Study on the Discourse Analysis in the Application of English Reading Teaching

YUJIE CHANG

ABSTRACT

English reading is quite an important language skill for learners and has been widely recognized. So, there is no doubt that reading is an important content of English Teaching. How to do it better and improve the savvy of students are the topics English teachers are discussing all the time. Nowadays, with the deepening research of the foreign language teaching theory, discourse analysis has become an important teaching method in English reading teaching. This method considers English discourse as the center, and plays an important role in students’ reading ability and cultivation. This paper aims at proposing and solving the issues existing in English reading teaching. It combines schema theory, genre analysis and six-step teaching approach. And it puts forward the application of discourse analysis theory in English reading to improve students’ reading ability and the effects of English reading teaching.

KEYWORDS
Discourse Analysis, English Reading Teaching, Schema Theory, Genre Analysis, Six-Step Teaching Approach

INTRODUCTION

As we all know that reading plays the basic role for people to learn foreign languages. On the one hand, reading can provide crucial and plenty of linguistic input for learners. On the other hand, it lays the basis for their further learning in listening, speaking and writing. Moreover, for most Chinese students, reading is regarded as the main method to learn English, because of lacking resources to help them develop their language skills. All in all, English reading is not just a carrier to learn language but also a tool to get information. Therefore, it is necessary to find a method to help students improve their reading ability and efficiency.

Research Background

English, regarding as a crucial and necessary tool to communicate, has become popular all over the world. A great number of people, no matter how old or what the gender, all have tried lots of methods to learn English. In China, schools and parents pay high attention to students’ English learning and their tests’ performance. Reading is the first place in the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Students can understand the writer’s thoughts much better and get the useful information of the article by reading. We hope, one day, students can put themselves into the real scene,
which is same to English-speaking countries, and then improve their English proficiency quickly.

**Signification and Purpose of the Study**

At present, as we all know, the objective of English teaching is to train students’ whole ability to use English. In other words, students are asked to talk fluently with each other in any occasion. The purpose of the study is to apply the discourse analysis theory into the English reading teaching to make sure that the discourse analysis theory can help students to improve their reading ability. And it is expected that this study can be the improvement in the English teaching, especially in the students’ reading ability.

**LITERATURE REVIEW OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

Discourse analysis is introduced in this chapter. Meanwhile, this chapter contains two sections. The first section explains the basic knowledge of discourse analysis. The second section deals with the related research of discourse analysis.

**Basic Knowledge of Discourse Analysis**

The basic knowledge of discourse analysis includes the definition of discourse and discourse analysis, as well as the main content of discourse analysis.

**DEFINITION OF DISCOURSE AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

Different scholars have the different understanding of discourse analysis from different angles. In 1952, Zelling Harris, an American structuralist, thought discourse as connected language. In the late 1970s, E. Hatch confirmed discourse stood for systemic-functional grammar. In 1976, Halliday and Hasan believed that discourse was the best semantic unit, the discourse was a set of language, it was not a grammatical unit like sentences, nor form units, but the unit of meaning. In 1990, Hatim defined discourse as a series of related communicative functions that were connected in some way in order to achieve an overall rhetorical intent. In 1994, Hu Zhuanglin, a linguist in China, defined the discourse as any natural language that was not fully constrained by sentence grammar in a given context. In 2008, Li Xiaoxiao gave a definition that the discourse was a linguist unit above the sentence level. People used language to talk did not take the sentence out of order together, the relationship between sentences had a very careful structure. In 2011, Zhang Jianjun said that discourse was usually regarded as a unit larger than a sentence. Only when two or more sentences have the syntax and semantic relation, it could embody the language coherence, discourse structure and pragmatic function. In 2013, Li Aiteng proposed that discourse referred to the natural language which was not completely restricted.

So, based on the above analysis, it can be seen that discourse is a logical structure, which can be used to achieve the communicative purpose of the whole language.

