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A Comparative Study of the Grammar Sections in the Old and New PEP Junior High School English Textbooks

Lihua Tang. Li Tang
China West Normal University, Nanchong 637000, China

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Abstract

This study investigates the similarities and differences between the grammar sections of the 2012 and 2024 editions of the People's Education Press (PEP) English textbook for Grade 7, Volume I, and examines how these revisions influence teachers' instructional priorities under the English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition)j. Using comparative and corpus-based methods supported by textual analysis, the study systematically compares the two editions in terms of grammar coverage, sequencing, and modes of presentation. The findings indicate that both editions present grammar in meaningful contexts and provide example sentences followed by varied practice activities. However, the new edition covers a broader range of grammar and streamlines previously dispersed content into fewer, more integrated units. It also introduces practical grammatical structures earlier and organizes them more closely around students' communicative needs. In terms of presentation, the new edition uses more word- and phrase-based unit titles to foreground thematic meaning, encourages students to discover and generalize grammatical patterns through observation and comparison, and replaces knowledge-oriented self-check activities with integrated reflective assessment. These changes shift the focus of grammar instruction from the explanation and mechanical practice of isolated rules to theme-guided, discourse-based, and inquiry-oriented language learning. The study concludes that the new edition is more closely aligned with the 2022 Curriculum Standards and better supports the development of students' practical language use and core competencies. Accordingly, teachers should organize grammar instruction around unit themes and discourse, facilitate students' independent discovery of grammatical rules, and create authentic contexts for meaningful language use.

Keywords

PEP Junior High School English Textbooks; Junior High School English; Grammar Sections; Pedagogical Implications; Textbook Comparison

1. Introduction

Grammar constitutes the rule-governed core of a language system and plays a vital

role in the development of students' English proficiency. It not only provides essential support for understanding linguistic structures and expressing meaning accurately, but also serves as a prerequisite for developing integrated listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. From forming sentences to comprehending discourse, students' command of grammar directly affects the efficiency with which they complete English-language tasks. The importance of grammar instruction in junior high school English education therefore cannot be underestimated.

In 2022, to meet the demands of talent development in the new era, China issued the Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) (hereinafter, the "2022 Curriculum Standards"). The document emphasizes that grammar instruction should be guided by themes and grounded in discourse. Teachers should lead students to understand grammar rules in authentic contexts and avoid teaching those rules in isolation. Grammar instruction has thus shifted from the mere transmission of rules to the development of contextualized, pragmatic language use. This shift charts a course for junior high school grammar instruction and provides an important criterion for evaluating its effectiveness.

Textbooks bridge the 2022 Curriculum Standards and classroom practice and are the principal medium through which grammar instruction is delivered. In response to the standards' reconceptualization of grammar instruction, PEP has systematically revised its junior high school English textbooks, with the new edition gradually replacing the 2012 edition of Go for It! This change involves more than an update of content; it marks a transition in instructional philosophy from a knowledge-oriented approach to a competency-oriented one. Against this background, the present study compares the grammar sections of the old and new PEP Grade 7, Volume I English textbooks.

2. Research Design

2.1. Research Questions

The design of a textbook's grammar sections embodies its curriculum philosophy and instructional intentions. To investigate the similarities and differences between the old and new PEP junior high school English textbooks and to formulate practical recommendations for using the new edition in accordance with the 2022 Curriculum Standards, this study employs comparative and corpus-based methods. It systematically compares the grammar sections of the 2012 edition (hereinafter, the "old edition") and the 2024 edition (hereinafter, the "new edition") published by PEP. The study aims to identify the design features and differences of the two editions and addresses the following three questions:

(1) What similarities and differences exist in the grammar coverage and sequencing of the old and new Grade 7, Volume I textbooks?

(2) What similarities and differences exist in the modes of grammar presentation

in the old and new Grade 7, Volume I textbooks?
(3) How do the changes in the grammar sections of the old and new Grade 7, Volume I textbooks alter teachers' instructional priorities?

2.2. Research Methods

This study employs textual analysis and comparative research to systematically examine the grammar sections in the old and new PEP junior high school English textbooks. The comparison identifies similarities and differences in grammar coverage, sequencing, and modes of presentation. On this basis, the study proposes corresponding recommendations for junior high school English instruction.

2.3. Research Materials

The research materials comprise the Compulsory Education Curriculum Standard Experimental Textbook: English (Grade 7, Volume I), published by PEP in 2012, and the Compulsory Education Textbook: English (Grade 7, Volume I), published by PEP in 2024.

