



“Grammar of Character”: Culture-Infused Grammar Tasks for Mixed-Age, Bilingual Classrooms

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Abstract

This paper presents the Grammar of Character framework as a decoding system of reading, designed for mixed-age bilingual classrooms. Drawing on theories of situated learning, attachment, and multiple intelligences, the framework integrates grammar, music, and character education to create embodied and contextualized learning. Through long-term observation of children—including the case of An Zhu, whose development from prenatal musical sensitivity to early reading and historical commitment offers a living example—the study demonstrates how musical intelligence supports bilingual literacy, fosters intrinsic motivation, and enables children to transform classical texts into lived experience. The study highlights theoretical, pedagogical, and cultural implications, and proposes directions for future interdisciplinary curriculum design.

Keywords: *Character Grammar, bilingual education, musical intelligence, situated learning*

1. Introduction

Language is humanity's most delicate form of breath. Before children learn to write, they have already spoken with the world through cries, laughter, murmurs, and imitation. Language acquisition is not simply about symbols and rules but is deeply rooted in context, attachment, and the musicality of rhythm.

Traditional language education often ignores these life-giving sources, reducing language to blackboard symbols, textbook sentences, and test blanks. This study originates from both the call of educational reform and the researcher's lifelong practice: over thirty years devoted to two central questions—why do some children fail to learn, and why do some lose the will to learn? Exploring multiple intelligences theory, the study identifies intelligence as a lens of understanding—like the monk and priest in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, weaving heaven's abstract knowledge with human context into a fabric of understanding.

Texts such as *Dream of the Red Chamber* and the *Book of Job* remind us that education is not merely about accumulating knowledge but about repeated trials of life, calling learners to find understanding where knowledge and context meet.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Context

Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasize situated learning, insisting that learning must occur in real-life contexts rather than abstract drills. This study embeds language learning within stories, games, and music, immersing children in sensation before introducing rules.

2.2 Multiple Intelligences and the Loom Metaphor

Gardner (1983) defined intelligence as a bio-psychological potential activated within cultural contexts. Here, intelligence is framed as a loom: heavenly warp (knowledge) and earthly weft (context) woven into the fabric of understanding. Musical intelligence, bridging linguistic, mathematical, bodily, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences, is especially crucial in early childhood.

2.3 Mathematics, Music, and the Fabric of Time and Space



In the Quadrivium, arithmetic is numbers, geometry is numbers in space, music is numbers in time, and astronomy is numbers in the cosmos. Music links these abstractions to lived experience.

2.4 Music, Language, and Ethos

For Plato and Aristotle, music shaped ethos—courage, temperance, grief, or freedom. Music's moral power suggests that grammar, too, must be linked with character.

2.5 Character Education and Language

Grammar is not merely structural but ethical. Character Grammar highlights the cultivation of virtue within the practice of language.

2.6 Flow Theory and the Metaphor of Star-Picking

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) emphasizes clear goals, balance of challenge and feasibility, and immediate feedback as keys to intrinsic motivation. This study emphasizes these conditions as central to classroom design, enabling children to climb ladders toward their own stars.

2.7 Character Grammar Framework

In the Character Grammar framework, each part of speech is reinterpreted through cultural figures and ethical metaphors. This redefinition transforms grammar from a merely structural system into a moral and aesthetic map of human experience. By pairing linguistic categories with characters from *Dream of the Red Chamber* and classical texts, the framework demonstrates how grammar can function as a bridge—linking linguistic form, cultural imagination, and character formation.

Table 2 presents an overview of the Character Grammar framework in bilingual format (Chinese/English), illustrating how each part of speech is aligned with both grammatical function and ethical resonance.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative action-research approach. The researcher, also the teacher, designs, implements, and reflects on lessons to explore how Character Grammar supports language, music, mathematics, and character development.

The research setting, the PLUS classroom, simulates a home-like, mixed-age environment built on context, belonging, and cycles of demonstration, invitation, and encouragement. Participants included four students (grades 1–8), whose interactions formed a small community of practice.

Data collection involved classroom observation, occasional audio/video recording, student work, teacher journals, IXL practice records, and AI-generated classroom snapshots. AI acted as recorder, audience, and companion—affirming children through recognition, affirmation, and awakening.

4. Findings

The findings indicate that the CHARACTER framework supports embodied and contextualized language learning. Through An Zhu's case, the nine conditions were vividly illustrated:

- Context: prenatal education, where the mother shared music, paintings, and stories.
- Home: a secure environment where the father's voice became an anchor.
- Affection: at three months, his first word was 'love,' which he used to call for his mother's embrace, even singing it as 'ah-yi ai.'



- Reading Aloud: at two and a half, he and his brother performed entire children's operas, role-playing characters and reading lines dramatically.
- Awakening: at age four, while reading Judges, he asked: 'Why did the Israelites keep repeating mistakes?' His mother explained: 'They lived in the moment; you are reading history.' This marked an awakening of thought.
- Commitment: at age four and a half, after completing the Bible, he committed himself to becoming a historian, determined to help humanity remember so mistakes would not be repeated.
- Transfer: dictating letters to his father, replacing unknown words with symbols, and adapting stories into his own versions.
- Encoding: his 'books' were printed and posted on the wall, giving him the dignity of authorship.
- Recognition: reading aloud before an audience, where listeners even guessed at his 'codes,' affirming his voice on a public stage.

5. Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Implications

Building on Gardner's (1983) definition of intelligence as a bio-psychological potential activated within cultural contexts, this study extends his framework through the loom metaphor: knowledge as heavenly warp, context as earthly weft, woven into the fabric of understanding.

This metaphor resonates with the motif of 'descending to earth' (下凡) in Dream of the Red Chamber. In the novel, immortals leave the clarity of heaven to enter embodied human life, where joy and suffering become the real teachers. Similarly, the C for Commitment in the CHARACTER framework signifies more than clarity; it marks the child's willingness to embody conviction—to 'descend' into responsibility and transform abstract knowledge into concrete action.

Thus, grammar is no longer only an abstract system of rules but a lived fabric: words become flesh, meanings become choices, and stories become decisions. In this weaving, grammar, music, and character are inseparable.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

Activity design replaces conventional lesson plans by integrating grammar with character formation, encouraging tangible contexts and collaborative learning.

5.3 Limitations

Findings are limited by sample size and context. Further testing across cultures and classrooms is needed.

5.4 Future Research

Future work could expand to different age groups, cross-cultural contexts, and digital tools (e.g., AI-assisted stories, multimodal assessment).

5.5 Summary

This chapter outlined theoretical grounding, pedagogical insights, research limits, and future directions, leading into the conclusion.

6. Conclusion



This study reimagined language education through the CHARACTER framework, integrating grammar, music, and character within embodied contexts. Findings show that Character Grammar supports bilingual, mixed-age learning and fosters intrinsic motivation through flow conditions. With An Zhu's case, the nine decoding conditions illustrate how affection, context, and music create pathways where children not only learn to read, but also commit themselves to life directions.

Ultimately, education is not about bringing stars down to children, but about giving them ladders—so they may reach for light, discover meaning, and write their own stories with commitment.

Part of Speech 詞類	Character 角色 (中/英)	Grammar Definition 語法定義	Character Sub-theme 品格副題
Articles 冠詞	石頭與綠珠草 / Stone & Grass	Honoring the Chosen One	命定與啟始 / Destiny & Beginning
Nouns 名詞	巧姐與嬌杏 / Qiao-jie & Jiao-xing	Naming the World	誕生與身份 / Birth & Identity
Nouns 名詞	黛玉與寶玉 / Daiyu & Baoyu	Naming the Soul	孤獨與相依 / Solitude & Dependence
Nouns 名詞	甄士隱與賈雨村 / Zhen & Jia	Echoing the Name	真實與虛妄 / Reality & Illusion
Pronouns 代名詞	寶玉與黛玉 / Baoyu & Daiyu	Calling & Responding	親近與疏離 / Closeness & Distance
Pronouns 代名詞	林肯與蓋茲堡宣言 / Lincoln & Gettysburg	Living as One People	自由與平等 / Freedom & Equality
Verbs 動詞	晴雯補裘 / Qingwen Mending	Breathing Life	真情與倔強 / Feeling & Defiance
Verbs 動詞	鳳姐理事 / Wang Xifeng	Moving the World	權謀與掌控 / Power & Control
Adjectives 形容詞	黛玉初入賈府 / Daiyu Entering	Seeing with Words	差恍與豐富 / Subtlety & Abundance
Adjectives 形容詞	寶釵與黛玉 / Baochai & Daiyu	Comparing Difference	娟雅與孤傲 / Grace & Pride
Adjectives 形容詞	動物狂歡節 / Carnival	Seeing the Exquisite	特質與氣質 / Trait & Temperament
Adverbs 副詞	劉姥姥進園 / Granny Liu	Coloring the Action	模擬與靈動 / Imitation & Animation
Prepositions 介詞	元春省親 / Yuan-chun	Bridge of Relation	孝順與孤絕 / Filial & Solitude
Conjunctions 連接詞	湘雲探春惜春 / Xiangyun et al.	Tying Thoughts Together	天真與憂鬱 / Innocence & Melancholy
Phrasal Verbs 動詞片語	小鼓手雅倫 / Little Drummer Boy	Healing the Heart	暗夜與寬恕 / Darkness & Forgiveness
Phrasal Verbs 動詞片語	雅各回家 / Jacob Returning	Struggling the Body	掙扎與順服 / Struggle & Submission
Phrasal Verbs 動詞片語	寶玉出家 / Baoyu Becoming Monk	Drifting with Others	迷惘與超脫 / Confusion & Transcendence
Imperative Verbs 祈使動詞	約伯提問 / Job's Questioning	Shaping the World	抗辯與信靠 / Protest & Trust



Volition Verbs 意志動詞	黛玉立誓 / Daiyu's Oath	Keeping the Vows	誓言與還淚 / Vows & Tears
Present Participles 現在分詞	香菱吟詩 / Xiangling	Naming Life Ongoing	磨難與綻放 / Hardship & Flourishing

This mapping highlights that grammar is never neutral; it is always situated within cultural and ethical horizons. By framing parts of speech as carriers of character, children in mixed-age bilingual classrooms are invited to approach grammar not as abstract rules, but as living metaphors for identity, relation, and moral imagination.

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