# A Study on the Practice of Applying Scaffolding Theory to the Teaching of Subjunctive Mood

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## Abstract

This study intends to apply scaffolding theory to the teaching of English subjunctive mood in senior high schools. After reviewing the researches about scaffolding theory and some studies related to English grammar teaching, the author puts forward a real lesson plan for subjunctive mood teaching, which includes the analysis of teaching material, teaching aims, teaching key point and difficult points, teaching method and the most important, teaching procedures. During the teaching procedures, the author tries to analyze every step, namely, lead-in, presentation and observation, discovery, practice, production, summary and homework, and after-class reflection, from the perspective of scaffoldings the teacher has given to students. The final finding shows that scaffolding can stimulate students' interest in learning, and improve their ability of independent and cooperative learning. On the whole, the practice of applying scaffolding theory can be encouraged in English grammar teaching.

**Keywords:** English grammar teaching, subjunctive mood teaching, lesson plan, scaffolding theory

## 1. Introduction

English grammar teaching has long been a controversial topic since Communicative Approach was implemented in EFL teaching in the 1960s. In fact, it is of great importance and necessity to teach English grammar in China with the upsurge and prevalence of Communicative Approach. According to Wang Qiang (2006), Chinese learners learning English as a foreign language need a certain degree of mastery of English grammar. Generally speaking, there are mainly two mistakes in the English grammar teaching nowadays. One is that the objective of oral communication is much too emphasized while the importance of the grammar teaching and the accuracy of the language are neglected. The other is that some teachers tend to employ the traditional grammar teaching methods which are less efficient and lack of attraction for students. In order to change the poor situation of English grammar teaching, our cognition of English grammar teaching should be changed and therefore, a new English grammar teaching model should urgently be constructed, which should aim at serving students' communicative ability.

However, few studies nowadays have focused on applying scaffolding theory to English grammar teaching, let alone the teaching of subjunctive mood. As a hot issue of syntax among scholars all the time, subjunctive mood is also a rather important as well as difficult point in English language teaching. Therefore, a successful teaching model of subjunctive mood can probably be called a great step towards prosperous English grammar teaching. To achieve this goal, this paper puts forward a new English grammar teaching model, that is, the application of scaffolding theory to the teaching of subjunctive mood.

In this paper, by way of designing an active grammar lesson full of teacher's scaffoldings, a lesson plan of how to teach subjunctive mood is provided and analyzed, which includes the analysis of teaching material, teaching aims and demands, teaching key point and difficult points, teaching method, teaching procedures and after-class reflection. As a result, the examples and results can be used as references for other researchers in this field. In brief, the paper is intended to provide strategies for improving English grammar teaching.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 The Scaffolding Theory

The scaffolding theory originates from Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky emphasizes interaction and engagement with the target language in a social context and believes that there is a distinction between students' actual developmental level and potential level of development which forms the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as:

"…the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers." (Vygotsky, 1978, 96)

Since ZPD is a kind of transition from the students' potential level to actual development, it should be given much attention. Teachers should not just see the students' current achievement. Instead, teachers should try to find ways and set up scaffoldings to help students fulfill their immense potential. Meanwhile, the notion of ZPD is applied not only to teacher and student, but

also student and student. Group study or pair work can also contribute to a student's learning process. Through the communication and cooperation with teachers, desk mates or group members, students can build up higher levels' understanding towards skill or knowledge in their mind.

The notion of scaffolding method comes from Vygotsky's concept about the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) defines scaffolding method as a teaching/ learning process that enables learners to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts.

At first, scaffolding is a term used in the construction industry. Later on, it is used in the educational field to describe the effective support that teachers or peers give to the student. Students are regarded as architectures. Student's learning is a process in which they constantly and actively construct themselves, while teachers' teaching is a necessary scaffolding to support students to continuously construct themselves and form new capabilities. When students' abilities get improved, the scaffoldings can be removed. As the delivers of knowledge, teachers give necessary guides to students, making students master and acquire the skills which can enable them to work on higher level's cognitive activities. This kind of mastery and acquisition is consistent with student's age and cognitive levels. Once students acquire this kind of skills, they can adjust themselves and get promotion. Generally, scaffolding is contingency, fading and also transference of responsibility.

According to Ellis and Larkin (1998), there are mainly five steps in the process of scaffolding method.

First, build scaffolding. On a certain topic, teachers try to construct a conceptual framework according to the requirements of ZPD. The level of the scaffolding knowledge should be a little higher than what the students have already mastered.

Second, get into context. Teachers create some situations and guide students to get into these situations. Teachers can give the students some visual and auditory stimulus or something that students are familiar with to arouse their interest. Teachers should also interact with students and give some instructive questions to encourage them to think.

