

**Interpretation of 8 Tenses Song / Planting Trees (Song)**

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**Key words:** English grammar teaching; situation; multimedia technology; tenses song

**Abstract:** Grammar teaching is a hot topic in the study of foreign language teaching and it is also one of the most difficult aspects in middle school English teaching. Throughout the history of modern foreign language teaching, it is not difficult to find that there always exist two dominate points of view towards grammar teaching: one is always in favor of the teaching of grammar and the other against it. Especially in the new century, it has aroused heated discussions. Should the teaching of grammar be optimized or should it be neglected? At present, middle school students commonly find it hard to master English grammar. The monotonous teaching methods and mechanical ways of practicing, plus lack of interest on the part of students, often result in low comprehensive language proficiency. Therefore, how to adopt a more effective grammar teaching method, with the emphasis placed on fostering students' ability to use the English language comprehensively, becomes an important issue in English teaching.

**1. Introduction**

The " 8 Tenses Song" is a result of "The Use of Multimedia Technology to Optimize High School English Grammar Teaching" which is an issue conducted by the author under the 2006-2007 National Basic Education Grant for Foreign Language Teaching and Research Project Issues. In 2017, the author's "Multimedia - Situation - Grammar Teaching Mode " won the Second Prize of the Guangxi Basic Education Teaching Achievement Award (the best award for English subject). It has proved through practice that this mode can optimize the objective of teaching grammar.

This article consists of three parts: the 8 Tenses Song, its background & theoretical basis, its process & effect and postscript. It focuses on how to make good use of the multimedia technology to create situations into a song based on topic, animation, audio and video settings, to help solve the problems in teaching English tenses.

## 2. 8 Tenses Song / Planting Trees (Song)

**8时态歌/植树歌**  
(8 Tenses Song/Planting Trees)

词曲：庄艳玲  
Words & Music : Zhuang Yanling

1=C  $\frac{4}{4}$  快速、轻快

0 0 5 5 | 5 - - - | 5 5 5 - | 0 0 0 0 |  
Plant-ing trees. Plant-ing trees.

0 0 0 5 1 2 | 3 5 3 0 5 1 2 | 3 5 3 0 5 5 5 |  
We plant trees<sup>(1.3)</sup> eve-ry year. We plant trees eve-ry year. We plant trees  
plant-ing trees. We are now plant-ing trees. We are now

6 6 5 5 4 4 3 | 2 - 0 5 1 2 :|| 3 5 3 0 5 1 2 |  
eve-ry year eve-ry year. We are now ma-ny trees. We've plant-ed  
plant-ing trees plant-ing trees. We've plant-ed trees next year. We'll plant more

3 5 3 0 5 5 5 | 6 6 5 5 4 4 3 | 2 - 0 5 1 2 :||  
ma-ny trees. We've plant-ed ma-ny trees ma-ny trees. We'll plant more  
trees next year. We will plant

6. 5 5 3 4 3 | 2 - - 2 1 7 | 1 - - - | 0 0 0 0 |  
more trees ne-xt year ne-xt year. (朗诵) Read aloud

0 0 0 5 1 2 || 6. 5 5 3 4 3 | 2 - - 2 1 7 |  
We plant trees<sup>D.S.</sup> more trees ne-xt year ne-xt

1 - 3 - | 5 - 1 - | 1 - - - ||  
year.

朗诵 Read aloud :

(女) Girl

我们每年种树，  
We plant trees every year.  
我们正在种树，  
We are now planting trees.  
我们已经种了很多树，  
We've planted many trees.  
明年我们将种更多的树。  
We'll plant more trees next year.

(男) Boy

去年我们种树，  
We planted trees last year.  
老师到来的时候我们正在种树，  
We were planting trees when the teacher came.  
老师到来之前我们已经种了很多树，  
We had planted many trees before the teacher came.  
我们(向老师)保证来年将种更多的树。  
We promised (to the teacher) that we would plant  
more trees the next year.

## 3. Background & Theoretical Basis

We all know the importance of grammar in a language. If we took vocabulary as bricks and tiles, we should take

grammar as reinforced concrete. You may build a house without reinforced concrete, but you can't build a skyscraper without it. Being framework for the functioning of a language, grammar plays the role as a structural principle. Without grammar, there would be no consistency for a recognized form to convey thinking, thus no language could be constituted. Grammatical competency is a knowledge system to master the form of a language and is a precondition for developing the practical ability of speech. A language is not only a system of habits, but also a system governed by rules. To learn English grammar well is essential for our students, especially it's of great help in their sustainable development in English learning.

However, a controversy has been lasting throughout the past two decades over Strengthening or Weakening English grammar teaching and learning in our schools, resulting in perplexity and hesitation in the English grammar teaching reform which lags far behind other classes such as reading, listening and speaking classes.

