

The Application of Situational Teaching Method to English Vocabulary Teaching in Senior High School

Zhangjing Xu

China West Normal University, Nanchong 637000, China

Abstract

The new curriculum standards (2017) have higher requirements for the comprehensive English ability of senior high school students. And English vocabulary teaching is still an important and difficult task in English teaching. In order to improve the problem that the high school English vocabulary is too large, the difficulty of memorizing words, so the situational teaching method gets into the classroom. Starting from the existing problems in senior high school English vocabulary teaching, this paper analyzes the development of situational teaching methods in vocabulary teaching, and expounds the theoretical basis and significance of situational teaching methods. Finally, this paper discusses in detail how to set the situation types and apply the situation teaching method to the practice of senior high school English vocabulary teaching in order to improve the efficiency of senior high school English learning.

Keywords

Situational Teaching Method; Vocabulary Teaching; Senior High School.

1. Introduction

Language ability is one of the four dimensions of the core competencies of students' English subject, and English communicative competence is an important component of language ability. It is the most important goal of English teaching to enable students to acquire communicative competence. According to the input hypothesis theory of Krashen in 1982, acquisition is formed on the basis of understandable language input in a certain context. A large amount of language input can enable learners to be rendered and influenced in rich situations(1). In English class, creating real language scenes is an important way for students to get understandable input and then acquire language. Creating a good language communication situation can enable students to contact English as much as possible, which is conducive to strengthening students' language sense, and is conducive to improving students' listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities. In the content of English teaching in senior high school, vocabulary is the basis for understanding articles and learning English grammar. According to the *General Senior High School Curriculum Standards for English (2017)*, after finishing the advanced high school English courses, students should "learn to use about 1,000 new words and a certain number of phrases; master 4,000–4,200 words in total."(2) Learning and memorizing vocabulary is a big difficulty for them in learning English. Situational teaching method is an effective learning method, especially for senior high school English vocabulary teaching. This method integrates language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing together. By setting up different scenarios, students can improve their interest in learning, make students have a more intuitive feeling of new vocabulary, and help students memorize English vocabulary quickly.

There are some problems in English vocabulary teaching. For example, some teachers' teaching methods are monotonous and boring. Some teachers only pay attention to the primary meaning of words when teaching words, teaching vocabulary in isolation, and do not let students try to use the learned words in sentences. Some teachers' vocabulary teaching lacks context and is

divorced from reality, resulting in the lack of connection among the new words taught, which is not easy for students to understand and remember. At present, although the use of situation in teaching has formed a consensus among many English teachers. However, how to eliminate the drawbacks of traditional teaching and make full use of the situations to improve students' language ability remains to be further explored and studied.

2. Relevant Research about Situational Teaching Method

2.1. The Definition of Situational Teaching Methods

Functional method or communicative method in early 1970s emphasized that language communicative activities should always be in certain situations, served for communication function and expressed the meaning in language situation. In the mid 1980s, task-based language teaching also advocated finishing the task of language application in real situations as much as they can.

Few language teachers in the 1990s are familiar with the terms Oral Approach or Situational Language Teaching, which refer to an approach to language teaching developed by British applied linguists from the 1930s to the 1960s. According to Palmer in 1917 and 1921, the origins of this approach began with the work of British applied linguists in the 1920s and 1930s. What they attempted was to develop a more scientific foundation for an oral approach to teaching English than was evidenced in the Direct Method. The result was a systematic study of the principles and procedures that could be applied to the selection and organization of the content of a language course(3,4).