Discourse analysis, regarding as a very important linguistics subject, germinates in the foreign counties in recent 30 years. In 1952, Zelling Harris published an article Discourse Analysis in Language Magazine, and mentioned the origin of modern
discourse analysis. In his opinion, discourse analysis was the study of discourse structure. In 1988, Huang Guowen pointed out that the discourse analysis stood for analysis of language units greater than the sentences or the paragraphs. In 2003, Xu Fei presented that discourse analysis was to make readers scientifically and systematically analyze the relative position of language materials in this paper and to identify the organization (structure) patterns in discourse and the linguistic meant to define the patterns of these structures. In 2008, Gou Yinglei, however, argued that the theory of discourse analysis was a kind of super syntactic analysis, which aimed at explaining how people constructed and understood discourses coherence. In 2009, Yang Guohua, in his paper The Application of Discourse Analysis in English Reading Teaching, put forward that discourse analysis regarded discourse as the basic unit to analyze and evaluate the articles from the perspective of discourse. It not only paid attention to the language form and language function, but also to the related background cultural knowledge. Then, in 2013, Xu Runde proposed that the analysis of the discourse was to analyze the longer sentences and the language fragments for the purpose of communication.

In a word, discourse analysis has been studied from the two aspects: macro and micro, in order to understand and analyze the main point of the discourse.

**MAIN CONTENT OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

Generally speaking, discourse analysis refers to the structural analysis in macro and micro views.

Macro analysis is the first phase of discourse analysis teaching. It is the surface understanding in English reading comprehension, and it plays a very important role in understanding some objective issues. It mainly relates to the teaching of background knowledge and genre. It is helpful to understand the discourse content roundly, by analyzing the framework of the different styles of discourse structure. It contains the genre framework of discourse, and the training of background knowledge, in order to make students understand the mode of discourse and basic content more quickly and accurately. This stage is designed to make students understand the discourse content and form, and lays the foundation for future in-depth understanding of the discourse.

While in order to have a deeper understanding of the discourse, micro analysis of discourse is requisite. Micro analysis mainly involves the analysis of vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and information structure. This part aims to help students understand the language points in discourse, find the logical link of information transmission, analyze the connection between sentences and paragraphs, and understand the themes of paragraphs. Meanwhile, reasoning method is used to help them understand the content of the discourse, as well as clarifying the roles of words, sentences, and paragraphs play in expressing of the overall meaning. So that students can deepen the comprehensive understanding of the discourse.

In the process of the analysis, we first analyze the macro structure of the discourse from the perspective of the whole discourse. Then we make a textual analysis of the discourse from the aspects of cohesive devices, information structure and so on. It is helpful for students to understand the article better and improve their reading ability.
RELATED RESEARCH OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Discourse analysis, as an independent language study, began in 1960s, and developed rapidly in 1970s. In 1952, Zelling Harris first came up with the term “discourse analysis” in the magazine of Language. It was the origin of discourse analysis. He kept a watchful eye on the distribution of linguistic elements in discourse and the relationship between discourse and social background.

In the 1960s, the linguists realized that the study on language should transcend sentences. More attention should be paid to the role of sentences in discourse and communication. In 1962, H.G Widdowson, an applied linguist in England, pointed that discourse was the use of comprehensive sentences.

In the 1970s, some experts of foreign language didactic field were attracted by discourse analysis. Halliday and Hasan said that discourse was a language unit and linguist analysis discourse was not the interpretation, but the explanation.

In the early 1980s, the study of discourse analysis made a substantial leap. At the same time, it as a new interdisciplinary practice appeared into the Chinese Linguistics scope. In 1981, Swales first came up with “Genre” in the book English for Specific Purposes. In 1985, Halliday, M. A. K. considered that it was necessary to think discourse as a semantic unit rather than a form unit. In the meantime, Wang Zongyan argued discourse analysis studied how sentences form a larger meaning unit in spoken and written language.

LITERATURE REVIEW OF ENGLISH READING TEACHING

Definition of Reading

Reading is a complicated psychological cognitive process. It is not only the process of language processing, but also the process of understanding the content of the article by using the background knowledge in hand.

In 2000, Harmer, J thought reading was a movement controlled by eyes and cerebrum. Namely, the cerebrum dealt with the signification of the messages sent by the eyes. In 2008, in Li Xiaoxiao’s opinion reading was a cognitive process in which readers relied on the knowledge in hand and consciously used reading strategies to predict and understand the meaning of the discourse. In 2011, Yang Guohua presented reading was an important way for people to obtain information. To language, reading was an important input, so as to improve the students’ comprehensive ability of language and achieve the purpose of using the language in communication.

Meanwhile, Zhang Jiangun and Yuan Xiuli pointed out reading was a creative act of getting information actively. In 2013, Du Yingdong stated reading should be a communication between the reader and the author. It was an interactive process rather than the process of comprehending discourse.

In a word, reading is a cognitive, active and interactive intellectual activity. It is a process of acquiring information from written language, and it is also a psychological process of deriving meaning from written language.
Previous Situation in English Reading Teaching

There are two issues with the English reading teaching in China. First, the traditional method is single and simple. Second, the explaining of the discourse reading, and vocabulary is boring.

