

English Reading Teaching from the Perspective of Functional Discourse Analysis

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Abstract—*Reading is a major form of language learning. Reading teaching plays an important role especially for English learners in China. It has always been the focus of English teaching, which requires a lot of teaching time. But the effect of English reading teaching is far from perfect. How to achieve the requirements of curriculum standards for students has always been a challenge for us. It is an urgent task for our teachers to really improve students' English reading ability and level. Through a comparative analysis of the differences between texts and functional texts, this paper explores how to cultivate students' ability to construct a quick and desired understanding of a text in the context of functional textual analysis so as to improve their English reading ability.*

Keywords—*English reading teaching, discourse, functional discourse analysis*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the traditional teaching of English reading in China, vocabulary and grammar have been emphasized for a long time, while discourse and language use have been neglected. Students' learning of English remains on the surface of language knowledge such as words, sentences and grammar [1-3]. This kind of learning is difficult to meet the curriculum standards and the requirements of college entrance examination for text reading [4-7]. Reading is the basic skill of English as a second foreign language, and for most people, reading is the most necessary skill to master. Reading is a complex decoding process which includes many factors, many exchanges and reactions [8-9]. Knowledge of text, language and pragmatics is the basis for decoding [10-13]. Pragmatics is knowledge of rules of interpersonal communication and textual principles. Reading comprehension is a process in which people recognize written information and construct it deeply. It is a very important means to absorb written information [14-17]. Reading ability is a kind of comprehensive language ability. It is a kind of ability to use words as carriers to obtain information. Guiding English reading teaching by using functional discourse analysis is also the call of corresponding English curriculum standards[18]. At present, language teaching attaches great importance to students' communicative competence in using language in practical situations. Therefore, reading teaching has become the core and main body of English teaching[16,19].

II. THE CONNOTATION OF ENGLISH READING TEACHING

A. The Background of English Reading Teaching

English teaching has always attached great importance to reading teaching. At the learning stage, reading class hours are the most, and reading takes the largest proportion in all kinds of English examinations at all levels, but the actual effect is not satisfactory. Input and output are not proportional. The main reasons are as follows: First, the drawbacks of traditional teaching mode are obvious. Most teachers still adopt "bottom-up teaching mode", "take reading materials as the carrier of imparting knowledge, and divide articles into words, phrases, sentences, grammar and other parts. The purpose of teachers and students' reading is still to learn language knowledge. This teacher-centered classroom has a negative impact on reading, because it neglects to grasp the whole, but treats the article as a simple superposition of words, sentences and grammar, often "ignoring the true face", which is not conducive to the cultivation of students' comprehensive language use ability; secondly, reading range is too narrow. For a long time, textbooks have been the main reading materials.

B. The Significance of English Reading Teaching

The solution of reading classroom problems and the cultivation of core literacy all need to conform to the students' cognitive law of teaching design, which is even more inseparable from the teachers' interpretation of the text and the grasp of the key and difficult points in the design of teaching activities. Therefore, the analysis of this paper focuses on discourse and lesson discussion. Text is defined as "any natural language with complete semantics in a given context that is not entirely constrained by sentence grammar". Reading is the interaction between the reader and the text. Information is hidden in the text. The accurate grasp of information depends on the correct analysis of the text. Therefore, discourse teaching is particularly important for students to learn English reading. If the learner's understanding of the text only stays in vocabulary, idioms, fixed collocation and key sentence patterns, it can't break through the narrow thinking mode of "seeing trees but not forests", and can't construct the overall link of the text, it can't improve English reading ability. Although many teachers have realized the problem, they have not found an effective way to solve it. Functional discourse analysis theory provides us with theoretical support and methodological guidance. It has been widely used in English reading instruction. It has strong operability and practicability in the process of reading teaching.

III. TEXT AND FUNCTIONAL TEXT ANALYSIS

A. *The Concept of Text*

"Text" refers to a language unit in English that, in whatever form, conforms to grammatical rules, is coherent and cohesive, can produce a certain context, and is composed of a series of segments or sentences. Text is organized according to a certain mode of thinking, and its structure is determined by the content of the text. The content of a text varies greatly, but the structure of a text is limited. As far as discourse structure is concerned, there are often comments, descriptions, explanations and narrations. The mode of thinking includes enumeration, narration, explanation, description, comparison, example, reasoning, analogy and so on. Changes in thinking patterns often affect the structure of discourse. "Language exists in discourse, not in sentences. If people want to study language, they must take discourse as the object of study. Functional discourse analysis not only has great theoretical value for language research, but also has practical value for many disciplines." Strictly speaking, there is no relationship between the size of a text and a sentence, but a relationship of "embodiment", that is, a sentence or clause reflects the features of a text, which distinguish "discourse" from "non-discourse".

