

Exploring Strategies for Developing Students' Pragmatic Competence Based on the Grammar Section of the New PEP Junior English Textbooks: A Case Study of Grade 7, Book 1

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Abstract: This article takes the new English Compulsory textbook for Grade 7, Book 1 published by People's Education Press as a case study to deeply explore the characteristics of its grammar section and its promoting effect on students' pragmatic competence. And the research finds that the grammar section of the new textbook, through contextualized and comprehensive design, fully embodies the concept of "a three-dimensional dynamic grammar" which integrates form, meaning and use. And it can effectively enhance the coherence and practicality of students' grammar learning and stimulate their interests in English learning further. Meanwhile, through the analysis of teaching examples, this paper further verifies the application value of "a three-dimensional dynamic grammar" reflected in the new teaching materials in grammar teaching, and proposes corresponding teaching strategies, providing the effective strategies for the development of students' pragmatic ability.

Keywords: The New PEP Junior English Textbooks; Grammar Section; Pragmatic Competence; Teaching Strategy.

1. Introduction

Both English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022) and "General Senior High School English Curriculum Standards (2020)" highlight the importance of cultivating pragmatic competences and emphasize that they should be enhanced through language learning at different educational stages. Both the above standards point out that teachers should construct real communication contexts and guide students to understand the relationship between language and situation (Ministry of Education, 2020; 2022). And the two standards also emphasize that grammar knowledge is the foundation for developing core competencies in the English subject. In fact, grammar is a key component of the language system, holding a significant position in foreign language teaching (Dai Weidong and Chen Liping, 2005; Cheng Xiaotang, 2013), including the English learning.

What's more, the textbooks, as an important medium for English learning, directly reflect the curriculum objectives (Yu Xinjie, 2021), and the design and implementation of their grammar sections are even more important ways to fulfill the basic requirements of grammar and develop the relevant pragmatic abilities. And the new English *Compulsory textbook for Grade 7, Book 1* published by People's Education Press actively responds to the concepts of the new curriculum standards and promotes the all-round development of students' pragmatic capabilities through scientific design. Therefore, it is of vital importance to deeply explore the specific role of the grammar section in the new textbooks in this respect.

Based on this, this study will take the new *English Compulsory textbook for Grade 7, Book 1* published by People's Education Press as an example to deeply explore the specific role and implementation strategies of its grammar section, aiming to enrich the theoretical framework of English education and provide effective and operational teaching strategies for front-line teachers.

2. Changes of the New Textbook: Analysis of the Grammar Section

(1) An overview of the Overall Structure
English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022) emphasize that the compilation of teaching materials should be based on the specific features of students' language ability development, especially with an overall design. It should follow the principle of progressing from easy to difficult, and pay attention to the interest, hierarchy and diversity of learning contents. Therefore, when compiling teaching materials, it is necessary to ensure that they are both easy to teach and easy to learn (Zhang Xianchen, 2024).

And under the guidance of the above, the new *English Compulsory textbook for Grade 7, Book 1* published by the People's Education Press has a clear overall structure, which is divided into the preparatory section and the formal section.

Firstly, the preparatory section aims to lay the foundation for English learning. The textbook employs dialogues, vocabulary, basic grammar and pronunciation teaching, and features an increased unit capacity and a consistent "Section A + Section B" structure, which helps students adapt quickly. And its innovation is reflected in aspects such as the content of the problem chain construction unit, the addition of the elective learning Project, the setting of the main characters in the cross-cultural background, and the all-English activity instructions. Secondly, the formal part unfolds around the unit theme and covers multiple sections such as vocabulary, grammar, reading and writing. Meanwhile, in this regard, the target textbook of the study has been significantly optimized in terms of contents structure, unit titles and objectives, as well as content requirements. They emphasize the main theme and thread, build an overall teaching system, and incorporate elements of real life. And they focus on the three major themes of "Man and Self", "Man and Society", as well as "Man and Nature", and strengthen the orientation of quality and the potential for education. What's more, it also relies on

real situations, pays attention to the application of language communication, selects closely related texts, adopts problem-oriented strategies, connects with students' lives, and comprehensively covers the requirements of the curriculum standards. The above points collectively demonstrate that the compilation of the new textbooks serves as a vital support for the endeavor of "cultivating the soul and enlightening wisdom." Moreover, it acts as a crucial carrier in addressing the fundamental questions of "what kind of people to cultivate, how to cultivate them, and for whom to cultivate them." (Wang Richun, 2023).

