

# English Tense Teaching in Secondary Schools Based on the Perspective of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics

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**Abstract:** As a new research focus, ECL has been applied to translation, contrastive study between English and Chinese, rhetoric and other fields, and also has provided a new perspective for language teaching. In junior middle school English teaching, tenses have always been one of the most important part. However, the traditional teaching mode of English tenses is hard to arouse students' interest in learning, and also reduces the efficiency of teaching. Therefore, on the basis of reviewing and summarizing the development of ECL and its current researches in the field of English teaching, this paper aims to explore the strategies of English tense teaching in junior middle school, to provide some new ideas and directions for foreign language teaching in China.

**Keywords:** Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics, English tense, Teaching approach.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the academic team headed by Professor Wang Yin of Sichuan International Studies University has devoted itself to the establishment of the indigenous psychology of China, Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL), which focuses on the "humanism" and "embodiment" of language. Gradually, The study of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL) is introducing from the field of linguistics theory into language teaching practice. The teaching view under the perspective of ECL provides a new research orientation and prospect for the educational and scientific research industry in China. Under the guidance of ECL's teaching concept, teachers can explore new teaching ideas through interactive perception and personal experience based on empirical researches to make up for the long-lasting deficiency of the traditional education model (Wang Jiao 2019).

As a new field of foreign language teaching, an increasing number of scholars have published relevant papers in major journals in China and contributed academic strength. However, there are still a few teaching researches related to Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL). CNKI contains only more than 10 articles, and most of them belong to the field of college English teaching, with rare special researches on English tense teaching in junior high school. Therefore, on the basis of reviewing and summarizing the development of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL) and its current researches status in the field of English teaching, this paper aims to explore the strategies of English tense teaching in junior middle school, hoping to provide some new ideas and directions for foreign language teaching in China.

## 2. The Connotation and Development of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL)

Since the 1970s, under the impact of postmodern philosophy and cognitive science, the "Cognitive Linguistics" centered on human and meaning has been gradually constructed, realizing the third revolution in the field of

linguistics in the 20th century (Wang Yin 2022).

Professor Wang Yin further realized indigenization of linguistics in China, developing Cognitive Linguistics into Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL) from the perspective of inheritance, integration and development. Its core theoretical point of view can be summarized as reality-cognition-language, that is, human language ability is not innate, but comes from "embodiment (embodied experience) + (embodied cognition)" (Wang Yin 2019).

At present, the study of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL) has been widely applied in many fields, such as translation, contrastive study between English and Chinese, rhetoric (for example, metaphor) and so on, which provides a new research perspective for the development of linguistics and the field of language teaching.

The philosophical foundation of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL) is embodied philosophy. It is pointed out that human thought, including cognition, concept, meaning and language, is obtained from the direct interaction and embodied communication between itself and the external environment. The same is true of English classroom teaching. Students first experience the perceptual language, form the concept of language in interaction and experience, and then realize the cognition of language and acquire the language. Therefore, the research of foreign language teaching based on the concept of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL) has gradually broadened the scope of more and more scholars, which have been constantly exploring the strategies and methods of its application in foreign language teaching in elementary, secondary and higher education.

## 3. Literature review of English teaching practice from the perspective of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL)

English teaching research based on the perspective of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL) has presented a trend of rapid growth in the past few years. This chapter aims to summarize the development status and direction of English teaching research from the perspective of Embodied-

Cognitive Linguistics (ECL).

In 2019, Professor Wang Yin first tried to form the reconstruction of English grammar teaching ideas from the perspective of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL), and carried out the core concept of “tracing back to the source, shifting ideas, aiming to innovate and combining teaching and practice” in teaching practice (Wang Yin, Wang Tianyi 2019).