Before understanding the situational teaching method, it is important to know the real meaning of the word "situation". By situation, in 1963, Pittman means the use of concrete objects, pictures, and realia, which together with actions and gestures can be used to demonstrate the meanings of new language items. The form of new words and sentence patterns is demonstrated with examples(5). The meaning of new words and sentence patterns is made clear visually with objects, pictures action and mime. Holliday, in 1964, believed that situational contexts include situational contexts, modal contexts, and communicative contexts(6). Besides, in 2008, according to Gao Hui, situation refers to the social context of communication activities, and language is often understood with a certain context(7). Pragmatically, situation refers to the communicative situations, including drama situation, prescribed situation, teaching situation, social situation, learning situation and so on. The "teaching situation" refers to the emotional atmosphere created by teachers in the teaching process. To some extent, it embodies the value of two-way interaction between teachers and students. The meaning of situation is pluralistic and three-dimensional. In different environmental conditions, its meaning also changes accordingly.

Different scholars have different definitions to situational teaching method. Based on the idea of Gu Mingyuan in 1999, Situational teaching is a teaching method that uses concrete and vivid scenes to arouse students' active learning interest and improve learning efficiency(8). Similarly, in 2000, Zhang Hua pointed out that Situational teaching refers to the creation of situations containing real events or problems, in which students independently understand knowledge and construct meaning in the process of exploring events or solving problems(9). Situational teaching requires teachers to use pictures, recordings, objects, computers, networks and other teaching tools in the teaching process to present teaching content in a vivid and intuitive form to students through dialogue, communication, role playing and other forms, and to transform boring knowledge into vivid and living language through vocabulary, sentence patterns and language expression(7). It is of great benefit to cultivating students' language sense, pronunciation and oral communication ability, and is conducive to improving students' listening, speaking, reading and writing ability.

According to Jack in 2000, situational language teaching adopts an inductive approach to language teaching. The meaning of words or structures is not to be given through explanation in either the native tongue or the target language but is to be induced from the way the form is used in a situation(10). Explanation is therefore discouraged, and the learner is expected to deduce the meaning of a particular structure or vocabulary item from the situation in which it is presented. Extending structures and vocabulary to new situations takes place by generalization. The learner is expected to apply the language learned in a classroom to situations outside the classroom.

In general, situational teaching method refers to the teacher's purposeful description and creation of vivid and specific teaching situations with certain mental and emotional characteristics in the classroom teaching process, so as to generate corresponding attitudes and feelings for students, so as to help students master the teaching materials and exert their independent learning ability.

2.2. Theoretical Foundation of Situational Teaching Method

The first relevant theory is constructivism learning theory. The theory of language underlying situational language teaching can be characterized as a type of British "structuralism". Piaget is the earliest proposer of constructivism learning theory. He believed that children gradually construct knowledge about the surrounding environment in the process of interacting with the external world, so that their own cognitive structure can be developed. Based on Zhang Dajun in 2008, knowledge is not acquired by teachers, but by means of meaning construction with the help of others (including teachers and learning partners) in the learning process in a certain context, that is, social and cultural background(11). Teachers should provide learners with background knowledge related to the learning content or create as real a situation as possible conducive to learning to help and promote meaning construction. Constructivists advocate situational teaching and emphasize the situational, social and proactive nature of learning.

Vygotsky, in 1978, emphasizes interaction and engagement with the target language in a social context based on the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding. It refers to "the distance between a child's actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers"(12). So when teachers and students share the cultural tools, such as language and social institution, students can develop their cognition.

In a word, constructivism learning theory emphasizes the initiative and drive of learners, and respects learners' subjectivity, participation, creativity, and interaction with teachers. In the learning process, the knowledge construction process of learners does not start from scratch, and the acquired knowledge and skills are not passively absorbed, but are consciously, actively and selectively reconstructed according to the cognitive structure, knowledge and skills already possessed by learners with the assistance of teachers and others. The core content of constructivism learning theory is to take learner as the center and emphasize learner's active exploration, discovery and construction of knowledge meaning.

The second theory is Krashen's input hypothesis, which explains the relationship between language input and language acquisition. Language is acquired by peoples' comprehension of input that is slightly beyond their current level. People understand input containing $i+1$ because the situation, context, facial expressions, gestures, etc. Effective input should have the following characteristics---comprehensibility, interestingness, non-grammatical program arrangement, sufficient input volume. With the help of modern multimedia and network technology, teachers increase the comprehensibility of language input and provide real language scenes. Multi-form resources enrich students' sensory experience, improve students' learning interest and enhance their learning motivation.

