

An Application of Appraisal Theory to Teaching College English Reading in China

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Abstract—This paper attempts to apply a new theoretical framework-Appraisal Theory to the analysis and teaching of college English reading, with the hope of finding a new way of teaching college English reading, which will be helpful to solve the problems in the process of teaching English reading in China.

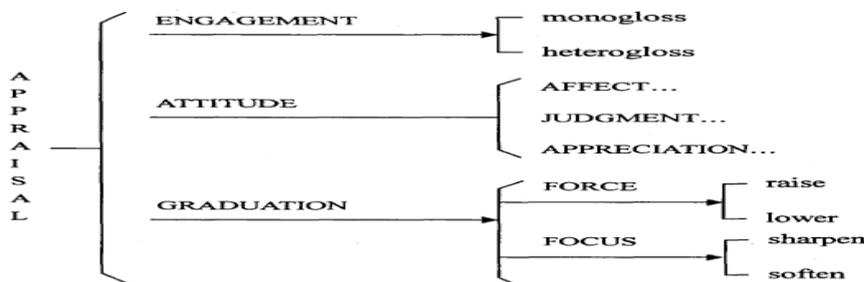
Index Terms—Appraisal Theory, college English reading, teaching in China

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading plays a very important role in teaching college English in China. Therefore, teaching of college English reading has attracted the attention of the language teachers and scholars for a long time. However, the present situation of college students' reading ability is not very satisfactory. This thesis attempts to apply a new theoretical framework-Appraisal Theory to the analysis and teaching of college English reading, with the hope of finding a new area of application for Appraisal Theory and a new way of teaching college English reading.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF APPRAISAL THEORY

Appraisal Theory, which was put forward by James Martin at the beginning of 1990s, is an extension of M.A.K.Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics. It provides an analytical tool for us to better understand the issues associated with evaluative resources and the negotiation of intersubjective positions, and opens a new area of interpersonal meaning. Martin examines evaluative lexis expressing the speaker's or writer's opinion on, very broadly, the good/bad parameter. The overall system of choices used to describe this area of meaning potential is called appraisal. The appraisal includes three categories. The main category or sub-system is affect, which deals with the expression of emotion. Related to this are two more specialized sub-systems: judgment, dealing with moral assessments of behavior, and appreciation, dealing with aesthetic assessments. The second one is engagement. Engagement is concerned with the ways in which resources such as projection, modality, polarity, concession and various comment adverbials position the speaker/writer engages with respect to the value position being advanced and with respect to potential responses to that value position-by quoting or reporting, acknowledging a possibility, deny, countering, affirming and so on (Martin & White, 2005:36). The last one is graduation. Graduation is concerned with gradability. For Attitude, since the resources are inherently gradable, graduation relates to adjusting the degree of an evaluation-how strong or weak the feeling is, that is, Force; in the context of non-gradable resources graduation has the effect of adjusting the strength of boundaries between categories, constructing core and peripheral types of things, called Focus.



An overview of appraisal resources (Martin&White, 2005:38)

III. PRESENT SITUATION OF TEACHING OF COLLEGE ENGLISH READING IN CHINA

Reading has been a prominent position in second language teaching and learning. It is always a major part of College English Teaching, and plays an important role in developing students' English proficiency. However, the situation is not very satisfactory. The main problems are as follow.

Firstly, some college students are content with getting the literal meaning of a text after overcoming vocabulary and

grammar difficulties. For them, reading English is still confined with language study, rather than for a thematic messages. Secondly, In China, the teaching of College English reading has been confronted with embarrassment for many years for falling to meet the ideal target of enabling students to master the foreign language flexibly. This is especially true with non-English majored college students who complain that they have made little progress except the vocabulary amount since graduation from high school. Thirdly, English teachers are confused by the discrepancy of reading discrepancy of reading competence among the students since they receive the same training and instruction. English teachers should make such questions clear as how students read in English, what difficulties they may encounter during their reading and how they respond to the difficulties.

IV. THE IMPLICATION OF APPRAISAL THEORY TO TEACHING COLLEGE ENGLISH READING

With the foregoing review of the appraisal theory and the problems of teaching of college English reading, the research methodology including subjects, instruments and materials and research procedures employed in the research is outlined now.

A. *Subjects of the Experiment*

The subjects of the experiment are 100 sophomore students who are non-English majors from Herbing Engineering University. They are randomly divided into two groups, the experimental group (EG) and the control group (CG) with each group 50 students in. The 100 sophomore students have passed the Band Four of College English Test, and their reading level is similar.