3. Results and Analysis

The scope, sequencing, and modes of grammar presentation in junior high school English textbooks directly affect the achievement of grammar-instruction objectives. Using the old and new PEP Grade 7, Volume I textbooks as examples, this section analyzes their similarities and differences in grammar coverage, sequencing, and presentation.

3.1. Grammar Coverage and Sequencing

The grammar content included in the old and new PEP Grade 7, Volume I textbooks is summarized in Figure 1.

2012 Edition		2024 Edition	
Unit	Grammar content	Unit	Grammar content
Starter Unit 1: Good morning!	Use of be; greetings	Starter Unit 1: Hello!	Basic use of be; personal pronoun you; greetings
Starter Unit 2: What's your name?	Wh-questions; asking names	Starter Unit 2: What's Your Name?	Wh-questions; asking names; personal pronouns he and she
Starter Unit 3: How are you?	Wh-questions; asking about health	Starter Unit 3: Where's the Postcard?	Demonstratives this and that; prepositions of place
Unit 1 My name's Gina.	Wh-questions	Unit 1 You and Me	Use of be; personal pronouns
Unit 2 This is my sister.	Demonstrative pronouns	Unit 2 We're Family!	Simple present; possessive case of nouns
Unit 3 Is this your pencil?	Demonstrative pronouns	Unit 3 My School	There be construction; prepositions of place
Unit 4 Where's my schoolbag?	Wh-questions	Unit 4 My Favourite Subject	Conjunctions and prepositions of time
Unit 5 Do you have a soccer ball?	Yes/no questions	Unit 5 Fun Clubs	Modal can to express ability
Unit 6 Do you like bananas?	Countable and uncountable nouns	Unit 6 A Day in the Life	Telling time; adverbs of frequency
Unit 7 How much are these socks?	Wh-questions	Unit 7 Happy Birthday!	Numerals; wh-questions
Unit 8 When is your birthday?	Wh-questions		
Unit 9 My favorite subject is science.	Wh-questions		

Figure 1. Grammar Content in the Old and New PEP Textbooks (Grade 7, Volume I)

With respect to grammar coverage, Figure 1 shows both similarities and differences between the old and new Grade 7, Volume I textbooks. Both include uses of the verb

be, wh-questions, demonstrative pronouns, and basic communicative expressions such as greetings and asking someone's name. Building on the old edition, the new edition adds the personal pronouns he and she, prepositions of place, the possessive case of nouns, the there be construction, conjunctions and prepositions of time, the modal verb can to express ability, expressions of time, adverbs of frequency, and numerals. The old edition, by contrast, contains content specific to asking about health, countable and uncountable nouns, and asking about prices. Overall, the new Grade 7, Volume I textbook covers a broader range of grammar.

With respect to sequencing, Figure 1 reveals substantial differences in the organization of grammar content. First, the new edition streamlines and integrates the content more extensively than the old edition. It reduces the total number of units by three through the reorganization of topics such as birthdays and subject preferences, consolidates grammar points into seven regular units, and introduces practical grammar earlier. For example, Starter Unit 3 of the old edition remains focused on the greeting "How are you?", whereas Starter Unit 3 of the new edition moves directly to prepositions of place in "Where's the Postcard?". This change can accelerate the development of students' ability to use language. In addition, Unit 2 of the new edition (We're Family!) introduces the simple present and the possessive case of nouns earlier, replacing the old Unit 2's narrow focus on demonstrative pronouns. The new edition also optimizes the sequence of grammar presentation. Whereas the old edition teaches demonstrative pronouns intensively before introducing yes/no questions, the new edition emphasizes integrated grammar use. Unit 3 (My School), for instance, presents the there be construction together with prepositions of place, helping students avoid developing fragmented grammatical knowledge. The new edition also moves key items forward to better match students' learning needs. Examples include the modal can (Unit 5) and adverbs of frequency (Unit 6), which appeared later in the old sequence. These adjustments reflect the 2022 Curriculum Standards' emphasis on practical language use. By reducing repetitive content—for example, the four old-edition units centered on wh-questions—integrating grammar modules, such as teaching be together with personal pronouns, and using everyday themes to facilitate knowledge transfer, the new edition addresses the old edition's slow progression and limited contexts and improves the efficiency of language learning and use.

3.2. Modes of Grammar Presentation

A comparison of the two editions reveals both similarities and differences in their presentation of grammar. These similarities and differences are discussed in detail below.

3.2.1. Similarities

First, both editions present grammar in meaningful contexts. They embed target

grammar in dialogues, short passages, and other forms of discourse so that students can perceive how grammar is used while interpreting context, rather than encounter rules in isolation, as illustrated in Figures 2 and 3.


