



A strategy for English reading teaching based on vocabulary, grammar and logic

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Abstract

"English Reading" is a professional compulsory course combining theory with practice. This course covers English language knowledge, culture and literature knowledge, national knowledge, cross-cultural communication knowledge, basic knowledge of humanities, social sciences and natural sciences, etc., aiming to improve students' reading efficiency and ability to obtain main information, especially text appreciation, rhetoric and critical thinking ability. The task of the lesson is to cultivate students' ability of discourse analysis, semantic appreciation, logical thinking, independent thinking and proficient communication, so as to make them become "application-oriented talents" of high-quality and with innovative consciousness and creative ability". Through the data analysis of an authoritative reading test officially organized by the university, the author found that a large proportion of students in sophomore year failed to perform well in the test and did not demonstrate excellent reading skills. The reasons are as follows: firstly, the "teacher-led role" is neglected in reading teaching; Secondly, students ignore discourse analysis in reading; thirdly, the students' understanding of vocabulary is limited to the meaning of completely equivalent Chinese; Fourth: Grammatical awareness is not strong. The author finds out the problems that students have in reading, and combines relevant cases to conduct in-depth discussions on these issues.

Keywords: reading comprehension; teacher-led; vocabulary; grammar; logic

Introduction

English reading is a professional compulsory course combining theory with practice. As the new era puts forward higher requirements for us, as teachers, we should guide students to change the learning methods of reading lessons in the past. They should not only focus on vocabulary, grammar, but also pay attention to the overall structure of the article, the logical connection between paragraphs, and the denotative and connotative meaning of words and lines, and moreover the rhetoric and idiom expressions should not be neglected either.

It is important for students to pay attention to the connection between the topic sentence of the development of paragraph, the connection between the central idea of the article and macroscopic framework of paragraph expansion and text construction, and the argument relationship between the details and the subject. Most importantly, social value behind the author's language should be noticed. Thus, English reading course could authentically be a transitional stage for students' cognitive progress.

"Syllabus for English Majors in Colleges and Universities" points out that the purpose of English reading lesson is to cultivate students' English reading comprehension ability and improve students' reading speed; to cultivate students' ability to meticulously observe language and improve their ability of analytical thinking, induction, reasoning and other logical thinking skills; Therefore, textbooks should use a wide range of reading materials to provide students with a wide range of language and cultural materials to expand the students' knowledge and enhance their English language sense and students' interest in learning. " The extensive reading course requires students to read a lot,

so the guiding role of the teacher becomes very important, which is not only reflected in the guidance of teachers on the structure of knowledge and the guidance of classroom activities, but also includes teacher's guiding students how to choose extracurricular reading materials in order to effectively cultivate their reading interest, expand their vocabulary and so on. [1]

Data Analysis of Students' English Reading Ability

The first semester of the 2018-2019 school year, from 14:45 to 16:45 on January 8, 2019, the sophomore students of the School of Foreign Languages, Sichuan University of Science & Engineering, conducted an examination of English reading, which was officially organized by the university. The relevant information of the test papers is as follows:

Principles of English Reading Test

The test papers are divided into four sections: basic knowledge, basic reading theory, theoretical application, and expanding ability. The focus and score ratio of each section of the test paper is:

1. Fill in the blanks with the correct forms of the given words. (20%)

This section examines the basic knowledge of students, with a focus on basic grammar knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, and the use of fixed phrases.

2. Synonyms and Lexical Substitution. (10%)

The detail is that in each of the following sentences, there is one underlined word, and students should decide which of the four meanings can replace the underlined word and fits the sentence best. This section examines students' ability of vocabulary replacement and the ability to use synonyms, which can test students' vocabulary levels and their ability to use English vocabulary.

3. Reading Comprehension (40%)

This section consists of four passages and twenty questions.

