

# A Case Study of Discourse-Oriented Analysis of English Reading Comprehension Test in Senior High

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**Abstract:** Reading comprehension is an important way for foreign language learners to improve their language competence, while discourse analysis is an important factor that affects reading comprehension. Previous studies have mainly focused on reading teaching guided by discourse analysis theory, and discourse-oriented analysis of English reading comprehension test is rarely involved, which is of crucial importance in high school English learning. This study adopts one case study and collects data by classroom observation and interview to inquire three different types of teachers' beliefs about analysis of English reading comprehension test, ways of discourse-oriented analysis of English reading comprehension test items and relevant effectiveness. It is found that the more discourse knowledge is applied in class, the higher the teaching efficiency would be achieved and students' participation would be involved in. Therefore, in reading teaching class, teachers should guide students to read and analyze the passages deeply, figuring out the thematic meaning, basic contents, stylistic features, content organization structure, language style and main idea, etc. While analyzing reading comprehension test items, teachers can apply previous acquired discourse knowledge if needed. Discourse knowledge will help teachers guide students to analyze and find out proper thinking and useful skills to do reading comprehension questions. It will also be helpful for teachers to abandon the traditional way of analyzing reading comprehension test items and organizing teaching based on the nature of discourse.

**Keywords:** Discourse analysis theory, Analysis of English reading comprehension test, Case study.

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## 1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is not only an important way for foreign language learners to acquire information and improve their language competence, but also an important way for evaluation and assessment in the process of language acquisition (Chen & Li, 2017). As an important way to check students' reading comprehension competence, reading comprehension test is always used by teachers in senior high school. According to Standards for English Curriculum in Senior High (2017 Edition/2020 Revision, abbreviated to Standards in the following), reading comprehension test aims at checking students' understanding of the main idea of the texts, logical relations of the ideas, writing intentions, the use of cohesive devices, cohesion and so on (Ministry of Education, 2020). However, during the teaching practicum, the author found some serious problems while observing some teachers analyzing reading comprehension test. For example, some teachers just told the students the answers to the questions without deeply analyzing the reasons, explained language knowledge out of context and asked students to underline some new words, expressions and grammar items. It is clearly that teachers ignore the importance of discourse knowledge in reading comprehension, which is against the purpose of reading comprehension test. Actually, discourse knowledge learning is the basis of the development of language competence and it plays an important role in language comprehension and expression. With the help of discourse knowledge, learners will better understand listening and reading materials (MOE, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to carry out the research on discourse-oriented analysis of English reading comprehension test in Senior High.

This BA dissertation consists of four parts, which mainly explores teachers' beliefs about the analysis of English

reading comprehension test, analyzes how different types of senior high school English teachers analyze English reading comprehension test within the analytical framework of analysis of English reading comprehension test and explores the effectiveness of discourse-oriented analysis of English reading comprehension test. For literature review, the author first discusses the understanding of certain terms such as discourse, analysis of English reading comprehension test and analysis of English reading comprehension test in senior high school, and then introduces the reading and discourse knowledge requirements in Standards, and finally sorts out domestic and foreign researches on discourse-oriented analysis of English reading comprehension test. For theoretical basis, based on discourse analysis theory, the author introduces the types and structure of discourse, analyzes the textual cohesive devices and constructs an analytical framework of analysis of English reading comprehension test. For research design, the author first presents the research questions, then introduces the research subject, and finally discusses the research instruments of data collection and the process of data analysis. In the fourth part, the author discusses the research results which include beliefs about analysis of English reading comprehension test, ways of discourse-oriented analysis of English reading comprehension test and effectiveness of discourse-oriented analysis of English reading comprehension test. Based on the analysis of research results, some suggestions about how to analyze reading comprehension test from the perspective of discourse analysis are given to teachers in senior high school.

## 2. Literature Review

To language learners, the importance of reading comprehension is obvious, and discourse analysis is a factor of great concern to their reading comprehension. Learning

discourse knowledge is the basis of developing language competence, it plays an important role in language comprehension and expression. In view of this, some experts and scholars at home and abroad begin to pay attention to discourse-oriented reading comprehension test.

## **2.1. Understanding of Certain Terms**

### **2.1.1. Discourse**

Opinions vary on definitions of “discourse”. Foreign scholars hold that discourse is an example of language use, which comes from communication. Richards, Platt, J. and Platt, H. (2002) claimed that discourse is a general term for examples of language use, i.e. language which has been produced as the result of an act of communication. Similarly, Widdowson (1979) argued that it is a language used in spoken or written language to obtain pragmatic meaning. According to Cook (1989), discourse is a string of meaningful and complete language, serving for certain purposes. Halliday (1994), the founder of systemic-functional linguistics, pointed out that the word text is used in linguistics to refer to any passage, spoken or written, whatever length, that does a unified whole.

In China, many scholars have given definitions to discourse. Hu (1994) said, “discourse refers to natural language not restricted by grammar that expresses complete semantics in a certain context”. Whereas Wei (2007) defines discourse in terms of its semantic structure and holds that discourse is foremost a unit of meaning and the complexity of meaning determines the size and length of discourse. In addition, Huang (1988) proposed that discourse can be defined from the perspective of its structure and function. From the perspective of its structure, discourse is larger than a sentence, i.e. arranged in a descending order, the grammatical units are sentences, clauses, phrases, words and morphemes from big to small. From the perspective of its function, discourse is the language in use, that is, the meaning of language is determined according to the context in communication.

Sometimes, only when two or more semantically and grammatically related sentences are connected together, can it the coherence of language be realized, the text be formed and its pragmatic function be exerted. Thus, discourse consists of more than one paragraphs or sentences, in which the components are cohesive in form and coherent in meaning (Wang, 2008). In other words, discourse is a language unit above the sentence level, and an entirety of language formed by a series of consecutive paragraphs or sentences during communication (Xu, 2010).

Generally speaking, discourse is the combination of the author’s choice of the central content, organization of the text structure, construction of the text meaning and expression of the core idea. Discourse in this essay refers to different types of genre used in students’ reading comprehension tests, namely narration, argumentation, exposition, etc.