B. *The Concept of Functional Discourse Analysis*

Functional discourse analysis is a microscopic and macroscopic study of a chapter that expresses complete meaning. Microscopic research focuses on the method of identifying textual cohesion, which can be analyzed by means of word meaning, syntax and the relationship between sentences. The macro research focuses on understanding the profound meaning of discourse, which can be analyzed by analyzing the overall structure of the discourse. Functional discourse analysis explores the use of cohesion at the textual level to analyze the coherence of a text, the use of textual organizational structure and discourse markers at the lexical and sentence levels to systematically analyze how language materials produce meaning in a text, and ultimately achieve a thorough understanding of the meaning of the whole text, thus achieving the purpose of using language. Many experts have described the definition of discourse. For example, functional discourse analysis is "a functional analysis of discourse, which is different from discourse analysis focusing on the characteristics of linguistic coherence". At the same time, it has been proposed that "language is text, and phonetics, vocabulary and grammar are all part of the text. They all play an important role in organizing the structure of the text, but they are not at the level of language parallel to the text". In short, functional discourse analysis is to enable readers to effectively analyze the process in which language produces meaning in the text, and to identify the structural patterns of language and the various linguistic means that constitute them.

C. *Forms of Text and Functional Discourse Analysis*

These definitions can illustrate the following two points: the basic unit of language should be discourse, not words, phrases or sentences; discourse has some functional and structural patterns to express the overall meaning. Language teaching should help students understand, learn and use language from the perspective of discourse, instead of learning language in terms of vocabulary or sentence units in isolation, it should also learn the function of discourse and the structure of discourse. In the learning stage, how to improve English learning from the surface knowledge of vocabulary, sentence patterns and grammar to the knowledge of discourse linkages requires not only teachers to change their ideas, but also an effective design to apply the knowledge of functional discourse analysis to reading teaching. This is what this study is trying to do.

IV. RELEVANT THEORIES OF FUNCTIONAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

A. *Context Scope*

Linguistic context refers to the internal environment of a text, that is, the relationship between word, phrase, paragraph or text, which is usually called "context". It helps to understand the specific meaning of language components such as words and phrases. Therefore, linguistic context becomes context, intralingual context or discourse context. It mainly emphasizes that the meaning of a sentence can be determined by its preamble and the following sentences. It is difficult to prepare to grasp the true meaning of a word in this context. In linguistic context, not only phrases can clearly refer to the text in the preceding text, but also any sentence in a complete text can be limited by the sentence in the preceding text. Language consists of semantics, vocabulary, grammar and morphemes. Some languages form specific contexts, that is to say, language and writing create their own unique linguistic contexts. Linguistic context includes lexical context and grammatical context; situational context is the linguistic environment related to the internal environment of the text, such as the surrounding things, time, situation, place and manner. It refers to the actual and direct speech situation at the time of communication, including the time, place, person, topic and the relationship between the speaker and the listener. Situational context determines the actual meaning of the author or the speaker in the discourse environment; cultural context refers to the history, culture, customs and human feelings of the language community in which the author or the speaker belongs. Each language community has its own history, culture, customs, ways of thinking and values. These factors, which represent the characteristics of a particular language community, constitute their unique cultural context. Obviously, cultural context refers to all the meanings that can be expressed in a particular society and culture, including communicative purposes, communicative processes, communicative means and communicative content. Among them, the proportion of contextual scope is shown in Figure 1.

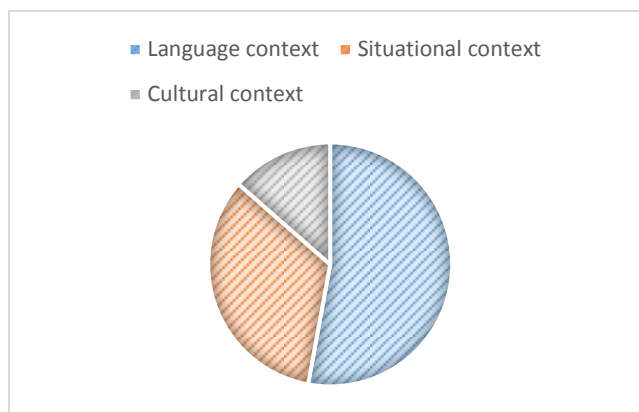


Figure 1 Proportion of contextual scope

B. Cohesion Theory

Based on linguistic forms, cohesion can be divided into five types: reference, substitution, ellipsis, connection and lexical cohesion. Reference, substitution and ellipsis are all grammatical, so they are also called grammatical cohesion. Lexical cohesion is divided into repetition and collocation. Connections are mainly grammatical, but there are also lexical elements. It should be emphasized that when it comes to "grammatical or lexical cohesion", it does not mean that cohesion is merely a formal association without meaning. Cohesion is a semantic relationship, just like all components of the semantic system, each of which can be distinguished separately. Some forms of cohesion are realized through grammar and vocabulary. This means that articulation plays a unique role in the relationship between the various parts of the text. Functional discourse analysis of cohesive means to deepen reading comprehension. Cohesion means are not only the way of reading material layout, but also the evidence of in-depth understanding of it. These methods can help students to understand the relationship between the front and the back text and the logical relationship, so that students can understand the structure of reading materials more clearly, grasp the main idea of the article, and deepen reading comprehension.