In addition, the new teaching materials reduce the number of units while expanding their capacity. They moderately increase the teaching content, enrich the cultural connotations, and present Chinese cultural elements in a variety of ways. In terms of reading, the new teaching materials focus on cultivating students' discourse awareness. They increase the quantity and types of reading materials, presenting different characteristics and introducing extended reading to approach the level required for the high school entrance examination. And the proportion of listening and speaking skills has been increased, with an emphasis on the basic teaching of pronunciation. The vocabulary and difficulty levels have also been enhanced to meet the growing demands of students' language learning. Besides, sections such as project activities emphasize comprehensive language application. They encourage students to consolidate their knowledge through practical operations, fostering a deeper understanding and more effective use of the language. And drama performances have been added to the second semester of Grade Nine, providing diverse teaching options.

(2) Analysis of the Characteristics of the Grammar Section

The new *English Compulsory textbook for Grade 7, Book 1* has demonstrated a series of remarkable features in the design of the grammar section.

First of all, in terms of the structure and content arrangement, the new teaching materials place grammar at the core of the unit and present it intensively through "Grammar Focus" to ensure the systematicness and coherence of relevant learning. And the presentation of grammar knowledge from the simple to the complex is helpful for students to construct and improve their grammar knowledge system.

Secondly, the grammar section of the new textbook fully embodies the concept of a three-dimensional dynamic grammar. In fact, it is proposed based on Larsen Freeman's three-dimensional dynamic grammar theory. He pointed out that grammar learning is divided into three dimensions: form, meaning and usage (Larsen Freeman, 2009). And the three-dimensional dynamic grammar concept in the new teaching materials is reflected as follows. In terms of formal learning, the teaching materials present the grammar structure through dialogues, pictures, etc., making the learning vivid and intuitive. And at the respect of meaning learning, it clarifies the pragmatic function of grammatical structures and help students understand their contextual meanings through dialogues and texts. And when it comes to practical learning, it design tasks close to life, such as writing self-recommendation letters and making posters, to enable students to apply grammar knowledge in real contexts, and then enhance their grammar awareness and pragmatic ability.

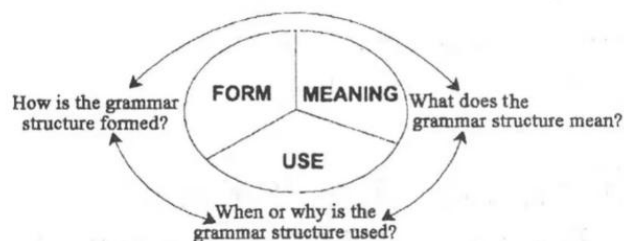


Figure 1. Three-dimensional Grammar Theory of Larsen Freeman

Finally, the new teaching materials have achieved significant innovations in contextualization and comprehensive application within grammar instruction. By presenting grammar through engaging dialogues, vivid pictures, and other interactive means, the learning experience is rendered more interesting and closely aligned with real-life scenarios. This approach not only captures students' attention but also helps them better understand and internalize grammatical concepts. Meanwhile, the materials feature a diverse range of tasks specifically designed to promote the comprehensive application of grammar. These tasks encourage students to actively engage with the language, thereby enhancing their grammatical application skills and fostering a deeper interest in learning. The integration of grammar content with students' real-life experiences is another key innovation. It provides them with ample opportunities to apply the knowledge they have acquired, reinforcing their understanding and making the learning process more meaningful and relevant. These characteristics collectively constitute the significant advantages of the grammar section of the new textbook. They provide students with an efficient, engaging, and highly effective grammar learning environment, ultimately contributing to their overall language proficiency and confidence in using English.