### **2.1.2. Analysis of English Reading Comprehension Test**

In the Chinese-English Dictionary of Social Sciences (Hu, 2010), test is translated as comment on and appraise. According to Richards, Platt, J., & Platt, H. (2002), test is any procedure for measuring ability, knowledge or performance, and test item is a question or element in a test which requires an answer or response. In reading comprehension test, test items are fixed response items, that is, one correct answer must be chosen from several alternatives. It is also called a multiple-choice item. For analysis of English reading comprehension test, it refers to teachers’ explanations and comments on questions and answers to reading comprehension test items. The main purpose of reading comprehension test is to measure students’ reading comprehension ability. Specifically, it includes reading skills, language knowledge, discourse knowledge, background knowledge and so on. Meanwhile, during the process of analysis of the test items, teachers can help students consolidate what they’ve learned, to guide them to master the discourse schemata, to develop reading strategies and skills, to excavate the humanistic connotation in the text, to expand students’ cultural horizon, to activate the students’ positive emotion, and to arouse their reading interest for further improving their ability of discourse comprehension and appreciation.

### **2.1.3. Analysis of English Reading Comprehension Test in Senior High School**

Analysis of English reading comprehension test in senior high school is a lesson in which teachers analyze, explain and comment on the question items in reading comprehension test in senior high school, which is of great significance in English learning. In this class, students might review or learn some reading skills, learn some language knowledge and discourse knowledge. And in this process, teacher’s role constantly changes from an instructor, a guider to a listener, aiming to enable students to understand the core content of the reading text and analyze the main idea and details of it, then find out correct answers to various questions. What’s more, the process helps bring the test’s functions of evaluation, diagnosis, encouragement and guidance on learning into play. The quality of reading comprehension test directly affects the development of students’ reading comprehension ability. In other words, it is to evaluate whether the students meet relevant reading and discourse requirements in Standards.

## **2.2. Reading and Discourse Knowledge Requirements in Standards for English Curriculum in Senior High**

Reading is one of comprehension skills. According to the Standards, students are required to do reading comprehension activities in discourse (MOE, 2020). Take compulsory course for example as follows:

**Table 1.** Content requirements of reading in Standards

Types of courses	Content requirements of reading
Compulsory course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Extract the main information and viewpoints from discourse and understand the main idea of discourse;</li> <li>b. Understand explicit or implicit logical relationships in discourse;</li> <li>c. Grasp the sequence of the main events in discourse;</li> <li>d. Grasp the key concepts and main details in discourse;</li> <li>e. Understand the meaning of headings, subheadings, and illustrations in written discourse;</li> <li>f. Identify key words and concepts to quickly locate target information;</li> <li>g. Predict the topic and content of discourse based on the title;</li> <li>h. Critically examine the content of discourse;</li> <li>i. Infer the meaning of words from contextual clues or non-textual information;</li> <li>j. Grasp the structural and linguistic features of discourse;</li> <li>k. Identify references and cohesive relationships that are common in written discourse;</li> <li>l. Selectively note down the required information while reading;</li> <li>m. The average amount of extra-curricular reading is no less than 1,500 words per week (no less than 45,000 words at the compulsory course stage).</li> </ul>

As discourse is of great importance to language learning, scholars and educators at home and abroad have made heated discussions and in-depth studies on it. According to Standards,

the students are required to learn the discourse knowledge as follows (MOE, 2020):

**Table 2.** Content requirements of discourse knowledge in Standards

Types of courses	Content requirements of discourse knowledge
Compulsory Course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The main writing purposes of narrative and expository texts (such as representation of experience, transmission of information, explanation of facts, imaginative creation) and the main structural features of such discourse (such as necessary and optional components of such discourse, the order of each component, etc.);</li> <li>b. The basic format, structure and language features of common practical writing in daily life;</li> <li>c. The common structure of discourse, features of titles and language features of news reports;</li> <li>d. Explicit cohesion and coherence in discourse, such as reference, conjunction, ellipsis, substitution and so on, which are realized by the use of pronouns, conjunctions, elliptical sentence and substitution;</li> <li>e. Functions, positions and stylistic features of the first sentence of a paragraph, the topic sentence and the transitional sentence in discourse;</li> <li>f. The role of context in the process of discourse comprehension and production, the relationship between context and discourse structure or between context and discourse content, for example, the prediction of discourse content through context, and the prediction of discourse context through discourse content.</li> </ul>

From above, it can be seen that content requirements of reading have close relations with that of discourse knowledge in Standards. Discourse knowledge instructs students to achieve effective reading and is of great benefit to their in-depth understanding of reading texts.

### 2.3. Domestic and Foreign Researches on Analysis of English Reading Comprehension Test

#### 2.3.1. Foreign Researches on Analysis of English Reading Comprehension Test

The relevant researches on discourse and reading comprehension in foreign countries still remain at discourse-oriented reading teaching, and almost no study on discourse-oriented analysis of English reading comprehension test is carried out. This may have something to do with the differences of educational background and goals between our country and foreign countries. However, foreign scholars have keen insight into discourse-oriented reading teaching and has achieved instructive results with continuous development of research. In the 1970s, the study of discourse-oriented reading teaching gradually began to rise. With the passing of time and the expansion of research, many scholars start to carry out research on how to apply discourse analysis

to reading textbooks and classroom teaching. Kintsch (1974) found that native English speakers are very sensitive to discourse structure. By teaching children in groups, Gordon (1980) found that in reading teaching, teaching children the main idea and structure of discourse can obviously improve children's ability of reading comprehension. After that, many scholars found that the use of discourse analysis theory can greatly improve the second language learners' reading ability. Carrel (1985), a well-known linguist, studied 25 ESL learners from different cultures at a university. These students were in the intermediate level of English, and majored in English intensive reading courses. After a period of discourse-oriented reading teaching, this research came to the conclusion that "discourse teaching can improve their reading comprehension as well (Carrel, 1985)." A new discourse-oriented teaching model is presented in *Language as Discourse: Perspectives for Language Teaching* (MC Carthy & Carter, 1994), which exerted a huge impact on the traditional grammar-based one.