In 2008, GuoYinglei proposed a lot of researches and analyses had been done on the whole reading process by reading psychologists, according to the method of information processing. These models could be broadly divided into three categories: the Bottom-Up Model represented by Gough, Top-Down Model token by Goodman and Interactive Model stood by Rumelhart. The first mode, Bottom-Up Model, considered reading as a decoding process. The readers’ task was from the recognizing of the smallest units to the understanding of the largest ones. Then readers continued to input information, and reading comprehension could be realized until decoding ended. The second model, Top-Down Mode, stated reading was a psycho-linguistic guessing game, which included the interaction between thought and language. Effective reading was not the result of accurate perception and identification of all discourse components, but the skills of choosing necessary, the fewest and the most effective clues for effective speculation. The last one, Interactive Model, presented lower level and higher-level process worked together interactively as a part of the reading process.

College English Syllabus pointed out the foreign language teaching could not stay at the sentence level of language skills training, but focus on the discourse teaching level and cultivating students’ communicative competence at discourse level. According to this requirement, in the English reading class, teachers should pay special attention to the cultivation of students’ reading skills and broaden their horizons. Meanwhile, teachers should guide students to focus on the discourse, as well as helping them analyze how sentences make a paragraph, and paragraph make a discourse. Last but not least, teachers are supposed to improve students’ sensitivity of discourse consistency and discourse understanding, and help them understand the communicative competence of discourse.

Integrating Discourse Analysis to English Reading Teaching

While reading, scene, shared knowledge, and the participants’ subjective factors are needed to understand discourse. This chapter deals with how to apply discourse analysis to English reading teaching.

Building up Students’ Strong Awareness of Discourse Analysis

Students are not familiar with discourse analysis, so at the preliminary stage it is very important to develop students’ right awareness of discourse analysis to make it acceptable.

GIVING STUDENTS GOOD INSTRUCTIONS IN DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

It is better for teachers to set a plenty of scenario simulations in English reading teaching class. Students can distinguish semantics meaning and pragmatics meaning of discourse clearly in this way. By knowing the intention and function of creating the
situation, students can truly get the situation awareness. So, when teaching, the two principles should be followed.

On the one hand, applying discourse analysis to English reading teaching can make abstract knowledge visible by means of teachers’ proper introducing. Pictures are more attractive than words, so students will be interested and curious when teachers show some pictures in class. And it will sow good seeds for the further study. On the other hand, it can make students understand the discourse accurately by improving the questioning skills accurately. It is necessary for teachers to ask questions from discourse structure and writing method, so as to improve the discourse awareness of students.

APPLYING SCHEMA THEORY TO INSTRUCTION IN READING TEACHING

In 1781, Kant, a psychologist in German, first came up with the Schema Theory. In his mind, Schema was an active organization of previous reactions or experiences. In 1932, Bartlett put forward the Modern Schema Theory. According to the theory, schema referred to a kind of storage mode to their acquired knowledge in the past and it was a reflection of the past experience of the human brain. In 1980, Rumehart completed the Modern Schema Theory. Modern schema theorists believe that schema is made up by variables, used to characterize the data structure of general concepts of storage in a memory.

According to schema theory, the reader’s reading ability is determined by three schemata: linguistic schemata, content schemata and rhetorical schemata. In the process of reading, the three kinds of schemata in the reader’s mind interact with each other.

Reading activity is actually the interpretation process to reading materials, based on the reader’s language, cultural, strategic and professional knowledge in hand. Schema theory regards the internal mechanism of the interpretation process as a clue in the reading material. That is to say, language information activates the schema in the mind, and the process of the variable in the schema is embodied by the information in the reading material. The result of the Schema Theory variable makes the main content of the discourse be visual. Generally Speaking, the reader’s understanding of a passage is to activate the appropriate schema in the reader’s mind, and use the appropriate schemata to explain the speech information in the discourse.

There is a close relationship between schema and discourse, and the correct use of discourse theory can improve students’ reading quality.

IDENTIFYING AND APPLYING DIFFERENT GENRE KNOWLEDGE INTO READING TEACHING

Genre is an important part in the teaching of discourse analysis. It is usually divided into four types: narration, exposition, argumentation and description. Here, the first three types will be analyzed.