3. Teaching Strategies and Practical Paths for the Development of Pragmatic Competence

English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education clearly states that junior high English grammar teaching should guide students to initially recognize that grammar knowledge is a unity of "form - meaning - usage", and its core purpose lies in understanding and expressing meaning through the application of grammar in the context (Ministry of Education, 2022). Furthermore, teachers should leverage teaching materials and resources to create multimodal discourse. By integrating grammar into real-life contexts, teachers can guide students to explore, experience, and construct their understanding of grammar. This approach promotes the seamless combination of learning and thinking, learning and application, and learning and creation, ultimately fostering the development of students' grammar literacy. (Luan Tingting, Kang Hongbing, 2024). In addition, the design of the grammar section in the new textbooks highlights the three-dimensional dynamic grammar concept, responding to the perspectives of the new curriculum standards. Therefore, by exploring how to effectively utilize the grammar section of the new teaching materials to design and implement teaching strategies that promote the development of students' pragmatic abilities, the specific contents are as follows:

Table 1. Teaching Strategies and Specific Teaching Activities for Promoting the Development of Students’ Pragmatic Competences

Teaching Strategy	Specific Teaching Activity
Form perception and imitation	Grammar form teaching should visually present structures, use multimedia for reinforcement, and enhance accuracy and language perception through imitation practice, dictation, and fill-in-the-blank exercises.
Meaning understanding and internalization	Teachers should use contextualized teaching methods, such as creating real-life scenarios and using situational dialogues and pictures, to explain grammatical meaning, stimulate interest, and promote understanding and internalization of knowledge.
Use practice and application	Design real or simulated communication tasks such as dialogues, role-playing, and group discussions to improve students’ grammar usage ability, pragmatic skills, and cooperation while increasing learning interest and effectiveness.

Based on the cognitive level and thinking development stage of seventh-grade students, this paper selects the “Grammar Focus” section: specific grammar point “There be” in Unit 3 “My School” of the new *English Compulsory textbook for Grade 7, Book 1* as a case to specifically elaborate on how to enhance students’ pragmatic ability. And under the guidance of the three-dimensional dynamic

grammar concept and the above teaching strategies, this class aims to deeply explore the “There be” sentence pattern, guide students to master its structure, rules, meaning and practical application, thereby enhancing their comprehensive English language application ability.

The specific activities of teaching practice are as follows:

Table 2. Teaching Practice Activities of “There be” for the new *English Compulsory textbook for Grade 7, Book 1, Unit 3*

Dimension	Teaching activities	Justification
Form	Through example sentences and comparative analysis, guide students to summarize the structural features of the “There be” sentence pattern.	This activity prompts students to strengthen their understanding of the target grammatical form and further internalize the language rules.
Meaning	Based on the specific situations and contexts in the textbook, guide students to understand and summarize the meaning of existence expressed by the “There be” sentence pattern.	It is based on the context and situation in the textbook, guiding students to deeply understand the meaning expressed by the target grammar and sentence patterns, strengthening the connection between grammar and meaning, and enhancing their language application ability.
Usage	Based on the teaching materials, diverse exercises and application activities are designed to enable students to master the correct usage of the “There be” sentence pattern in practice.	It aims to enable students to master the correct usage of the target grammar proficiently in practice through practice and application activities, and to achieve the transformation of grammar knowledge into pragmatic ability.

And the teaching activities and steps of this class are as follows:

1. Introduction and Initial Perception

At the beginning of the course design, teacher shows pictures containing school elements to activate students’ background knowledge and stimulate their interests further.

And through a carefully designed question chain, students are guided to pay attention to the common features of the items in the picture, especially to focus on the concept of “existence”, laying a solid foundation for the subsequent relevant introduction, which aims to enhance students’ learning participation and the depth of sentence pattern understanding.

2. Summary of Structure and Rules

At this stage, teacher presents example sentences of the target sentence pattern, guiding students to observe and analyze the structural features, especially the guiding role of “There” and the correspondence between the “be verb” and the “noun”. And in this lesson, students are asked to study in groups through cooperative learning. They summarize the rules of sentence structure through brainstorming and discussion, and share the results of their groups. After that, teacher summarizes and deepens, clearly pointing out that the standard structure of the “There be” sentence pattern is “There + be verb + noun + location”, emphasizing that the selection of the “be verb” should be based on the singular or plural form of the noun to ensure students’ accurate perception and in-depth understanding of language rules. It can promote the mastery of sentence patterns and the improvement of language application ability.