For the past century, foreign scholars have put forward many innovative ideas and approaches on discourse-oriented reading teaching, making great contributions to the development of English language and its teaching.

### 2.3.2. Domestic Researches on Analysis of English Reading Comprehension Test

Discourse theory was introduced to China in the 1970s and has gained remarkable popularity and development in China. There are two obvious signs. One is the emergence of a large number of relevant researches, the other is the great impact on the language field and the foreign language teaching field. Discourse analysis theory has not only been discussed in theory, but also been applied and verified in practice. The upsurge of discourse research is no longer just a phenomenon. Moreover, it leads people's attention to language research and language teaching from the micro level of words and sentences to the macro level of discourse (Qu, 2007). Of researches on discourse analysis theory in China, most are about discourse-oriented reading teaching, few are about analysis of English reading comprehension test. But in a relevant essay, You (2021) pointed out that there are two main characteristics of discourse-oriented analysis of English reading comprehension test: Firstly, it pays attention to background introduction of reading texts. Secondly, it emphasizes that students should have an overall comprehension of reading texts. At the same time, it emphasizes that the teacher plays a role as a guide, a leader and a background teller, not as a speaker, a preacher and an indoctrinator of his own views.

On the current situation, there are still many problems in analysis of English reading comprehension test in senior high school. There is an urgent need for teachers to innovate and reform the original teaching model so as to improve the quality of analysis of English reading comprehension test. At present, the application of discourse analysis theory is to eliminate the shortcomings of traditional English teaching model, so that teachers can shift the teaching focus from vocabulary and grammar to the whole discourse to achieve the goal of cultivating students' English reading ability (You, 2021).

At the same time, You (2021) also put forward many effective measures of discourse-oriented analysis of English reading comprehension test in senior high school. For example, teachers can emphasize on the introduction of relevant background of the reading comprehension discourse, conduct in-depth analysis of the genre and structure of it, and focus on the cohesive devices of it.

## 3. Theoretical Basis

### 3.1. Discourse Types and Discourse Structure

#### 3.1.1. Discourse Types

Discourse types refer to narrative, argumentation, exposition, practical writing and other types of writing, as well as oral, written and other multi-modal discourse, such as text, graphics, songs, audio, video and so on (MOE, 2020).

Different types of discourse is different in ways of information organization, thus narration, argumentation, exposition and other types of discourse have their own particular and distinctive structures and language features (Wang, 2019).

Narration is a relatively common genre, including stories, biographies, history, travelogues and so on. Stories are usually centered on people or events, and are told in terms of time, place, person and cause, process, and ending of events. Biographies give a detailed introduction to the life of the characters, and use the clues of time and space to reproduce the characters' experience in life or the process of their

success. Travelogues are usually focused on describing what one has seen and heard during the travel, taking the transfer of time and space as the main line.

Exposition is a writing style that explains and introduces an object or something. The purpose is to objectively provide knowledge and explain various questions or phenomena. Expository writing can be described in terms of categories, explanations, comparisons, numbers, examples, or the order of time and space. Each paragraph of exposition has a topic sentence, which expresses the main idea of the paragraph and is often at the beginning of the paragraph.

Argumentation is a process of debating on a topic or trying to convince others of a certain point of view. It often raises a straightforward question or argument to show the author's standpoint and views. After that, analysis of the problem is carried out by using facts, data and other arguments to demonstrate the point of view. Finally, the conclusion is reached after problem-solving and discussion. Therefore, argumentative writing generally consists of three parts, i.e. putting forward views, demonstrating views and drawing conclusions.

#### 3.1.2. Discourse Structure

Thinking is the core of language, language is the tool of thinking. Language is composed of lexical system and grammatical system which combine sound and meaning (Xia, 2017). The features of discourse structure are formed under the influence of language thought patterns. Under English thought pattern, people are more accustomed to logical thinking, apt to express directly and fond of the cause-and-effect way of thinking. Here are four common types of English discourse structure:

General-Particular Pattern: it is the most widely used discourse structure in English, which can best embody the thought pattern of English. It has two main forms of expression: ①Generalization-example: the first sentence of a paragraph is usually a summary sentence, often used to express a point of view, give a conclusion or definition of a concept. The rest of the argument is stated with examples according to the content of the first sentence, which can illustrate, enrich, or strengthen the point of view conveyed in the first sentence. ②Preview-detail: the first sentence of a paragraph is usually a summary or a statement of the main idea, followed by supporting details to illustrate the main idea. This kind of discourse structure is often seen in argumentative writing.

Problem-Solution Pattern: the feature of this discourse structure is to first describe a particular situation or explain the real phenomenon. Then, find out the core problem needed to be solved from them. After that, analyze the cause of the problem. Finally, put forward some suggestions to problem-solving. This kind of discourse structure is common in narrative and expository writing. For example, in an exposition of environmental protection, the writer first describes the current phenomenon of endangered animals, so as to bring out the reason, namely environmental pollution and habitat destruction, that led to this phenomenon. And then he or she analyzes the causes of environmental pollution and the destruction of animal habitat. And finally he puts forward suggestions and means of animal protection.

Matching Pattern: it is a kind of discourse structure commonly used in English to compare the similarities and differences between two things. The aim is to make it easier for readers to understand the writer's viewpoint and what he wants to convey by means of comparison. This kind of

discourse structure has three common forms of expression: ① repetition, that is, using the same word or root repeatedly, or using other words with similar meanings to express the same idea; ② word association, i.e. using words that represent context equivalence and comparison relations (e.g: and, but, while, while, similarly, differently, etc); ③ parallelism, that is, the use of sentence parallelism, semantic parallelism, question parallelism, etc, to express the similarities and differences of things (Shen & Dong, 1999).

Example: Trust the young; trust the future.

(It contains sentence parallelism and semantic parallelism.)

Claim-Counterclaim Pattern: it's the form of "introducing a point of view- clarifying it-giving a new one". The writer first states an opinion which is generally accepted or shared by the majority. Then he clarifies, explains and illustrates the opinion. Meanwhile, he expresses his own opinion or standpoint, or puts forward a contrary one to the former point of view, or explains the real situation, etc. By doing so, he or she shows that views or claims accepted by the majority are unreasonable or false, and then he will state corresponding reasons.