3. The Significance of Situational Teaching Method

Situational teaching method is of great significance to foreign language teaching in China. First of all, in terms of children's language teaching, situational language teaching provides children with a large number of opportunities to perceive, experience and imitate, cultivates their perception of discourse context, including discourse context, situational context and cultural context, and can greatly stimulate children's interest in learning and thus determine their learning effect to a large extent. Secondly, situational language teaching is conducive to creating a simulated second language environment and activating children's second language acquisition potential under the context conditions in our country, making full use of children's language acquisition ability before the end of the critical period. Then, situational language teaching is also suitable for adult foreign language teaching under the context conditions in our country, especially in the aspect of special purpose English (ESP). This is because special purpose languages are always generated in special situational and cultural contexts, which in turn affect the linguistic features of discourse contexts, such as civil aviation English, tourism English, banking English, business English, and so on.

Situational language teaching combines the meaning of language (understanding and expression) with the generation of language (discourse context), and takes into account the cultivation of language ability and language application ability, which is impossible to achieve in listening and speaking method or communicative language teaching alone. Situational language teaching not only pays attention to learning language form (morphology and syntax) through the situation, but also pays attention to grasping the meaning of language (understanding expression) through the specific situation, and organically combines the form and meaning of language. Therefore, situational language teaching can not only lay a solid language foundation for students and cultivate their language ability, but also enable students to develop a sense of discourse context, including discourse context, situational context and cultural context on the basis of language, cultivate students' discourse competence and social language competence, and cultivate students' ability to use language in practice. This is the significance of situational language teaching to foreign language teaching in China.

4. Design Principles of Situational Teaching Method

Any teaching method has its essential implementation principles. Teachers should also follow relevant principles when conducting situational teaching.

According to the teaching materials based on the situational approach, some principles of situational language teaching can be reflected. According to Jack, Richards in 2000, "The main characteristics of the approach are as follows: 1) Language teaching begins with the spoken language. Material is taught orally before it is presented in written form. 2) The target language is the language of the classroom. 3) New language points are introduced and practiced situationally. 4) Vocabulary selection procedures are followed to ensure that an essential general service vocabulary is covered. 5) Items of grammar are graded following the principle that simple forms should be taught before complex ones. 6) Reading and writing are introduced once a sufficient lexical and grammatical basis is established(10)."

The following are the recommended principles in vocabulary teaching and learning. The first principle is intuitiveness. Intuitive situations can simplify cognition, thus making the complex simple, the abstract concrete, making knowledge easier to perceive and form a deep memory. Designing scenes close to life in the English vocabulary class can help to present the target vocabulary more intuitively and stimulate the sensory experience of students, so as to bring them into it and acquire vocabulary naturally in the process of exploration. For example, in student's book 1, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press of senior high school English

book (2019), an activity form unit 5, into the wild, asks students to look at the pictures and complete the idioms with animal names:

- 1). as busy as a(n)_____.
- 2). kill two_____with one stone.
- 3).When the cat’s away, the_____will play.
- 4). hold your_____.
- 5). It’s raining_____and_____.



Figure 1. Pictures related with idioms(13)

This activity uses pictures to create contexts which can better mobilize students’ various senses to participate in learning activities and help them better understand and remember new knowledge. According to the animals and corresponding scenes, students can guess the relevant words in animal idioms, correspondingly, they are bee, birds, mice, horses, cats and dogs.

