

Original Paper

A Analysis of the Contextualization for French Grammar Teaching in Chinese Universities

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Abstract

In the past thirty years, French teaching in Chinese universities has undergone many changes. Language plays a vital role in transmitting information between countries. Grammar teaching should be an important part of foreign language teaching. Of course, Chinese students' learning habits should be respected. However, investigating their preferred learning style in the process of contextualization is our responsibility as well. Therefore, in order to meet the new requirements of grammar teaching in China, we must combine the role and communicative function in grammar teaching. Finally, based on the results of the analysis, the corresponding teaching suggestions are summarized.

Keywords

French teaching, Chinese students, French Grammar, contextualization in language teaching

1. Introduction

We begin to understand in China that foreign language teaching is a fundamental subject of research. Therefore, it is very important to establish an effective system to achieve good language proficiency. We will pay special attention to the field of learning French in university environment, especially to grammar teaching.

In China, French teaching has increased significantly. At present, more than 140 universities in China offer French majors. China's educational culture is deeply influenced by the traditional methods of

Confucius' time, and it is still different from that of Europe. Generally speaking, in Chinese classrooms, the focus of courses is on teachers who occupy a central position in the classroom. (Blanc-Vallat, 2016; Bouvier, 2002) School learning is considered a difficult process for most students. Passing the examination is still a basic motivation of "compulsory education", that is, the first and second stages. However, it has been noted that for students in institutions of higher learning, a large proportion of them are not always active in class. According to their study habits, for them, learning a foreign language is mainly about remembering words and grammar rules. Considering their educational culture, the application of communicative approach still seems to be "idealistic". On the one hand, the traditional thinking of Chinese advocates high respect for teachers, so it is difficult for learners to take the "first step" by asking questions from time to time in class; Therefore, they are not used to speaking freely and playing roles; On the other hand, the teaching conditions are difficult; In fact, from primary to secondary school, a class consists of 25 to 45 people, and in the 45minute course, each student is not allowed to speak for a limited time. Although the number of students in universities is relatively small, it is difficult for learners to get rid of the study habits acquired before. It is undeniable that language ability, especially grammar teaching and learning, is still the most important study in their class.

2. Background and Theory

The meaning of contextualization in this article is mainly derived from the French "contextualisation" in pedagogy. The word "contexte" is defined as "background" in French, which includes the narrow adaptation of speech itself to the context of the environment, as well as the contextualization and "contextualization" in a broad sense proposed by scholars in foreign language teaching, which has been introduced into teaching practice and become one of the tools. At present, in according to the trend of international teaching methods, communicative competence in college French teaching has been advocated in China. In order to understand the integration of grammar by this new teaching method in the old teaching background, we must first analyze the concepts of grammar in teaching and the characteristics of this teaching method.

Beacco thinks that grammar is "the form and syntax of sentences", which is a term that can be extended beyond sentences. As CECRL (The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) calls for, it integrates linguistic contributions and involves textuality. Text as the concept of "discourse sequence" is the core of pragmatic competence. [...] "The Committee of CECRL considers that: "Grammar usually refers to scientific research in the field of research [...]: they are theoretical structures, which not only record language 'reality', but also propose a representation of epistemological control". (Beacco, 2010, p. 15)

The common idea of Chinese national curriculum and CEFRL is the acquisition and use of grammar knowledge. The purpose is to communicate. Perfect mastery of grammar is not the ultimate goal. In view of this, we intend to know whether college grammar teaching is part of really achieving this goal.

Aiming at making an answer to this question, the concept of communication ability is of importance. This concept was defined by Hymes in 1976 as “knowledge of psychological, cultural and social rules that control the use of speech in social environment”. (Hymes, 1976) The four components of communicative competence are: “language mastery”, “text mastery”, “reference mastery” and “situation mastery”. (Coste, 1978)

In 1982, Moirand proposed the following communication capabilities: “-Linguistic components, that is, knowledge and use (ability to use) of phonetic, lexical, grammatical and textual patterns of the language system. Discourse component, that is, the knowledge and use of different types of discourse and its organization according to the parameters of the communicative situation in which discourse is produced and interpreted. Reference component, that is, knowledge of empirical fields and world objects and their relationships. Sociocultural components, or knowledge and possession of social rules and norms of interaction between individuals and institutions, cultural history and relations between social objects”.