Third, explore independently. When students start exploring, teachers should give them some inspiration and guidance, and then make students to analyze. During the process of exploration, teachers should give students some timely hints to help students get improved along with the conceptual framework.

Fourth, cooperate. Students work in a group and discuss with the group members. In this process, they can share their opinions and experience with each other.

Fifth, evaluate. Evaluation towards the learning effects includes self-evaluation and evaluation from the group members. The evaluation content include self-study ability, student's contribution to the group's cooperative learning and whether completing the meaningful construction of knowledge.

These are the main five steps of scaffolding method. Of course there will be some adjustments according to the changes of subjects or conditions. The scaffolding method does not develop so well in China. It is just starting. Some educators have tried to explore and study the scaffolding method. However, the relative studies in China are just some implications that the scaffolding method can be used in English teaching but have not done a deep research. However, if the scaffolding theory is applied to English grammar teaching well, students' learning efficiency can be highly improved. For example, ever though group work has developed well in today's classroom teaching, some students still cannot learn well by themselves. However, if teachers give proper guide and meanwhile, group members help with each other, students' learning potential will be fully developed. By means of scaffolding approach, teachers can help student set up some meaningful scaffoldings and encourage students to imagine, which will make English grammar teaching and learning become much more interesting and easier. And then students' cooperative consciousness and abilities of solving problems can get improved as well.

## 2.2 Related Studies abroad and at home

Grammar is a kind of regular rules of the words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs and passages, which should be observed by people when they use one kind of languages. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary (the 7th edition), grammar is the rules in a language for changing the form of words and joining them into sentences. McKay (1987) thinks that there are three main views of grammar teaching, which are school of explanation, school of analogy and school of acquisition. In fact, the three kinds of views give different requirements to different learners. According to the achievements of some linguists, Mitchell(2009) concludes that learners ought to be offered opportunities to learn grammar at different stages to strengthen their comprehension of grammar and text-based as well as problem-solving grammar teaching are likely to contribute to the growth of learners' grammatical knowledge.

With regard to ways to improve English grammar teaching, Gao Yuan (2007) concludes that adopting new teaching methods, writing textbooks and pedagogical books are two efficient ways. Specifically, Lin Zhengjun and Liu Yongbing (2012) points out that in the process of grammar teaching, teacher should try to create particular contexts and show various aspects of grammatical forms and meanings. Furthermore, Cheng Xiaotang and Zheng Min (2002) give some detailed suggestions to teachers' grammar teaching. Students should master English grammar on the basis of understanding. That is to say, teachers should not only ask students to memorize grammar rules, instead, teachers should lead students to understand grammar rules. Meanwhile, teachers should encourage students to summarize grammar rules. All the views above are corresponding to the main tenets of the scaffolding theory, which has aroused interest and attention for a few years. There are also some researches from rather different aspects to dig out the way of teaching grammar. From the perspective of language aesthetics, Jia Fang and Li Ping (2013) says that in the teaching of English grammar, the teachers should lead the students to discover, perceive, appreciate and create the beauty of the language. From the above analysis, it is clear that the researches on English grammar teaching have lasted for a long time and researchers have also found out, generally or specifically, many effective ways to teach English grammar.

However, there are few researches on English grammar teaching with scaffolding method. As

reviewed above, there are mainly five steps included in scaffolding theory, which are building scaffolding, getting into context, exploring independently, learning cooperatively and evaluation. Whereas, English grammar teaching based on scaffolding method is still relatively new to many teachers, which should be highly emphasized and put into practice to improve students' mastery of English grammar and their communicative ability as well.

### 3. Lesson Plan of Applying Scaffolding Theory to the Teaching of Subjunctive Mood

*3.1 The Analysis of Teaching Material*

This piece of material "Unit 1 Arts" is selected from "New Senior English for China" for students in Grade 2 (Book 6). The focus of this class is on Discovering Useful Structures--- *If* clause in the subjunctive mood.

Type 1: Things that do not happen. E.g. *If* you were an artist, what kind of pictures would you paint?

Type 2: Things that did not happen. E.g. *If* Rob hadn't injured himself, we would have won.

Type 3: Things that will not happen in the future. E.g. *If* it were to/should rain tomorrow, I would stay at home.

However, since this lesson tends to use scaffoldings and some more meaning practice related to daily life, some mechanical exercises in the textbook are neglected in the teaching procedure.

*3.2 The Teaching Aims*

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to, first, get familiar with the three basic forms of *If* clause in subjunctive mood; second, use *If* clause in subjunctive mood correctly; third, develop their comprehensive language competence; four, desire to explore *If* clause in subjunctive mood further and put it into daily life; five, arouse their attention to society and form correct and positive values.

*3.3 The Teaching Key Point and Difficult Points*

The teaching key point is the format of three types of *If* clause in subjunctive mood, that is, *things that do not happen, did not happen* and *will not happen in the future.*

The teaching difficult points are the mastery of the three types of *If* clause in subjunctive mood and the usage of *If* clause in subjunctive mood in daily life.

