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Research on the Application of the PACE Model Based on Situational Teaching Method in High School English Grammar Teaching

Qian Xie
China West Normal University, Nanchong Sichuan, 637009, China

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Abstract

English grammar serves as the foundation for accurate expression and effective communication. However, traditional grammar instruction often overemphasizes linguistic forms while neglecting their practical application in authentic communicative contexts. The PACE teaching model, grounded in input processing, interaction, and output theories, effectively integrates both form and meaning. Applying the PACE model through a situational teaching approach to high school English grammar instruction helps guide students to deeply understand the meaning-making functions of grammatical structures. This is achieved by engaging them in authentic contexts through perception, imitation, and observation, thereby enabling the accurate and flexible use of grammatical knowledge to solve problems in communicative activities. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the application of the PACE model within a situational teaching framework to high school English grammar instruction, supported by specific teaching cases. The objective is to promote the development of students' grammatical competence and their core literacy skills.

Keywords

Situational Teaching Method; PACE Teaching Model; High School English Grammar Instruction

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the Research

Grammar ensures accuracy in English communication. Two main approaches exist: explicit grammar teaching (direct rule presentation, deductive) and implicit grammar teaching (learner-induced rule induction, inductive) (Ellis, 1994). To resolve this debate, the PACE model (Presentation, Attention, Co-construction, Extension) was proposed, emphasizing grammar learning through authentic contexts (Adair-Hauck & Donato, 2002a; Tang & He, 2024.9). Meanwhile, English

Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools (2017 Edition, 2020 Revision) advocates integrating "form, meaning, and use," rejecting isolated mechanical drills. This aligns with the Situational Teaching Method (Richards & Rodgers), which creates real-life scenarios for contextualized grammar learning. Thus, strong synergy exists among the curriculum standards, the situational approach, and the PACE model.

1.2. Purpose and Significance of the Study

This study bridges pedagogical theory and classroom practice by integrating the Situational Teaching Method with the PACE model for senior high school grammar instruction. It explores how this combined approach helps students perceive and apply grammatical items in authentic contexts for meaningful communication. Practically, it offers educators a concrete framework as an alternative to traditional grammar teaching. Theoretically, it contributes to discourse on effective grammar pedagogy by examining the synergy between authentic language use (Situational Teaching Method) and structured cognitive process (PACE model), aiming to enhance students' grammatical proficiency and core English competencies.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Situational Teaching Method

The Situational Teaching Method, rooted in constructivism, emphasizes that meaningful learning occurs in authentic contexts. Scholars like Brown et al. (1989) argue knowledge is situated, while Zhang Qinghua (1996) and Zhang Hua (2000) highlight scenario-based interaction and problem-solving. Xu Wen (2007) confirms its alignment with modern language teaching and China's educational reforms. Pedagogically, it boosts interest (Zhang, 2000), enhances memory and lowers anxiety (Wang, 2009), and fosters problem-solving and communicative competence.

2.2. The Application of Situational Teaching Method in Grammar Teaching

Research on the Situational Teaching Method (STM) in grammar instruction spans educational levels. In junior high, Han (2017) found STM superior to traditional methods for grammar achievement and interest. In senior high, Wangyin Li (2020) identified an implementation gap: exam pressure and teacher resistance limit STM use, though Li Wenwen (2024) suggests multimedia integration. At college level, Lin (2019) proposed a three-stage framework. Overall, despite proven efficacy, STM remains underdeveloped in high schools due to contrived scenarios and lack of structured guidance, leaving its potential largely unrealized.

2.3. The PACE Model

The PACE model advocates context-based instruction, providing comprehensible

language materials to ensure students grasp meaning while being exposed to target language (Zhai, 2017). Grounded in Communicative Language Teaching, Constructivism, Input Processing, and Output Hypothesis, it integrates explicit and implicit grammar instruction, balancing form and meaning (Adair-Hauck & Donato, 2002a). Donato and Adair-Hauck (2016) highlight three features: learners neither analyze forms in isolation nor receive pre-packaged rules; form reflection becomes an explicit discussion topic; through dialogic inquiry, students construct understanding of form-meaning relationships within culturally rich narratives. The model's four stages form a coherent and cyclical instructional sequence:

1. Presentation

In the Presentation stage, authentic and meaningful target language materials, such as stories, poems, or songs, are introduced through multimodal texts (Adair-Hauck & Donato, 2002a). This immerses students in realistic and natural contexts, maximizing their comprehension of the content. Authentic materials are essential for capturing students' attention, stimulating their interest, engaging their imagination, and fostering motivation for grammar learning.