The second principle is diversity. In order to promote students’ language acquisition, teachers should provide a variety of language output opportunities as much as possible in the classroom teaching process, which can promote students’ all-round and flexible mastery of vocabulary, thus maintaining a fresh sense of classroom teaching activities, and promoting the overall improvement of language ability. For example, in student’s book 1, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press of senior high school English book (2019), an activity form unit 1, a new start, asks students to complete the posters with the correct form of the words in the following box(13).

badminton drama band debate gym piano stage photography science



Figure 2. Posters

According to the drawing and descriptions on these posters, students can predict out the corresponding clubs and relevant information about clubs. In addition to posters, which are visual information activities combining pictures and written text, there are other types of activities, such as an activity in the same unit---distinguishing the differences between American and British English. Asking students to look at the pictures and get to know the American English words and their British equivalents(13). Just as you can see the following pictures and the corresponding meaning of words.



Figure 3. British English and American English

Through the visual display of pictures, students can clearly connect their national cultural background knowledge of Britain and America through visual information, distinguish the meaning of these six groups of words, and understand the differences between British English and American English.

The third principle is interest. The creation of scenarios should fully consider students’ interests, hobbies and the creation of interesting scenarios will help to enhance students’ emotional motivation in vocabulary learning, and greatly enhance class activity and student participation. For example, in student’s book 3, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press of senior high school English book (2019), an activity form unit 5, what an adventure, asks students to look at the items in the first aid kit and talk about what they are used for. Add anything else that you think would be useful(14). Just as the drawings below, students can combine what they want learn with their adventure experiences to express their ideas, when using the given words in the drawings, students can internalize the following vocabularies about the first aids on an adventure.



Figure 4. Items in the first aid kit

The fourth principle is culture. There are cultural background differences in any language. In order to reduce the sense of distance, sometimes teachers need to combine the unique cultural

background of vocabulary to create a specific situation, which is more conducive to students' understanding and mastery of vocabulary. For instance, in student's book 3, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press of senior high school English book (2019), an activity form unit 4, amazing art, about Chinese art forms, asks students to look at the pictures and answer the questions. 1) What do you know about these art forms? 2) Have you tried any of these art forms? Share your experience with the class(14). Based on the thinking to the following Chinese art forms, students can combine the visual information in the pictures, and students almost are the Chinese natives, they have a certain understanding of Chinese traditional culture to some extent. Therefore, they can learn new vocabulary through cultural factors, so that they have a stronger grasp of vocabulary, and can not forget easily, and have a certain grasp of the context of vocabulary.



Figure 5. Chinese art forms

5. The Types of Situation in Situational Teaching Method

In teaching practice, teachers can use various forms to create situations. Here are some of the author's own thoughts on situations creation.

First, create situations with real objects, drawings, PPT and other visual aids. Physical objects have the characteristics of image and intuition. Using objects to create situations can better mobilize students' various senses to participate in learning activities, help students better understand and remember new knowledge, and cultivate students' observation, imagination, memory and thinking abilities. In vocabulary teaching, in order to enable students to more intuitively understand the meaning of words and establish the connection between words and semantics, teachers should use objects, pictures, stick figures, videos, music and body language as much as possible to create context, which is conducive to reducing the translation of interlanguage, helping students to deepen vocabulary memory, and cultivating English thinking, reducing students' dependence on Chinese. For instance, in student's book 1, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press of senior high school English book (2019), an activity form unit 5, into the wild, about animal migration, asks students to look at the pictures and choose the animals that migrate. And then talk about what they know about animal migration(13).



Figure 6. Animal migration

This activity will show real animal pictures in front of students, students can easily understand, quick memory. Students can make use of the relevant background knowledge about animal migration in their daily life, such as the information about animal life they learn from the Internet, watching movies, TV dramas, short videos, etc., to help them answer the above questions. The combination of pictures and vocabulary is a very useful English learning method. This kind of picture can also help students consolidate knowledge, cover up words, and let them speak English by looking at the picture. It can not only check their knowledge grasp, but also help them improve their understanding and memory of concrete things, and compare knowledge points with reality, so as to learn more efficiently.

