

The Application of Theory of Habitual Domains on English Majors' Extracurricular Reading

Chen tao¹ Zhao Caihong¹ Zhang qing

(1,Joint first authors)

(Shanghai Dianji University, Ganlan Road,Pudong Area, Shanghai)

Abstract

Extracurricular reading is essential for language learning. Based on the sampling survey of seven universities in China, it is proposed that with the help of the guidance from teachers, the Theory of Habitual Domains can be of help for English majors to cultivate good habits of extracurricular reading. The theory can also help students carry out effective reading.

Keywords: English majors; habit of reading; Theory of Habitual Domains

1. Introduction

Reading is an important method for students to enhance vocabulary and raise language level. As a language, English requires students to develop all-roundly in listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities, for these abilities do complement and influence each other. Extensive reading can increase the input of utility, reserve for the output of language and it also can help students to broaden their horizon and improve cross-cultural communicative competence.

Many experts and scholars of the world have investigated to English major students' extracurricular reading condition

and emphasized the profound influence of the extracurricular reading for English majors. They all have recognized that lots of extracurricular reading plays a significant role in English learning, Dong Yafen (2003) believed that "extensive reading is the basic way to enlarge vocabulary---reading easily perceptible and authentic English materials and books is one of the fundamental ways to improve oral English" [1]. A small amount of practice or reading material is far less than enough for language input and less input would directly generate less output. Lili did a survey on English major students' extracurricular reading situation in Foreign Language College of Guangzhou University and pointed out that teachers should get to know students' reading habits and give them correct guidance [2]. However, not all English majors can realize the importance of extracurricular reading. Many students have not formed the habit of extracurricular reading. Common problems of English majors such as lacking interests, weak reading motivation and poor reading ability of one's own seriously restrict the improvement of the students' learning ability.

In real teaching, how could teachers give corresponding guidance to students on extracurricular reading? At different stages of their learning course, are English

majors still suffering the same predicament? In order to get further understanding of these problems and prove scientific and reasonable guidance for English majors as well as for teachers, the research team of Shanghai Dianji University made a survey concerning English majors' reading aims in seven universities.

2. Questionnaire in seven universities

2.1 Method and scope of investigation

In 2013, from March to April, the research team carried out a survey among 487 English majors, including 54 male English majors and 433 female: 124 freshmen, 146 sophomores, 185 juniors and 32 senior students from seven universities in China. The questionnaire consists of questions of single-option, multiple-choice and open-ended questions. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed and 487 valid questionnaires were received and the universities which were involved in this survey are located in Shanghai, Hebei, Shan'xi, Hubei Provinces.

In order to ensure the feasibility of the survey, the questionnaire went through several discussions and three times of distribution among small groups and five times of revision. The questions contains English majors' extracurricular reading frequency, the frequency of students borrowing library books, reading purpose, reading material selection, reading problems and so on.

2.2 Analysis on research results

2.2.1 Autonomous learning ability and extracurricular reading.

It is shown by the statistics gathered from the survey that reading frequency of English majors are gradually decreasing with their study process and basically, the proportion of those who read everyday only amounts to 10% while the proportion of those who hardly read anything reaches

up to 30%. The data indicated that as English majors spent less and less time reading in their learning course, not only did their reading frequency reduce, but their autonomous learning ability also declined, as a result, their learning initiative faded away and their learning goal blurred.

2.2.2 Professional reading requirements and extracurricular reading.

As for library reading frequency and quantity, data shows that each month, about 60% of these English majors go to the library and they borrow 1 to 3 books for their extracurricular reading; 58% students go to library for 1 to 4 times each month, but the proportion of the students who never read anything reaches up to 30%. Those whose frequency of borrowing books is more than 10 times are less than 10% and the proportion of those who can finish reading 9 copies a month is only 3%. It can be seen that these English majors haven't put enough emphasis on reading and they don't set strict demands on themselves to form good reading habits.

2.2.3 Learning Enthusiasm on Extracurricular Reading.

The final result of the survey shows that in each grade, there are no more than 33% male students who never read anything in their spare time and there are 7% the female students who borrow books at a frequency of 10 times and there are only 4% who can finish more than 9 copies a month. Apparently, the English Majors lack interests of reading.

Reading is the core part of English learning and it is essential to spiritual cultivation and cultural heritage. Passion is the driving force for learning. Only when the students' reading enthusiasm gets evoked and their motivation of reading is enhanced, can they have the ability to ena-

ble themselves to fully enjoy the fun of reading.

2.2.4 Reading habits and extracurricular reading.

For English majors, extracurricular reading is of great help to improve their English level. In the investigation, there are 50% students reading for improving their reading ability, building vocabulary, and broadening horizons and enhancing the quality of reading. Required reading forced by teachers is carried out by 27% students. According to the survey, the majority of the students want to achieve the above three kinds of abilities, however, the results of the survey shows that students' reading enthusiasm is not high enough, they have not formed good reading habits and they lack autonomous learning abilities.

3. Theory of habitual domains and English majors' reading ability

3.1 Theory of habitual domains

You Bolong, professor of Business School of the United States University of Kansas, put forward the Theory of Habitual Domains that reveals the behavior subject (especially the ability of creation and innovation ability) formation mechanism: if the habitual domains of a certain problem is becoming greater, the information encoding scope is becoming larger and is having much more quantity, becoming more systematic and in this way, the conflict of various information is decreasing, coming closer to meet the demand of environment and objects, so, the person's ability to solve problems will become stronger, enabling the person to see into problems more precisely and his possibility to achieve success is greater. Habit field is formed with the learning process of the main body. When subjects

learn and accumulate more and more knowledge, the opportunities of new things appearing to them become less, and especially when they are faced with the outside environment without major changes, this phenomenon will be more obvious. China Foreign Affairs University doctoral tutor Qin Yaqing (2001) said: "the key to learn a foreign language is to read a lot, we could not master the language of English only by a few text books " [3]. Hence, a good reading habit helps students to read a lot and plenty of reading is beneficial for students' brain information input, helping students to contact with the outside world and understand the need of development of the era. So, a great deal of reading is an effective method to improve the abilities of students.