2. Attention

The Attention stage aims to direct learners' awareness to specific linguistic forms within the meaningful context (Adair-Hauck & Donato, 2002b). Teachers continue to emphasize contextualization during this phase, using questions to draw attention to recurring grammatical patterns or vocabulary. Additionally, target structures can be visually highlighted through formatting techniques such as bold, italics, underlining, or boxing.

3. Co-construction

During the Co-construction stage, teachers employ indirect, scaffolded questions, cognitive probes, or hints to encourage learners to formulate hypotheses and generalizations (Adair-Hauck & Donato, 2002b). This guides students in inductively deriving grammatical rules. The purpose of questioning here is not to assess knowledge but to activate prior learning, stimulate reflection on new forms, facilitate comparison, and support collaborative rule formation.

4. Extension

The Extension stage provides opportunities for learners to creatively apply newly acquired skills (Adair-Hauck & Donato, 2002b). Teachers design open-ended activities that require students to transfer and apply grammatical knowledge to solve practical problems in novel contexts, thereby achieving the goal of using grammar for authentic communication (Tang & He, 2024). Effective extension activities should align with the learned content, possess genuine communicative relevance, and be engaging to encourage active participation.

The PACE model offers a structured yet flexible framework for grammar instruction by integrating meaningful context, guided noticing, collaborative rule formation, and practical application. It distinguishes itself from traditional methods by fostering

active learner engagement, explicit metalinguistic discussion, and a dialogic approach to understanding form-meaning connections. Through its four stages, the model not only enhances grammatical accuracy but also promotes communicative competence, making it a pedagogically robust approach for contextualized grammar teaching.

2.4. The Application of the PACE Model in Grammar Teaching

Research on PACE spans educational levels, demonstrating adaptability and effectiveness. In high schools, Zhai (2017) used PACE with a story to teach attributive clauses, fostering engagement and metalinguistic awareness. Miller (2024) applied it in a German classroom, integrating grammar with lexical learning. In junior high, Ni (2020) taught prepositions and adverbs via thematic continuity. At university, Davin & Kushki (2021) showed PACE promoted grammatical development through dialogic interaction. However, current research has yet to fully explore authenticity-driven grammar learning. This proposed PACE-Situational Teaching Method integration addresses this gap by using genuinely authentic materials. This approach is highly feasible, supported by theoretical synergy, empirical evidence, and a structured framework, offering an innovative alternative to traditional grammar teaching.Avoid combining SI and CGS units, such as current in amperes and magnetic field in oersteds. This often leads to confusion because equations do not balance dimensionally. If you must use mixed units, clearly state the units for each quantity that you use in an equation.

3. The Application of the PACE Teaching Model Based on Situational Teaching Approach in High School English Grammar Teaching

This paper attempts to integrate the PACE teaching model—grounded in input processing, interaction, and output theories while balancing focus on form and meaning—with high school English grammar instruction through the lens of the situational teaching method. Using specific cases, it elaborates on the practical application of the PACE model in high school English grammar classrooms. The design is illustrated with the grammar section of Unit 2 *Wildlife Protection* from the *People's Education Press English* compulsory book 2. The unit falls under the theme category of "Human and Nature", and the grammar section focuses on the present continuous passive voice. The accompanying text remains closely related to wildlife protection. This paper seeks to contextualize the lesson within the unit theme, enabling students to perceive grammatical structures in theme-related texts, comprehend and summarize grammar rules, and apply them in practice.

3.1. Creating Relevant Situations and Presenting Language Materials

In the introduction stage, teachers can activate students' prior knowledge and

seamlessly link it to new knowledge by creating authentic situations. Through interactive tasks, students' desire to express themselves is stimulated, encouraging active participation and laying an emotional and cognitive foundation for subsequent learning.

At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher can play a 30-second video featuring endangered animals such as pandas, elephants, and rhinos. After the video, the teacher can ask: "These endangered animals are facing extinction due to hunting, pollution, and habitat loss... What can we do?" The visual impact and questioning prompt students to reflect on wildlife protection and activate their existing knowledge. After students respond, the teacher can introduce the following scenario: To raise awareness about wildlife protection among teachers and students, the school's Animal Protection Association is creating an English poster (including sections such as "Examples to Study", "Reasons for Protection", and "Measures to Take"). Students who actively contribute ideas during this lesson will have the opportunity to deliver a speech at the association's public welfare event.

