

Discussion on how to Conduct English Reading Teaching Based on Thematic Meaning

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Abstract

The National English Curriculum Standard (2017 Edition) states that students' inquiry into the meaning of a topic should be the most important element of student' language learning, directly affecting their level of comprehension, development and the effectiveness of language learning. Thematic context, as one of the six elements of English curriculum content, has a crucial role in English language teaching. Teachers should pay attention to the exploration of thematic meaning in English reading teaching, so that students can gain more knowledge from English reading texts and improve their reading ability comprehensively. This article explores how to teach reading based on thematic meaning from the perspective of thematic meaning.

Keywords

Thematic meaning, English reading teaching, English reading teaching based on thematic meaning.

1. Introduction

First of all, in English learning, listening and reading help students to accumulate language input, while speaking and writing are their language output. However, in China, where there is a lack of a native English environment, students have fewer opportunities to rely on listening to accumulate language input, so a majority of Chinese students get their language input through English reading. At the same time, reading is also a key test item of the college entrance examination and reading comprehension questions account for a large proportion with high scores, which requires a high level of overall ability of students. So, English reading is very important in senior high school.

And the NECS points out that key competence is the goal of English teaching and proposes that English teaching should be led by the theme and designed based on the discourse, which provides new ideas and methods for English reading teaching. The NECS clearly states that the depth of students' understanding of thematic contexts and discourse directly affects the extent of their discourse comprehension, the level of their thinking development and the effectiveness of their language learning. So, teachers should consider the exploration of thematic meaning as the core task of teaching and learning to integrate learning content and lead students to develop their key competence.

To sum up, based on the importance of English reading and the requirements of the National English Curriculum Standard, it is especially necessary to explore the thematic meaning English reading teaching in high school. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to help teachers understand this new model of reading instruction, identifying specific ways to teach reading based on this model and enriching teaching activities to improve the quality of reading instruction.

2. Concept Definition

2.1. Thematic Meaning

The term thematic meaning comes from linguistics. The British linguist Leech (1981) divided meaning into seven categories, namely conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, stylistic meaning, affective meaning, reflectiveness meaning, collocational meaning and thematic meaning, where thematic meaning generally refers to the meaning expressed through “words order” and various forms of “emphasis” (Zhu Yafu, 2005). Another linguist, Lyons (2000), divided meaning into four categories which are conceptual meaning, social meaning, emotional meaning, and thematic meaning, of which thematic meaning is the profound meaning conveyed by the text and is the source of students’ language, emotions and thoughts (Zhang Jinxiu, 2019).

From a constructivist perspective, thematic meaning is constructed through active interaction between individuals and discourses, individuals and others, and individuals and selves, so it has great openness and diversity (Zhang Jinxiu, 2019).

In terms of ELT, thematic meaning refers to the core idea or deeper meaning presented by the theme, which is often related to cultural connotations, emotions, attitudes and values, and the exploration of thematic meaning directly affects students’ understanding of the discourse (Chen Xinzhong, 2018). What’s more, the discourse is the carrier of thematic meaning. The thematic meaning is the sublimation of the meaning of the discourse, which is more profound and condensed than the discourse (Zhang Linlin, 2019).

Therefore, this study believes that thematic meaning is inseparable from the discourse and needs to be presented in oral or written discourse. Thematic meaning refers to the deeper understanding of the content of the discourse, which requires teachers to guide students to read the discourse in depth, and to perceive and refine the thematic meaning in the process of exploring the discourse.

2.2. English Reading Teaching Based on Thematic Meaning

The NECS requires the English curriculum to take the inquiry of thematic meaning as the core task of teaching and learning, and puts forward the idea of English teaching based on thematic meaning. And English teaching based on thematic meaning is to design teaching objectives, contents and activities around a certain topic (Cheng Xiaotang, 2018).

Li Baorong made suggestions for teaching reading based on thematic meaning. He believes that the key to teaching reading based on thematic meaning is to combine the exploration of thematic meaning with language development and to pay attention to the “degree” of the exploration, not to pursue the so-called grand and vague thematic meaning in isolation from the the discourse (Li Baorong, 2018).

According to Su Keyin, in the learning based on thematic meaning, students read the discourse with certain theme based on their prior experience and current cognitive level. They enhance their emotional experiences and improve their English language learning, creative thinking, and communicative skills through interactive activities (Su Keyin (2019).

Therefore, this study believes that English reading teaching based on thematic meaning is to take the theme as the leader, use the discourse as the carrier and create authentic situations in the classroom so as to cultivate students’ key competence and realize the educational value of the English subject.

3. The Application of English Reading Teaching Based on Thematic Meaning

3.1. Interpret Reading Discourse

English reading teaching based on thematic meaning should take discourse as the carrier and take exploration of thematic meaning as the center, so teachers should first interpret reading discourse thoroughly, which is the prerequisite for teachers to effectively lead the exploration of thematic meaning. Teachers can conduct discourse interpretation from five perspectives, namely, theme, content, style, language and author. And then organize the interpretation content and try to answer the three questions led by what (theme and content), why (theme and author) and how (style and language)(Zhang Qihui&Wangqiang, 2019). Also, understanding the discourse content and the deep meaning of the discourse is determined by sorting out and interpreting the discourse content(Chen Shike2019).

