
The Use of Schema Theory in the Teaching of English Reading Comprehension

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ABSTRACT

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Schema theory has an important application value in English reading teaching. It is essential for optimizing the teaching environment of English reading teaching, improving the effectiveness of English reading teaching, developing students' English reading ability, and cultivating students' good English reading thinking. Moreover, it plays an important role in promoting the all-round development of students. Aiming at the problems in junior high school English reading teaching, this paper proposes a development strategy for English reading teaching based on three different schema theories: language theory, content theory and form theory, so as to further improve the quality and efficiency of junior high school English reading teaching.

Keywords:

Schema Theory; Junior High School; Teaching of English Reading

1. INSTRUCTION

Language learning is inseparable from reading. Reading, as one of the four skills in the foreign language, is by far the most important skill for many students learning English (Zhao Jing, 2017). Besides, reading is the main way to obtain and master information. Reading comprehension is an important way for students to obtain information and expand their knowledge. Through continuous reading, people can input the external knowledge into their own mind, and generate new knowledge through the processing of information by the brain. And it is an important part of the English language ability of junior high school students. Just as Chen Xianchun(1998) once mentioned in his work: "Reading is one of the most basic methods for human to recognize this modern society. It is also the basic application of foreign language".

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However, the traditional English reading teaching still relies on traditional Grammar - Translation Method in English classroom teaching. It is easy to focus on the text and ignore the importance of the rest of the content. Therefore, it's important for a teacher to show a great concern on English reading teaching and actively guide students to consciously change their traditional way of learning. Since the 1960s, English reading theory has been influenced by psycholinguistics, especially Goodman reading psycholinguistic model, namely "Schema Theory". So how to apply the schema theory to the teaching of English reading to promote the development of English reading ability? This article will discuss this topic.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW OF SCHEMA THEORY

2.1 Definition of Schema Theory

A schema is a mental model of conceptually related "elements" which directs how new information is organized (Stein, 1992). Schematic theory is a theory for cognitive psychologists to understand mental processes. Different

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scholars have different views towards to schama theory. This theory was first proposed in 1781 by the German philosopher and psychologist Kant. And he claimed it as "innate structures, which organize our world". British psychologist Bartlett (1932) described "schema" as "a positive development model" and believed that schema can be used in language comprehension. Rumelhart defined schema as "a data structure that represents a genetic concept stored in memory". Anderson defined it as "an abstract structure of knowledge," while Medin and Russ simply refered to schema as "a general knowledge structure for understanding."

In the 1970s, scholars represented by Rumelhart and Carrell introduced schema theory into the study of reading theory, explored the process and mechanism of cognitive text meaning, and created modern schema theory.

Furthermore, as for the theoretical significance, schema refer to the knowledge structure and empirical structure, which can help people recognize the world unconsciously.

From these definition, we can get that schema is gradually accumulated experience and knowledge structures during the process of a man's cognition, whether consciously or not, people are using the existing schema to understand the world.

2.2 The Classification of Schema Theory

Depending on the meaning of above description, it is either assimilated into existing knowledge structures and the schema remains the same or the schema changes and is reconstructed. Either way, the schema provides individuals with a knowledge base that serves as a guide for the interpretation of information, actions, and expectations, thereby simplifying the process by which people make sense of events and situations (Bartlett, 1932; Lord & Foti, 1986; Engle & Lord, 1997). This part, we will talk about three schema: Language schema, Content schema and Formal schema.

2.2.1 Language Schema

Language schema is a general understanding of the language rules of a particular language, which contains vocabulary, grammar, speech rules and so on. In other words, it refers to the basic language knowledge.

2.2.2 Content Schema

Content schema refers to the background knowledge that students have known about the content of the article. It mainly includes the cultural background knowledge and knowledge related to the topic of the article (Li Han, 2020). It is also called thesis schema.

2.2.3 Formal Schema

Formal schema, as its name suggests, refers to the

structure of text, generally refers to the readers' understanding of genre and rhetorical techniques. It can help us get to know the inner meaning of the passage.

