The Development of Critical Thinking in Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

Based on the discourse and pragmatic theory system, the article explores the advanced English classroom teaching model and carries out an analysis of the teaching effect. The purpose of the study is to verify whether this model is conducive to improving students' critical thinking skills as well as their ability to interpret and construct texts in depth.

Keywords: *Critical thinking, Pragmatic theory, Discourse theory.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the birth of discourse analysis theory, it has profoundly influenced language teaching and research. Many researchers have tried to apply this theory to foreign language teaching, such as writing teaching and translation teaching, and received good results. Advanced English is a compulsory course for English majors offered in their upper grades. The texts in this course cover a wide range of subjects including education, history, law, culture, science, and politics, etc. [1] Genres also range from narration and exposition to description and argumentation. The texts are longer and more difficult to understand. Cultural reasons behind the texts bring more barriers for students to make out their meanings. This article puts discourse analysis theory and pragmatic theory into advanced English classroom teaching and tries a new teaching model, namely advanced English classroom teaching based on discourse and pragmatic theory. This article first elaborates on the relevant theoretical basis of the model, and then uses "New English Course" (Li Guanyi, 2004) Text 1 of Unit 7 in Book 6 as an example (hereinafter referred to as Text 1), to analyse discourse cohesion and coherence, information structure, cultural pragmatics, and detailed introduction of each link in teaching, and finally analyse the learning effect. The purpose is to explore whether the model is conducive to improving students' critical thinking while interpreting and constructing texts.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Related theories involved in this article include discourse analysis theory, cohesion and coherence theory, pragmatic theory, and cultural pragmatic theory.

Firstly, Halliday and Hasan believed that discourse is the unity of form and meaning. Form and meaning must be correspondingly complete, but each has a certain degree of independence and dependence. [2] The discourse does not express unrelated information, but it is linguistically coherent and information interrelated, which constitutes a coherent text.

Secondly, cohesion and coherence are part of the discourse structure and have become means of discourse analysis. Cohesion and connection of texts are adopted in advanced English course, with the purpose to enable students to master the interrelatinship between sentences and text structure. [3] The author uses context to help learners correctly interpret the text, and deepen the understanding of sentences and texts. This will also cultivate students' discourse organization ability.

Finally, the situational context and cultural factors in pragmatic theory help learner to deeply understand the writing background of the text through the surface structure of the language. The hidden cultural connotations will cultivate learners' critical thinking so as to make them truly appreciate the inner meaning of the text.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses three research methods, i.e. teaching experiment, survey, and interview.

As for teaching experiment, the subjects of the experiment are the English majors of grade three in the School of Foreign Languages. Using the textbook "New English Course Book 6 (Li Guanyi, 2004), the experiment covers two semesters. The purpose is to try to construct an advanced English teaching model based on the discourse analysis theory and pragmatic theory and to see whether the model is conducive to improving students' critical thinking while interpreting and constructing texts.

The author also uses survey and face-to-face interviews to investigate the actual teaching effect of this model.

4. ADVANCED ENGLISH CLASSROOM TEACHING BASED ON DISCOURSE ANALYSIS THEORY AND PRAGMATIC THEORY

This teaching model includes the following components: situational context analysis, micro-discourse analysis, macro-discourse analysis, cultural pragmatic analysis, and discourse analysis.

4.1 Contextual Analysis

Take Text 1 of Unit 7 as an example, from the scope of the discourse, the tone of the text is analyzed in three aspects.

From the aspect of discourse range, the author of the text uses a lot of facts to prove that people's inner beauty and outer beauty should be unified, but the reality is divided. The author of the text reiterates that only when inner beauty and outer beauty are unified can we have true beauty.

As for discourse tone, the author and the readers of the text are the information master and the information receiver respectively. The social distance, cultural distance and psychological distance are relatively large.

Finally, as far as discourse style is concerned, the text is basically a piece of argumentation written in formal language.

Through analysis, we find that an argumentative essay often shows the structure of introduction, development and conclusion. At the same time, the whole structure could be adjusted according to the purpose of the writer so as to make the readers have a better and easier understanding of the message. The author of the text starts with the original Greeks' understanding of beauty and talks about inner beauty and how external beauty is separated, which involves factors such as religion, culture, and society. In the end, the author proposes that the separation of inner beauty and outer beauty affects social values. The negative impact brought by the separation will make readers resonate with the content of the text and think more deeply.

4.2 Micro-discourse Analysis

After the above analysis, learners can understand the background of the text and grasp the context of it, and then the teacher guides the learners to conduct micro-language text analysis, using various cohesive means such as reference and vocabulary cohesion, omission, substitution, etc. the teacher guides the learners to analyse the paragraphs that are difficult to understand. Take the second paragraph as an example:

"They may have resisted Socrates' lesson, we do not. Several thousand years later, we are more wary of the enchantments of beauty. We not only split off — with the greatest facility — the "inside" (character, intellect) from the "outside" (looks); but we are actually surprised when someone who is beautiful is also intelligent, talented, good."

