grammatical units at different levels and other important and difficult problems in grammar, which helps learners to improve efficiency in the process of language acquisition and achieve better learning results. Thus, they will have a comprehensive and profound understanding of Chinese.

Furthermore, grammar instruction also undertakes the task of cultivating learners' communicative abilities, assisting them in using Chinese appropriately in various practical situations. Through the study of grammar, learners can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and social customs behind the Chinese language, enhancing their accuracy in Chinese communication. Therefore, Chinese grammar instruction should not only focus on formal teaching but also integrate context and communicative functions to improve learners' practical language application skills. High-quality grammar instruction plays a positive role in promoting the global dissemination of the Chinese language.

3. Current Status of Chinese Grammar Instruction

3.1 Teaching Principles, Models, and Methods

Teaching Chinese grammar to non-native speakers adheres to a set of pedagogical principles, such as starting with the simple and gradually moving to the complex, proceeding in an orderly manner, focusing on clarity and extensive practice, emphasizing comparative analysis, and highlighting correct expression. These principles aim to ensure the systematic and practical nature of the teaching content while considering students' receptiveness and learning outcomes. In terms of teaching models, a variety of approaches, such as the direct method, situational teaching, and task-based teaching, are widely applied. These models simulate real communication scenarios to enhance students' ability to use grammar. Regarding teaching methods, teachers employ visual methods, deductive methods, inductive methods, comparative methods, and situational introduction methods. They use concrete and vivid illustrations, extensive practice, comparative analysis, and situational creation to help students understand and remember grammatical rules better.

3.2 Teaching Effectiveness

In terms of teaching effectiveness, the traditional teaching model and methods have achieved significant results in helping students master basic Chinese grammar knowledge. Learners can consolidate their memory through extensive practice and repetition. However, the teaching effectiveness may be more reflected in knowledge retention than language application ability. Learners may perform well in exams but struggle to accurately understand subtle differences in different contexts and the cultural connotations behind the language, leading to an inability to flexibly apply the grammatical knowledge they have learned in real communication scenarios. As the exploration of grammar teaching models and methods deepens, contextual teaching strategies have been proven to effectively enhance learners' practical language application abilities. Students can deepen their understanding and memory of grammatical structures in actual or simulated contexts, thereby improving the accuracy and naturalness of their language output.

3.3 Limitations of Existing Teaching

Although existing teaching models and methods have systematic and formulaic advantages and have played a significant role in teaching Chinese grammar to non-native speakers, they still have obvious

limitations. Traditional teaching models often focus more on explaining and memorizing grammatical rules, easily neglecting the actual language use environment and communicative functions. With the updating of educational concepts and the advancement of teaching reforms, more and more educators have begun to realize that traditional grammar teaching models can no longer meet learners' actual needs. In teaching practice, many teachers have tried contextual teaching strategies to improve teaching effectiveness. Chinese grammar teaching is gradually shifting from a traditional focus on formal teaching to a greater emphasis on cultivating communicative abilities. However, issues such as a disconnect between what is taught and the actual needs of learners, limited coverage of grammar in Chinese textbook compilation, a focus on grammatical rule explanation in classroom teaching at the expense of context, and a low degree of integration between grammar teaching and language skill training still exist and significantly affect the continuous improvement of teaching effectiveness.

4. Application of Contextual Teaching Strategies

4.1 Theoretical Foundation of Contextual Teaching Strategies

Contextual teaching strategies refer to integrating language knowledge with actual usage contexts to enhance learners' language application abilities. The theoretical foundation of these strategies is primarily derived from research findings in linguistics and education. Contextual teaching theory emphasizes that language learning should take place within real contexts, promoting students' language acquisition through immersive language use. (Jia, 2024) This teaching method focuses not only on the formal structure of language but also on its functionality and contextual factors, considering that the meaning and usage of language are determined by the context of use. (Shi, Chen, & Liu, 2021)

4.2 Application of Contextual Teaching Strategies in Chinese Grammar Instruction

In recent years, contextual teaching strategies have gained increasing attention. These strategies emphasize teaching languages in actual or simulated contexts to improve learners' practical language application abilities. In teaching Chinese grammar, applying contextual teaching strategies can help learners better understand the pragmatic functions behind grammatical rules, promoting the internalization and transfer of their language knowledge. Contextual teaching strategies in Chinese grammar instruction are generally implemented through the following models:

4.2.1 Situation Simulation

Teachers can create or simulate various real-life situations, such as shopping in a market or ordering food in a restaurant, allowing students to master grammatical points through communication in simulated situations.