### 3.2. Textual Cohesive Devices

Sentence and sentence, sentence and clause, clause and

clause are connected together by cohesive devices in a special way. Cohesion occurs when the interpretation of one component in discourse depends that of another component (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Cohesion is an visible network of discourse, which makes discourse coherent through grammatical cohesion, lexical cohesion and conjunction.

#### 3.2.1. Grammatical Cohesion

Grammatical cohesive devices mainly include reference, substitution and ellipsis. The use of grammatical cohesive devices can integrally link the inner meaning of discourse together, with strong coherence and logic.

Reference. It refers to the use of personal pronouns or demonstrative pronouns in discourse in place of the person or thing mentioned in the preceding paragraph in order to avoid repetition and keep the meaning consistent. Reference can be divided into two types: exophoric reference and endophoric reference. Exophoric reference refers to the semantic relations outside discourse, which are commonly found in oral discourse, while endophoric reference refers to the semantic relations within the discourse, mainly used in written ones (Huang, 2001). According to components of reference, it can be divided into three categories: personal reference, demonstrative reference and comparative reference (Liu, 1999).

**Table 3.** Three types of reference

Types	Markers and explanations	Examples
Personal reference	Personal reference refers to the use of personal pronouns to connect specific nouns in discourse. e.g: I, him, your, mine, etc.	e.g: When someone steals Mary's doll, her father tries to get it back. it in this sentence is a personal reference to the word doll.
Demonstrative reference	e.g: a. demonstrative adverbs: here, there, now, then. b. the definite article the. c. selective demonstratives: this, that, these, those.	e.g: Lily has made great progress in the final test. This is a piece of good news. In this sentence, this is a demonstrative reference.
Comparative reference	e.g: (the) same, similar(ly), such, so, different(ly), other, otherwise, more, less, as+adjective, ordinal words (such as first, second, etc), the comparative and superlative degrees of adjectives and adverbs.	e.g: Una is fond of reading romantic novels, and her mother also likes doing so. In this sentence, so is a comparative reference.

Substitution: it refers to the use of an alternative to express a certain language component mentioned above in discourse. Substitution is sometimes used to avoid repetition or links the

context. Halliday and Hasan (1976) divided it into nominal substitution, verbal substitution and clausal substitution.

**Table 4.** Three types of substitution

Types	Markers and explanations	Examples
Nominal substitution	Nominal substitution refers to the use of an alternative to replace a noun or noun phrase. e.g: such as one, ones, that, both, none, the same, some.	e.g: However, he is defeated by the colossal man, the only one he couldn't beat. Here, one is the substitution of the noun man.
Verbal substitution	Verbal substitution refers to the use of the proper form of do in place of a verb or a verb phrase.	e.g: A: Will you have a big meal tonight? B: I may do. Here, do is the substitution of the verb phrase have a big meal.
Clausal substitution	Clausal substitution refers to the substitution of clauses with so or not.	e.g: A: Did they accept you? B: I guess not. The not replaces (that) they didn't accept me.

Ellipsis: also known as substitution by zero, it means omitting words or phrases in the second sentence that should

be repeated in the preceding sentence to make their meaning dependant on the first sentence. Ellipsis is used to avoid

repetition, highlight key information, and link context. Similar to substitution, ellipsis can also be divided into three

types: nominal ellipsis, verbal ellipsis and clausal ellipsis.

**Table 5.** Three types of ellipsis

Types	Markers and explanations	Examples
Nominal ellipsis	Nominal ellipsis refers to the ellipsis of the head word or modifier in nominal phrases.	e.g: A: There are lots of snacks. What about having some? B: Sure. I'd love to. Lots of snacks are omitted here.
Verbal ellipsis	Verbal ellipsis refers to the ellipsis of certain verb phrases.	e.g: A: Have you finished your homework? B: Yes, I have. In sentence B, have is equal to have finished my homework. Finished my homework is omitted.
Clausal ellipsis	Clausal ellipsis refers to the omission of a clause in question-answer sentences.	e.g: A: Why are you so excited? B: I don't know why. I'm so excited behind why is omitted here.

### 3.2.2. Conjunction

Conjunction refers to the connection between adjacent sentences or sentence groups. It can indicate the semantic connections between sentences by connectives. It is even possible to predict the semantic meaning from the logic of the preceding sentence. Here, the connectives include not only the conjunctions between sentences, but also the adverbs or prepositional phrases with connective meanings (Hu, 1994).

Based on the studies on conjunction by Halliday and Hasan (1976), Hu (1994) and Huang (2001), semantic relations between sentences can be divided into the following ten categories: antithetic, concessive, replacive, enumerative,

casual, additive, resultative, summative, illustrative and explicative.

### 3.2.3. Lexical Cohesion

Lexical cohesion refers to a cohesive device that uses words of the same meaning repeatedly or multiple related words in discourse to express the same and integral meaning, thus making the discourse semantically cohesive. Lexical cohesion, the most important and prominent form of cohesion, is achieved through the choice of words to establish a chain throughout the discourse. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), lexical cohesion includes two categories: reiteration and collocation.

**Table 6.** Two types of lexical cohesion

Types	Markers and explanations	Examples
Reiteration	Reiteration refers to the repetition of a word in various forms in discourse. It can be further subdivided into repetition, synonym or near-synonym, hyponymy and generalization.	e.g: a. The room is not clean, I want to clean the room. (repetition) b. Mary is a creative girl. She always has some innovative ideas. (synonym) c. I'd love to go to a beautiful place such as Chengdu. (Chengdu is a place, belonging to general words.)
Collocation	Collocation refers to the lexical co-occurrence of words with particular relationships, which mainly includes complementarity, antonymy, metonymy, relativeness, etc.	e.g: a. She is an excellent scientist. However, she is an awful mother. (antonymy) b. While actresses tend to put on nice makeup, actors prefer not. (complementarity)

In discourse, some words with interrelated meanings may appear at the same time. These words belong to a same lexical set and form a lexical chain. In some articles and poems, lexical cohesion is achieved through a lexical chain or a lexical set formed by several lexical chains. While reading, we should pay attention to the collocation in it.

