Intertextuality in Reading Teaching
Wei XUE1,a*, Rong ZHAO2,b
1School of Foreign Studies, Xi’an University, Xi’an, China
2School of Foreign Languages, Xidian University, Xi’an, China
a xuewei05@163.com, b 2594845123@qq.com
*Corresponding author

Keywords: Intertextuality, Reading Teaching, Intertextual Space, The Social Background Knowledge.

Abstract. This study attempts to apply the intertextual theories to the Extensive Reading teaching. Based on the analysis of the questionnaires tests in three classes with three different focuses of applying intertextuality, the paper ends with the conclusion that the intertextual theories in reading do serve a certain help in reading teaching, and for the freshmen English-majors, the social background knowledge is more important than the basic language knowledge.

Introduction
The idea that when we read an article we are seeking to find a meaning which lies inside that paper seems completely commonsensical. Reading is an act that plunges us into a net-work of textual relations. To interpret a text, to discover its meaning, or meanings, is to trace those relations. Reading thus becomes a process of moving between texts. Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations. They are what theorists now call intertextual.

Intertextuality
Scholars in different fields consider the notion of ‘intertextuality’ from different perspectives for different purposes. It is widely believed that Kristeva coined the term intertextuality on the basis of Bakhtin’s work. Bakhtin [1] argues that every text is dialogical, in the sense that it gains its meaning in relation to other texts. Bakhtin's theories continually return to inform different theories of intertextuality. Julia Kristeva's attempt to combine Saussurean and Bakhtinian theories of language and literature produced the first articulation of intertextual theory. Kristeva [2] points out that a given text is “a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one other”. Intertextuality in its simplest definition is based on the commonsensical notion that texts are influenced by other texts. That is, texts have long histories replete with conventions, functions, particular ways of making meaning, and other ways of interacting with other texts.

From the dictionary, we know that intertextual is an adjective which relates to or derives meaning from the interdependent ways in which texts stand in relation to each other. Intertextuality is a term coined by Julia Kristeva to designate the various relationships that a given text may have with other texts. Intertextuality is the shaping of texts' meanings by other texts. It can refer to an author’s borrowing and transformation of a prior text or to a reader’s referencing of one text in reading another. For Kristeva, “the notion of intertextuality replaces the notion of intersubjectivity” when we realize that meaning is not transferred directly from writer to reader but instead is mediated through, or filtered by, "codes" imparted to the writer and reader by other texts.

Intertextuality seems such a useful term because it foregrounds notions of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence in modern cultural life. According to Barthes[3], the idea of the text, and thus of intertextuality, depends on the figure of the web, the weave, the garment (text) woven from the threads of the 'already written' and the 'already read'. Therefore, every text
has its meaning in relation to other texts. The process of intertextuality should be through its major theoretical contexts. Intertextual reading encourages us to resist a passive reading of texts from cover to cover. There is never a single or correct way to read a text, since every reader brings with him or her different expectations, interests, viewpoints and prior reading experiences. Each reader should be encouraged to read articles in whatever order best suits his or her purpose. Just in this point, the paper attempts to apply the intertextual theory in reading teaching among English-majored students.

The Analysis of Questionnaires and Tests

The questionnaires and tests are applied to three English-majored freshmen’s classes in the same grade with the similar English level for a whole semester. It's designed that class one is to increase their intertextual awareness through enriching the social background knowledge, class two is to increase their intertextual awareness through enlarging the vocabulary storage, class three is to increase their intertextual awareness through practicing passage reading comprehension. All the three classes are given three questionnaires and tests during the whole semester. Every time after a test or a questionnaire, there is a data-collection and a data-analysis. At the end of the semester, the results are put together and some comparison and contrast are followed.

Since the three classes have the same final exam paper, we can see which method influences the English-majored freshmen more. Because class two is designed to increase their intertextual awareness through enlarging the vocabulary storage, students in this class get higher marks in vocabulary part than the other two classes. For the same reason, class three is designed to increase their intertextual awareness through practicing passage reading comprehension, students in this class finally get higher marks in reading comprehension part than the other two classes. Thus, it’s safe to say enlarging vocabulary storage by memorizing frequently is a good way to enlarge English-majored freshmen’s intertextual space in mind so as to increase their intertextual awareness, and practicing passage reading comprehension by doing a lot of exercises is also a good way to enlarge English-majored freshmen’s intertextual space in mind so as to increase their intertextual awareness. However, according to the total marks from the final exam at the end of that semester, class one get the higher total marks than the other two classes. That’s to say, the better way to improve the English-majored freshmen’s reading comprehension ability is to increase their intertextual awareness through enriching the social background knowledge.

The study has covered one whole semester to test three classes designed to increase their intertextual awareness through enriching the social background knowledge, to increase their intertextual awareness through enlarging their vocabulary, and to increase their intertextual awareness through practicing passage reading comprehension respectively. Through the data-collection and the data-analysis, the result is that enriching the social background knowledge by reading large amount of English-written materials is a better way to enlarge English-majored freshmen’s intertextual space in mind so as to increase their intertextual awareness. Then, students’ reading comprehension ability is improved as well. What’s more, after making a comparison and contrast for the three approaches applied to the three classes, we find that, for the majority of English-majored students, the best way is to enrich their social background knowledge by reading large amount of English-written materials. So that their intertextual space in mind is enlarged, and their intertextual awareness is enhanced as well.

Conclusion

We know that the history of intertextual theory is not very long. From the beginning till present, it covers no more than 70 years. [4]The application of intertextual theory in reading aspect has the history of approximately 30 years or more. Intertextuality is one of the most commonly used terms in contemporary linguistic study. It was the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure who promotes this notion. Later, the Russian literary theorist M. M. Bakhtin continually informs different theories of intertextuality. Then, in the late 1960s, Julia Kristeva attempted to combine Saussurean and
Bakhtinian theories of language and literature and finally produced the first articulation of intertextual theory. [5] According to Julia Kristeva, every text (or utterance) is dialogical, in the sense that it gains its meaning in relation to other texts. Thus, the extensive reading class teaching is designed to enlarge the repertoire of other texts, including the basic language knowledge. From the results of the data-analysis, we can see clearly that more amount of vocabulary repertoire in English can increase the students’ reading comprehension ability in English; more amount of passage reading practice can help build the repertoire in English so as to increase the students’ reading comprehension ability in English; more amount of social background repertoire in English can also increase the students’ reading comprehension ability in English. But the results of their final exam show that the social background knowledge is more important for the majority of such students. Thus, for the English-majored freshmen, the major objective of Extensive Reading course is to try hard to enlarge students’ social background knowledge in the target language. Teachers in China who are teaching the Extensive Reading course should think of ways to improve students reading comprehension ability with the help of intertextual theories.

Acknowledgement

This research was financially supported by the MOE (Ministry of Education in China) Project of Humanities and Social Sciences for the West and the border area (Project No. 14XJA630004).

References