Second, performing situations relies on the use of body movements to express the meaning of words, and to increase the enthusiasm and participation of students. The teacher can adapt the dialogues or plots in the text into short plays according to the teaching needs, and let the students perform them in class, so as to cultivate the students' language ability. The short play in class will let students be immersed in the scene, participate in the performance with interest, and actively internalize the language information. For example, in student's book 1, an activity form unit 3, family matters, using language part, asks students to complete the dialogue with the correct form of the words and expressions in brackets(13). Here, students can be divided into four groups. The group members will play different roles. In this way, students can actively participate in the dialogue of the role performance, and the forms and meanings of these verbs can also be fully practiced.

Dad: Adam, Sally, come here. Mum ¹ _____ (have) something to tell you.
 Adam: Coming!
 Sally: Coming!
 Mum: I ² _____ (call) Grandma yesterday and invited her to our house this Sunday. We ³ _____ (throw) her a big birthday party! So, we each need to choose a present.
 Adam: I know – I ⁴ _____ (give) her a new tea set. She ⁵ _____ (like) drinking tea!
 Mum: Good choice. What about you, Sally?
 Sally: I ⁶ _____ (think of) making a scarf for her.
 Mum: Good idea. I'm sure Grandma ⁷ _____ (love) it. Oh, ⁸ _____ you ⁹ _____ (finish) the guest list yet, dear?
 Dad: Yes, I have, and I'm working on the invitations.
 Mum: OK. So we still need to prepare food and drinks. I'll make a checklist.

Figure 7. The dialogue of the role performance

Third, create situations with stories. In senior high school English vocabulary teaching, teachers can use humorous stories to create situations and introduce topics. The color pictures, animations, objects, expressions, actions and postures involved in the story can stimulate students' visual and auditory systems, activate students' thinking, activate the classroom atmosphere, and promote the development of students' positive sense. For example, in student's book 3, an activity form unit 4, amazing art, using language part, asks students to look at the picture(14). Describe what is happening using the passive form of the words and expressions in the box.

By setting the scene in the picture, combining the given verb and changing it into the passive voice as required, students can give full play to their imagination, organize language expression and create sentences. At the same time, students are asked to describe the whole picture in a coherent sentence to create a short story, so that students can not only exercise their logic and understanding ability, but also internalize the above verbs.

arrange carry hang paint put up sweep write



Figure 8. School art exhibition

Last, create situations with music. Music can attract students' attention, stimulate students' interest in learning, create a language environment for students to integrate viewing, listening and speaking, and deepen students' understanding to vocabulary they have learned. Combine music with vocabulary teaching, or play music or English songs related to the relevant words to create a relaxed and happy learning atmosphere and stimulate students' desire to learn. For instance, in student's book 1, unit 2, before teaching the passage "Neither Pine nor Apple in Pineapple", teacher can play a song, called "Lemon tree", to introduce the the topic(13). This form of introduction, coupled with the upbeat rhythm of music, can mobilize students' interest in learning. And by asking the teacher, "Do you know which fruit is mentioned in this song?" "Do you like it? Why?" Thus enter the study of the article.

6. Suggestions for Situation Creation

Situational approach plays an important role in promoting English vocabulary teaching. Teachers should pay attention to the following problems when creating situations.

First, the situations created should be closely related to the teaching objectives. Some scenarios are very interesting and can attract students' attention, but they have little to do with the teaching content, which is a common problem in high school English classroom teaching when creating scenarios.

Second, create situations that are inspiring. Good situations should be able to stimulate students to have cognitive conflict, thus stimulating their thirst for knowledge. For those problems that students have some understanding but cannot completely solve with their existing knowledge, the creation of scenarios can re-stimulate students' cognitive conflicts and encourage students to actively participate in class activities with a purpose.

Third, the creation of the scene should be concise, the type and number of props should not be too much, so as not to distract students' attention and grasp the key point of the scene.

In short, situation plays a very important role in English teaching, which can create a good language environment and fully mobilize the non-intellectual factors of students to promote their active learning and use of language.

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