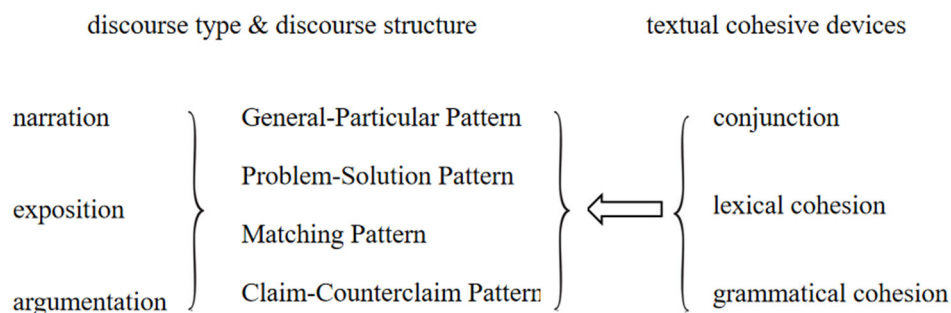
Example: Molly was sent to hospital after the car accident, and the doctors helped her have an operation. With the tender care of nurses, she soon recovered. (lexical chain)

### 3.3. Analytical Framework of Analysis of English Reading Comprehension Test

At the theories part, the author introduces discourse types, discourse structure and textual cohesive devices. The

discourse knowledge is widely used in reading comprehension and analysis of English reading comprehension test which is of great help for students to have an in-depth understanding of discourse and for teachers to analyze the discourse.

This study aims at exploring these teachers' teaching beliefs about analysis of English reading comprehension test, ways of discourse-oriented analysis of English reading comprehension test and the effectiveness of discourse-oriented reading comprehension test. Thus, the author has developed an analytical framework of analysis of English reading comprehension test and the outline of teacher interview (See appendix B for details.). The analytical framework is as follows:



**Figure 1.** Analytical framework of analysis of English reading comprehension test

### 3.4. Summary

Discourse analysis theory involves two levels: macro-structure level and micro-structure level. From the perspective of discourse analysis theory, this chapter introduces discourse types and discourse structure at the macro-level, focuses on the analysis of textual cohesive devices at the micro-level and constructs a new analytical framework based on this theory for analyzing and evaluating the analysis of English reading comprehension test.

From the definition of discourse, it's obvious that discourse is of various types. This chapter mainly introduces the most frequently involved discourse types in high school English reading comprehension, namely narration, exposition, argumentation which the author has explained and analyzed respectively. For discourse structure, the author summarizes four common structure patterns of English discourse: General-Particular Pattern, Problem-Solution Pattern, Matching Pattern and Claim-Counterclaim Pattern.

Textual cohesive devices, as a kind of micro-structure of discourse, are indispensable. Textual cohesive devices make discourse coherent through grammatical cohesion, lexical cohesion and conjunction. Grammatical cohesion mainly includes reference, substitution and ellipsis. Lexical cohesion includes two categories: reiteration and collocation (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Conjunction represents the semantic relationships between sentences and can be divided into ten categories.

The author constructs an analytical framework of discourse-oriented English reading comprehension test, which includes discourse types and discourse structure and textual cohesive devices. This analytical framework is beneficial to conduct a more comprehensive and objective evaluation of analysis of English reading comprehension test.

## 4. Research Design

### 4.1. Research Questions

Reading comprehension tests have a great influence on the enhancement of English reading comprehension ability of high school students. Discourse knowledge learning is the

basis of developing the ability of language application as well as an important factor for students' reading comprehension. In view of this, the author devotes herself to analyze the analysis of English reading comprehension test from the perspective of discourse analysis. The author conducts this research in order to know more about the front-line teachers' understanding of discourse analysis and the application of discourse in reading comprehension test. This research is mainly to address the following questions:

- What are the beliefs about analysis of English reading comprehension test of different types of teachers?
- How do different types of teachers apply discourse knowledge to analyze reading comprehension test items?
- What influences does discourse-oriented analysis of English reading comprehension test have on the development of students' reading comprehension competence?

### 4.2. Research Subject

This study is a case study of discourse-oriented analysis of English reading comprehension test in senior high school. Three English teachers from a key senior high school in Chengdu are selected as research subject. The research subject belongs to different types. Their teaching styles and teaching beliefs are representative but different. The first teacher is an outstanding academic leader in English in Chenghua District, devoting herself to the research of teaching and education. The second teacher is a typical traditional-style teacher. Her classes are test-oriented, and her teaching is of high efficiency. The last one is good at testing paper analysis, but her teaching is not mature and efficient enough. In the academic world, English teachers are divided into three types: expert teacher, proficient teacher and novice teacher (Wu & Luo, 2001). According to the characteristics mentioned above, the author take the three teachers as corresponding representatives of three typical types of teachers. In order to ensure the privacy of the research subject, letters A, B and C are used here to replace their real names, namely, expert teacher—teacher A, proficient teacher—teacher B, novice teacher—teacher C.

**Table 7.** The Subject's Basic Information

	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C
Age	48	36	26
Sex	Female	Female	Female
Teaching years	23	14	2
Professional title	Intermediate Title	Advanced Title	Primary Title
Degree	Master	Undergraduate	Undergraduate

### 4.3. Research Instruments

The data were collected through classroom observation and interview.

Classroom Observation:

Classroom observation is the most direct and important way of investigating the classroom teaching of analysis of English reading comprehension test. In order to improve the pertinence of this study, the author designs an analytical framework of analysis of English reading comprehension test. And then she carries out the investigation of the current situation based on it. Classroom teaching, a process that embodies teacher's teaching beliefs, has its activities designed and implemented to serve some specific teaching purposes. We can tell the teachers' teaching beliefs and teaching methods of analysis of English reading comprehension test from their classroom teaching. By classroom observation, we can analyze their similarities and differences, and it is helpful to grasp the situation so as to come up with research findings.