The fact is that new conception and methods in English grammar teaching & learning have scarcely been adapted in the past three decades, despite of the great changes in educational environment that has come up with much-higher demand from our students, that most of our middle school English teachers dominate the grammar class by stressing stuffing students with grammar rules and mechanical training, and that most, if not all, students feel English grammar dull and hard to learn, hence a pervasively low efficiency in English grammar learning.

In the author's view of point, the arouse of interest, contextualization and multimedia technology are keys for teachers to achieving efficiency in English grammar teaching and strengthening students' memorization of the grammatical rules.

### **3.1 Interest**

Many experts and scholars have made meaningful research and given constructive advice in improving English grammar teaching & learning. One key point in common is that to transform the tedious grammar knowledge into a workable language ability depends in a great degree on whether or not the students' interest is waken and on how they are positively involved in the classroom.

“ All intellect-related work depends on interest( Piaget).” In language learning, memorization is fundamental. Memorization can not go without interest, the latter being an important guarantee for strengthening the former. In English teaching & learning, students' interest shall be taken into account in first priority.

To arouse students' interest in grammar learning and strengthen their memorization of the grammatical rules, contextualization and multimedia technology are necessary approaches for teachers.

### **3.2 Contextualization ( Chapter-based Context)**

Constructivism believes that learning is a situational experience process in which knowledge is not gained from the teaching of teachers but is constructed automatically through the interaction of the learners and situation. The teaching & learning situation includes in its category topics, context and speech circumstance, which are inseparable, sometimes compatible, other times just as a whole. Without situation, no learning and using could be done. The main purpose of creating an effective situation is, by adapting effective approaches, to initiate the learners' interest, motivate their enthusiasm in involvement in the teaching & learning activities.

Gagné R.M. divides the learning of verbal information into three categories. The first involves the learning of "names" or "symbols", the second is the learning of isolated or individual facts, and the third is the learning of "organized information". The latter two kinds of knowledge are usually referred to as "declarative knowledge". Unfortunately, most middle school teachers treat English grammar merely as "names" or "symbols", which leads to tedium and inefficiency of grammar teaching. In Gagné's view, information is stored in long-term memory in coded form. The main characteristics of the coding materials entering long-term memory are semantic or are organized according to meaning. Therefore, the most important prerequisite for a grammatical rule to achieve long-term memory is to have a meaningful background or context. This organized background previously acquired and stored in the learner's memory can facilitate the coding of verbal information to form schemas.

### **3.3 Multimedia Technology**

Facts indicate that the traditional means of education and teaching methods failed in meeting the immediate needs of students while the adaption of modern multimedia technology, with its advantages in visualization, vividness, intuitiveness, information in quantity, plentiful content and diversification of teaching methods, may maximize students' interest in positively participating in the teaching & learning activities. The adaption of multimedia technology greatly helps in improving the teaching process and raising its efficiency. Without the participation of multimedia, there would be no modern educational technology, and a real sense classroom teaching & learning reform would be out of the question.

Multimedia technology is the technical support for realizing contextualization and diversification in language teaching. This technical support is irreplaceable by other media. Its remarkable advantage is that it can, at a high speed and effectively, compose and synthesize various kinds of media information, such as text, graphics, images, animation, sound, video and so on. It greatly expands the scope of non-language teaching media and adds many valuable features to teaching events. This media feature plays a key role in supporting the coding

and extracting processes contained in various learning outcomes. By quickly switching unusual visual and auditory stimuli of different scenes, it controls attention effectively, helps learners in memory coding and storage of the knowledge, and generates specific images extractable for the learners. These images in turn constitute a method of coding and storing memory as well as clue sources for extracting the content learned (Gagne, R.M.).

#### **4. Composing Process & Effect**

##### **4.1 Origin**

The 8 Tenses Song is a combination of interest, contextualization and multimedia technology. The " 8 Tenses Song" is a result of "The Use of Multimedia Technology to Optimize High School English Grammar Teaching" which is an issue conducted by the author under the 2006-2007 National Basic Education Grant for Foreign Language Teaching and Research Project Issues.

As stated above, people's communication of ideas and access to information takes place in certain situations. There'd be no linguistic social activities without linguistic situation. Therefore, the highest arrangement of a language is not the sentence as described in the traditional grammar but the chapter context instead because the precise meaning of sentences can only be accessed to through the specific chapter. A chapter with coherent meanings provides us with a context in the language learning. To students with reading competence, it is extremely effective to deliver teaching with paragraphs logically associated. In grammar class, the setting-up of a situation with context is mainly supported by topic, questions, dialogues, animation, audio and video.

Today, multimedia such as the internet, video, animation and music are the most influential forms of popular art and entertainment that can mobilize our students' interest to achieve an effect of teaching-as-entertaining. To import quantities of these elements in English grammar teaching should be available and encouraging.

