

Exploration on the Application of Exquisite Corpus in English Grammar Teaching

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Abstract: Exquisite corpora like lyrics, proverbs, tongue twisters, not only contain a lot of authentic language expressions, but also include interesting contexts and catchy rhythms. Besides, these exquisite corpora are often interesting and closed to life, which can greatly arouse students' enthusiasm in study, and ease their stress in studying grammar. In the potential sense, exquisite language materials are conducive to the cultivation of the aesthetic sense of language, as well as students' intercultural communication ability and cultural accomplishment. This essay chooses Class 11, Senior 1, No. 1 Middle School of Zaoyang, Hubei Province as research object, through empirical research, so as to explore the effect which grammar teaching with exquisite corpus has brought on students' grammar learning, grammar application ability, and their language competence. It is also expected that this teaching way could make a difference to students' cultural awareness, artistic appreciation and the level of intercultural communication.

Keywords: Exquisite corpus; Grammar teaching; English ability; Cultural literacy; Aesthetic education of language

1. Introduction

This topic belongs to the research field of linguistics, specifically exploring the application of exquisite corpus in high school grammar teaching, such as lyrics, proverbs, tongue twisters. Grammar, as a rule of a foreign language, is often boring for students, and it is also difficult to a certain extent, so grammar classes often make students feel dull and are hard to stimulate students' initiative. However, these problems can be avoided when we introduce the use of exquisite corpus into grammar teaching.

This paper adopts the method of empirical research, and selects Class 11, Senior 1, No. 1 Middle School of Zaoyang City, Hubei Province as research object, using the questionnaire as main survey form. Besides, during the course of studying, document method, action research, questionnaire investigation method, are used synthetically.

In foreign countries, in ESL (English as a Second Language) teaching and learning, exquisite corpus as a potential tool to promote language acquisition has been recognized by many researchers and teachers, such as Lo and Li (1998)[1], Ulya, M. (2010)[2], Intani, N. (2011)[3], etc. Songs are considered as a good language learning medium that promotes listening, speaking, reading and writing skills and provides learners with the opportunity to learn pronunciation, rhythm, grammar and vocabulary.

In high school grammar teaching, it is beneficial to stimulate students' interest in learning grammar and improve their English ability and application ability of English language by using exquisite corpus in grammar teaching. With the interesting context and catchy rhythm, the use of exquisite corpus can cultivate the perception of language beauty, construct aesthetic classroom, and develop aesthetic education. The cultural background contained in the corpus will help cultivate students' intercultural communicative competence and humanistic quality.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Previous studies on significance of using exquisite corpus in teaching

At home and abroad, a number of studies have shown that choice of language materials suitable for students' current English level, full of ideological and cultural characteristics, not only can enrich the form of English teaching, widen the path of the teaching, but also can arouse the students' interest in learning English, at the same time develop their language sense, listening, thinking and aesthetic ability,

etc. In the teaching, based on the actual situation of students and the teaching contents, teachers select the appropriate interesting exquisite corpus, which is beneficial to cultivate their ability of cross-cultural communication, and to create a relaxed, pleasant classroom atmosphere, reducing the stress and distance, thus improving teaching efficiency.

2.1.1. The enhancement of study interest and the enthusiasm

The study found that songs, proverbs, tongue twisters and other exquisite language materials have a certain effect on improving students' enthusiasm in learning foreign languages. The use of music in foreign language teaching can make students feel relaxed and happy, relieve the pressure and anxiety brought by the foreign language class. Songs can help increase their enthusiasm and attention, thus making the classroom atmosphere more active and student-centered. Razak, N.A.N. & Md Yunus, M. (2016)^[4], Coleman, R. C. (2017)^[5], all agree that songs can provide a change from routine classroom activities. The use of songs in English class can make the classroom atmosphere from monotonous to pleasant. Songs can also relieve the tension in the classroom, and then improve the enthusiasm and efficiency of students' learning.

2.1.2. The improvement of language knowledge and language ability

Marjorie H. Holden and Mimi Warshaw (1985)^[6] contend that for the English teaching, study of proverbs can be an umbrella under which numbers of objectives may be accomplished, such as specific grammatical forms in creative writing, grammatical analysis of unusual constructions, the expansion of vocabulary, the recognition of rhetorical devices, etc. Besides, the findings from Azza Ashraf Mohammed Abdel Rahim (2013)^[7] show that using context of songs in teaching grammar implicitly has effects on improving the writing performance of junior at high schools. Through the help of selected songs clips accompanied with their lyrics, the grammatical features are impeded in without explanation of the grammatical rules and without learners' awareness (Azza Ashraf Mohammed Abdel Rahim, 2013).

