

A Study on the System Construction and Practical Pathways of Junior High School English Grammar Teaching under the Guidance of Thematic Meaning

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Abstract: Grammar teaching in junior high school English education has the problem of separating form and meaning, and the concept of grammar teaching guided by thematic meaning provides a theoretical basis for addressing this problem. Based on the combination of grammatical knowledge and thematic semantics, this paper will present the theoretical foundation, system structure and application cases of the analysis. It can be seen that the nature of thematic meaning is the semantic field for grammatical knowledge; it reveals the endogenous mechanism of grammatical rules driven by meaning and shows the cognitive adaptation features of grammar learning at the junior high school stage. Based on the above, this paper puts forward the principles of thematic hierarchy screening and gradient setting for grammar items, sets up a classification of the three presentation modes for grammatical structures under meaning orientation, designs practice modules that integrate grammatical form and meaning, and determines the derivation sequence, internalisation framework and transfer trigger conditions of grammatical rules in light of thematic context. This paper presents a system of theory for teaching junior high school English grammar.

Keywords: thematic meaning; junior high school English grammar teaching; grammar internalisation; cognitive adaptation; transfer trigger conditions

Introduction

The problem of the separation between form and meaning has long existed in junior high school English grammar teaching, and the root cause is that rule explanations are out of touch with context and fail to meet the demands of authentic semantic expression. The concept of thematic meaning sets up the thematic world as the basic unit for organising grammatical knowledge, and by evoking and constraining meaning through form, it achieves an organic integration of form and meaning. Learners at the junior high school stage are undergoing changes in their cognition and have a limited ability to learn abstract rules; thus, thematic knowledge can provide cognitive support to reduce analytical pressure and promote learning. Although the present study has paid some attention to the effect of context, it has not yet built an organised system based on thematic meaning as its logical foundation, and a full path design from selection and presentation to internalisation and transfer is still lacking. The purpose of this paper is to organise and present the theoretical basis, basic content and application directions of the system.

1. Theoretical Basis of Junior High School English Grammar Teaching under the Guidance of Thematic Meaning

1.1 The Logic of Integrating Thematic Meaning and Grammatical Knowledge

According to the Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition), grammatical knowledge should be presented in thematic situations. Thematic Meaning is the Semantic Field of Grammatical Knowledge. Grammatical rules are given an operative representational form in some cases of language use. The general idea of the grammar system and the organisation plan for many items in the grammar can be derived from thematic meaning. The main reason for the integration logic is that the selection of grammatical form is restricted by thematic meaning. For example, the past tense is used to describe events that have already happened, and conditional sentences are used to present the reasons and results of such events; both are driven by thematic meaning. In terms of the

organisation of information, a theme can serve as a general cognitive system to organise the semantic functions of all sorts of grammatical structures and build a knowledge topology with meaning nodes at the centre^[1].

In accordance with the Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition), the grammatical knowledge should be in line with the principle of unity of form, meaning and use. Grammatical knowledge has structural constraints on thematic meaning, and the expression of meaning must be in line with the norms of the language system. Under different thematic contexts, there are systematic differences in the frequency of use and distribution patterns of grammar items; these differences are not random but are determined by the degree of match between the semantic potential of the grammatical forms themselves and the thematic meaning. The combination of thematic meaning and grammatical knowledge is in the form of "meaning first, then form"; that is to say, thematic meaning sets the purpose of communication, and grammatical forms provide symbols to achieve this end. Generally speaking, the basis of the integration logic is a two-way selection process; that is to say, the thematic meaning selects a suitable grammatical structure, and in turn, the grammatical form determines the range of expression for that thematic meaning, thus achieving stability through interaction^[2].

1.2 The Endogenous Mechanism of Grammatical Rules Driven by Meaning

At the base of the meaning-oriented mechanism is the conversion of grammatical rules from external memory items into internal cognitive tools. Traditionally, the method of teaching grammar has been to present the rules as fixed structures, and students participate in rote drills in situations lacking meaning; thus, these rules are stored in the declarative memory system and have poor transferability. With a sense of purpose, students will be able to learn the rules of grammar in their own way and use them in daily life. First, the cycle of need-form matching starts with the appearance of needs due to the meaning of the topic; then, learners retrieve relevant grammatical structures from their existing knowledge base to meet these needs, and if the existing structures are insufficient, new grammatical rules are dynamically learned through assimilation.