(i) Narration

Narration is like telling a story. Thus, the five elements: when, where, who, what and why are necessary in the articles. The story schematic structure falls into two situations. If the article is portraying a person, the change of his emotion is the main
line. While if it is an event, and its development is always the main line. When it is the biography schematic structure, the character’s life will be the main line.

(ii) Exposition

Exposition schematic structure has two types: the problem type and things type. Problem type happens as follows: facts, reasons, problems and solutions. However, things type expounding covers: definitions, compositions, types and functions.

(iii) Argumentation

The characters of argumentation words are reasonable, logical and eloquent. Argumentation is composed of argument, evidence and reasoning. And there are three necessary elements of argumentation schematic: raising the questions, analyzing the questions and solving the problems.

Schema Theory can help students comprehend the discourse better, widen their horizons and improve their reading ability.

Presenting a Sample Lesson by Using Six-Step Teaching Approach

In this section, Six-Step Teaching approach will be used in classroom teaching, for the sake of applying the discourse approach better.

Step 1. Background Information
First, warm up activities are necessary to activate students’ background knowledge. It is usually presented in the following way. At the beginning, teachers can display a product, in picture, which plays an important role in the article. Then he asks students when it is usually used and what’s the function of the product in life. Next, he makes students imagine what will take place by glancing articles. At last, let them fast reading the article again.

Step 2. Discourse Structure Analysis
The teacher helps students to analyze what kind of structures the discourse belongs to. Then students should find the corresponding elements.

Step 3. Summary of Main Idea
Students should read the discourse one more time, so as to get more useful messages from the topic sentences, which usually hide in the beginning or ending sentence. Therefore, it is not very difficult for them to catch the main idea.

Step 4. Guessing Author’s Writing Intention or Attitude
The teacher can ask students some questions, related to the author’s writing intention or attitude. Then students can discuss with each other to exchange their thoughts and give an exact answer. By doing this, students can not only understand the article better but also improve their abilities of conversation and expression.

Step 5. Explanations of Language Points
In order to make students understand discourse absolutely, students should learn the discourse from both macro and micro perspective. Teachers should point out the main words and sentences for students.

Step 6. Consolidation of After-school Exercises
There is an old saying writhing down or you will forget the goo. So it is absolutely not enough for students just learning from class. In hence, it is necessary for teachers to arrange some after-class exercises to students every day. In addition, the
exercises should be accomplished within the required time. If students kept following
the teacher’s discourse analysis teaching method, in the near future, their reading
comprehension abilities will be improved.

CONCLUSION

Due to the influence of traditional teaching methods, most English teachers still
focus on imparting, mastering and practicing of vocabulary and grammar in reading
classroom. Students cannot master the article from both micro level and macro level.
While the application of discourse analysis can help get rid of the current situation.

This thesis primarily researches the theories of discourse analysis and its
implication in the English reading teaching. In the English reading teaching, Discourse
analysis makes a great contribution.

Different from traditional teaching method, discourse analysis method makes
students be the master of the classes, and teachers play the role of assisting them. So, it
arouses the enthusiasm of students and improves their abilities of autonomous learning
to a great extent. In addition, discourse analysis pays attention not only to the
vocabularies and sentences but also to the whole article. Therefore, it can enhance the
students’ interest. At the same time, it changes the timeworn teaching method into a
new point, promoting the reading effect greatly.

Limitation

Though the application of discourse analysis can improve the teaching efficiency
in the English reading teaching, it still has some limitations.

Firstly, time to research the task is not enough. Therefore, the conclusions may
not be comprehensive or even not correct enough.

Secondly, different students may have different reading habits and reading levels.
Moreover, the learning motivation of various students is likely to be diverse. So, the
method may not be suitable for everyone.

Thirdly, there are a variety of understandings of discourse and teaching habits
for teachers. That is why it is difficult to display the real effect of this research clearly.

Implications

This thesis applies discourse analysis theory into English reading teaching and
tests its feasibility. The new teaching method offers students new views to understand
the articles, improves their reading interest and cultivates their abilities of thinking
independently. Different from traditional teaching method, in the new teaching
method, teachers play the role of brokers between knowledge and students, making
students be the leaders of the class. So, it is useful to improve their abilities of
autonomous learning.

In order to improve the reading ability of students quickly and efficiently, and to
cultivate students’ sensitivity to different types of genres, it is necessary for teachers to
provide a variety of types of reading materials. By the way, the degree of difficulty
must be appropriate for students. At the same time, the topics of the materials should
be diverse, in order to help the students to experience different cultures.
REFERENCES