Since then, there has been a wave of foreign language teaching research upsurge from the perspective of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL). Wang Jiao (2020) continued to systematically study college English grammar teaching on the basis of the theory put forward by Professor Wang Yin, and proposed some strategies such as deeply understanding the real causes of grammar and shifting the negative motivation factors that affect students’ learning, so as to make up for the shortcomings in traditional grammar teaching. At the same time, scholars not only focus on English grammar, but also explore the empirical research on the teaching effectiveness of vocabulary, applied writing, spoken English and other basic abilities (Yu Jiarui 2020; Zhang ailing 2020; Zhang Na, Zhang Huiting 2021, etc.).

In addition to the study of basic language ability teaching, a growing number of scholars also pay much attention to the overall strategies in primary and secondary schools and college English teaching. Among them, Professor Lin Zhengjun of Beijing Foreign Studies University points out that it is necessary to guide learners to acquire language knowledge and learn to use language in communication through the exploration of foreign language teaching practice from the perspective of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL). Learners are encouraged to use language expressions according to register and speaker intention (Lin Zhengjun 2020). In 2022, after summing up the differences in cognition ability and characteristics of students in different studying phases, Professor Lin Zhengjun further discussed the specific application of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL) teaching theory in English teaching in primary, junior and senior high schools (Lin Zhengjun 2022).

To sum up, it can be concluded that English teaching based on the concept of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL) has become a hot spot in the field of language teaching, and the teaching ideas of the combination of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL) and English grammar have been paid much attention to by lots of scholars. However, there has been rare special research on English tense teaching strategies in junior middle school yet. Therefore, this paper will explore the teaching of English tenses in junior high school from the perspective of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL), and try to design a set of scientific, effective and systematic English classroom teaching strategies.

## **4. Exploration of English Tense Teaching Strategies in Junior Middle School Based on Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics**

Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL) pays much attention to embodiment (interactive experience) and emphasizes that the essence of language learning is to learn how to use language to achieve the goal of communicative output in the authentic contexts (Sun Ya 2017). The key of English classroom focused on students’ interactive experience is to establish vivid and authentic communication situation so that students can feel and experience language firsthand.

Therefore, this paper tries to integrate the concept of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL) based on interactive experience into English tense teaching in junior middle school, and summarizes the following teaching strategies: 1) the pre-class preparation link: stimulating learning motivation and transforming from “being passive” into “being active”; teachers creating situational classroom and turning “abstraction” into “concreteness”; 2) class instruction link: revealing the causes of grammar and mastering the law of use efficiently; students experiencing situational classroom and improving classroom participation; 3) after-class application link: practicing situational language after class and developing students’ critical thinking; giving comprehensive evaluation and summary and impressing course content on students.

### **4.1. Pre-class preparation link**

#### **4.1.1. Stimulating learning motivation and transforming from “being passive” into “being active”**

The learning process of English tense itself is a bit abstract. So there is a great deal of difficulty in understanding English tenses for junior high school students. Therefore, junior middle school English teachers should make up for the shortcomings of the combination of blackboard blackboard writing and oral explanation in the traditional classroom, enhance students’ interest in learning, and focus on transforming from “passive” input into “active” output.

In the pre-class preparation stage, we can refer to the driving link of the Production Orientation Approach(POA) put forward by Professor Wen Qiufang (2015). Through the problems exposing in the first attempt output, the students are becoming aware of their own shortcomings, so as to stimulate the interest and motivation of learning by themselves. Taking the teaching of “present progressive tense” as an example, teachers can first put forward some abstract questions: “Do you know ‘present progressive tense’?” Or “How do you understand ‘present progressive tense’?”. Some students may preview in advance or have seen the present tense in the text before, but they still find the concept of actions being carried out or taking place vague and abstract, difficult to really comprehend, and unable to make an accurate and clear definition of the “present progressive tense”. Then, the teacher can guide the students in a more specific way: “How do we describe the action that is taking place? For example, what are we doing now?” Students may give a series of vague answers such as “in the classroom”, “having a lesson” or “we are speaking”, but cannot accurately interpret the specific connotation of the basic form of “be verb + v-ing” in the present progressive tense. Teachers can create an authentic communicative scene in which students ask each other “What are you doing?” in the form of groups activity, write example sentences, and try to define and sum up the rules of “present progressive tense”. Through the introduction of topic tasks, students are more likely to find their own defects in language expression, modes of thinking, understanding of the present progressive tense and so on, and stimulate learning motivation.