Next, the teacher reads aloud an adapted text titled Examples to Study in Wildlife Protection, which was modified by a member of the Animal Protection Association after studying the "Reading and Thinking" section A Day in the Clouds from the same unit. While listening, students consider the main content of the text. Through storytelling, the teacher helps students initially grasp the general meaning of the text while honing their listening and information-processing skills. The text contains numerous examples of the present continuous passive voice, allowing students to initially perceive the target grammar within a meaningful context. This approach helps engage students' enthusiasm. Additionally, the life-like scenario design enables students to use language naturally in authentic contexts, reducing the stereotypical rigidity of grammar learning, alleviating learning anxiety, and sparking interest and participation.

3.2. Enhancing Grammatical Awareness and Paying Attention to Linguistic Forms

Dai Weidong and Ren Qingmei (2006) argue that if learners can notice the grammatical features they are about to master, their awareness of these features is enhanced, making it easier for them to recognize and attend to these features in subsequent language input.

At this stage, the teacher can present the adapted text *Examples to Study in Wildlife Protection* again on the whiteboard, with the target grammar highlighted in bold to draw students' attention. The text is as follows:

The thin mountain air forces frequent rests as we hike. Before us, Tibetan antelopes **are being observed**—the purpose of our journey. These graceful creatures, once hunted for their valuable fur, now are being protected in the Changtang National

Nature Reserve.

My guide Zhaxi explains, "We're not just saving animals—we're saving ourselves". After their population dropped by 50% in the 1980s-90s due to hunting and habitat loss, strict measures were taken. Now, antelope habitats **are being monitored** constantly, and special bridges **are being constructed** to ensure safe migration routes.

Thanks to these efforts, the species was removed from the endangered list in 2015. However, protection programs **are not being discontinued** as threats remain. As I reflect under the stars, I realize that while wildlife conservation efforts **are being implemented**, true change requires humanity to live in harmony with nature.

The teacher then poses the following questions based on the text:

Q1: What conservation efforts are currently happening for Tibetan antelopes?

Q2: Why are Tibetan antelopes still receiving protection despite their population recovery?

By answering these questions, students not only pay attention to the characteristics of the target grammar but also enhance their awareness of these grammatical features. This stage aims to activate students' intentional attention, guiding them to identify and annotate instances of the present continuous passive voice within the text, thereby preparing them for the establishment of grammatical rules.

3.3. Focusing on Form and Function, Co-constructing Grammar Rules

Positioning Adair-Hauck & Donato (2002b) point out that teachers can guide and assist students in co-constructing systematic grammar rules through indirect, scaffolded, and guided questions or prompts. In this stage, the teacher can facilitate collaborative inquiry through questioning, enabling students to autonomously summarize grammatical rules and understand the meaning-making function of the target grammar.

To better understand wildlife protection measures, the teacher can guide students to complete a listening exercise based on a discussion between members of the Animal Protection Association regarding local wildlife conservation actions. The dialogue is as follows:

Amy: Ben, what actions are being taken by our club to protect local wildlife?

Ben: Bird nests _____ (place) in campus trees, and educational posters _____ (make) about snake protection.

Amy: Good! I heard frogs _____ (harm) by trash near the pond.

Ben: A cleanup _____ (organize) this weekend. Also, warning signs _____ (put up) to stop littering.

Amy: Good idea! Our club's efforts _____ (organize) by more people every day.

While completing the dialogue, students not only expand their knowledge of wildlife protection measures but also deepen their understanding of the meaning of the present continuous passive voice—namely, that "an action is currently being

carried out". After completing the dialogue, the teacher guides students to engage in collaborative discussion, summarize the structure of the present continuous passive voice, and fill in the following table.

Table 1. The Present Continuous Passive Voice

Affirmative	am/is/are + being + past participle
Negative	am/is/are + not + being + past participle
Yes/No Question	Am/Is/Are + subject + being+ past participle ?
Wh-question	Wh-word + am/is/are + subject + being+ past participle ?