Internalisation of grammatical rules should also provide meaningful contexts to present the conditions for using the rules clearly. The same grammatical pattern can have many different meanings in different places. For example, the simple present tense can be used to describe both habitual behaviour and general truths, so this difference can only be perceived to some extent. With the help of thematic clues, students are more motivated to use the grammatical rules in their daily lives and thus pay less attention to the particular morphological features of these rules. Cognitively, when people are motivated by a sense of purpose, they do not need to learn abstract grammar rules; instead, they can acquire the application of these rules spontaneously through repeated experience in perception and use. The end point of internalisation is that the grammatical rules have been deeply integrated with the representation of thematic meaning; at this time, the rules do not need to be recalled explicitly but are automatically activated along with the activation of thematic meaning^[3].

1.3 Cognitive Adaptation Features of Grammar Learning at the Junior High School Stage

At this time, the cognitive development of junior high school students is changing rapidly; they are moving from concrete operations to formal operations. At this time, the students do not know the learning goals of the grammar well, and presenting them in the form of abstract rules is also not feasible. The first type of cognitive adaptation is that the organisation of grammatical knowledge should be in line with the learners' schemas. Junior high school students can learn the regularity of grammar from complete thematic contexts, but they find it difficult to learn grammatical terminology and complex rules that are not related to contexts. At this time, the aim of the theme is to offer "cognitive support"; that is, by presenting the logic of events or attribute relations among objects, we can reduce the mental effort required for grammatical analysis.

Another cognitive trait of grammar learning at the junior high school level is that inductive thinking is more suitable than deductive thinking. Learners can spontaneously form an implicit understanding of the distribution of grammar by comparing several thematic contexts; although this knowledge is difficult to express in words, it can guide actual language production. Repeated presentation of the thematic meaning helps to gradually increase grammatical sensitivity, and the appearance of variants for the same grammar item under different thematic frameworks prompts learners to develop the ability to generalise grammar across themes. Junior high school students have a relatively small

working-memory capacity, so explicit teaching of grammatical rules should not be done in isolation but should be integrated with meaning. According to the theme, reduce the redundancy in the information and show the structure-function relationship of grammar concisely; thus, we can save space for encoding and storing grammatical rules. Finally, the cognitive adaptation features indicate that the main focus of organisation for grammatical knowledge in junior high school grammar teaching should be thematic meaning^[4].

2. Constituent Elements of the Junior High School English Grammar Teaching System Under the Guidance of Thematic Meaning

2.1 Thematic Hierarchy Screening and Gradient Setting of Grammar Items

The thematic hierarchy screening of grammar items orders the items according to the strength of the demand for thematic meaning in grammatical forms. The frequency of occurrence and the function of the various grammatical elements in thematic contexts are not the same. A "theme-grammar co-occurrence matrix" is used to find grammatical patterns that appear frequently in all the thematic areas. For example, in the thematic area of describing one's own characteristics, the co-occurrence frequency of the comparative degree of adjectives and degree adverbs is relatively high; in the thematic area of narrating sequences of events, there is an organised distribution of adverbial clauses of time and the simple past tense. The three levels of the thematic hierarchy are the core, the extension and the periphery. Grammar items in the core layer have a relatively high degree of association with thematic meaning, and the reason for using a particular grammatical form is reduced significantly when it is not related to that theme.

Gradient Setting follows the dual-progression logic of thematic meaning complexity and grammatical form difficulty. The same grammatical element can be applied to various themes at all times in the learning process. Modal verbs can be used in the theme of "school rules" to express a single function at a basic level, and at a higher level, they can be combined with the theme of "environmental protection suggestions" to show polysemy and pragmatic differences. The Gradient Setting should also consider how abstract the thematic meaning is and how complex the grammatical structure is; grammar items related to concrete themes (such as shopping and asking for directions) are suitable for early introduction, and those associated with abstract themes (such as values and causal relationships) should be introduced later. Grammatical items are arranged in a spiral vertically, and at each level of the spiral, a different theme is repeatedly used; although the same grammatical item can be used in many ways to express different meanings^[5].