B. *Instruments and Teaching Materials*

The teaching material is a textbook of New Horizon College English published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

C. *The Design of the Experiment*

In this experiment two groups are used: one was an experiment group, which is taught in the way of adopting Appraisal Theory, and for the control group, traditional method are applied such as introducing background information, word explanation, sentence paraphrasing, text translation and so on. For each group, the hours allocated for each text is the same.

D. *The Design of Classroom Teaching by Using Appraisal Theory*

The test analyzed by means of Appraisal Theory, and there comes the issue of how the classroom teaching can be carried out. The following is a tentative design. The process of teaching is divided into three stages: comprehension of the text, explanation of the text and critical reading.

In the process of comprehension of the text, the teacher can help the students with the difficult words, phrases and sentences.

In the process of explanation of the text, the teacher takes control of the explaining process, asking students questions concerning a language point or sentence meaning every now and then to know whether the students have understood the literal meaning of the text. And then the teacher can also ask the students some comprehensive questions about the text to help the students know better about the text.

In the process of critical reading, the teacher can ask the students to comprehend the text from the following three steps:

Firstly, to understand the context of the text. Halliday argues that context should include two parts: one is linguistic context, including intratextual context and intertextual context; the other is non-linguistic context, which includes context of situation and context of culture. Language and culture are closely related; vocabulary, an important element of language, is bound up with culture. Words are loaded with cultural factors. Apart from learning the pronunciation, the spelling and the literal meaning of a word, students should master its cultural meaning as well to ensure their appropriate application of the words in any situation. So from the words the author chooses, the readers can know the author's real feelings, purposes and so on.

In situational context, we touched upon background knowledge a little, which is connected with the situation of the utterance or text. In reading a text, it is also necessary to be familiar with its related cultural background knowledge. So the introduction of the necessary background information of a text can help the students know better about the meaning beyond the clause (with texts in other words). Therefore, it is necessary to situate the analysis of discourses in the background of the contexts of situation and of culture in which these discourses are produced.

Secondly, to distinguish the author's attitudes and to discuss the underlying values and ideology. Different registers and genres require writers to use appropriate ways to signal their evaluation; thus certain disciplinary community has its specific styles to demonstrate evaluation. At the same time, the writer takes the readers into consideration in choosing the way to encode his opinion. So in this part, the teacher can ask students to make a list of sentences or phrases containing emotional words such as happy and unhappy or satisfied and dissatisfied, etc. Tell them to underline the subjects and objects of the emotions. And then give them some time to read the list carefully. Second, ask students to find out the sentences or phrases that contain words expressing evaluations. Words like positive and negative ones.

From the above steps, students can see more clearly the author's attitude. Moreover, students can find out the basic approach employed by the author more easily. This is concerned with various aspects of discourse organization, including the question of how people, places and things are introduced in text and kept track of once there; how events and states of affairs are linked to one another in terms of time, cause, contrast and similarity; how participants are related as part to whole and sub-class to class; how turns are organized into exchanges of goods, services and information; and how evaluation is established, amplified, targeted and sourced.

Thirdly, to encourage the students to speak out their views about the text. In order to make the appraisal knowledge connected with prior knowledge to consolidate the ability of finding out evaluative resources, the students are required, on one hand, to read the text intensively and they are given some time to generalize the whole text from the points of strategy and content on their own, on the other hand, to interpret the information, give their opinion and respond. In this way, they could develop their critical thinking skills and they are empowered to become independent, critical thinkers and readers. Consequently, the knowledge would be systematized and organized. Correspondingly, students could have a much deeper understanding of the text.

E. Experiment Results and Analysis

After 18 weeks' study (2 hours for each week), the two groups of students were given a quiz about reading comprehension. The quiz is from the Band Six of College English Test, which is the authority of the English language test in China. From the result of the quiz, we can know the mean scores of EG is higher than that of CG

F. Shortcomings of the Experiment

Owing to the limitation of time and other factors, only non-English major sophomores are chosen as the subjects. And the sample used is too limited in size. Therefore, this study only serves as a pilot for a larger scale study. In the process of the experiment, only the mean scores of the quiz is used, which is not enough.

V. CONCLUSION

The results of the present study indicate that the application of Appraisal Theory to the teaching of college English reading is very helpful for students in their reading comprehension. With the help of Appraisal analysis, students can have a better understanding of the reading materials. And this indicates that the Appraisal Theory can be used as an important strategy to develop their critical ability. Appraisal Theory can provide the Chinese English teachers with a new perspective to teach reading in English.

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