According to CECRL, communicative competence includes the ability to perform various actions in foreign language communication. It shows that communicative competence includes not only linguistic competence, but also sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence.

It puts forward to us that the learning goal of learners is “under different contexts and conditions, under different constraints, using their skills, carrying out language activities, processing (receiving and producing) texts of topics in specific fields, mobilizing strategies that seem to be most suitable for accomplishing the tasks at hand. Monitoring of these activities by focal points leads to strengthening or changing capabilities.” (Council of Europe, Language Policy Division, 2005, p. 15)

At the same time, Chiss tells us that we will unconsciously shift from linguistic competence in the strict sense to communicative competence involving the social and cultural use of language forms. In any case, if one pursues the goal of truly mastering a foreign language in terms of production and understanding, one cannot imagine exercising this communicative competence without the support of linguistic competence. (Chiss & David, 2012)

For Chinese French teaching, first of all, we should avoid confusing “grammar teaching” with “grammar teaching method”, that is, traditional method or “grammar-translation method”; French grammar teaching not only contradicts the quality education proposed in Chinese national education curriculum, but also enables students to learn French systematically. Thereby improving students’ ability to use language. It encourages students to develop their intelligence in order to discover and construct metalinguistic knowledge is an important part of a language, which promotes learners’ cognitive ability.

Grammar teaching should be an important part of foreign language teaching. Of course. It is wrong to simply study French grammar and overemphasize the role of grammar in the teaching process, but completely ignoring the “cultivation of communicative competence” in grammar teaching cannot be regarded as the only solution. Therefore, in order to meet the new requirements of grammar teaching

in China, we must consider the role and communicative function of culture in grammar teaching. It is important to have a better understanding of our research field in all graduate schools in China. Therefore, we will deal with the remote questionnaire first.

3. Public Involved and Method

Our questionnaire is aimed at French learners from 10 universities in China. Our questionnaire is published on the Internet through “SoJump”, an online professional survey tool. It is widely used in colleges and universities in China. For example, in 2015, about 1,200 Chinese institutions used it. “SoJump” includes an evaluation system and a questionnaire platform. As far as we are concerned, we use this platform and think it is the most suitable way to collect data about Chinese students who are interested in learning. Compared with traditional methods, this tool meets our needs better with its efficiency and accuracy. It allows students to fill out questionnaires remotely. This process enables us to obtain data collected and generated automatically. In addition, the tool provides an opportunity to work from questionnaires and testimonies, mainly through online surveys, and allows for multiple responses to questions. To ensure that the completion rate of the questionnaire is satisfactory, we ensure that there is no high correlation between the questions (thus shortening the length of the questions).

Our questionnaire is a general analysis of college French grammar teaching and learning. Chinese. We will analyze the importance and role of grammar in the course. Then, we will study the role of metalanguage in grammar learning and teaching.

We published our first questionnaire on the Internet, called “An Overview of College Grammar Teaching for Chinese students” for about six months. We collected a sample of 121 students from different universities or schools in China.

From our first questionnaire, we can see that women make up the largest proportion of French learners in China. This phenomenon is also very common in the field of foreign languages. Asian learners have their own characteristics: for example, their age is mainly between 21 and 25 years old. It is worth noting that unlike all people in France who can freely enter higher education institutions, it takes at least three years of intense preparation to enter Chinese universities, not to mention that professional experience is not taken into account. Participants in this study mainly come from universities and colleges of liberal arts, and Xi’an International Studies is one of the representatives.

4. Analysis of the Questionnaire


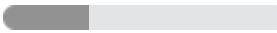
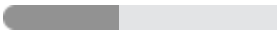
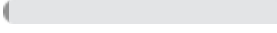
The learning motivation of the students interviewed is various. For some, this is a professional reason because they think learning a new language is a good opportunity. Being able to speak a foreign language is really helpful: Sino-French cooperation and exchanges in the fields of culture and science are very frequent. Therefore, getting a “French professional” degree is an asset of their career.