2d Role-play the conversation. 分角色表演对话。

Sally: Good morning, Jane.
Jane: Good morning, Sally.
Sally: Oh, Jane, this is my sister Kate. Kate, this is my friend Jane.
Kate: Nice to meet you, Jane.
Jane: Nice to meet you, too. Are those your parents?
Kate: Yes, they are.
Jane: And who's he?
Sally: He's my brother, Paul.
Jane: Oh, I see. Well, have a good day!
Sally/Kate: Thanks! You, too. Bye!

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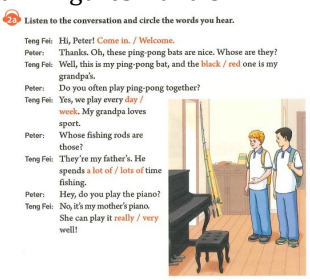
Figure 2. Old Edition, Unit 2, Section A, Activity 2d


2a Listen to the conversation and circle the words you hear.

Teng Fei: Hi, Peter! Come in. / Welcome.
Peter: Thanks. Oh, these ping-pong bats are nice. Whose are they?
Teng Fei: Well, this is my ping-pong bat, and the black / red one is my grandpa's.
Peter: Do you often play ping-pong together?
Teng Fei: Yes, we play every day / week. My grandpa loves sport.
Peter: Whose fishing rods are those?
Teng Fei: They're my father's. He spends a lot of / lots of time fishing.
Peter: Hey, do you play the piano?
Teng Fei: No, it's my mother's piano. She can play it really / very well!

Figure 3. New Edition, Unit 2, Section A, Activity 2a

(PEP Junior High School English, Grade 7, Volume I)

Figure 2 shows that Activity 2d in Section A of Unit 2, This Is My Sister, in the old edition presents the target grammar through a dialogue. By introducing family members through sentences such as "This is my sister," the dialogue enables students to learn the use of demonstrative pronouns in the context of becoming acquainted with a family. It also incorporates the simple-present use of be, naturally embedding grammar in an everyday family-introduction context. Figure 3 shows that Activity 2a in Section A of Unit 2, We're Family!, in the new edition likewise presents grammar through discourse. The dialogue takes place when a classmate visits a student's home. The speakers discuss a ping-pong bat, fishing rods, and a piano, explaining ownership and related activities such as playing ball games and fishing. This everyday exchange presents structures including the simple present and wh-questions, allowing students to notice grammar in context. The analysis of Figures 2 and 3 therefore shows that both editions attach importance to presenting grammar in specific, realistic contexts to support understanding and mastery.

Second, both editions provide numerous example sentences in their grammar sections to demonstrate specific uses, followed by corresponding exercises. This mode of presentation helps students consolidate what they have learned and deepen both their understanding of grammar rules and their ability to use them, as shown in Figures 4 and 5.

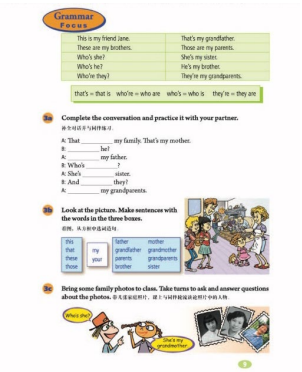


Figure 4. Old Edition, Unit 2

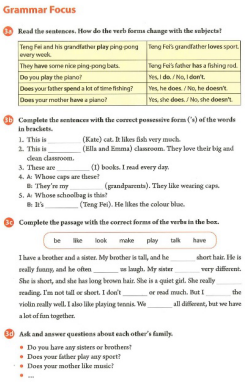


Figure 5. New Edition, Unit 2

(PEP Junior High School English, Grade 7, Volume I)

Figure 4 shows that the Grammar Focus section of Unit 2, This Is My Sister, in the old edition uses examples centered on introducing and asking about family members, such as "This is my friend Jane" and "Who's she?". These examples expose students to grammar in a familiar family setting and are therefore easy to understand and remember. The section then provides a range of exercises: Activity 2a requires students to complete a dialogue, Activity 2b asks them to construct sentences, and Activity 2c involves questions and answers based on family photographs. Moving from imitation to independent production, these activities progressively develop students' ability to use grammar. Figure 5 shows that the Grammar Focus section of Unit 2, We're Family!, in the new edition provides numerous examples of the simple present. By varying the subjects—for example, Teng Fei and his grandfather and Teng Fei's grandfather—and the corresponding verb forms, the section enables students to observe rules such as subject–verb agreement directly. This form of presentation is highly focused. Activity 1b first asks students to notice changes in verb forms; the gap-filling exercises in Activities 2a and 2b then provide targeted practice in understanding and applying the rules; and the question-and-answer activity in 2c develops practical language use. The analysis of Figures 4 and 5 shows that both editions follow the presentation of a grammar point with targeted exercises of varied types, thereby helping students understand the point more effectively.