3. THE APPLICATION OF SCHEMA THEORY IN ENGLISH READING TEACHING

Language schema can guide students to find the certain information in the text, and help students be ready for reading. Besides, it will introduce background information, which can enrich studnets' background knowledge, active content schema as well as assist students' reading. What's more, teachers can encourage studnets to predict by using the title and pictures. The detailed description of language schema in English reading teaching as following.

3.1 The application of Language Schema in English Reading Teaching

Language schema limits the ability of English reading comprehension. Before English reading teaching, English teachers should let students familiarize theme with relevant vocabulary, grammar, usage and other knowledge, and establish students' language schema. For example, there is a passage about sports. We may learn some new words about sports, such as basketball, volleyball, footable and so on. For the study of the word "basketball", the PPT is used to present a picture (the content is a basketball and Yao Ming), accompanied by praise and comments from netizens, while giving a sentence: Yao Ming plays basketball very well. This process assists students to learn some new words by using pictures. Besides, a teacher can guide students to guess the meaning of the vocabulary based on the context. The richness of language knowledge structure is helpful to activate the reader's language schema in the process of reading, and the text information is combined with the knowledge of language skills in the reader's mind to realize the literal understanding (Cao Jianhui, 2019).

3.2 The Application of Content Schema in English Reading Teaching

Discourse exists in a certain context, and reading material is no exception. The content schema refers to the context in which we speak, or the knowledge system and experience background stored in our minds related to the topic of the article (Ding Yidan, 2017). For example, when it comes to Dragon Boat Festival, we think of Qu Yuan, dragon boat race, Zongzi, realgar wine and etc. Content schema is often culturally relevant. When a teacher teaches a passage titled "The Spring Festival", He/She can ask students to predict what will be

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talked about in this article according to the title. Then, students may answer there are some customs in the Spring Festival, such as getting lucky money, posting couplets, making dumplings and etc. This process helps activate students' background knowledge about the Spring Festival, which have been stored in their brain.

Schema theory has advanced our understanding of the interactions among the reader, the reading context, and the text. The content schema will help students predict and break the meaning of the text, and ultimately improve the English reading skills of students. The reader's background knowledge can affect second language reading comprehension ability. Christine Nuttall (1996) strongly support this view. He said that on the case of readers have same capacities in other aspects, the more the reader get to know the knowledge of the article topic, the easier it is to understand the corresponding article.

Reading Material is infinite, but the subject is limited. If we can help students build up the contents of the schema about different, not only the teaching of English reading easy, but also students read in a more comprehensive system. (Zhang Xiang, 2011)

3.3 The Application of Formal Schema in English Reading Teaching

The formal schema mainly refers to the reader's familiarity with the arrangement of information structure. It can also be said to be the understanding of the structure of the text, generally refers to the reader's understanding of genre and rhetorical techniques. For example, when students answer reading questions, if they ask the cause and effect. They are likely to break through if they find causal terms, such as because, on an count of and so on. If learners master the formal schema, they will grasp the logical relationship of the article as a whole and better analyze the general idea of the article.

To sum up, language schema can help students arrange the information of the passage in a logic way and improve their thinking quality. A teacher can help active students' knowledge related to the passage, developing students' sensibility about language and enriching their language accumulation. Knowing the background information assists students experience sentimental value of the passage and accurately grasp the author's purpose of writing. All in all, in English reading teaching, a teacher should help students use language schema. Only in this way, students can improve reading efficiency and make progress in reading.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper explores how to use schema theory to help improve English reading teaching efficiency. Given the concrete use of the different schema theory in English reading teaching, the writer gives an example in each part. To sum up, this requires teachers to understand the learning characteristics of students, stimulate students' learning initiative, recognize the nature of reading, clarify teaching content, flexible using of schema theory, in order to improve the quality of English reading teaching (Piaget, Haider, 1980). However, there are also some limitations. For example, the content and analysis are not very detailed. And this paper doesn't have empirical research, lacking data to support the idea. Hopefully, further research can do more detailed and deeper study in this field.

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