#### **4.1.2. Creating situational classroom and turning “abstraction” into “concreteness”**

In the pre-class preparation stage, teachers need to make full preparations, collect a large number of video materials with authentic language, use a variety of multimedia teaching, create appropriate real situations, transform abstract text knowledge into intuitive realistic experience, and help

students combine language materials learning with their own life experience (Liu Xiaoming 2020).

Now still taking the teaching of “present progressive tense” as an example, teachers could choose to present it to students in the form of video in class.

Example 1: Linda is doing homework now.

Above the example sentence, the video shows correspondingly an animation of a little girl doing her homework in front of the desk;

Example 2: The boy is drinking milk.

Above the example sentence, the video shows correspondingly an animation of a boy drinking milk with his head raising;

Example 3: Some students are playing football on the playground.

Above the example sentence, the video shows correspondingly an animation of a group of students playing football on the playground.

Example 4: The students are reading English texts aloud.

Above the example sentence, the video shows correspondingly an animation of all students reading English texts in the classroom.

Such a vivid animation scene can help students intuitively experience these situations from the vision, so that students are able to easily understand the “doing homework”, “drinking milk”, “playing football” and “reading English texts” means the series of ongoing action of “doing homework”, “drinking milk”, “playing football” and “reading English texts”, thus leading students to more deeply understand the connotative meaning of “ongoing or happening action” in the present progressive tense.

## 4.2. Class instruction link

### 4.2.1. Revealing the causes of grammar and mastering the rules of use efficiently

In the classroom instruction link of English tenses in junior high school, teachers can make full use of the theoretical point of view of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL) categories to explain the specific grammatical phenomenon of tenses, so that students can learn what grammar rules they have learned are and why the rules are used the way they are, so as to master the rules of the use of English tenses efficiently and accurately.

Taking the present perfect tense as an example, the structure of “have+V-ed” is usually used to emphasize the influence of what happened in the past on the present state, which is distinguished from the simple past tense, but there is little specific explanation for its reasons in the traditional grammar book, so that students can only memorize it by rote, rather than grasp its essence and connotation. When the English verb “have” is followed by a noun phrase, it can be used to indicate the typical meaning of “possessing something”. Professor Wang Yin and Professor Wang Tianyi (2019) pointed out that the “have” structure used in the present perfect tense is also based on this prototype usage above:

Example 5: I have a pencil.

Example 6: I have closed the door.

Example 5 means “I have a pencil at present”. In the present perfect tense of example 6, the noun phrase “a pencil” followed by “have” in example 5 is replaced by the verb phrase “closed the door”, which can be seen that the past participle phrase replaces the prototype usage “have+NP”. Naturally, the sentence can be easily understood that the

subject “I” possess the state—“closed the door”, which is the reason that the present perfect tense can express the influence of what happened in the past on the present. In other words, the underlined part of the two example sentences has the equivalent grammatical function. Thus it can be seen that the word “have” still plays a “possess something” prototype function here, indicating whether its actions have an impact on the current state by using or not using “have” in English.

Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL) reasonably reveals the causes of the grammatical phenomenon of the present perfect tense, updates the traditional grammar’s view that “have” is only an auxiliary verb. It is simple and easy to understand, convenient for teachers to explain in class, and arouses students’ interest in learning, so as to grasp the essence and law of the use of tense grammar more efficiently.

