

Research on High School English Vocabulary Teaching Based on Thematic Context

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Abstract

Vocabulary teaching is of great significance in senior high school English teaching, but the current senior high school English vocabulary teaching deviates from the thematic context and tends to mechanical memory, leading to inefficient vocabulary learning for students. This paper takes Unit 2 Food for thought in the second volume of English textbooks published by FLTRP edition as an example to conduct teaching practice research. It elaborates on relevant design ideas and proposes teaching strategies from three aspects: discovering themes, focusing on themes, and deepening themes.

Keywords

Thematic Context, High School English, Vocabulary Teaching.

1. Introduction

The English Curriculum Standards for General High School (2017 Edition Revised in 2020) (hereinafter referred to as the *Curriculum Standards*) points out that vocabulary learning is not a simple word memory, nor an independent word practice, but a comprehensive language practice activity carried out in a specific context with specific themes. Students perceive and understand the meaning of relevant topics through listening, speaking, reading, reading, and writing, and use words to express the information and meaning of relevant topics (Ministry of Education, 2020). At present, most high school English vocabulary teaching is disconnected from the context, teaching words and phrases in isolation, and allowing students to repeat and memorize them over and over again. This mechanical memory method not only has poor learning performance, but also students may feel disgusted with learning English over time.

Therefore, teachers should conduct vocabulary teaching in the thematic context based on the thematic meaning. The Curriculum Standards mention that the thematic context covers topics such as human and self, human and society, and human and nature, involving fields such as humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, providing topics and context for disciplinary education. In teaching, teachers should guide students to use the structure of words and the context of the text to understand the meaning of words, use resources such as dictionaries, learn the usage of words, and boldly use new words to express their own meanings. In teaching activities, teachers should constantly reproduce relevant words based on the theme context. For example, before group activities, teachers should remind students of the requirements for using relevant words and consciously encourage them to use newly learned words in discussions. In the process of students' vocabulary learning, teachers can guide students to use mind maps to sort out vocabulary according to the theme (Ministry of Education, 2020). This points out the direction for high school English vocabulary teaching, which is based on discourse, guided by thematic meaning, and following the process of pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading, to help students achieve vocabulary cognition, consolidation, and application in language practice.

2. The Current Situation and Problems of High School English Vocabulary Teaching

The author found through attending high school classes that the current high school English vocabulary teaching mainly adopts the following process: Firstly, the teacher assigns word previews to help students familiarize themselves with some of the words before class; Secondly, during class, the teacher uses a vocabulary guide to explain vocabulary, which is divided into key words, sub key words, and a small amount of supplementary vocabulary. The teacher explains vocabulary in the following aspects: definition, part of speech, derivatives, collocations, etc. Finally, after learning some words, teachers will use dictation or dictation to test students' learning outcomes. Therefore, there are the following problems in English vocabulary teaching in senior high schools: (1) Under Teaching to the test, teachers' teaching concepts only stay in teaching knowledge, what to test, and what to teach. Teachers do not have the awareness to carry out vocabulary teaching from the thematic context. (2) Lack of effective strategies for vocabulary learning and consolidation. At present, vocabulary teaching mainly adopts a relatively mechanical memorization method, which is not very effective in activating students' existing vocabulary knowledge and cannot help them learn the functions and meanings of words simultaneously.

3. Strategies for Vocabulary Teaching Based on Thematic Context

Cheng Xiaotang (2018) pointed out that a classroom based on thematic meaning exploration is to design classroom teaching goals, content, and activities around a certain theme. The author attempts to conduct teaching practice research using the example of Unit 2 Food for thought vocabulary teaching course in the second volume of English textbooks published by FLTRP edition, guiding students to discover themes and activate relevant existing vocabulary knowledge; And apply vocabulary knowledge in the context around the theme; Finally, deepen the theme, transfer and internalize vocabulary knowledge, and integrate theme meaning exploration into the whole process of vocabulary learning.