In a word , discourse interpreting can be divided into the following three steps:

- (1) Interpret theme and content, that is, to clarify the main idea and content of the discourse through surface comprehension.
- (2) Interpret theme and author, that is, to discover the author's writing intention or value orientation through deep comprehension.
- (3) Interpret style and language, that is, to think and summarize the literary form, content structure and writing techniques used by the author to express the thematic meaning on the basis of discourse comprehension.

3.2. Design Teaching Objectives

Teachers should design teaching objectives around the theme and students themselves. Paying attention to students' existing cognitive level and ability is the starting point of setting teaching objectives(Chen Chunhui&Zhang Jingshun, 2019). According to the teaching content provided by the textbooks, teachers should put themselves in the position of their students to set teaching objectives. So teachers should consider students' experience, their needs and their cognitive level.

Teaching objectives around thematic meaning includes both subject-based teaching objectives and language-based objectives(Chen Xiaotang, 2018). In other words, teachers should not only lead students to understand the thematic meaning of discourse, but also lead students to learn language knowledge, language skills and other aspects knowledge related to language itself.

3.3. Design Learning Activities

3.3.1. Design Perceiving activities to activate thematic meaning

Activating thematic meaning is the first step of thematic meaning inquiry. Before reading, teachers can create situations around the topic according to students' existing knowledge and experience, and pave the way for necessary language knowledge and cultural background. In this process, teachers should guide students to preliminarily perceive the thematic meaning through observation and thinking, laying a foundation for learning and acquiring new experience and exploring new knowledge and thematic meaning.

Teacher should guide students to think and predict the content through the title. When perceiving a text, the first thing students notice is the title of the discourse. Title is the focus of the discourse, paying attention to the title can help students predict the content and the thematic meaning of the discourse and quickly arouse students' desire to actively explore and read the discourse.

Teacher should use teaching materials to help students perceive discourse. The NECS put teachers should help students to cultivate language skills of listening, speaking, reading,

viewing and writing. The viewing skill is added after the other skills mentioned. Video, pictures, discourse illustrations, etc. are effective and direct carrier to cultivate the viewing skill. They are closely related to the context of the discourse, providing students with intuitive and vivid information.

3.3.2. Design understanding activities to enrich thematic meaning

Enriching thematic meaning is the core step of thematic meaning inquiry. Discourse is the support and carrier of English teaching.

Teachers should lead students to study the discourse deeply, constructing the thematic meaning by extracting the gist of the discourse and managing discourse structure and detail information.

In the process of enriching the thematic meaning, teachers can appropriately explain the important words and language points in the discourse that influence students' understanding of the text, and should pay special attention to the language expressions closely related to the theme, so as to arouse students' thinking about the theme by exploring the meaning expressed in the context.

At the same time, during this process, one of the important missions for students is to understand the discourse, that is, to construct thematic meaning and language based on the discourse. So thinking visualization is a construction way that can help students, among which, mind map is an effective tool to realize thinking visualization. Mind map can help students organize knowledge to make abstract discourse knowledge explicit, visual and systematic, and understand the discourse content and construct the thematic meaning. Therefore, teachers can use mind map in teaching design to effectively break through the difficulties in students' understanding of thematic meaning and reduce the difficulties of exploring it.

3.3.3. Design transcend activities to sublimate thematic meaning

Sublimating thematic meaning is the climax of thematic meaning inquiry. Discourse, as the carrier of information and thoughts, need teachers focus on the deep cultural connotation and value orientation contained in the discourse. What's more, teachers should encourage students to rationally express their personal views in combination with the real life to realize the educational value of reading teaching based on thematic meaning.

After processing the text reading and text information, teachers can ask students to look back at the discourse and put some output activities to help students realize the extension and expansion of the thematic meaning. According to the guidance of the activity theory of English learning, teachers can design activities of reasoning and argumentation, criticizing and evaluation, imagination and creation. In the process of thinking and complete these activities, students' understanding of the thematic meaning is constantly deepened. When students fully understand the thematic meaning of the discourse, they can deeply understand the author's inner feelings, value orientation and viewpoint from different perspectives, highlighting the educational value of English subject.

4. Conclusion

English reading teaching based on thematic meaning takes students' understanding of thematic meaning as the main line and language expression as the second line to design teaching activities. Through a series of progressive activities around the thematic meaning, teachers guide students to learn the language expression and discourse structure, to understand the relationship between the various parts and the thematic meaning, to explore the hidden information and deep meaning behind the discourse and to grasp the connotation, value and significance of the discourse theme. So, teachers, as leading role, should help students to complete the thematic meaning exploration. It is necessary to carefully interpret and analyze

the discourse, sort out the thematic meaning and pay attention to the students' knowledge transfer, ability improvement and key competence cultivation.

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