Some people even think that with the passage of time, this language will become as important as

English. In fact, the history of France is full of shining thinkers, philosophers, and writers. Learners are attracted by its literature, history, art development, historical sites and so on. Learning this language can help them learn more about French culture, which is why they are flocking to it.

Mastering a new language, such as French, is an incentive. It is very important for students in universities. In fact, mastering a foreign language seems to be a condition for studying abroad. For these students, the ability to understand French in writing and oral is very important. For others, the opportunity to work in a foreign-funded enterprise is another important incentive factor. To work with some foreigners in the future, naturally, it is necessary to master this language. However, students will encounter many difficulties in oral, such as grammatical mistakes, which will discourage them a lot.

Table 1. Reasons for Learning French for the Students

Options	Total	Proportion (%)
Hobbies, passions, attracted by French culture	32	 26.45%
The necessity of teaching in French and the pressure of schools	37	 30.58%
Occupational reasons	49	 40.5%
Others	3	 2.48%
Total valid responses	121	

With regard to grammar learning habits, we asked them to choose between explicit grammar and implicit grammar. The Explicit grammar is based on the teacher's interpretation of rules, and then students' conscious application; The purpose of implicit grammar is to let students master grammatical functions (such as morphological syntactic changes), but it is not recommended to explain any rules and eliminate metalanguage, but to rely on more or less systematic manipulation of sentences and forms.”

As we know, explicit grammar is the E/A(French: enseignement et apprentissage, means Teaching and learning) of primitive or simplified metalanguage, while implicit grammar involves indirect and spontaneous aspects of grammatical E/A.

In our research, we need to ask whether explicit grammar should be completely ignored. Therefore, we try to find a balance between the Action Approach, the Communicative Approach and the Traditional Approach, bearing in mind that the purpose of teaching a foreign language is to allow the correct use of the language according to the context.


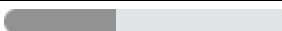
On the other hand, the teaching of descriptive grammar should not impose a burden on students: measures must be taken and implemented to improve the metalinguistic skills of both teachers and

learners. To better support our hypothesis, we need to consider the following results:

On the contrary, among the five skills expected by Chinese students, the necessity of mastering grammar ranks second. Oral communication ability is the most concerned skill, while reading ability seems to be as important as grammar ability. However, we cannot ignore the fact that grammatical competence is a prerequisite for the acquisition of all other language skills. However, it must be pointed out that students pay less attention to grammar, because on the whole, mastering grammar seems to be a difficult skill to acquire.

Then, we ask students what they think of methodology. Obviously, 60.33% of people prefer internalized grammar, as Besse and Porquier explain: it is an unconscious and spontaneous communication using the grammar of a given language. For them, this grammar is both innate and acquired.

Table 2. Grammar Teaching Method Preferred by the Students

Options	Total	Proportion (%)
Acquire grammatical knowledge unconsciously	73	 60.33%
Explicit teaching	48	 39.67%
Total valid responses	121	

Students prefer to be exposed to linguistic forms, which they will internalize in ways that are usually unknown, while teachers “have no real means of control: therefore, learners will gradually develop a linguistic intuition that enables them to make acceptable judgments (from the perspective of rules, from the perspective of norms)” (Vigner, 2010, p. 33). A statement made by himself or others. Just like native French speakers, learners who are exposed to French can make progress more easily and quickly in the spoken language. Grammar development in natural learning is a way to master the form of learning activities.

Besse and Porquier (1991, p. 81) suggest that to practice through structure Teaching grammar in an implicit way. These structural exercises are based on the concept of “pattern phrases”: “they more or less eliminate the need for students to recite rules and help them have pattern phrases related to specific situations” (Al-Khatib, 2005, p. 22). However, this process of internalization based on implicit rules does cause some problems: in this way, learners will make more mistakes in writing, because written language is more formal and complex than spoken language, not as simple as spoken language. At the same time, because of the lack of rules to explain sentence structure, it is difficult for some learners to understand the grammatical purpose of the exercise. Therefore, teachers should combine grammatical rules, grammatical descriptions and Sino-French comparisons, based on, inter alia, structural exercises. However, between explicit syntax, and implicit grammar, we can't ignore

the importance of metalanguage, which is the core of understanding foreign language grammar.