2.1.3. The cultivation of cultural literacy

Proverb study will excite both the teacher and the students and should nurture skills that carry over or transfer to the study of literary classics as well as to social studies (Marjorie H. Holden and Mimi Warshaw, 1985). The similar idea could be found in Dwi Haryanti (2017)^[8] research, that proverbs are believed to have an important role in language teaching as a part of obtaining cultural knowledge, metaphorical understanding, and communicative competence. They have been considered an important part of the fostering of pupils, as they prompt moral values and present common behavior.

3. Research Process

3.1. The whole empirical design

The concentrated teaching time is one month in January. The grammar teaching of Senior Grade One is mainly focused on attributive clauses, so for this time's empirical teaching, I choose some exquisite corpus related to attributive clauses, including songs, proverbs, mottos, tongue twisters and so on. The teaching time mainly adopts students' separate English self-study time at night, while taking into account the students' normal English classes in the daytime.

3.2. The case presentation of teaching procedures

3.2.1. Case presentation of teaching attributive clause using the song "Cry on my shoulder".

Step1. Use multimedia player to play the song to students. After that, ask them to discuss in groups to tell partners their feelings about the song. Invite some students to share their feelings.

Step2. Listen again. When it comes to the attributive clauses in the song, I (the teacher) pause the player and let the students take the notes about the sentence they have heard.

Step3. Show the complete lyrics and ask students to check their notes. Help students to find out the meaning of these sentences according to the context of the lyrics.

Step4. Based on the meaning, ask the students firstly observe the sentence structure by themselves, and then analyze and discuss the function of the clauses led by "that", "who", "where", etc. in groups.

Step5. Relied on a general understanding, explicitly show students the grammar points of the attributive clauses, and explain to them the differences of the clauses which are led by different relative pronouns.

Step6. Teach students some basic rules of English liaison, such as loss of plosion, consonant to vowel linking. Help students grasp the rhythm of English lyrics and learn to sing it.

3.2.2. Case presentation of teaching attributive clause using proverbs.

Step1. I read the proverbs to my students, and students follow me to repeat the sentences.

Step2. Divide the students into small groups and let them discuss to find out the meaning of each proverbs.

Step3. I invite some volunteers to translate each proverb, and pay attention to the places where students make mistakes and the phrase which are unknown to students.

Step4. I explain the common mistakes to students, for example, when students translate the attributive sentence, they prefer to put the attributive at the end of translation according to the original sentence order, but according to Chinese expressing habit, attributive is put in front of the nouns, which is different from English expression.

Step5. I explain for students the idiomatic expressions in proverbs and add some others.

Step6. Help students learn the concise and balanced sentence structure of proverbs, feeling the catchy rhythm in reciting.




4. Results and Discussion

After a period of intensive empirical teaching using exquisite language materials, I choose questionnaire survey and examination to learn about students' gains and improvement during this period. The gains not only include the enhancement of English knowledge and ability, but also include the cultivation of English interest, the development of English thinking quality, intercultural communication ability, and the grasp of language aesthetic feeling in this process.

4.1. Students' satisfaction with using exquisite corpus to teach grammar

When students are asked about whether they are satisfied with this teaching method and what the distance between this teaching method and their ideal teaching method is, the vast majority of students are satisfied with this teaching method and think that it is quite suitable for their own learning goals. When it comes to the choices for different learning forms of grammar course, among the textbook sentences, exercises and exquisite corpora, nearly half of the students prefer to choose the more vivid and interesting exquisite corpus.

Table 1 Students' satisfaction of the grammar teaching style with exquisite corpus (single choice).

Options	Subtotal	Proportion
I am satisfied with this teaching method and think that it is very suitable for my own learning goals	35	 63.64%
I am generally satisfied, and think this teaching way is quite in line with my learning goals	18	 32.73%
Not satisfied. I do not have much demand on this teaching method	2	 3.64%
The number of valid filling	55	

As the context created by exquisite corpus is live, it can improve the boredom of using textbook sentences to explain grammar. Unlike grammar exercises, exquisite corpus can be sung, recited, easy to remember, close to students' life, so it can solve the problem that although students can understand or analyze grammar, but cannot skillfully use the grammar in context.

4.2. Students' preference on the teaching environment

In the process of my empirical teaching, I adopted three different teaching environments. One is to

teach in English, supplemented by explanation in Chinese, which is welcomed by most students. The second method is to teach totally in English and create a pure English learning environment, ranked secondly in popularity. The third way of teaching is to teach in Chinese and use multimedia as a supply, which is welcomed by only a small number of students.

