

The Application of Discourse Analysis in Reading Comprehension

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Abstract:

From the perspective of linguistics, reading comprehension is not only a simple analysis of vocabulary and grammar, but also should be grasped from the aspect of discourse analysis. Based on the theory of functional linguistics, this paper discusses the application and value of discourse analysis in English reading comprehension.

Key words: Systemic-functional grammar; discourse analysis; reading comprehension

Introduction

Today's English education are emphasized to focus on training students' listening, speaking, reading and writing. To a certain extent, to train students' reading comprehension ability is an effective way to improve listening, speaking and writing ability. By reading a lot of material, students' vocabulary and cultural background knowledge has been improved, language sense has been exercised, writing ability can naturally improved. When communicate with others, they can accurately grasp the information in other people's words and express themselves in appropriate way. In the current selection system, the written examination is still the main factor, and the requirement of reading ability is really high. How to improve students' reading comprehension ability is particularly important. This article mainly discusses this question from the perspective of systemic-functional grammar.

1. Systemic-functional Grammar and Discourse Analysis

Systemic-functional grammar is founded by famous scholar M. A. K. Halliday, which is based on two facts. First, the language user makes a choice in the language network and tries to realize different semantic functions in social interaction. Second, language is an indispensable part of human social activities. Systemic-functional grammar includes two aspects: Systemic Grammar and Functional Grammar. In systemic grammar, the so-called system includes a chaining system and a selection system. Halliday defines the system as a series of options and entry criteria. Simply put, in a number of possible options, adding specific constraints to form a meaningful overlap, that is a system. In the functional grammar, Halliday mainly describes how language is used to meet people's needs. He believes that the language has three pure functions, namely: conceptual function, interpersonal function and discourse function.

Discourse function refers to the ability to organize textual idioms in a series of spoken or written language. Discourse analysis is not proposed by Halliday, but it is also an important symbol of systemic functional grammar distinguished from other linguistic groups. Halliday believes that textual function consists of three major forms of representation---thematic system, information system and cohesion system. Among them, thematic structure and cohesive relation constitute are the important components of Halliday's discourse function. Systemic functional grammar is regarded as a communicative unit, and text is considered as a super sentence. It can be used to study text by studying sentences, and the whole text is a set of grammar. Systemic functional grammar pays attention to the relationship between sentences and text, and considers the two as a kind of embodiment.

2. Reading comprehension

What is reading? Reading is an extremely complex psychological process. Functional approach holds that reading is a highly creative behavior. Readers screen and evaluate the information according to the known information, knowledge and experience. The process of reading comprehension is mainly divided into four levels: the first level is literal comprehension, the second is inferential comprehension, the next one is evaluative comprehension, and the last one is appreciative comprehension. Evaluative comprehension and appreciative comprehension are the highest state of understanding, which means that readers can analyze and judge logically according to the structure of the article, and infer the implied meaning of the author and the author's view from the lines.

3. The application of discourse analysis in reading comprehension

3.1 Contextual analysis of discourse

Context, that is, linguistic environment, refers to the atmosphere and state while speaking or transinformation, including both language and non-linguistic factors. Both linguistic and non linguistic factors are included. Serving as a limiting or supplementary function in language. A full understanding of the context of a text can help to better understand the text, grasp the ideas that the author should convey, and accurately understand its implied meaning. The more the reader knows about the background cultural knowledge, the more profound meaning they can understand.

In reading materials, we should not only carefully distinguish the information that the author tells us, but also try to figure out its context. For example, in TEM8 2015 (new type), there is such a description of reading

comprehension in passage three:

I had to keep a stern eye on the clutch, a willful piece of mechanism that seized every chance to leap out of its socket with a noise like a strangling leopard.

The literal meaning of this passage is: I shall pay close attention to that wayward clutch, and it will seize every opportunity to shout out from the slot, like a hunting prey leopard.

The true meaning of this sentence is not simply like the surface meaning that the clutch as quick as the leopard. Combined with context before and after we can see that the author here used humorous language to express the meaning the is very old. Only when we have a thorough understanding of the context can we analyze the article in the right direction without being biased by the language of the author. It is thus clear how important the context is for discourse comprehension.