3.2.2. Differences

Beyond the similarities discussed above, the two editions exhibit more pronounced differences in their modes of grammar presentation. These differences are examined below in terms of unit titles, the Grammar Focus section, and end-of-unit assessment.

First, the two editions differ in the way their unit titles are presented, as shown in Figures 6 and 7.

2012 Edition
Units
Starter Unit 1: Good morning!
Starter Unit 2: What's your name?
Starter Unit 3: How are you?
Unit 1 My name's Gina.
Unit 2 This is my sister.
Unit 3 Is this your pencil?
Unit 4 Where's my schoolbag?
Unit 5 Do you have a soccer ball?
Unit 6 Do you like bananas?
Unit 7 How much are these socks?
Unit 8 When is your birthday?
Unit 9 My favorite subject is science.

Figure 6. Old Edition, Unit Titles

2024 Edition
Units
Starter Unit 1: Hello!
Starter Unit 2: What's Your Name?
Starter Unit 3: Where's the Postcard?
Unit 1 You and Me
Unit 2 We're Family!
Unit 3 My School
Unit 4 My Favourite Subject
Unit 5 Fun Clubs
Unit 6 A Day in the Life
Unit 7 Happy Birthday!

Figure 7. New Edition, Unit Titles

(PEP Junior High School English, Grade 7, Volume I)

As Figures 6 and 7 show, most unit titles in the old edition take the form of sentences, such as “What’s your name?” and “How are you?”. The old Grade 7, Volume I textbook contains three starter units and nine regular units, for a total of 12 titles. Eleven of the 12 are presented as sentences. Sentence-form titles therefore account for approximately 92% of the total, while phrase-form titles account for approximately 8%. In the new edition, by contrast, unit titles are more often presented as words or phrases, such as “Hello” and “You and Me.” The new Grade 7, Volume I textbook contains three starter units and seven regular units, for a total of 10 unit titles. Six titles are phrases; together with the one-word title, non-sentence titles account for 70% of the total, while sentence titles account for approximately 30%. The emphasis in unit-title presentation has thus changed, and this shift is closely related to grammar instruction. Phrase-form titles generally make the unit theme more salient. In future instruction, teachers should therefore attend carefully to unit titles, identify the unit theme, and teach grammar under the guidance of that theme and through discourse, rather than as isolated rules.

Second, although both editions contain a Grammar Focus section, they differ in how that section presents grammar, as shown in Figures 8 and 9.

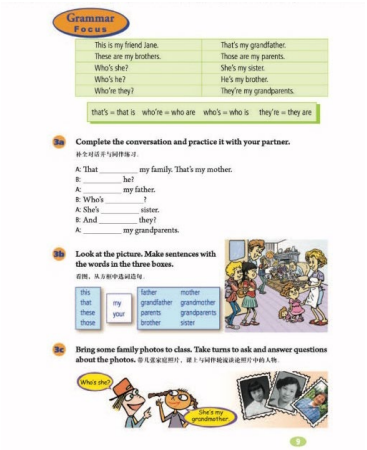


Figure 8. Old Edition, Unit 2

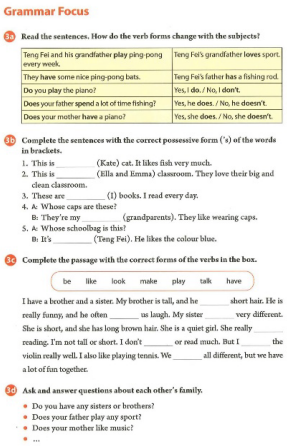


Figure 9. New Edition, Unit 2

(PEP Junior High School English, Grade 7, Volume I)

Figure 8 shows that the Grammar Focus section in the old edition introduces grammar mainly through everyday conversational examples, such as "This is my friend Jane. That's my grandfather." It also exposes students to basic expressions involving demonstrative and personal pronouns, including the contracted forms "that's = that is" and "who's = who is." The associated interactive practice primarily consists of pairwork dialogues, so the format is relatively limited and the explanation concentrates on basic grammar points. Figure 9, by contrast, shows that the new edition presents grammar through a table in Activity 3a. Rather than merely displaying rules, it prompts students to observe and compare examples so that they can independently discover and generalize sentence patterns and verb-form changes in the simple present. Compared with the old edition, this mode of presentation is better suited to developing students' capacity for independent inquiry and induction and is therefore important for cultivating their core competencies.