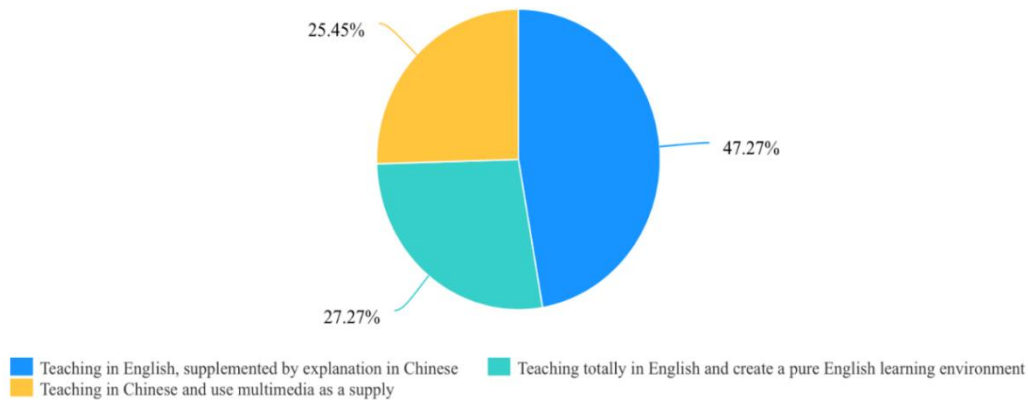


Figure 1 Students' preference for language environments in English grammar teaching (single choice).

When asked how students feel about learning in an all-English teaching environment, 30.91% of the students showed that they could basically accept and understand the lesson content, and believed that their long-term persistence would contribute to the improvement of their English ability. 56.36% of students said they can only understand a part, but they insist on following the teacher's thought. But at the same time, there are 12.73% of the students did not understand completely in class, in a state of giving up the class.

Table 2 Students' feelings in a pure English teaching environment (single choice).

options	subtotal	proportion
I can basically accept and understand the lesson content, and believe that the long-term persistence will contribute to the improvement of their English ability	17	30.91%
I can only understand a part, but I insist on following the teacher's thoughts	31	56.36%
I totally cannot understand the teacher in class, in a state of giving up	7	12.73%
The number of valid filling	55	

From the results of the two figures, it is not difficult to find that students actually hope that their teacher can use more English in the English class. Although it may be a little hard for them to totally accept the class content, most students still prefer an English class where their teacher will teach and talk with them in English most of the time.

In the teaching of exquisite corpus, teachers can create a foreign language environment for students, which is very conducive to the improvement of students' English ability, especially their listening ability. However, for high school students who do not have a solid English foundation and high English ability, teachers can assist the process of English explanation with a small amount of Chinese explanation. The exquisite corpus contains many idiomatic expressions and some complex grammatical structures. Appropriate Chinese explanations will help students to better understand the grammatical knowledge and can also take care of students who have a little difficulty in English at the same time.

4.3. Students' gains on grammar teaching with exquisite corpus

4.3.1. The gains on English interest and knowledge

After a period of intensive teaching using exquisite language materials, 47.27% of the students believe that their biggest gain is the enhancement in the aesthetic sense of English language and the improvement of interest in learning English; 32.73% of the students think the biggest gain is the

consolidation and mastery of grammar knowledge, and the improvement of oral and listening ability; 20% of the students think they have mostly gained from mastering some exquisite language expressions through the corpus.

Table 3 Students' choices on the biggest gain in teaching with exquisite corpus (single choice).

options	subtotal	proportion
The mastery of some exquisite language expressions through the corpus	11	20%
The consolidation and mastery of grammar knowledge, and the improvement of oral and listening ability	18	32.73%
The enhancement in the aesthetic sense of English language and the improvement of interest in learning English	26	47.27%
The number of valid filling	55	

The questionnaire results of empirical teaching are basically consistent with the former literature researches. Songs, proverbs and other fine language materials are close to life and convey some common emotion of human beings. Therefore, learning grammar in this context is very conducive to students' understanding and application of grammar. Exquisite corpus has a strong rhythm, and includes many authentic expressions, making it easy to be memorized and applied. Besides that, using fine material in teaching also creates a more relaxing and interesting classroom atmosphere.

4.3.2. The improvement on English abilities

When it comes to students' opinions about which English abilities have been greatly improved during this period of empirical grammar teaching using exquisite language materials, 72.73% students think speaking ability is the most improved aspect; 69.09% of them think listening is the most improved aspect; followed by English grammar 47.27%, and the last two aspects are reading and writing. (Shown by figure 1.2)

The above results indicate that the use of exquisite language materials in grammar teaching does improve students' listening and speaking ability during grammar learning. Students have improved their oral ability by singing and reciting the exquisite language materials. At the same time, they have gradually grasped the rhythm of English in the catchy rhythm of songs and proverbs, and improved their listening ability.