Next, through questioning, the teacher encourages students to work in small groups to compare and distinguish between passive and active voice, understand their pragmatic functions, and further explore grammatical rules.

Q1: Which sentence is more appropriate in this context?

a. Bird nests are being placed in campus trees, and educational posters are being made about snake protection.

b. We are placing bird nests in campus trees and making educational posters about snake

protection.

Q2: Which sentence is more appropriate in this context?

a.... frogs are being harmed by trash near the pond.

b. Trash near the pond is harming frogs.

Through collaborative teacher-student effort, the following pragmatic functions of the passive voice can be summarized: Emphasizing the recipient of the action; Omitting the agent when it is unknown, irrelevant, or obvious; Maintaining textual coherence and facilitating information flow.

Meaningful practice not only strengthens the connection between form and meaning but also promotes the internalization and application of grammatical rules. To help students gain a deeper understanding of the distinction between passive and active voice and to activate grammatical rules, the teacher may select an adapted text from the grammar section prepared by an Animal Protection Association member, guiding students to explore the importance of wildlife protection more profoundly.

In the wetland of my hometown, there are many different kinds of animals, including wild birds, fish, snakes, insects, and so on. But things have changed terribly in recent years. Small birds are being caught with nets, and wild ducks are being sold at food markets. Fish and snakes are killing for food in restaurants. The wetland is polluted seriously every day. This is not just about losing a beautiful place —it's about losing biodiversity. Wetlands are crucial for clean water, flood control, and wildlife survival. If we don't act now, many species will disappear forever.

After reading the text, the teacher poses the following questions:

Q1: Are the sentences in italic type grammatically correct? If not, how should they be corrected?

Q2: Why should humans protect wildlife? What would happen if we don't?

The teacher asks students to identify and correct the two grammatical errors in the text while reflecting on why wildlife should be protected. Through discussion and correction, students gain a deeper understanding of the usage and distinction between active and passive voice, as well as a more profound awareness of the reasons for and importance of environmental conservation.

3.4. Transferring to Authentic Contexts, Conducting Extension Activities

The key to assessing students' mastery of grammar lies in examining whether they can flexibly apply grammatical rules in new contexts, accurately express personal viewpoints, and elaborate deeply on their understanding of thematic meaning. Only when students actively use grammatical knowledge to construct meaning can it be demonstrated that they have achieved the transition from rule cognition to communicative competence. In this stage, the teacher should create new contexts and guide students to innovatively activate and transfer grammatical knowledge through extension activities, achieving unity of form, meaning, and use.

After learning about examples, measures, and reasons for wildlife protection, the teacher encourages students to continue designing a poster for the Animal Protection Association. The content requirements for this English poster are as follows:

Work in groups of four and create a poster titled "Let's Protect Wildlife" (Please use the present continuous passive voice where possible).

Information to include:

(1) Examples of wildlife protection.

(2) The current wildlife protection situation in Nanchong.

(3) Reasons for protecting wildlife in Nanchong.

(4) Ways to protect wildlife in Nanchong.

By reflecting on the current state of wildlife protection in their hometown and proposing solutions, students transfer the target grammar to a new context. They also recognize themselves as practitioners of wildlife protection, enhancing their innovative thinking and problem-solving abilities. More importantly, this activity cultivates students' sense of social responsibility and contributes to the development of core competencies. This research proposes an integrated pedagogical framework combining the Situational Teaching Method's contextual principles with the PACE model's structured cycle for senior high school grammar instruction. It addresses the challenge of fostering both grammatical accuracy and communicative fluency, as mandated by modern standards. The framework offers a principled alternative to traditional form-focused teaching, bridging the gap between knowing grammar rules and using them effectively. While further empirical work is needed, this integration aims to transform grammar from daunting prescriptions into an engaging tool for meaningful communication,

developing learners' confident, flexible, and expressive capacity.

4. Conclusion

This research proposes an integrated pedagogical framework combining the Situational Teaching Method's contextual principles with the PACE model's structured cycle for senior high school grammar instruction. It addresses the challenge of fostering both grammatical accuracy and communicative fluency, as mandated by modern standards. The framework offers a principled alternative to traditional form-focused teaching, bridging the gap between knowing grammar rules and using them effectively. While further empirical work is needed, this integration aims to transform grammar from daunting prescriptions into an engaging tool for meaningful communication, developing learners' confident, flexible, and expressive capacity.

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