This is the second paragraph of the text. There are three sentences in total. The author talks about Greeks' impression of Socrates and their interpretation of beauty awareness. He refers back to Greeks, which have an inherent function of discourse cohesion. Later is a more referential relationship and will be the first The Greeks in the first paragraph and the "we" in this paragraph are linked, which has a strong connection function. In this way, the author naturally compares the ancient Greeks and our modern people and thus the distance between the two groups of people is reduced.

4.3 Macro-discourse Analysis

The author of the text uses a three-stage organization, as well as declarative sentences and explanatory sentences throughout the text. Each paragraph has an explicit or implicit topic sentence, but the position is not limited to the beginning of the paragraph. Topic sentence can occur in every position of each paragraph. The cohesive chain of sentences can express the general content of the

paragraph. All the information is related to the text's title "Beauty", and serves the subject of the text, that is, inside beauty and outside beauty should be united together. Therefore, Text 1 has strong cohesion and coherence.

4.4 Cultural Pragmatic Analysis

The first paragraph of Text 1 mentions Greeks and points out how the ancient Greeks understood beauty, that is, a "complete" or perfect person should be a combination of inner beauty and outside beauty. When learners analyze this paragraph, they should know the philosophical background of this concept of beauty. Only in this way, can they better understand the following paragraphs. The third and fourth paragraphs cover quite a few cultural concepts such as Christianity, Christian country and post-Christian country, etc. The author of the text discusses the influence of the concept of beauty and why it has such an influence. All of these messages call for learners to have a deep understanding. To introduce these concepts to students, the teacher needs to have a certain understanding of knowledge in philosophy and sociology. It should be said that the cultural, religious, and philosophical factors behind the text are needed for understanding the text. [4] The text itself involves only surface knowledge, and only combining the two can learners truly understand the connotation of the text. Thus, learners will not be confused about long sentences and difficult sentences.

4.5 Discourse Analysis Exercises

In the final stage of text teaching, teachers should train students' cohesive and coherent sensitivity to achieve a transition from knowledge to ability, from passive to active change. After the discourse analysis of Text 1, the teacher uses text 2 in this unit to guide learners to conduct independent discourse analysis and make progress in class. Learners can express themselves from different angles. The teacher makes an auxiliary evaluation. Of course there are many ways to practice reading text. For example, in terms of text content or language, the teacher asks questions in the form of language to check students' mastery of the content of the text. The teacher also asks the learners to write out the central idea of the text, or use tree or network drawings to draw the general structure. [5] These effective exercises can be a kind of training for a single project or multiple projects. Practice not only depends the content of the classroom learning, but also promotes learners' original language skill level.

5. TEACHING EFFECT ANALYSIS

After the above classroom teaching experiment, the author uses questionnaires and interviews to test the teaching effect. The content involves learners' learning interest, text awareness, and text construction ability, critical thinking and the feasibility of this teaching model, etc. The study has the following findings:

Firstly, learners' interest in learning increases and their awareness of subject participation also increases. Among the 70 students surveyed by the questionnaire, 57 students believed that their understanding of language class has changed a lot, and it is no longer a subject that discourages them, but a course that can strengthen their current learning enthusiasm.

Secondly, learners' discourse construction ability is enhanced. In response to "Can you master the information conveyed by the text, grasp the theme of the text, and how does the author focus on the subject", 21 answered "fully able" and 35 answered "basically able" and 14 answered "No". The teacher conducted face-to-face interviews on these 14 learners and found that they have a relatively small vocabulary and they are unable to fully understand the text. But overall, 56 students answered "Yes", which accounts for 80% of the total, and the expected aim of the study is basically achieved. Therefore, the classroom teaching mode helps to improve students' discourse construction ability.

Thirdly, learners' critical thinking skills are enhanced. In response to "Can you grasp the author's creative intentions and standpoints", 18 answered "Fully Enough", 32 answered "Basically Able", and 20 answered "Not Enough". Through interviews, the teacher found that most students can be guided by the teacher. They could use discourse theory and pragmatic theory for discourse interpretation, but they sometimes have difficulty in independent thinking. This means that learners' English learning habits formed in the past are hard to change. This is a rather long process.

6. CONCLUSION

This teaching model t has a certain promotion effect on other related disciplines of this major. During the interview, the teacher found that most

learners believed that their advanced English learning ability was improve and it would have a positive impact on other related disciplines of this major, such as text construction and critical thinking.

Finally, here are some reflections and suggestions for this teaching model. In the interview, most learners believed that this teaching method has a positive effect on their advanced English learning. But because it breaks the traditional passive learning model, they must take the initiative to do more things, which would bring them some pressure. Slow students thought that this teaching mode would be quite challenging. [6] Therefore, teachers should resort to other means to make the class teaching friendlier to learners especially slow learners.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Yanli Jia.

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