### 4.2.2. Experiencing situational classroom and improving classroom participation

The teaching process of English in junior middle school should focus on strengthening students’ experience of language itself and language use, and on this basis, further guide students to establish the cognition of language itself and language use (Lin Zhengjun 2022). In the class teaching application, teachers should strengthen the communication between teachers and students on purpose, so that students can participate in class activities to the maximum extent possible, use in learning while learn in using, in order to effectively improve students’ interest in learning English. Teachers can adopt the form of competition in groups, guide students to think actively, and carry out classroom activities in a multi-modal form, so as to achieve the purpose of integration of learning and using.

Taking the teaching of “simple future tense” as an example, “My Dream” topic speech activities, simulated scene performances and so on can be carried out in class. Students are divided into groups of three to five members, and each group of students have to take turns to have at least three minutes of thematic speeches or scene performances (which can be combined with PPT, audio, video and other multi-modal presentation). Whether it is a speech or a scene performance, the theme is chosen by the students themselves, as long as closely follow the topic of “My Dream”. During the process of talking about the dream and the future, students are encouraged to use the simple future tense in language expression more frequently. Through this kind of immersive form, students can experience and interact in the situational classroom and improve their sense of participation in the classroom. In this process, the students learn to think actively in the activities, and gradually form the concept of English tense in their minds.

## 4.3. After-class application link

### 4.3.1. Practicing situational language after class and developing students’ critical thinking

The purpose of learning a language in class is to apply what we have learned after class. Students are supposed to be much proficient through practice in the use of situational language after class and review in time. At the same time, this phase will not only help teachers know more about the teaching effect, but also help students find out what shortcomings still exist in group activities, improving their communicative competence in the process of continuous learning and practice.

For instance, after learning the simple future tense in class, group members are expected to use situational language to give a speech with the topic of “My Dream” or give scene

performances, while other students need to observe the students who are performing carefully and give a score to them according to their speech or performance content, speech or performance posture, body language, presentation skills, innovative ability and emotional expression, and if possible, prepare camera recordings and videos in advance. The students can also learn a lot during the process of watching others perform and develop their critical thinking by giving some comments. In addition, according to the kept video material, the teacher is able to repeatedly observe and reflect after class, in order to improve teaching.

#### 4.3.2. Giving comprehensive evaluation and summary and impressing course content on students

After the activities involving the whole class, the teacher first ask students to act as an assistant teacher to conclude what have learned this lesson, and make a summary about the language mistakes of the performing students, focusing on the use of the simple future tense, including vocabulary, syntax and so on. The classroom based on interactive experience not only lingers on teaching knowledge itself in the classroom, in addition, teachers should also comment on the students' appearance and behavior, put forward suggestions, in order to help them to improve their interpersonal communicative ability. Through the way to establish a vivid and authentic communication situation, students can obtain more interactive experience about the language, impressed by the course content.

By carrying out the application of English tense teaching in junior middle school from the perspective of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL), the effectiveness of classroom teaching can be obviously viewed, which not only greatly improves students' basic cognition of these kinds of tenses, but also promotes the students' communicative competence to a certain extent, and combines classroom teaching with learners' real life experience. At the same time, it also implements the teaching concept of "whole person education" which is strongly advocated at present.

## 5. Conclusion

Above all, it can be seen that English teaching from the perspective of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL) has become a hot spot in the field of modern language teaching, and the teaching idea of the combination of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL) and English grammar has been paid much attention to by many scholars. However, there has been rare specific research on English tense teaching in junior high school. Therefore, there is still a lot of room for development and progress in this field.

This paper makes a tentative exploration on the teaching practice of English tenses in junior middle school from the perspective of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL), and summarizes the teaching strategies from three aspects, including preparation before class, class instruction and after-class application and review. However, there are still lots of problems to solve, such as about how to further perfect its theory in practice and how to apply its core ideas to empirical classroom teaching, requiring more and more excellent teachers and researchers to continue to enrich and improve, constantly learn in the teaching practice process, find and solve problems, and verify and correct them, so as to bring

more fruitful results to the field of foreign language teaching.

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