Grammar Focus

3a Read the sentences. Underline the verbs in *there be* structure and circle the prepositions of positions.

Where is the library? Where are the bookcases?	It is behind the classroom building. They are next to the window.
Is there a whiteboard in your classroom? Are there any lockers?	Yes, there is. / No, there isn't. Yes, there are. / No, there aren't.
There is a shop between the teachers' building and the science building. There are some trees in front of the sports field.	

3b Complete the sentences below.

- A: Where _____ the lockers?
B: _____ next to the reading corner.
- There _____ a nice library behind the classroom building.
- A: _____ there a book shop in this school?
B: Yes, there _____. _____ across from the dining hall.
- A: _____ there any flowers in front of their classroom?
B: No, there _____. But there _____ some trees.
- A: Where _____ the school hall?
B: _____ between the classroom building and the science building.
- There _____ some pictures of famous people on the wall.

3c Circle the correct prepositions to complete the description of the classroom in the photo.

This is a classroom in the UK. There are many things in the room. There's a screen in front of / on the wall. A whiteboard is next to / between the screen. There are some bookcases behind / under them. The teacher's desk is in the corner, across from / in front of a window. Students sit between / on chairs at long tables, but today there aren't any students.



3d Talk about how your classroom is different from the classroom in 3c.

- A: In our classroom, there are plants next to the teacher's desk.
B: And there's a reading corner in our classroom.
A: ...

3. Discussion on Significance and Function

General Senior High School English Curriculum Standards (Ministry of Education, 2020) emphasizes that grammar teaching should be combined with specific contexts to enhance students’ grammar awareness. Based on it, teacher constructs a real situation and teaches the “There be” sentence pattern by using “comparative method”. In other word, by providing two scene descriptions, one using and the other not using this sentence pattern, teacher should guide students to conduct comparative analysis and then experience its unique function respectively. And the group discussion of this step focuses on the meaning of the target sentence patterns, and students need to brainstorm to summarize their usage: describing the state of existence and emphasizing the characteristics of location. The teacher then summarizes and deepens. This process not only deepens students’ understanding of target grammar but also enhances their language application ability. And the teaching strategy used effectively integrates theory and practice, promoting students to appropriately apply grammar knowledge in real contexts, enhancing their awareness of English grammar, and thereby improves the core literacy of the English subject.

4. Practice and Application Deepening

Figure 2. “Grammar Focus” of *English Compulsory textbook for Grade 7, Book 1, Unit 3* published by People’s Education Press

At this stage, it’s necessary to back to the textbook for practice and application (Figure 2). The “Grammar Focus” section in book 1, unit 1 consists of 4 practices, and these 4

ones are set in a progressive manner based on the three-dimensional dynamic grammar concept.

Firstly, Part 3a carefully arranges typical example

sentences containing the target grammar in tabular form, aiming to guide students to fully identify and deeply understand the verb forms of the “there be” structure in the sentences, namely “there is” and “there are”, as well as their correct usages in expressing the concept of existence. Meanwhile, it is also required that students master proficiently and accurately apply the prepositions that describe the positional relationship of objects, such as “behind”, “next to”, “between” and “in front of”, etc., to precisely express the spatial relationship. Through the detailed identification and marking of these grammatical structures and prepositions, students can not only deepen their understanding of the composition and usage of the “there be” structure, but also apply it flexibly in actual writing and oral expression. This enhances the richness and accuracy of their language expression. The process of repeated practice and marking has further promoted students to internalize the structure of “there be” and the usage of positional prepositions into their own language skills. This not only improves their grammatical proficiency but also significantly enhances their language perception and application abilities. In conclusion, the teaching objective of this practice is to help students understand and master the verb form and positional preposition usage of the “there be” structure through the analysis of the formal dimension, thereby enhancing their grammatical accuracy and language expression ability. Actually, the new teaching materials can strengthen the guidance for students to discover and summarize language rules, embodying the teaching ideology of “learning-centered, student-centered, and teacher-guided” (Mei Mingde, 2024).