4.2.2 Role-Playing

Teachers design different roles within communication scenarios, and students engage in dialogues or discussions by playing various roles, thereby practicing and applying Chinese grammatical knowledge.

4.2.3 Case Analysis

Teachers provide real-life cases in Chinese contexts, analyze their grammatical structures, and help

students deeply understand the usage and functions of grammatical points, enhancing their accuracy in practical application.

4.2.4 Media Resources

Teachers utilize authentic materials such as movies, TV shows, and news to extract grammatical points for teaching, thereby improving students' comprehension of Chinese in everyday life scenarios.

4.2.5 Task-Based Teaching

Design task-oriented teaching activities that encourage students to cooperate in completing tasks, such as planning a trip or solving a problem. In the process of completing tasks, students explore and apply the grammatical points they have learned, explicitly enhancing their Chinese communication proficiency.

4.3 Teaching Case Analysis and Practical Effects

A contextual teaching case of grammar point "了" Indicating Change"

"了" is an essential and practical grammatical point in teaching Chinese grammar. Learners are first introduced to the usage of "了" in HSK1, where "了" indicates the occurrence or completion of an action, denoted as "了①" in this paper. The meaning expressed by "了①" can be found in many languages with similar grammatical structures, making it relatively easy to understand and grasp. Upon entering HSK3, learners will study the second usage of "了", which indicates change, denoted as "了②" in this paper. In Lesson 5 of the "HSK3 Standard Course," titled "我最近越来越胖了," the usage of "了" to indicate change is explained as follows: "Used at the end of the declarative sentence, the particle 了 indicates a change in the situation or the occurrence of a new situation." If learners rely solely on dry English explanations and associate it with the usage of "了①" for occurrence or completion, it can cause significant comprehension difficulties. At this point, teachers employing contextual teaching strategies can significantly assist learners in accurately understanding the usage of "了②" and help students appreciate and infer the implicit meanings of sentences during language input, deepening their understanding of the content.

Below is a brief demonstration of the teaching segment for "了②":

(1) Introduction: Utilize real-life context for teacher-student interaction to review the usage of "了①".

"Teacher: 你吃早饭了①吗?

Student: 我吃早饭了①。

Teacher: 你吃什么了①?

Student: 我吃了①两个鸡蛋。"

Teachers guide students to recall that "了①" indicates occurrence or completion.

(2) Grammar Teaching: Teachers present "了②" example sentences with context:

"a.早上是晴天 (context), 现在下雨了②。

b.来中国前我不喜欢吃面条 (context), 现在有点儿喜欢了②。

c.两个月没见 (context), 妹妹长高了②不少。"

Teachers guide students to consider the grammatical function of "了②" in context, and students can

easily understand the usage of "了②" to indicate change through the context in the sentences.

(3) Practice: Teachers provide sentences with context and guide students to complete the sentences with "了②".

For example:

"d.上个星期天气很热，这个星期_____了②。

e.昨天我有点儿发烧，今天_____了②。

f.以前我不会说汉语，现在_____了②。"

Students attempt to complete the sentences with "了②" based on the teacher's guidance.

For example:

"d.上个星期天气很热，这个星期不那么热了②。

e.昨天我有点发烧，今天好多了②。

f.以前我不会说汉语，现在会说了②。"

(4) Review and distinguish the usage of "了①" and "了②". Teachers provide a text that includes the usage of both "了①" and "了②". Teachers guide students to work in pairs, read, analyze the text, and mark "了①", "了②", trying to explain the grammatical function of each "了".

For example:

"妈妈早上去超市了①，她买了①一斤苹果。回家的路上突然下雨了②。她又回到超市买了①一把伞。妈妈回到家给儿子吃苹果。儿子说：“我刚在学校吃了①两个苹果，今天不想再吃了②。”妈妈说：“那好吧，明天你就又想吃了②。”

In the teaching case above, by employing contextual teaching strategies, students can not only quickly understand the usage of "了②", learn to use "了②" in the correct context, but also distinguish between "了①" and "了②", thereby gaining a more accurate and in-depth understanding and application of the content, enhancing their Chinese communication skills.