Interview:

Assisted by the interview method, the author had further communication with three teachers after the classroom observation. According to the earlier classroom observation, the author designed an interview outline beforehand, and made a detailed inquiry in time in the process of interview. After the interviews with three teachers, the author has a deeper understanding of their teaching beliefs, methods and modes of analysis of English reading comprehension test, as well as the implementation of discourse-oriented analysis of English reading comprehension test. All of these findings provide a strong basis for the author to conduct the research and come to a conclusion.

### 4.4. Data Analysis

Based on Chen's (2000) steps of data analysis, the specific steps of data analysis of this study can be summarized as follows:

Reading the primary data carefully. The primary data of this study are from classroom observations and interviews, including video clips of classroom teaching, analytical framework of analysis of English reading comprehension test as well as recordings and transcripts of teachers' interviews.

Sorting. The primary data are specifically classified and organized at multiple levels according to the types of teachers and the categories of research instruments to facilitate data comparison.

Presenting data. After the above steps completed, the results of interviews and classroom observations are presented.

## 5. Research Results and Discussion

It is clear that the research subject belongs to different types and their teaching styles and teaching beliefs vary. But they represent three typical types of English teachers. Therefore, the author will then compare and analyze the similarities and differences of expert teacher—teacher A, proficient teacher—teacher B and novice teacher—teacher C from three aspects: beliefs about analysis of English reading comprehension test, ways of discourse-oriented analysis of English reading comprehension test and effectiveness of discourse-oriented analysis of English reading comprehension test. (The reading comprehension test materials are four pieces of reading comprehension discourse from the same weekly exam paper of Senior 2. See appendix B for details.).

### 5.1. Results

#### 5.1.1. Beliefs About Analysis of English Reading Comprehension Test

This part is mainly from the interview recordings and the author's summary of it.

What's your belief about analysis of English reading comprehension test? For this question, teacher A—expert teacher gave out her answers as follows:

Reading comprehension test is not the simple explanation of test items, also not just a check of the answers and the paraphrase of difficult words in Chinese. Instead, it is a crucial step that the teacher guides students to use discourse knowledge to analyze the discourse with purposes so as to make it easier for them to discuss about the main idea, structure, and even details of discourse. Meanwhile, they can work out the difficulties and problems in reading comprehension by their joint efforts. And finally, good interactions between teacher and students and among students can be achieved. Remember! It's not just teachers' task!

From teacher A's interview, we know that she believes that reading comprehension test should be based on discourse analysis and it requires students' participation in class. She is in favor of applying student-centered teaching model to analysis of English reading comprehension test which is beneficial for students to concentrate on class and develop the ability of independent thinking.

However, in teacher B—proficient teacher's eyes, classroom efficiency is extremely important. When asked

about her belief of that, she said:

In this process, the first and foremost task is to help students figure out each test item and find out the source of each option of these test items. During the analysis of English reading comprehension test, the teacher should introduce some useful reading comprehension strategies and guide students to use them. The ultimate goal is to improve the efficiency and quality of reading comprehension to get good scores.

Of course, the accumulation of language knowledge is essential for English learning, too. The author gets to know this thought of her because she says that she's always trying to find out all of the words that belong to key vocabulary but are difficult to memorize for students before class. And then she will dictate the Chinese meanings of them in class for students to write down and memorize as an after-school assignment.

Similar to teacher B, teacher C—novice teacher considers analysis of English reading comprehension test as a way for students to familiarize themselves with the objective rules of test items of the National College Entrance Examination in advance. She told us her belief about this type of class:

Analysis of English reading comprehension test is a kind of English class served for students to prepare for the National College Entrance Examination. In the class, I will first guide students to analyze the types of test items and then conclude the frequency of each type's occurrence. As the saying goes, only when you know the other and know yourself well, can you fight a hundred battles with no danger of defeat.

Perhaps it's because she has learned science when she was in senior high, she focuses on the data and is keen to use them to prove something. She has analyzed the relevant data of the reading comprehension part of the National College Entrance Examination in the past five years, and will also share her findings with students in class.

### **5.1.2. Ways of Discourse-Oriented Analysis of English Reading Comprehension Test**

During classroom observation, the author analyzes three teachers' ways of discourse-oriented analysis of English reading comprehension test according to the discourse-oriented analytical framework of analysis of English reading comprehension test. It is found that they all apply discourse analysis to reading comprehension test, but the degree varies largely from teacher to teacher. After class, the author knows more about them through the interview that the three teachers are distinct from each other with their different understanding of discourse analysis, so their ways of reading comprehension test are quite different. Each of the ways has its own characteristics.

In the reading comprehension test, teacher A will guide the students to grasp the general idea of the discourse, and sometimes she will provide some relevant background information. This step helps them achieve ideological consistency with the author of the discourse and thus easily understand opinions that the discourse is intended to convey. Just before this, she also asks students "what discourse type does this discourse belongs to, what is the topic of this discourse and so on." (Teacher A's class is of good English learning basis, and she begins to guide students to analyze the theme, genre and so on of reading comprehension materials from discourse analysis at senior 1. So it is not difficult for her class to do so). Different from the "teacher-centered model" widely adopted in the past, teacher A supports a "student-centered, teacher-led model". There are many

opportunities for discussion and debate and adequate time for students' independent thinking. When students are faced with controversial test items, teacher A will provide them with a small stage in which they can debate freely and share their ideas. After that, the teacher concludes what they say and make a detailed analysis. In this period, the teacher plays the role of a guide and an observer to a great extent. When it comes to teacher A's stage, she will first lead students to analyze the discourse type, discourse structure and the relationships among paragraphs. Then, to practical test items, teacher A will lead students to analyze from the micro-level of discourse analysis, textual cohesive devices like grammatical cohesion, lexical cohesion and conjunction are often involved. After finishing the analysis of all these test items, she will explain some key words and long difficult sentences which affect students' understanding of the discourse. As for the rest of the difficult words, it needs students to look them up in dictionary after class as a self-learning task. Of course, this way requires good self-learning and consciousness of students.