3.2 Thematic analysis of discourse.

The discourse consist of different sentences and paragraphs. In the same discourse, sentences and paragraphs are all around the same center point, so to grasp the theme of discourse is particularly important. The theme is the central idea of the full text, and a general survey of the whole text.

Finding the topic sentence is more easy to grasp the author's true writing intention, and on this basis can better understand the full text. Such as in TEM8 2009, there is such a description of reading comprehension in Text B:

The workforce is ageing across the rich world. Within the EU the number of workers aged between 50 and 64 will increase by 25% over next two decades, while those aged 20-29 will increase by 20%. In Japan almost 20% of the population is already over 65, the highest share in the world.

It is easy to see that the subject sentence here is the first sentence at the beginning, and all the statements behind it are closely centered around *the workforce is ageing across the rich world*. In the text, no matter how complex it is, it's closely related to a certain theme, and grasps the topic, which can help the reader understand the text quickly and thoroughly.

3.3 Discourse structure and genre analysis.

Genre is a tool or medium for the purpose of communication. Therefore, the genre analysis of text can not be limited to the description of its linguistic features or style, but its communicative purpose should be taken into account. The structural arrangement of discourse is limited by a certain genre, and the two concepts of genre and structure are closely related. For example, in the TEM8 2015 (new type), passage one:

What went wrong? Is the lingering shadow of the global financial crisis making it hard to accept extravagant indulgences? Or do people shop more impulsively—and therefore make bad decisions—when online? Both arguments are plausible. However, there is a third factor: a question of touch. We can love the look but, in an online environment, we cannot feel the quality of a texture, the shape of the fit, the fall of a fold or, for that matter, the weight of an earring.

It is easy to see that this is an argumentative essay. The author begins with an interrogative sentence, then follows two questions, and then uses the declarative word order, which are all about the first question. With a clear grasp of the genre, it is easier to understand the whole text.

4. How to use discourse analysis to improve students' reading ability.

4.1 Strengthen the cultivation of cultural background knowledge.

In English reading comprehension test, more and more American culture is reflected in it. We know that text symbols are only a kind of carrier between the author and the readers. Only when the reader connects his background knowledge with the information of the article, can he achieve the effect of understanding. And different people have different cultural backgrounds, their values and customs are different. A nation that considers it proper, but it may be totally alien to another nation. For example, when talking about the population problem, Chinese will associate with the population explosion, food shortage, control population growth, while the Western think that we should keep the population growth, otherwise it will bring the aging of population, thus affecting business development. Therefore, the lack of content schemata often leads to a lack of understanding of the content. English reading are related to history, geography, politics, economy, religion and culture. Sometimes a word, a phrase, or a sentence has a very profound cultural meaning, simply rely on the dictionary can not solve the problem. It is necessary to link the article with its background at all times when answer the questions in reading comprehension.

4.2 Pay attention to train students' ability to understand the logical relations of the articles according to the discourse markers and the identification of the cohesive groups. Different discourse markers and cohesive phrases express different discourse relations. Only by deeply understanding the role of discourse markers can the reader understand the context of the text clearly.

4.3 Summarize the main idea of the whole paper.

The discourse is composed of paragraphs, each section of the subject sentence basically summarizes the meaning of the paragraph. The reader can usually infer the general content of the text according to the topic sentence. In other words, the synthesis of several thematic sentences can generalize the central idea of the whole text. As long as we grasp the central idea of the full text, we can understand the article faster and better.

4.4 Analysis the features of discourse, improve the ability to understand and appreciate the work.

After grasp the genre framework, teachers can guide students to carefully analyze the structure of discourse. Digging the deep meaning of the article, help students infer the deep topic of discourse, seek the author's views on the subject and the expectations of the reader. Appreciate the inner beauty of the text, and read the text with an appreciative view, so as to grasp the whole situation. This not only improves the reading ability, but also raises the students' appreciation of the works. It also deepens the attempt and scope of the understanding.

5. Summary

Systemic functional grammar provides theoretical support for discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is helpful for deep analysis of text. It plays a prominent role in reading comprehension. Guided by systemic functional grammar, it is essential to use text analysis to deeply analyze reading materials, which is essential for improving reading comprehension ability.

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