Third, both editions include end-of-unit assessment, but the assessment is presented differently, as shown in Figures 10 and 11.

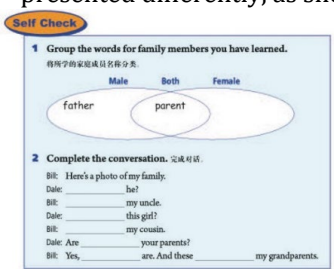


Figure 10. Old Edition, Unit 2, Self Check

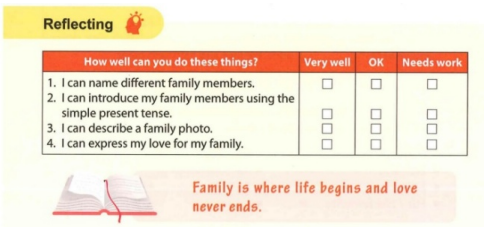


Figure 11. New Edition, Unit 2, Reflecting
(PEP Junior High School English, Grade 7, Volume I)

Figure 10 shows that the old edition's end-of-unit assessment (Self Check) uses the activity "Group the words for family members you have learned" to ask students to classify family-member terms as male, both, or female. This presentation places greater emphasis on vocabulary classification. The old edition also includes a "Complete the conversation" activity that requires students to use grammar in a practical context. Figure 11 shows that the new edition's assessment section (Reflecting) uses several tasks under the prompt "How well can you do these things?" to integrate grammar use with practical language skills and the expression of emotion. These tasks include naming different family members, introducing family members in the simple present, describing a family photograph, and expressing love for one's family. This mode of grammar presentation places greater emphasis on integrated competence and on the practical and affective dimensions of language use.

The comparison of Figures 10 and 11 indicates that the old edition's end-of-unit assessment focuses primarily on students' language knowledge and language functions. Its grammar component chiefly assesses mastery and simple application of grammar knowledge. The new edition, however, focuses on language use and understanding of the unit's thematic meaning. In assessing grammar, it gives greater attention to students' ability to use grammar in specific contexts to solve practical problems and emphasizes the integration of grammar, language use, and thematic meaning.

4. Conclusions

By comparing the coverage, sequencing, and modes of presentation in the grammar sections of the old and new PEP Grade 7, Volume I junior high school English textbooks, this study identifies numerous similarities and differences between the two editions.

In terms of grammar coverage, the new PEP Grade 7, Volume I textbook broadens the range of grammatical knowledge while retaining the core content of the old edition. It adds several grammar points, including the personal pronouns he and she and prepositions of place, resulting in a more complete system. Compared with the old edition, the new edition therefore offers broader coverage. This design can meet Grade 7 students' progressive language-learning needs and provides strong support

for constructing a comprehensive framework of grammatical knowledge.

In terms of sequencing, the new edition streamlines and integrates grammar content, reduces the number of units, and organizes grammatical knowledge that was dispersed across the old edition into more concentrated modules. It also introduces practical grammar earlier to accelerate instructional progress, thereby improving the efficiency with which students develop the ability to use language. In addition, the sequence of grammar presentation has been optimized by moving certain key points forward, making it more responsive to students' learning needs. These adjustments fully reflect the 2022 Curriculum Standards' emphasis on practical language use and address the old edition's slow progression and limited range of contexts.

In terms of presentation, both editions situate grammar in context and use numerous examples and accompanying exercises to help students consolidate learning. The new edition nevertheless introduces several changes. Its unit titles are generally presented as words or phrases, which foregrounds the unit theme and gives teachers a clearer basis for theme-guided grammar instruction. In the new Grammar Focus sections, teachers are expected to guide students in independently exploring and generalizing grammatical patterns. Compared with the old edition, this approach better cultivates students' core competencies. Finally, the new end-of-unit assessment integrates grammar use with practical language skills and emotional expression. It therefore places greater emphasis on assessing students' ability to use grammar to solve practical problems in specific contexts and highlights both the practical and affective dimensions of language use.

Overall, the revision of the grammar sections in the new PEP Grade 7, Volume I textbook is more closely aligned with the 2022 Curriculum Standards. Its coverage, sequencing, and modes of presentation all demonstrate an increased emphasis on developing students' ability to use language and their core competencies.

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