C. Discourse Structure

Text is organized according to a certain mode of thinking, and its structure is determined by the content of the text. The content of a text varies greatly, but the structure of a text is limited. As far as discourse structure is concerned, there are often comments, descriptions, explanations and narrations. The mode of thinking includes enumeration, narration, explanation, description, comparison, example, reasoning, analogy, comparison, explanation and so on. Changes in thinking patterns often affect the structure of a text, and they influence the formation of a text from a macro perspective. The following is a discussion of discourse structure from the perspectives of genre and discourse patterns.

V. REFLECTIONS ON ENGLISH READING TEACHING BASED ON FUNCTIONAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

A. Teacher Team

Teachers continue to improve their personal qualities and conduct reading teaching from the perspective of functional discourse analysis. Reading is about the interaction between readers and articles. The readers are active information seekers and meaning constructors, and teachers play an intermediary role in helping students become the subject of reading. A teacher's understanding of reading affects how he or she teaches reading and how he or she mediates between text information and students. Moreover, teachers, as an influencing factor, can play the role of setting an example. Therefore, the premise of the growth of students' discourse awareness is the improvement of teachers' discourse knowledge and personal accomplishment.

B. Pay Attention to Context Knowledge

Language and culture are inseparable. To grasp the characteristics of the times of reading materials is the basis of understanding it. Teachers should enrich and activate students' contextual knowledge through various ways, pay special attention to the introducing link at the beginning of class, connect students' existing background knowledge with new information through group discussion or questioning, and enhance their cultural sensitivity. In daily teaching, teachers should consciously introduce British and American culture to students to enhance their cultural accomplishment. At the same time, students should increase the amount of extra-curricular reading in English. Reading is a process of acquiring and constructing information actively, and gradually get rid of the negative influence of Chinese on English learning in this process, so as to achieve flexible reading and using English.

C. Explanation of Text Patterns

Explanation of discourse patterns promotes reading comprehension. Although the content of the reading material is tens of millions, its discourse pattern is relatively fixed. Therefore, on the premise of familiarity with discourse patterns, students can grasp the main idea of the article more quickly and accurately and clarify the logical relationship. If there is no guidance in this respect, students will be blinded in reading.

D. Improving Students' Text Awareness

Teachers let students understand that a reading material always revolves around a topic and has its hierarchical structure. We should learn to take discourse as a unit, grasp the theme and structure of the article as a whole, and understand the internal relations among different levels of the discourse. Firstly, it predicts the structure of the text by grasping the characteristics of the genre. Different genres of articles have different ways of organization. In order to better understand the organization of the text, the judgment of genre is the most important. Secondly, we should cultivate discourse awareness through relevant reading strategies, such as predicting the content of the text through the title and predicting the organization of the text through the text pattern.

E. Setting up Teaching Links

The concept of functional discourse analysis is unfamiliar to students. Starting from the genre characteristics, this paper summarizes the concept of schema by using students' own genre knowledge to help students grasp the discourse structure as a whole. Then start with the paragraph, with the help of summarizing the main idea of the paragraph, guide the students to pay attention to the coherence of the paragraph, let them think about how the sentences in a paragraph connect with the sentences. Then look at the coherence of paragraphs and paragraphs, observe the role of the first sentence and the last sentence, and summarize the way of topic development. In the process of research, we must closely link the problem design of the teaching link with the text, and proceed from the text level, sentence level and lexical level. In particular, we should not ignore the puzzles students encounter in their thinking. Once confused, it can reduce the difficulty of the topic, plus the teacher's patience to explain, give students time to digest and absorb.

F. Teaching Methods should Conform to Teaching Laws

The teaching of discourse should not be purely theoretical. It should be combined with practice. It is more important for students to use it. Therefore, teaching methods should be diversified, such as observation, imitation, discussion and practice. Students' cooperative learning, group learning and peer-to-peer homework approval should arouse their enthusiasm for participation. Students' exercises, reflections and discussions take up most of the classroom time.

VI. SUMMARY

Traditional reading teaching focuses on the form of language. The focus of teaching is often on analyzing words, explaining grammar, and translating original texts. Its advantage is that in the teaching, students can understand the internal structure of the sentence and expand the knowledge of the language, which has a certain effect on the foundation of the language. The main shortcoming is to make the material structure a word and a sentence, simply equating the material with the word and sentence superposition, ignoring the connection between the statement and the statement, the paragraph and the paragraph. Due to the lack of overall grasp in discourse, students often know that but they do not know why, contrary to the original intention of reading teaching. With the help of functional discourse analysis theory, teachers can master the various genres of discourse in the teaching of reading, and use the forward and reverse reading strategy teaching method, that is, functional discourse analysis theory to deal with the text. Guide students to use known information to understand the structure of text information, better understand the author's purpose, ideas, accurately summarize the topic of the chapter, and interpret the article in the way that is closest to the author's development ideas, so as to cultivate students' reading ability.

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