The English lyrics of the 8 Tenses Song written by the author were first published in the society journal of Foreign Language Professional Committee of the China Education Society, "English Teachers", Issue 4, 2009,page 15-19. The teaching of eight tenses together with passive voices was designed with the action situation of planting trees. Since then, it has been promoted to a certain extent through the reports of the National as well as the Guangxi Biennial Conferences on Foreign Language Teaching in Primary and Secondary Schools and on Nanning No.3 High School Campus Network. At the beginning of 2017, the music of Tenses Song, also known as Tree Planting Song, was introduced in demonstration classes in numeral schools with the topic "One Action Easily Settles Eight Tenses & Voices", which was widely praised and won the 2017 first prize for English

Teaching Achievement of Guangxi Primary and Secondary Schools. At the end of 2017, on the school Red-songs Singing Competition stage, students from the Chinese & American Class sang the song together. In April 2019, after two years of teaching practice, "8 Tenses Song" was recorded in the studio and played on Youku video platform, receiving good social responses. At the beginning of the upload, the heat reached high up to 205.

#### 4.2 Concept

English grammatical rules, like the formula theorem of mathematical physics, can play a template effect that can be applied to all parts of the world and help language learners learn more, faster and better.

The design concept of 8 Tenses Song is, on student-centered basis, through living situations and a song, to activate grammar rules, simplify grammar teaching and mobilize students' positive factors so that students can learn English merrily and lay a good foundation for lifelong learning.

#### 4.3 Content

Verb tense is a unique linguistic feature of the English language and an indispensable part of English sentences. There are eight tenses in common use: Simple Present Tense, Simple Past Tense, Present Continuous Tense, Past Continuous Tense, Present Perfect Tense, Past Perfect Tense, Future Tense, Past Future Tense. These eight tenses are the essential grammatical elements that Chinese middle school students must master at present.

Current junior and senior middle school English textbooks and online platforms rarely have a total review unit for the eight basic tenses. Even if there are, the verbs used in example sentences are mostly irregular verbs such as *do, read, write, teach, hear, eat* and so on, which weakens the exemplary role of grammar and poses certain difficulty for junior students to understand and remember the rules, not to say to make correct use of them.

8 Tenses Song consists of two imaginative pictures based on "Present" and "Past", each containing four examples of different tenses. Due to the author's insufficiency of musical literacy, only four basic tense soundtracks are created. The other group of four sentences concerning the "Past" are recited in Chinese and assigned to students as translation assignments, so that they can remember them more firmly. In the demonstration classes, the students can sing Tenses Song/Tree Planting Song along with the teacher after listening to it only once. It not only enlivens the classroom, but also makes the basic tense rooted in their minds. It is the first time in China to bring out typical sentences of eight tenses by means of singing.

#### **4.4 Effects**

4.1. By designing the situation of “planting trees” from the students' reality and integrating the boring eight basic tenses into the song, the rigid and abstract grammatical rules are transformed into vivid, concrete and easy-to-extract mental images.

4.2. When the eight sentences representing eight tenses are separated into two groups according to the “Present” and “Past” periods of teaching, the learning difficulty is reduced, which conforms to the cognitive law.

4.3. A “tree planting” action leads to eight typical sentences without superfluous words interspersed among them so that the content of memorization is highly concentrated and easy to remember.

4.4. Students can sing this song after they listen to it once and can do it skillfully by singing it twice, not only activating the classroom, but also making the basic tenses rooted in the mind like children's songs that are unforgettable for a life time, and eventually making the learning activities become the students' initiative and happy things.

4.5. Animation and music are universal languages so that this song is likely to spread both at home and abroad.

#### **5. Postscript**

In the demonstration classes in ten schools (excluding Nanning No. 3 High School that the author works in--- one top key high school of Guangxi, P.R. China ), the 2200 participants were students from different grades of Junior 3, Senior 1 and Senior 3. After being reminded in Chinese of the eight basic tenses that they had learned, they were asked to make four sentences with “plant trees” in four arbitrary different tenses. The result was that less than 5% of the students could complete the task within two minutes. It indicates that middle school students are far from satisfactory in mastering the eight basic tenses. Middle school classes are like this. What about universities? Do they also need to make up for this lesson?

#### **6. About the composer / author**

Zhuang Yanling, female, aged 57, is an advanced teacher with a 37-year experience of teaching English in Nanning No. 3 High School, Guangxi, the PRC, 4 first-class winners in National and Guangxi(province) English teaching competitions and supervisor of 2006-2007 National Grant for Basic Foreign Language Teaching & Research Project issue. Her "Multimedia - Situation - Grammar Teaching Mode " has won her the second prize of the 2017 Guangxi Basic Education Teaching Achievement Award. In the same year, her 8 Tenses Song won

the first class prize of the 2017 Guangxi Basic Education English Teaching Achievement Award.

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