5. Challenges in Implementing Contextual Teaching Strategies in Grammar Teaching Practice

5.1 Imperfections in Existing Textbooks

Effectively implementing contextual teaching strategies requires a wealth of teaching resources. However, many current textbooks for teaching Chinese as a foreign language have limitations in terms of scope and content, failing to provide sufficient contextual materials for each grammar point. It undoubtedly increases the difficulty for teachers to create authentic and accurate contexts in the classroom, thereby limiting the application and effectiveness of contextual teaching strategies. The imperfections in textbooks affect the quality of grammar knowledge impartation and weaken students' abilities to understand and apply grammar points deeply.

5.2 The Challenge of Teacher Preparation

To compensate for the shortcomings of textbooks, teachers must invest significant time and effort in preparing appropriate contextual materials during the lesson preparation process, which includes selecting authentic materials suitable for teaching, designing scenarios that are close to students' real

life, and finding or creating relevant teaching aids. In addition, teachers need to ensure that these contextual materials match the students' language level, neither too simple nor too complex, to avoid affecting students' comprehension. This process undoubtedly increases the burden on teachers, especially in the absence of professional training and teaching resources. The challenges faced by teachers are even more severe.

5.3 Limitations of Classroom Teaching Time

Universities and colleges have already determined the credits and hours for each course in their talent training programs, which cannot be adjusted arbitrarily. However, in teaching Chinese grammar at intermediate and advanced levels, many grammar points are inherently complex and require students to spend much time analyzing and understanding them in different contexts. Grammar teaching that uses contextual teaching strategies is relatively time-consuming. Within a limited time, teachers must ensure the systematic impartation of grammar knowledge and that students have ample opportunity to practice and apply it in context, which presents a significant challenge in practical operation. If teachers struggle to integrate effective contextual teaching activities into every grammar point in the classroom, the teaching outcome is often significantly compromised. Therefore, due to the limitations of classroom teaching time, teachers usually face difficulties in entirely using contextual strategies to complete teaching tasks.

6. Strategies and Recommendations

6.1 Promote Textbook Reform and Updates

Encourage textbook authors to reform and improve existing textbooks based on the needs of contextual teaching strategies, which include adding contextual materials and practical activities related to grammar points.

6.2 Enhance Teacher Professional Development

Provide professional training and workshops to help teachers master the skills to design and implement contextual teaching strategies, thereby improving teachers' lesson preparation efficiency and teaching quality.

6.3 Establish a Resource Sharing Platform

Schools or educational institutions can use multimedia and network technology to develop interactive and resource-rich electronic textbooks and teacher resource-sharing platforms. Encourage teachers to upload and share their self-made contextual teaching materials to achieve resource sharing and provide more teaching support.

6.4 Optimize Course Structure and Teaching Models

Refine the course structure, adhering to the "focused explanation with extensive practice" principle in grammar teaching. Reduce tedious theoretical explanations and increase engaging contextual case analyses and exercises, allowing learners ample time to experience, comprehend, and assimilate grammar points within context. Implement innovative models such as task-based teaching and the

flipped classroom, encouraging learners to independently study grammatical theory outside of class, thus having more time for practical application and contextual exercises during class.

6.5 Encourage Small Class Teaching

Where conditions permit, implement small class teaching so that teachers can pay more attention to each student's learning progress and needs, and implement personalized and differentiated contextual teaching.

These strategies can effectively alleviate the challenges faced by contextual teaching strategies in Chinese grammar teaching, enhance teaching outcomes, and promote the improvement of students' Chinese language abilities.

7. Conclusion

This paper has delved into the application of contextual teaching strategies in the grammar teaching of Chinese as a foreign language, revealing the significant effectiveness of this strategy in enhancing learners' abilities in Chinese grammar. The findings indicate that, compared to traditional teaching models, contextual teaching can more effectively facilitate learners' understanding and application of grammatical knowledge and strengthen their cross-cultural communication skills. The research provides teachers with new teaching strategies. It offers insights for textbook compilation and curriculum design, providing a fresh perspective and methodology for teaching Chinese grammar to non-native speakers. Future research can further explore how to optimize textbook content, enhance teacher professional development, and more effectively utilize educational technologies such as multimedia and artificial intelligence to support contextual teaching.

With the continuous advancement of educational technology and the renewal of teaching philosophies, we look forward to deeper exploration and broader application of contextual teaching strategies in the future, which will contribute more significantly to the international dissemination of Chinese and the promotion of cultural exchange.

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