For the understanding of discourse analysis, teacher A gave out her answer as follows:

The reading comprehension text, a kind of written form of discourse, is of great significance for students to analyze with discourse analysis. I got to know about discourse analysis theory during my graduate school years. Then, I applied it to practical teaching and found it efficient for students to understand the discourse. It was at that time that I realized the benefits of this theory. Experts in this field divide discourse analysis devices into two levels: the macro-level and the micro-level of discourse analysis. I'd like to adopt the way of analyze from the macro-level first and then the micro-one which is similar to the model of "First, the whole. Then, the partial."

In teacher B's class, the author noticed that her teaching purpose is very clear and the class efficiency is rather high. What she says is often to the point. She can always easily find out test items that most students are not sure about or get stuck in. Moreover, as test items are multiple choices, every choice is worth discussing and analyzing. She will point out sources of almost all the choices appeared in test items.

Example: Teacher B: "The source of this question is in the third sentence of paragraph five of this passage." "Combining with the second sentence of the third paragraph and the first sentence of the next paragraph, we can analyze the answer to option C of question four."

Teacher B's analysis of English reading comprehension test mainly focuses on the explanation of test items on her own, introduction and application of reading strategies and skills to find out right answers of test items, and the accumulation of language knowledge. She will use some of the cohesive devices of discourse analysis include synonyms, substitution, and fixed collocations of phrases. After that, teacher B will analyze few typical long difficult sentences in the passage, so that it will not affect students' understanding of discourse when they meet similar sentences the next time. Finally, teacher B will tell them the Chinese meanings of difficult words and ask students to write down on their notebook.

When asked about the understanding of discourse analysis, teacher B said:

I know this theory, but I'm not familiar with it. I just think that some cohesive devices are beneficial for reading comprehension test and make it easier to do. You know, we

will unavoidably use synonyms, substitution, etc, and memorize some fixed collocations to finish reading comprehension test items.

For teacher C, she will ask students to answer a few questions at first in her class: How many points does the reading comprehension section account for in the whole test paper? How many passages are there and what kind of discourse does each passage belong to? What are the types of test items and what is the proportion of each type? Then she will explain the test items of passage A, B, C and D one by one. She will also provide opportunities for students to raise questions and give them time to think about questions and analyse passages. But she seems to spend too much time and energy on the analysis of the test items and types of them instead of the in-depth analysis of discourse.

Teacher C also shared her understanding of discourse analysis:

I just want to help the students get familiar with the types of test items and reading strategies to do them. As for discourse analysis, I'm not familiar with that theory. But according to what you say, I guess I may have used that in the analysis of some test items. Do you remember the first question of passage B? It's about synonyms. Students are also required to analyse the original sentence of the underlined word.

Example: What does the underlined word "distinguish" in Paragraph 1 probably mean?

A. Tell. B. Enjoy. C. Smell. D. See.

Teacher C: The answer is A. Tell. We can guess the meaning of distinguish

according to the meaning of it in its source sentence "She can only distinguish the

five basic flavors - sweet, salty, bitter, sour, umami." Tell in option A has various

meanings. We are familiar with its meaning of to give information to sb. by

speaking or writing, but here, tell means to distinguish one thing or person from

another (Hornby, Wehmeier, McIntosh, Turnbull & Ashby, 2007).

### 5.1.3. Effectiveness of Discourse-Oriented Analysis of English Reading Comprehension Test

According to scholar Song's (2007) concept of effective teaching, the author concludes the concept of effective analysis of English reading comprehension test: it means that teachers and students follow the objective rules of analysis of English reading comprehension test to promote students' integrated, coordinated and sustainable development and progress in the "three-dimensional goals (i.e. knowledge and skills, process and methods, and emotion, attitude and values)" with optimal speed, benefit and efficiency. Therefore, it can effectively achieve the expected goals of analysis of English

reading comprehension test, implement the teaching activities organized to meet the needs of social and individual's educational values.

Judging from the students' sustainable development and progress in English learning, teacher A's analysis of English reading comprehension test is undoubtedly the best one to meet this requirement. Almost every step and section of her class is closely related to discourse analysis and the realization of the three-dimensional goals. However, it is a big challenge to teacher's and students' English competence. It requires teachers to learn about the discourse knowledge, analyze the discourse deeply and find out useful information, and apply discourse analysis into practical use. Students are demanded to recall the main idea and detailed information of discourse before class, concentrate on the analysis of discourse in class, and spend time on looking up new words and remembering them after class. Teacher A's analysis of English reading comprehension test seems to be more suitable for research-oriented teachers and students who have a good foundation in English, a proper attitude in English learning, and independent thinking ability in English. This, of course, is also the fervent expectation of all English teachers and students who want to teach and learn English well.

For teacher B, the reading comprehension test efficiency is so high that she completed the test in the shortest time (i.e. 30 minutes). Her way analysis of English reading comprehension test is traditional and simple that the teacher explains and lets the student write down her explanation and analysis. This way can clear up most students' questions with the fastest speed. However, the author finds that a few students still have doubts and disputes after teacher's quick explanation, want to put forward but finally give up. Their performances are like frowning with the right hand slightly raised and down for several times.

According to the way of analysis of English reading comprehension test discussed in the previous section, it is known that teacher C is keen to analyze the data of various types of test items and share reading strategies with students, so as to make them thoroughly understand the rules of reading comprehension to get better scores for the reading part. When explaining the test items, some questions will be put forward to guide the students to have in-depth thinking, so as to help students understand the implied meanings of discourse. According to the author's observation, this teacher's classroom atmosphere is moderate, the teacher will give the students opportunity to ask and answer questions, but it seems that the teacher hasn't made full analysis of the detailed information of discourse. Occasionally, the teacher is not confident enough to answer students' questions, or the answer is not precise and firm enough.

To evaluate the effectiveness of discourse-oriented analysis of English reading comprehension test, the author makes a chart to analyze the data and show it clearly.