*3.4 The Teaching Method*

The teaching method of this lesson is mainly communicative approach, of which activities that involve real communication, meaningful tasks to promote learning.

*3.5 The Teaching Procedures*

3.5.1 Lead-in

| Timing | 2 minutes |
|---|---|
| **Procedures** | 1.   After greeting, T shares a beautiful English song with Ss. And then lets them fill in the two blanks. <br><br> *"If I _____ (be) a boy, even just for a day.* <br><br> *I_____(will) roll out of bed in the morning, and throw on what I wanted…"* <br><br> 2.   Let two Ss give the answers. <br><br> 3.   T emphasizes the form of the words and introduces the topic---subjunctive mood. |

The lead-in part can attract Ss' eyes by a beautiful English song and at the same time, by filling in the blanks with correct verbs, Ss could be led into the topic unconsciously and would raise a question in their mind "why like this?", which makes a smooth transition to the next stage.

3.5.2 Presentation and Observation

| Timing | 5 minutes |
|---|---|
| **Procedures** | T presents and explains a poem which includes three types of *If* clause in subjunctive mood, that is, *things that do not happen, did not happen* and *will not happen in the future.* <br><br> *"If I had met you then,* <br><br> *I wouldn't have let you pass by.*      .....***past*** <br><br> *If I were with you now,* <br><br> *I shouldn't let you cry.*       .....***present*** <br><br> *If I were to see you again,* <br><br> *I would take you to fly."*       .....***future*** |

This part is a deeper input than the lead-in part, because this poem integrates all the three forms of If clause in subjunctive mood, which can certainly give students a new and overall presentation. In fact, the poem's three lines are three typical examples of If clause in subjunctive mood. This is the first scaffolding that is built by the teacher to lead students to analyze the internal structures of If clause in subjunctive mood by themselves, which is of course the next step.

3.5.3 Discovery

| Timing | 10 minutes |
|---|---|
| **Procedures** | **Individual work:**<br><br>1.  T: *Did you feel any grammar points according to the poem? Please think about it individually and write it down on your paper.*<br><br>2.  Let one student share his/her answer.<br><br>**Pair work:**<br><br>1.  Let Ss exchange what they have discovered with their desk mates and then do some corrections.<br><br>2.  Ask one student to give their final answer and T writes it on the blackboard according to the student's answer.<br><br>**Induction:**<br><br>1.  Show the structure of *If* clause in subjunctive mood on the PPT, and let Ss add it to fulfill their answers on the paper.<br><br><table><tr><td>Time</td><td>*If* clause</td><td>Main clause</td></tr><tr><td>Past</td><td>had done</td><td>would/should/could/might+ have done sth</td></tr><tr><td>Present</td><td>were/did</td><td>would/should/could/might+ do sth</td></tr><tr><td>Future</td><td>were/did should do/ were to do</td><td>would/should/could/might+ do sth</td></tr></table><br>*2.*  Lead Ss to remember the model verbs like this: "妈， 我受苦！", that is, "*might, would should could! + do sth/ have done sth*" |

There are totally three steps in this discovery process, individual work, pair work and then teacher's induction. This process is the second and meanwhile, significant scaffolding. As mentioned in the last process above, because the teacher has built the first scaffolding, the students can surely get into the grammar atmosphere and explore individually. The reason why pair work is followed is that the teacher takes full consideration of different students' levels. By learning cooperatively and evaluating with each others, students can share their

answers with and learn from each others. Finally, the teacher uses a mind map to show the structure, which is the key point of this lesson. To help students to remember the model verbs in the main clause, the teacher also gives a jingle to students.

3.5.4 Practice

| Timing | 5 minutes |
|---|---|
| **Procedures** | 1.   T lets Ss discuss the 3 questions on the PPT with their partner. <br><br> *1. If Rob hadn't injured himself, we _____ (have) won.* <br><br> *2. If you ____ (be) an artist now, what kind of pictures would you paint?* <br><br> *3. If it _____ (rain) tomorrow, I would stay at home.* <br><br> 2.   Ask 3 Ss to answer the questions and read the sentence. <br><br> 3.   Ask them what kind of situation it is, *past, present or future?* |

After teacher's presentation and detail explanation, this practice aims at consolidating what they have learned before, getting students be more familiar with the basic structures and trying to use the structures into real examples. In fact, this step can be regarded as a transition.