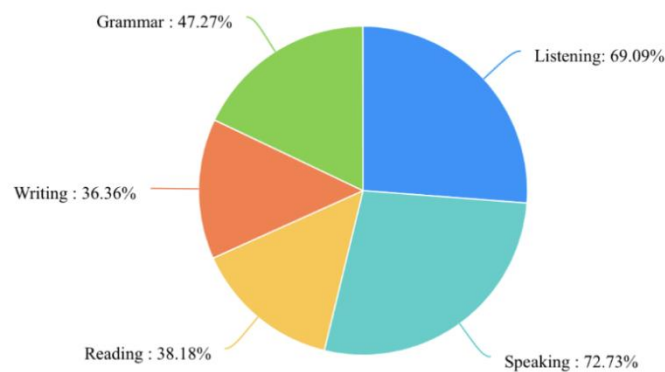
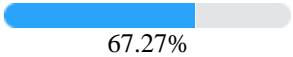
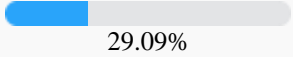
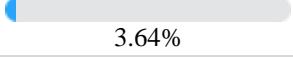


Figure 2 Students' choices on the greatly improved English abilities (multiple choice).

As for the application of exquisite corpus after class, most students think that exquisite corpus is close to the expression we use in our daily life, which is very helpful for English communication. Students in a small part think that generally the study of exquisite corpus is helpful for daily English communication. Only few of students think that the study of exquisite corpus is not helpful for their own English communication.

Table 4 Attitudes towards the application of exquisite corpus in communication (single choice)

Options	Subtotal	Proportion
I think the exquisite corpus is close to my life language expression, and very helpful to my English communication	37	 67.27%
The study of exquisite corpus is generally helpful for daily English communication.	16	 29.09%
The study of exquisite corpus is not helpful for their own English communication.	2	 3.64%
The number of valid filling	55	

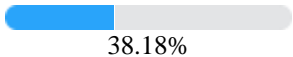
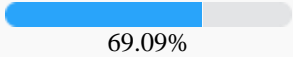

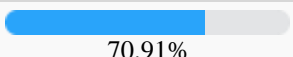
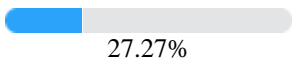
From the above survey, it can be seen that exquisite corpus is conducive to the cultivation of students' ability to apply English grammar, which is quite different from the textbook sentence examples or exercises. Only when the corpus taught by the teacher is close to students' life, students can better apply it in their life, cultivating and improving their English ability.

4.3.3. The cultivation on cultural accomplishment

Authentic corpus reflects English thinking and different cultural characteristics, so in addition to improving English knowledge and ability, students can also cultivate English cultural literacy in the learning process of exquisite corpus.

According to the questionnaire survey, over 70% of the students believed that during the period of intensive teaching using exquisite materials, they began to gradually understand the expression differences on English and Chinese thinking; 69.9% of the students thought they had learned many idiomatic expressions, such as "lose the ground", "one can't make brick without straws"; 47.27% of the students understood the closed-loop thinking among English listening, speaking, reading and writing, learning input and application output; 38.18% of the students feel that their grasp of English language sense has been enhanced; At the same time, 27.27% of the students realized some cultural characteristics behind the fine corpus, such as the openness and straightness of western thinking.

Table 5 The acquisition in exquisite corpus study, besides the grammar knowledge (multiple choice).

Options	Subtotal	Proportion
grasp of English language sense has been enhanced	21	 38.18%
Have learned many idiomatic expressions, such as "lose the ground", "one can't make brick without straws"	38	 69.09%
Have understood the closed-loop thinking among English listening, speaking, reading and writing, learning input and application output	26	 47.27%
Have gradually understand the linguistic differences on English and Chinese thinking	39	 70.91%
Have realized some cultural characteristics behind the fine corpus, such as the openness and straightness of western thinking.	15	 27.27%
The number of valid filling	55	

Using good materials in English teaching, it brings to students not only gain of knowledge and ability, but also the feeling of the language beauty. Students experience the beauty of language rhythm in the catchy rhythm of exquisite language materials, the beauty of artistic conception in the context created by the language, and linguistic differences caused by the different English and Chinese thinking, thus gradually cultivating students' intercultural communication ability and cultural accomplishment.

5. Conclusion

Through a period of empirical teaching with exquisite corpus, students generally feel that their interest in learning English has increased, and they have mastered a lot of useful language expressions through learning the language materials. Their English ability, especially their oral and listening ability, has been greatly improved. In addition, in terms of the use of language, students can better understand grammar in the context and apply it in their own life expression and communication. In the process of learning the corpus, students are constantly exposed to authentic English expressions, gradually understand the different expressions between English and Chinese caused by the different thinking pattern, and realize the interconnection between English input and output. In terms of cultural literacy, students can cultivate artistic conception of the language. Unwittingly, they have gradually enhanced the intercultural communication ability through understanding the difference between English and Chinese thinking, thus achieving the goal of cultural literacy cultivation.

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