	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C
Class Atmosphere	90% concentrated	80% concentrated	60% concentrated
Student Questioning	6 (times)	1	3
Teacher Questioning	8	10	2
Group Discussion	3	0	1
T&S Interaction	14	11	5
Discourse Type	4	1	4
Textual Cohesive Devices	9	6	2

**Figure 2.** Evaluation of the Effectiveness of discourse-oriented analysis of English reading comprehension test

Based on the classroom observations, recordings of interviews and the analytical framework of analysis of English reading comprehension test, the author finds that teacher A mentioned discourse knowledge for 13 times, including discourse types, discourse structure and textual cohesive devices. There were 14 times of T&S interaction, which is of the most among three teachers. Besides, group discussion occurred for three times. Thus, in teacher A's assessment class, the participation between teacher and students was relatively balanced. Nearly 90 percent of the students listened carefully and took part in heated debate and group discussion. The class atmosphere was quite good.

Based on the observation, interviews and analytical framework, the author finds that teacher B mentioned discourse knowledge for 7 times, only once for discourse types and most of the times were for textual cohesive devices. In teacher B's class, the participation of students was far lower than that of the teacher and the students had fewer opportunities to express their views. There were only one student questioning and even no group discussion. Nearly 80 percent of the students listened to the class carefully and took notes with teacher B's explanation.

Based on the observation, interviews and analytical framework, the author finds that teacher C mentioned discourse knowledge for 6 times, which was mainly for discourse types. The interaction between teacher and students was lower than that of the other two teachers', for 5 times only. There were 3 times of student questioning and 2 times for teacher questioning which was of low frequency for a teacher to raise questions. The only time of her class for group discussion is better than none of teacher B's class. Nearly 60 percent of teacher C's students listened carefully and the rest of the class either discussed their views in a low voice during the teacher's presentation, or raised their hands to ask questions and had interactive discussions with the teacher.

## 5.2. Discussion

### 5.2.1. Strategies of Discourse-Oriented Analysis of English Reading Comprehension Test

Comprehension is affected by the experiences, abilities, motivation and reading goals of the reader (Anastasiou & Griva, 2009). Kintsch (2004) noted that it requires identifying and understanding the important ideas of texts and making inferences based on both texts and background knowledge. Here are some effective strategies for teachers to conduct the

discourse-oriented analysis of English reading comprehension test. First, analyze the discourse type and comb the discourse structure. Every type of discourse has its own special structure and characteristics. Only when students understand the structure and features of discourse well, can they realize what the writer is meant to convey so that they can cope with test items. Second, introduce background information of the passage or arouse students' existed background knowledge about it. English reading belongs to intercultural communication. In addition to language factors, it is also affected by the differences between Chinese and Western cultures. Students' understanding of the external world and the breadth of their knowledge will directly affect their understanding of reading articles (Chen, 2010). Third, guide students to analyze the discourse with discourse knowledge based on specific items of the passage. Different kinds of test items require students to use different discourse knowledge. Semantic meanings of discourse include the main idea, detailed information and implied meanings of discourse. Students can adopt skimming and scanning to quickly grasp the main idea of this passage. For items which involve detailed information, students can look through the whole passage and localize relevant sentences with key words. As to implied meanings, they demand students to read the whole passage carefully and focus on specific sentences to infer from them. Textual cohesive devices includes grammatical cohesion, lexical cohesion and conjunction. The teacher instructs students to find out the way that sentences or paragraphs are connected together and then figure out the textual cohesive devices involved. Author's writing purpose or attitude is implied by certain words or sentences. Students ought to be sensitive with words that suggest the author's positive or negative attitude and read through the passage to find out relevant sentences. Fourth, guide students to find out the right way of thinking about a particular test item by using follow-up questioning techniques. The teacher interacts with students on uncertain test items to get to know about each others' different ideas of them. Students are able to figure out with the help of the teacher's guidance and instruction and their own answers with reflection. Fifth, arouse students' motivation by using various student-centered activities. For example, there are always many controversial options in the test. Students may have their own understanding and way of thinking. On that occasion, a free debate is of help to activate students' desire of in-depth analysis of discourse. In the

process of the debate, students will rethink and the right answer will gradually come out.

### 5.2.2. Requirements for Teachers to Analyze English Reading Comprehension Test

Expert Wang (2019) said, “the understanding, analysis and application of the discourse used in teaching are crucial to the effective implementation of teaching.” So it is to analysis of English reading comprehension test. Teacher’s understanding, analysis and application of the discourse used in the test have far-reaching influence on students’ in-depth understanding of the discourse and their error correction of test items.

To achieve the effectiveness of analysis of English reading comprehension test, teachers ought to do the following things: Firstly, improve the ability of discourse analysis. It requires teachers to read relevant literature to know more about discourse analysis theory and then put it into use as much as possible. Secondly, read the discourse of reading comprehension test carefully and analyze the discourse knowledge involved (i.e. discourse types, discourse structure, cohesive devices and so on) to deepen the understanding of the semantic meanings of the discourse before class. Lastly, analyze the test items and design a lesson plan combining the requirements of reading and discourse knowledge in Standards.

## 6. Conclusion

Different types of teachers have different beliefs about analysis of English reading comprehension test. These teachers’ ways and effectiveness of it vary from each other with their different understanding of discourse analysis. Despite these differences, their common goal of analysis of English reading comprehension test is to help the students master the reading strategies and skills and analyze the reading text with discourse analysis thus enhancing their ability of reading comprehension problem-solving.

English teaching ways are developed from word-and-grammar-focused to discourse-focused one indicating discourse analysis in teaching (Chen & Pan, 2021). Based on the author’s observation and analysis, it is found that the more the discourse analysis is applied to discourse-oriented analysis of English reading comprehension test, the better the effectiveness of it is. That’s because students can have an in-depth understanding of discourse to get the main idea easily and get more detailed information. Therefore, English teachers should keep pace with times, adopt this new and effective method to improve the effectiveness of analysis of English reading comprehension test.

This case study will inevitably have some limitations in the research process. First, the English proficiency of students are different. These students are from three different classes of senior 2. After more than a year of English teaching by different teachers, the students’ English learning habits, English learning attitudes and English proficiency have changed greatly with the influence of teaching styles and beliefs, etc. This may have a certain degree of interference to the conclusion. Second, the data may be not accurate and comprehensive enough because of the researcher’s limited ways of questioning and expression as well as the limited research time and depth. Third, three teachers taken as research subject are representative to some extent, but they can not fully represent the typical types of teachers because the classification of them is somewhat subjective.

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