2.2 Classification of Presentation Modes for Grammatical Structures Based on Meaning Orientation

Under the category of meaning orientation, according to how closely they correspond to meaning, the presentation forms of grammatical structures can be divided into three types: direct-mapping type, transformational-mapping type, and inferential-mapping type. Direct Mapping Type: There is a one-to-one correspondence between the semantic function of a grammatical form and its surface structure; thus, as shown in the following typical examples within the same thematic context, the plural form of nouns is associated with the theme of "quantity", and the present continuous tense is related to the theme of "ongoing activities". Grammatically speaking, the form of such expressions should be frequently used and semantically obvious in the thematic discourse so that learners can naturally form a form-meaning connection without explicit instruction.

The kind of transformation mapping used is for grammar items that have the same grammatical form but different semantic functions, and these differences are systematically organised by varying the thematic context. For example, the simple past tense can be used to indicate time, show the process of events in a story, or express emotions at that time; in teaching it, parallel thematic texts should be prepared for students to compare. The kind of inferential mapping used is for grammar items that have a very context-dependent semantic function, such as the subjunctive mood and inversion structures. A theme is given as the starting point for induction in presentation mode, and learners, by observing changes in meaning, deduce the grammatical rules. The three display modes in the system are connected in series, and the first cognitive map is of the direct-mapping type; the other two are transformational maps and inferential maps, respectively; all of them help to construct semantic networks and pragmatic awareness. The choice of display method depends on the semantic transparency of the grammar item and the strength of the thematic context constraint.

2.3 Design of Practice Modules Integrating Grammatical Form and Meaning

The Design Goal of the practice modules is to cover both grammatical form and meaning at the same time, and it no longer needs to be done in separate form drills and meaning applications. The three modules of the integrated practice are as follows: The first is the identification and matching module; students need to mark some grammatical expressions in topical texts and explain what these expressions mean in context; The second is the transformation and generation module; students are given a framework for expressing topical meaning and have to rearrange or extend the text according to a specific grammatical structure; Finally, there is the discrimination and correction module; various grammatical forms can be used to convey different meanings in the same theme, and students are asked to distinguish among them and select appropriate grammatical structures based on the context of the text^[6].

All the practice modules are arranged in increasing order of difficulty, and they are divided into closed-ended and open-ended types. The identification and matching unit is in a high-constraint task mode and has both the thematic context and the grammar items set in advance. The transformation and generation unit reduces the form constraints but keeps the system of thematic meaning. The Discrimination and Correction Unit increases the difficulty of the context and adds interfering grammatical forms. Set up an internal connection mechanism for the modules, and the output of the previous module will be used as the input material for the next module to keep the continuity of meaning cues. All of the practice materials are taken from discourse segments that have complete thematic meaning, not from isolated sentences, and each discourse segment is based on a single thematic clue; thus, every occurrence of a grammatical form serves to express thematic meaning. The Design of the practice modules can be used to present grammatical forms and meanings in various ways.

3. Practical Pathways of Junior High School English Grammar Teaching under the Guidance of Thematic Meaning

3.1 The Derivation Sequence of Grammatical Rules Based on Thematic Contexts

The first step in the sequence of derivation for grammatical rules is thematic context, and then, through three cognitive stages, meaning identification, structure awareness and rule abstraction are achieved. The Goal of the Identification stage is to find the semantic functions that grammatical structures have in complete thematic discourse. For instance, in a discourse on daily life, learners can notice that the simple present tense is used to describe regular events. At this time, there is no rule construction; only an initial correspondence between form and meaning has been established. The structure-noticing stage has caused learners to focus on the external features of grammatical forms rather than the thematic meaning. By placing several similar structures in the same thematic context side by side, learners can notice the regularity of morphological change and compare different forms of verb endings in discourses with different personal subjects^[7].

The end of the derivation sequence is the rule abstraction stage. Based on the results of structure noticing accumulated in the previous stage, learners can independently derive the morphological conditions and usage restrictions of grammatical rules. At this time, the thematic context is in the background, but the semantic framework established in the earlier stage of meaning identification still serves as a reference system for rule abstraction, and rule generalization should not deviate from the actual operation of the language system. Generally speaking, the order of derivation is one-way; that is to say, it goes from particular to general and from meaning to form, but at every stage, there is also feedback. When learners go off track at the stage of rule abstraction, they can return to the stage of meaning identification and re-examine the correspondence between grammatical forms and thematic meaning. The aim of the above process is to use thematic context as cognitive support to find the rules, gradually reduce semantic support, and finally achieve independent discovery and formulation of grammatical rules^[8].