3.2 Theory of Habitual Domains and Enlightenment of Reading Habit.

Study in university hinges on autonomous learning as teachers in universities no longer deliberately urge students to do what to do, in this way, students might be more creative and put autonomous study into full play. When freshmen enter universities, most of them are blind about their own study. Teachers should help students to be aware of the importance of professional reading.

Freshmen have strong curiosity about new things, accordingly, teachers can organize various activities to stimulate students' interest in reading and cultivate their reading habits, such as "Book Fair", "Prize Winning Essay Reading" and "Extracurricular Knowledge Contest" to arouse students' concern and enthusiasm on professional reading. At the same time, corresponding guidance could also be given to students according to their reading ability status.

Reading method is directly related to the students' reading effect. For professional reading, teachers should make full use of

teaching materials, expanding the reading scope of sophomores on the basis of familiar materials[4]. Teachers could offer sophomores guidance lectures or materials recommended by guidance books, which can provide relevant and appropriate bibliography for students, thus, students can form a clear picture of what they should read and what they could read so as to give full play to the role of extracurricular reading courses and professional knowledge, further their understanding of professional courses, and broaden the students' idea of reading.

As for junior students, a good reading list and clear reading goals can see them through the senior year. Sophomores may have several directions to go with their study, such as going for postgraduate study, going abroad and direct employment. Decisions made by them closely link to the fate of their future. In this period, teachers should communicate with the students regularly and help them make better choices.

Teachers should also care for students' all-round development, taking into consideration students' emotion, attitude, values besides their academic study.

Interest is the driving force for encouraging and promoting students' reading ability. Russian educator Ushinski pointed out: "Without interest, compelling study will kill students' will to learn". If students are interested in study, their interests will produce active need to extracurricular reading from their inner heart, prompting them actively and completely go for reading so as to acquire enough knowledge.

The evocation of reading interest mainly links with the combined effect of internal motivation and external incentives. Reading interest is limited by readers' age, experience, knowledge, hobbies and reading purposes. Reading content and reading style also have a direct affect on readers' interest [5].

Researchers believe that inducing students' interest in reading can greatly enhance their knowledge and expand their horizon so as to stimulate their interest in reading and initiatively make reading contents into a kind of information stored in its own memory, which can promote students' interest in reading.

3.3 The maintenance of reading interest.

Since it is hard for young people to focus on the same thing for a long time and they do lack reading perseverance and persistence, when they encounter difficulties in reading and learning process, they will easily give up their reading interest which is just found. At the same time, assignments and exams and other burdens might force them to sacrifice their reading interest. Therefore, it is not an easy job to keep their interest in reading. The persistence of reading depends on reading habits which is to be maintained. Behavioral psychology research shows that: the repetition of certain action for more than 21 days will form a habit; 90 days' practicing will form a stable habit. So, if teachers want to enable students to develop good reading habits and to help them maintain their reading interest and to enable them get mental and physical pleasure brought about by reading at the maximum degree, they should always urge their students to form a good habit of reading and should often give them encouragement and affirmation so as to cultivate their daily reading habits, making them keep this habit throughout their entire university life, which will have a profound impact on their current studies and future life .

Maintaining the habit of reading is an uphill battle that requires students' autonomous learning in daily life. If English majors want to maintain their newly established habits, they should make a plan for their own and try to take interest in a hab-

it so that reading could become an essential part of life. Every day, students can browse through English newspapers and magazines, read English masterworks, pay attention to practical information and understand the needs and the trend of the development of the era.

3.4 Enhance enthusiasm and improve autonomic learning.

Students also need to make a reasonable reading plan in advance according to their own specific situation. When they accomplish one reading plan, they should better complete the corresponding book report to ensure that they could transfer interest into a habit.

The definition of learning motivation is an internal initiation mechanism including stimulating individuals' learning activities, maintaining the learning activities, causing and making the individual learning activities towards a certain learning objectives. Learning motivation can excite and reinforce each other with learning activities. Once learning motivation is formed, it will last throughout the whole process of learning activity. Ausubel (Ausubel, 1969) proposed in "School" that the cognitive drive is a need to understand things, learn knowledge, and systematically explain and solve problems. Its target is to acquire knowledge and be satisfied with the acquisition of knowledge. This drive is mainly derived from the original human curiosity and desire to explore. Students must have their own specific reading motivation, get to know their own direction and make out the reason why they should read and know which level they want to achieve.

4. Conclusion

The Habitual Domain Theory shows that syntrophic knowledge stored in the brain (known as knowledge structure) and its habit of utilizing knowledge are two factors that determine the capacity of the

main body. Habitual domain theory not only reveals the mechanism of personal ability, it also shows the important impact of the knowledge structure on the ability of main body. The Theory of Habitual Domains requires that when English majors practice reading, on the one hand, they need to cultivate good reading habits and interests, skills and methods of reading, make clear the reading purpose and make extracurricular reading and the specialized knowledge complement each other; On the other hand, teachers should give proper guidance to make students form a good habit of reading, so as to increase the amount of reading and the growth of knowledge. Researchers hope that through this investigation and research, English major students and teachers can understand that a good reading habit can help students improve reading ability, broaden their horizons, enrich university life and it is also conducive to their future work and life.

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