And the following 3b and 3c practices respectively require students to complete the dialogue and select the correct positional prepositions in combination with the context. This design profoundly reflects the meaning dimension in the three-dimensional dynamic grammar concept. And through the dialogues and descriptions, students can understand the basic grammatical meaning of the “There be” structure expressing the existence of something somewhere, and master the correct application of its singular and plural forms “There is” and “There are”. The practice also guides students to learn to use the target grammar structure to describe the specific positions of different items in space by simulating communication in real contexts, such as the location descriptions of lockers, libraries and other scenarios, so as to flexibly apply this structure in actual contexts. All in all, this teaching method not only focuses on students’ mastery of grammar, but also attaches great importance to their understanding and application ability in real contexts. It enables students to perceive the usage and meaning of the “There be” structure in the context, deeply understand and master this grammar knowledge point, thereby enhancing their language communication ability and practical application ability, making grammar learning more vivid, interesting and productive.

And the final 3d question requires students to compare the real classroom with the classroom pictures in the textbook, aiming to deepen their understanding of the target grammar structure’s usage. By comparing the characteristics of different classrooms, students need to flexibly use the “There be” structure for practical description, such as mentioning the characteristic reading corner of their own classroom. This requires them not only to recognize this structure but also to accurately apply it in specific situations. In addition, 3d encourages students to discuss and

communicate, share the characteristics of the classroom, and cultivate their language expression ability and sense of cooperation. This interactive learning not only enhances students’ language application ability, but also promotes social interaction and mutual understanding. In conclusion, the 3d setting reflects the application dimension of the three-dimensional dynamic grammar concept, comprehensively assisting students in mastering the “There be” structure, while developing their language expression and social skills.

5. Evaluation and Feedback

In the practice of language teaching, immediate feedback, peer evaluation and mutual assistance, summarized evaluation and reflection are the key links. In this class, the teacher corrects grammatical mistakes promptly and encourages diverse expressions. Additionally, the teacher guides students to review each other’s homework, pointing out the highlights and areas for improvement, and offering assistance when needed. Finally, the teacher summarizes the students’ performance, emphasizing the importance of the “There be” sentence pattern. The teacher also encourages students to reflect on the learning process, raise questions, and provide feedback. This process lays the foundation for the adjustment and optimization of subsequent teaching, thereby enhancing students’ language application ability and overall teaching effectiveness. In summary, these teaching practices enable students to deeply grasp the structure, usage, and meaning of the “There be” sentence pattern, and apply it flexibly in real contexts, thereby enhancing their overall English language application ability. Meanwhile, these strategies can also deepen teacher’s instructional approaches, offering valuable insights for future English teaching.

4. Summary and Insights

This study examines the grammar section of the new *English Compulsory Textbook for Grade 7, Book 1*, published by People’s Education Press. It aims to explore the role of this section in developing students’ pragmatic competences and the strategies for its effective implementation. The research reveals that the new textbook effectively integrates the three-dimensional dynamic grammar concept. Through its contextualized and comprehensive design, the textbook significantly enhances students’ learning interest and the coherence and practicality of grammar learning. As a result, it lays a solid foundation for the development of students’ pragmatic ability.

Despite progress in English grammar teaching, several challenges persist. These include insufficient integration of information technology into the classroom, a lack of emphasis on developing cross-cultural communication skills, and inadequate attention to individual differences among students. These issues highlight critical areas for improvement in future English grammar instruction.

In light of these challenges, this study advocates for a more comprehensive approach to grammar teaching. It urges teachers to embrace the three-dimensional dynamic grammar concept, which emphasizes the integration of form, meaning, and usage. By combining this concept with practical teaching methods, educators can develop grammar instruction that is tailored to the needs of their students. To achieve effective grammar teaching, the paper suggests four key strategies: First, contextualize grammar lessons to make them relevant and engaging. Second, integrate information technology using multimedia and online platforms to enhance teaching and meet diverse needs. Third, prioritize cross-cultural

communication skills to prepare students for globalization. Finally, address individual differences through differentiated learning tasks and goals to ensure success for all students.

Through these measures, the innovation and development of grammar teaching can be promoted, which can ultimately contribute to the improvement of students' overall language abilities and comprehensive qualities further.

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