

Study on English Reading Teaching for Non-English Majors under the Guidance of Discourse Analysis Theory

Silu Wang*

School of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Chongqing Normal University, Chongqing 401331, China

* Corresponding author email: 1287214139@qq.com

Abstract: Within the spectrum of English learning endeavors, English reading undoubtedly occupies a pivotal position. Nevertheless, conventional instructional paradigms in English reading tend to overemphasize grammatical rules and lexical items, while neglecting the cultivation of students' comprehensive command of English reading skills and their capacity for systematic textual analysis. Such an approach, albeit conducive to enabling students to accumulate a certain vocabulary size and acquire fundamental grammatical knowledge, to a significant extent constrains their reading comprehension proficiency and their ability to analyze complex texts. Discourse analysis, as an effective approach to reading instruction, is gradually attracting extensive attention from the educational community. As a scientific and systematic method of reading teaching, it can effectively make up for the deficiencies of traditional reading instruction and provide strong support for students' all-round development. This paper aims to explore the application of discourse analysis in English reading teaching and its impact on students' reading ability. It is hoped that this study can provide new ideas and methods for English reading teaching, helping students not only master linguistic knowledge in the reading process but also improve their comprehensive literacy, so as to achieve all-round development.

Keywords: Discourse Analysis, Non-English Majors, English Reading.

1. Introduction

In an era of globalization, English reading proficiency is critical for non-English majors, supporting their academic growth, career development, and cross-cultural engagement. As mandated by China's College English Teaching Guidelines, reading instruction should go beyond basic language skills to foster higher-order abilities, such as understanding textual depth, analyzing discourse structures, and grasping authors' intentions. However, current teaching practices often focus excessively on fragmented vocabulary and grammar, neglecting holistic comprehension of text structure, logic, and context. This leads to a common issue: students can decode words and sentences but struggle to interpret entire texts or evaluate authors' perspectives, failing to meet modern demands for critical and cross-cultural thinking.

Discourse analysis theory, which emphasizes language's contextuality and wholeness, offers a solution. By guiding students to analyze themes, cohesive devices, and information flow at the discourse level, it addresses the limitations of traditional methods, enhancing their ability to grasp texts comprehensively and think critically.

This paper explores the application of discourse analysis in non-English major reading instruction, using case studies to illustrate its role in improving students' holistic and in-depth comprehension. It aims to provide practical insights for teaching innovation and enhancing students' core English competencies.

2. Discourse Analysis Theory

2.1. Definition of Discourse Analysis Theory

Discourse, as a unit of meaning, refers to a spoken or written segment of any length that is semantically complete.

It is generally acknowledged that discourse encompasses three dimensions: language use, idea transmission, and communication within social contexts.[1] In specific contextual conditions, discourse integrates conceptual culture, interpersonal meaning, and textual meaning. Communication is the transfer of information, and discourse serves as the medium for such information transfer. In other words, human discourse is based on text, and speakers exchange information through context. Therefore, discourse is not only a process of production but also of dissemination. As a process, discourse is a dynamic interaction between communicative parties; thus, discourse analysis focuses on the use of language aiming primarily to analyze the actual semantic meaning of utterances in specific communicative contexts.[2]

2.2. Systemic Functional Grammar

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is rooted in the theories of the London School, with Bronisław Malinowski and John Rupert Firth as its core representatives. The London School advocates analyzing the meaning of language from the perspectives of its functions and contexts. In the 20th century, building on the research of his predecessors, M.A.K. Halliday integrated systemic grammar and functional grammar to establish SFG, which has exerted a significant impact on modern linguistic studies.[3] According to SFG, language is a system of choices, and all linguistic outputs are manifestations of such choices. Meaning arises from choices made within contexts. Language is inherently linked to meaning, forming a deep-seated relationship within the system. To express meaning, speakers must make selections—choosing appropriate functions from the linguistic system that fit the given context to accomplish discourse. Additionally, SFG identifies three meta functions: the ideational function, the interpersonal function, and the textual function. Among these, the textual function connects various components of

language, enabling the unity and integrity of meaning.

2.3. Discourse Analysis and English Reading

To sum up, discourse analysis is the interpretation and study of cohesion within a context. It explores how language is employed to convey a complete meaning, often involving a variety of linguistic variants. Taking the utterance as the object of analysis, “it regards speech as a specific unit of language use, analyzing the meaning of utterances in context; such analysis often goes beyond the level of the sentence, with linguistic materials situated in a dynamic process.”[4] It is worth noting that our daily life is intertwined with the linguistic communication of speakers. The application of discourse analysis in English reading teaching emphasizes a holistic grasp of the text. By analyzing elements such as the text’s theme, paragraph structure, cohesive devices, and the author’s intention, it helps students establish a systematic understanding of the text. This approach not only facilitates students’ in-depth comprehension of the text’s structure, content, and intention but also significantly enhances their reading ability and comprehensive language proficiency.[5] Unlike traditional fragmented learning, it focuses more on cultivating students’ logical thinking and critical thinking skills, enabling them to effectively analyze and understand complex texts.

3. English Reading Teaching for Non-English Majors

3.1. English Reading for Non-English Majors

English teaching for non-English majors has its particularities due to specific stage and teaching objectives. According to China’s current College English Teaching Syllabus, college English teaching aims to develop students’ reading ability to a relatively high level, listening ability to a certain level, as well as preliminary writing and speaking abilities. The basic requirement of the syllabus is that college students can skillfully understand the events and details of a passage, and further conduct analysis, reasoning and judgment to grasp the author’s views and attitudes.[6]

Therefore, college English teaching at different levels plays an important role in college English teaching and serves as the core of English teaching. The focus of teaching lies in improving students’ reading ability, cultivating their English proficiency and developing their English awareness. Reading materials of different themes and genres can not only directly enhance students’ English ability, but also enable them to learn about relevant cultural customs, broaden their horizons, and foster sound outlook on life and values.