3.2 Framework of Internalisation Operations for the Synergy of Grammatical Form and Meaning

The two channels in the main way of the framework for internalisation operation are form processing and meaning processing. Given that there is continuous presentation of thematic meanings, the processing of grammatical forms should not compete for attention with that of meaning but should

be integrated into the flow of meaning processing. The three parallel working subsystems in this framework are the attention allocation subsystem and the grammatical form sensitivity threshold subsystem for learners in the process of processing thematic discourse. Give more weight to the early stage so that the formal features have been learned correctly, and then, as the frequency of exposure increases, this attention is gradually reduced; thus, grammatical processing becomes automatic. The semantic integration subsystem integrates the procedural meanings of grammatical forms (such as temporal relations expressed by tenses and the attitudinal colouring of modal verbs) with the conceptual contents of thematic discourse to form a unified semantic representation, and the structure consolidation subsystem strengthens the strength of the link between grammatical forms and specific categories of meaning through repeated exposure to thematic contexts, thus changing this link from declarative knowledge to procedural knowledge^[9].

The first difference in the framework for internalisation is that one does not need to organise things in the order of "form first and then meaning" or "meaning first and then form"; rather, both are dealt with at the same time. Input of thematic discourse activates both the path of form detection and the path of meaning comprehension at the same time, and these two paths cross-validate each other: the path of meaning comprehension generates expectations for grammatical patterns, and then the path of form detection verifies whether these expectations have been met; when there is agreement, the efficiency of internalisation is increased. If there is a mismatch, the framework will carry out a re-analysis and have the learner modify either the grammatical form or the thematic meaning to match. The framework of the above operation is to reduce the uncertainty of matching form and meaning by adding constraints from the thematic context and thus promote internalisation. The achieved state of internalisation is that grammatical forms can be used automatically according to thematic meaning, and one does not need to be conscious of the rules.

3.3 Trigger Conditions for Grammatical Transfer in the Extension of Thematic Threads

Generally speaking, the trigger conditions for grammatical transfer and the way thematic threads are extended are related. Extension of thematic threads is the continuous deepening or changing of the perspective for the same theme in different learning units, and grammatical transfer is the application of a form-meaning matching pattern learned in a known thematic context to a new thematic context. The three conditions for transfer have been met. First, the semantic similarity of the themes is at a certain level, so the source theme and the target theme have many features in their conceptual structure. For example, transfer from the theme of "describing the physical appearance of people" to the theme of "describing the characteristics of animals" is better than transfer from the former to the theme of "narrating historical events". Second, the semantic function of a grammatical form in the new thematic context should be the same as in the original thematic context; if this function changes, a new matching relationship needs to be established, and the original matching pattern will be considered interference^[10].

The third trigger condition is the distribution density of grammatical forms in the extension of thematic threads. If the density is too small, the internal connections will not be realised; if it is too large, adaptation of transfer will be hindered. The optimal density is shown by the regular appearance of grammatical forms at natural intervals in thematic discourse, and each occurrence has a different thematic meaning cue. The two directions for the extension direction of thematic threads are: horizontal extension (at the same level of difficulty) is mainly the transfer of recognition for grammatical forms, and vertical extension (with increased difficulty) is generalisation transfer of grammatical functions. The latter needs to extract the constant semantic features of grammatical forms by comparing them in a space of different thematic contexts, and it is driven by variable input.

Conclusion

Systematically explore the teaching of junior high school English grammar based on thematic meaning from the perspectives of theoretical foundation, system construction and practical application in this paper. The theoretical foundation of this paper is to present the reasoning behind combining thematic meaning and grammatical knowledge, reveal the internal mechanism of grammatical rule generation under the influence of meaning, and explore the cognitive adaptation characteristics of grammar learning at the junior high school stage. The components of the system are organised thematically in this paper, gradient levels have been set for grammar items, a classification of the three presentation modes (direct mapping type, transformational mapping type and inferential mapping type)

has been established, and practice modules that integrate form and meaning have been designed. Based on the actual path, design the derivation sequence of "meaning identification, structure noticing and rule abstraction" in this paper and build an internalization operation framework with dual-channel synergy for form processing and meaning processing, as well as analyze the three trigger conditions for grammatical transfer: semantic similarity, functional identity and distribution density. The theoretical system and operating path for teaching junior high school English grammar are presented in this paper. In the future, all kinds of themes will be further studied for their moderating effects on grammatical transfer, and quantitative norms and verification methods for screening the thematic hierarchy of grammar items will also be established.

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