3.5.5 Production

| Timing | 15 minutes |
|---|---|
| **Procedures** | 1.   T provides several pictures about daily usage of *If* clause in subjunctive mood. <br><br> **Situation 1: When you want to ask others a question that can never be answered….** <br><br> Use an example with a picture: <br><br> *Q: If your mom and girlfriend fell into the river at the same time, who would you save first?* <br><br> **Situation 2: When you're angry and have nothing to say…** <br><br> Use an example with a picture: <br><br> *Eg: If you died in the future, you would die of bitchery.* <br><br> **Situation 3: When you want to give some suggestions…** |

| | Use an example with a picture: |
|---|---|
| | *Eg: If you had had the bag yesterday, it might have suited you very much.* |
| | 2.　After that, T creates three situations for Ss to discuss. |
| | **Situation1: One year ago, I chose to study further rather than found a job, because I was so crazy with the postgraduate life. What do you think should I do at that time?** |
| | **Situation2: Now my parents order me to feed myself, because I am an adult. What should I do?** |
| | **Situation3: If I am going to find a job. What kind of job should I choose?** |
| | 3.　Divide the whole class into several groups by 4 that every group is in charge with only one situation and ask them to try to use *If* clause in subjunctive mood. Every groups should give the teacher at least one suggestion. |
| | 4.　T gives an example first. "*If I were you, I would…*" |
| | 5.　Ask several Ss to give their suggestions to the teacher. |

This is students' output exercise. By using pictures of daily life which are familiar with students, students can be much more active in class. Meanwhile, this is the third scaffolding the teacher has built during this class. First of all, the teacher builds a scaffolding and uses several daily usages of If clause in subjunctive mood and creates three situations as examples for the following steps. Secondly, from the teacher's three own situations which can particularly arouse students' interests, students are willing to give some suggestions to the teachers by using If clause in subjunctive mood. Considerately, the teacher also gives an example first before students begin their discussion and this is also a small scaffold. After the students begin their discussion and give their creative suggestions to the teacher, it is time for teacher to remove all of these scaffoldings.

3.5.6 Summary and Homework

| **Timing** | 3 minutes |
|---|---|
| **Procedures** | 1.　**End of lesson summary** |
| | 　Share another song "because I love you" with Ss and emphasize the line "would you ever let me down?" by using a famous saying "to love is nothing, to be loved is something, to love and to be loved is everything". |

> *"If I got down on my knees and I pleaded with you,*
>
> *If I crossed a million oceans just to be with you,*
>
> *Would you ever let me down?"*

**2. Assignment:**

Give some suggestions to teenage puppy love. Use at least 3 different structures of *If* clause in subjunctive mood. At least 100 words.

This summary looks like an unrelated topic of this lesson, but the lines are full of *If* clause in subjunctive mood and the last line is a sublimation to arouse all of the students' emotions at the end of the class, which is novel and makes the beginning song echoes with the end song. Meanwhile, after the lesson, the assignment is rather simple for students to finish.

*3.6 After-class Reflection*

Based on scaffolding theory, this lesson gives a typical example of how to teach students English grammar efficiently and actively. Firstly, the lesson mainly consists of four scaffoldings timely built and then removed by the teacher to adapt to students' ability and competence at that time and to reach higher level of cognition. Secondly, this lesson tends to use some examples related to students' daily life and the teacher's self information, which can surely attract students' eyes at that time. However, there are also some shortages in this lesson. For example, because time is limited, it seems that the teacher has ignored students' different levels, especially students with lower English level, which must be paid more attention next time.

**4. Conclusion**

The importance of English grammar teaching is self-explanatory in English teaching. However, how to teach grammar effectively is urgently to know by most teachers and scholars. The impression of grammar teaching is always that teachers teach rules and students write down the rules and using a lot of exercises to consolidate the learning. In this paper, a new teaching method is adopted in modern English teaching, that is, applying scaffolding theory to English grammar teaching, especially the teaching of subjunctive mood.

Scaffolding is a kind of teaching pattern guided by Constructivism theories. It is different from the traditional one-way explaining teaching method. Instead, it focuses on teachers guiding students to construct and internalize the knowledge learned so as to reach higher level of cognition. To be specific, this method makes use of some interesting scaffoldings to guide students to explore grammar rules independently step by step and then they can get a conclusion through checking their answers in the communication with other group members and with the help of teachers. In this process, the teachers can arouse students' interest by the interesting scaffoldings to change the tedious atmosphere as well as to give students chances to study independently so as to obtain the state of changing the roles in class. Therefore, it is beneficial for both students and teachers. The application of scaffolding theory is in order to

try to solve the many problems existed in English grammar teaching and finally lead students to study independently with the help of teachers.

Using a real lesson plan, this paper analyzes in detail why scaffolding is built at that time and how scaffolding attracts students' interest, improves independent learning ability and cooperation ability. The results indicate that scaffolding can stimulate students' interest to a large extent and can also improve students' independent learning and cooperation ability. In conclusion, the practice of applying scaffolding theory can be used in English grammar teaching.

**Acknowledgement**

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