3.2. Drawbacks of Current English Reading for Non-English Majors

However, the current college English reading teaching has many drawbacks.

Firstly, teachers have low motivation to promote students’ learning interest.[7] Restricted by teaching conditions, most of English teaching in China adopts the traditional teacher-centered teaching mode. The classroom becomes a platform where teachers speak alone, with students not participating and showing passive behavior. Most classes are boring and passive listening sessions.

Secondly, the sense of wholeness in English teaching is relatively weak. The focus of text interpretation and training still stays at the grammatical level, over-emphasizing the

analysis and application of words and grammatical phenomena, while neglecting the overall analysis of the text and the appreciation of its cultural connotations. In English learning and teaching, teachers’ neglect of discourse analysis affects students’ acquisition and application of discourse knowledge.

Finally, students master reading skills in isolation without forming a systematic framework. Although the emotional analysis of the whole text is involved in teachers’ teaching process, there is usually not enough time for systematic analysis, resulting in students’ unsystematic mastery of reading skills.

4. An Empirical Exploration of College English Reading Teaching based on Discourse Analysis Theory

English reading teaching should be elevated to a higher level of discourse, emphasizing the training of English reading skills and avoiding the phenomenon of “focusing only on trees without seeing the whole forest” so that students can truly understand the text. English reading comprehension at the discourse level includes a more macro-level understanding of the text’s outline, logical relationships within the context, the author’s writing structure, the text’s theme, as well as the author’s viewpoints and attitudes. The analysis of college students’ classroom discourse can be practiced from the following aspects. This paper takes the text Harlic Haplin from Unit 2, Section A of New Horizon College English (Book 4) as an example.

As the opening of a text, the title usually consists of a word, a semantic segment, or a sentence; it is often neglected by teachers and fails to receive due attention from students. However, as the first piece of information, the title is concise and pithy, accepted by readers as the first known information. Discourse is a process where known information moves towards unknown information, ultimately realizing the expression of meaning. In the reading process, the title always summarizes the central idea, indicates the text’s main theme and genre, and enables readers to form expectations. Taking Harlic Haplin as an example, the title is a person’s name, from which it can be inferred that the main character is Harlic Haplin. When a person’s name is used as the title, the text is often a narrative or biography, progressing in chronological order, as evidenced by phrases such as “he was born,” “1913,” “the 1920s,” “1942,” “Harlic Haplin died,” and finally “Christmas 1977.” According to discourse analysis theory, such inferences based on the title are feasible.

Structure is the main thread of a text, including progressive, single-center, multi-perspective, phenomenon-explanation, and problem-solving types. The progressive type refers to a text that proceeds from the abstract to the concrete, gradually developing the theme. It always contains progressive adverbs such as “what’s more,” “furthermore,” “in addition,” and so on. The single-center type is a common genre, usually argumentative. The entire text revolves around a central idea, which can be seen in essays on natural sciences or other academic fields. In this type, the main idea of the text can be inferred from the title and the first paragraph based on the context. The multi-perspective type is an extension of the single-center type, often found in news reports. The phenomenon-explanation and problem-solving types are relatively specific forms within the above categories.

In the process of studying or reading a text, known

information can be used as an auxiliary tool to facilitate English reading comprehension. Taking Harlic Haplin as an example, many students are already familiar with Harlic Haplin before learning this text. As a world-renowned performing artist, Harlic Haplin is best known for his work *The Gilded Age*; his primary performing style is comedy, and his expressive approach is satire—all of which constitute our known information. All the above information can be analyzed as potential known information and utilized by readers. It is worth noting that readers or learners' background knowledge may be inaccurate or inconsistent with the author's stance. Therefore, readers should subjectively determine the central idea based on their existing background knowledge.

Signal words or marker words are key to understanding textual details. They indicate the emergence of new information, shifts in information, or the emphasis of important information. Common signal words are characterized by their frequency of appearance in the text, mostly including numerals, time or location words, transition words, causal conjunctions, and progressive words. For instance, signal words such as "he was born in London," "left Britain in 1913," "meanwhile," "Hollywood," "therefore," and "1942" can assist in understanding the text, helping readers grasp its direction, development, and rhythm.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we primarily explore the drawbacks existing in modern English reading teaching and conduct a detailed discussion on how to apply discourse analysis theory to college English reading instruction. Modern English reading teaching overemphasizes the learning of grammar and vocabulary, while neglecting students' understanding of the overall structure and inherent meaning of the text. Discourse analysis theory emphasizes the holistic comprehension of the text, helping students establish a new knowledge structure by analyzing elements such as the text's theme, structure, cohesive devices, and the author's intention. The introduction of discourse analysis theory into English reading teaching can not only cultivate students' discourse analysis ability but also enable them to understand meanings within the macro system

during the reading process, thereby enhancing their ability to grasp the text as a whole and achieve in-depth comprehension.

In conclusion, in modern English reading teaching, emphasis should be placed on cultivating students' discourse analysis ability, helping them establish a new knowledge structure and understand meanings within the macro system. This not only contributes to improving the quality of English reading teaching but also significantly enhances students' English proficiency. By introducing discourse analysis theory, students can develop a holistic perspective during the reading process and master systematic analytical methods, thereby improving their reading comprehension ability and language application skills. It is hoped that the discussions in this paper can provide new ideas and methods for English reading teaching, assisting a wide range of students in making greater progress in their English learning journey.

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