On the other hand, only 39.67% of learners find it better to adapt to descriptive grammar. Remember, the purpose of descriptive linguistics is to study a particular language: it studies vocabulary, grammatical rules, language proficiency, and prescribes language rules. Descriptive grammar is defined as “a complete description of language, that is, the organizing principle of language”.

In college, this is very common in China, the so-called “traditional” method is favored in French teaching. Can only the method of “translation” meet the needs of students? The metalanguage of Chinese and French helps us to describe grammar. However, they do not only exist in descriptive grammar: most students tend to a less “cumbersome” grammar, that is, an internalized approach, while ignoring the feasibility of this approach in class, especially considering the characteristics of Chinese learners. The second language of most Chinese learners is English. From the beginning of primary school to the end of high school, English grammar rules run through their minds all the time, which can be said to be deeply rooted. Although the grammatical rules of French and English have something in common, there are more differences, especially for French beginners, who often confuse the infinitive in French (defined as verb prototype) with the infinitive in English (to do).

Therefore, it seems necessary to adopt an approach that takes into account the characteristics of Chinese students, including their mother tongue and their second language, English. The problem now is not only to remember grammar rules perfectly, but also to establish a new method aimed at promoting grammar learning, including grammar assimilation and grammar use.

5. Conclusion

First of all, for teachers, they can improve their metalinguistic skills. Teachers should understand that metalanguage is an indispensable tool for teaching French grammar. Metalanguage plays a key role in the teaching of grammar knowledge. In evaluating learners and controlling the rhythm of courses. Teachers should be well prepared for the course and fully familiar with grammar, such as different terms. At the same time, it is necessary to have a deep understanding of Chinese and French grammar systems.

Teachers can also improve their ability to manipulate various metalinguistic activities and their ability to fully mobilize language knowledge in class. They should organize metalinguistic activities throughout the teaching process, which is of great help to “passive” Chinese students. In this sense, it is interesting not only to evaluate students’ reactions through metalanguage, but also to encourage students to express themselves bravely in class.

Besides having a good understanding of Chinese students’ learning situation, teachers can also have a comprehensive understanding of Chinese and French grammar system, so as to better understand students in the learning process. In order to find out why students encounter specific learning difficulties, teachers must pay attention to: whenever they encounter French difficulties, the teaching speed can be slowed down, so that teachers can explain the usage of the grammar of the difficulties

encountered, so that students can acquire French grammar knowledge more quickly.

As a reminder, the teaching content in French class consists of two levels: a linguistic level and a communicative level. For language skills: in addition to cultivating learners to describe, analyze and explain the language they have learned, they can be taught to use the language in the appropriate mode of communication. If students do not possess enough metalinguistic knowledge, it is difficult for them to have a capacity for discourse analysis and recognition of language concepts, let alone a capacity for pragmatic expression.

It is difficult for them to have the ability of discourse analysis and language concept recognition, let alone pragmatic expression. Knowledge related to one's mother tongue, metalanguage can not only promote the learning of a specific grammar point, but also have a positive impact on the systematic construction of students' knowledge. Appropriate metalanguage teaching is not contradictory to other teaching methods. Especially in grammar teaching, the application of metalanguage is indispensable for the realization of other teaching contents.

For example, teachers can use it to help students overcome obstacles, expand their language knowledge and ensure the smooth development of various teaching activities. In the first stage of French learning, students' cognitive ability to process and manipulate their knowledge is still relatively low, and the importance of teachers' use of metalanguage is not always obvious. But teachers can begin to help students cultivate metalanguage consciously. For example, they can guide students to progress through the use of terminology, language generalization and language interpretation. Chinese students should learn how to connect the new knowledge structure they need to integrate with the Chinese knowledge structure.

In addition, in French grammar classes in Chinese universities, teachers may pay attention to the application of metalinguistic skills while paying attention to the explanation of knowledge points, but they may also consider students' classroom participation. Usually, Chinese learners feel fear when speaking and answering questions. So, teachers should encourage them to answer questions boldly. By answering questions with proper metalanguage, students can gain more confidence.

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