3.1. Discover the theme in pre-reading and activate students' existing vocabulary knowledge

Before class, the teacher should discover the thematic context of the unit. In class, questions are used to activate some vocabulary knowledge related to the thematic context, which not only helps students consolidate the vocabulary knowledge they have already learned, but also helps students strengthen the connection between new and old knowledge, facilitating the acquisition of new knowledge. The thematic context of this unit is people and society. This unit introduces diverse dietary cultures and healthy dietary habits, guiding students to delve into the relationship between healthy eating and lifestyle, ultimately achieving an understanding and tolerance of diverse dietary cultures, and reflecting and improving their dietary habits.

The author believes that at this stage, teachers can first provide some pictures of food from different countries, let students see the pictures and say the names, and then through group discussions, let students think about which other countries' food they know. Teachers can provide students with clues by giving names of countries and foods on the PowerPoint presentation. For example: Curry (India), Dim sum (China), Pasta (Italy), Fish and chips (United Kingdom). Through this activity, not only does it activate students' existing knowledge, but it also lays the foundation for their future vocabulary acquisition.

3.2. Focus on the theme in while-reading and create situations to apply vocabulary knowledge

At this stage, teachers should use the cultural knowledge and thinking patterns contained in the discourse to create situations related to the theme, helping students apply vocabulary knowledge in the context. On the one hand, teachers should create integrated and connected practical situations around the theme, guide students to use visual learning tools such as charts to sort out the theme vocabulary, summarize the complex relationships between vocabulary and other elements of the discourse, link fragmented knowledge, and deeply understand and accurately grasp the theme of the discourse; On the other hand, teachers should create practical situations for communication and sharing based on the essence of language interactivity, encourage students to use newly learned vocabulary in dialogues, and incorporate it into their own language and cognitive system (Zong Fengchang and Sun Xuyang, 2012).

This unit introduces diverse dietary cultures and healthy eating habits. *A Child of Two Cuisine* This article describes some Chinese and Western foods. After quickly browsing through this article, students will combine the food comments materials in the using language section to help construct the vocabulary network of this article. For example, ask students to complete the following table based on the description of the article.

Table 1. Food comments

Name	Appearance	Smell	Taste	Feel
Stinky tofu	Grey thing	A burnt sports shoes	Not so bad	Someday fall in love with it
...				

The second article in this unit, *Cold Trusts*, introduces the lifestyles of people from different professions. Based on the previous learning of new and old vocabulary, combined with the article content that is close to students' actual lives. Teachers can create situations for students to judge whether their lifestyle is healthy and provide corresponding reasons; Then guide students to think about what healthy eating habits and lifestyles are, and reflect and improve their own eating habits. In situations, teachers should encourage students to express their opinions and actively apply new and old vocabulary in communication.

3.3. Deepen the theme in post-reading and expand the vocabulary knowledge internalized in the situations

At this stage, students already have relevant knowledge about a specific theme and the cognition acquired in the context of that theme. Therefore, teachers should guide students to transcend discourse, connect with real life, reflect on the cultural connotations and value orientations brought about by discourse, and internalize and transfer the learned knowledge.

This unit not only introduces diverse dietary cultures and conveys healthy dietary habits, but also allows students to think about the reasons behind different dietary habits, enabling them to achieve an understanding and tolerance of diverse dietary cultures. Teachers can assign some after-school questions and have students present them in the next class, such as: Why does Sichuan region love spicy food? What are the reasons for the abundance of Western dairy products? Etc. Teachers should also pay attention to clarifying evaluation criteria in activity requirements, guiding students to transfer and apply vocabulary knowledge constructed in discourse learning, creatively proposing problem-solving solutions, and reasonably expressing viewpoints, in order to experience the practicality of the learned vocabulary, enhance learning efficiency, and comprehensively and accurately grasp vocabulary usage (Zheng Huanhua, 2013).

4. Conclusion

Learning vocabulary is not a mechanical form of memory and isolated practice combinations, but rather based on thematic meaning and combined with discourse to carry out vocabulary teaching. This is not only beneficial for the development of students' vocabulary knowledge and language abilities, but also for the cultivation of their subject literacy, ultimately achieving the teaching goal of improving the effectiveness of vocabulary teaching.

References

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