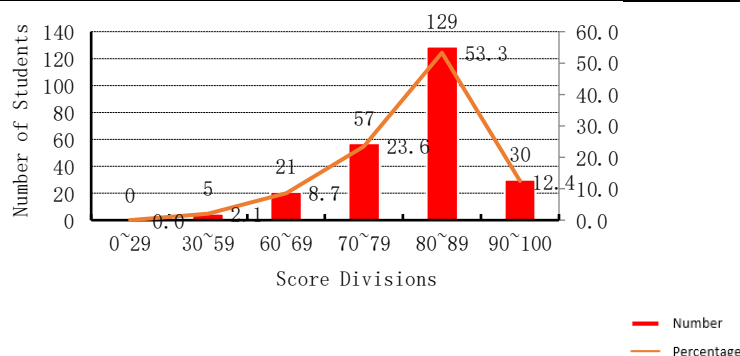
This section examines the basic ability of the student's paragraph extension, the ability to master the topic sentence of a paragraph; examine whether the student can quickly obtain useful information in the text.

4. Translation (30%)

This section mainly examines the students' mastery of the content of the articles they have learned, as well as the students' language output ability, and examines whether they can grasp the key information of the article.

In total, 242 sophomores took the exam and the result of the exam is shown below:

Score Divisions	0~29	30~59	60~69	70~79	80~89	90~100	The highest	The lowest	Average
Number	0	5	21	57	129	30	96	46	80.9
percentage	0.0	2.1	8.7	23.6	53.3	12.4			



The analysis of the results of the reading test of the whole grade is as follows:

1. Overall performance status: the analysis of students' test performance is shown in the figure above, showing a normal distribution of performance; That is to say, the average score of 80-89 accounts for the majority, while the rest of the scores decrease successively to both sides, among which the underachieving students accounted for 34 percent of the total.

2. The author checks the papers of 34% of the students and finds that a large proportion of these students have lower scores in the vocabulary, reflecting that the students are not well versed in the understanding of words in specific contexts; they are in the quick reading section. They did not score high in the “speed reading” part, and a few students did poorly in this part, indicating that students need to further strengthen the text understanding and important grammar, so as to improve the effectiveness of information input in reading.

3. It reflects the problem of teachers' teaching: teachers seldom explain reading methods and skills in teaching, fail to allow students to carry out a lot of discourse analysis due to the limitation of class time, which makes the lesson lack of effective teacher-led guidance.

The Balance between English Teachers' "Leading Role" and Students' "Subject Status"

Compared with other subjects, the particularity of English learning determines that English classroom teaching should pay more attention to students' independent practice, that is, students' "subject status".

However, the content of English reading texts involves all aspects of social life; and at the same time, the styles are diverse, including profound literary works, practical expository articles, news and advertisements, excellent narrative works and logical argumentative articles, which are all-inclusive and cover a wide range of knowledge. This requires teachers to have a wide range of life experience and adequate knowledge reserves, and play a "leading" role in the English reading class, because if separated from the teacher's leading role, the student's “subject status” will be restrained: compared with teachers, the cognitive structure of students is relatively weak, and the acquisition of important knowledge is not targeted, so in the face of a large and extensive knowledge system, it is easy for students to get "selective loss".[2]

Case Studies of English Reading Teaching

CASE STUDY 1:

In the book “Reading Course” (second edition), edited by Weidong Dai, there is a short passage like this: “In certain volatile situations, the Security Council has given UN peacekeeping operations "robust" mandates authorizing them to "use all necessary means" to deter forceful attempts to disrupt the political process, protect civilians under imminent threat of physical attack, and/or assist the national authorities in maintaining law and order.” And then there is a question about the passage: Question: The passage suggests that robust peacekeeping can use all necessary means for all the following purposes EXCEPT for?

- A. protecting civilians
- B. maintaining law and order
- C. disrupting the political process

Most of my students just get confused by this question, because they think that all of the three choices are right the purpose of "use all necessary means". The reason why they cannot make a right choice is that they do not understand the relationship between “to deter...” and “to disrupt...”.

They mistakenly think “to disrupt...” is adverbs of purpose, but actually “to deter forceful attempts” is the adverbs of purpose of the sentence, and “to disrupt the political process” is just a modifier, an attribute, of the noun “attempts”. That is to say, the purpose of "use all necessary means" is to deter “disrupt the political process”, instead of to “disrupt the political process”.

CASE STUDY 2:

In one of my papers “A Special Strategy for Practical English Teaching: to Find Interesting Linguistic Phenomena of English” published in SSRG International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, Volume 5 Issue 5, 2018, there is a case about students’ misunderstanding of some special English words: in the fourteenth paragraph of the article “The Changing Sino-American Relationship”, from the unit seven of the book “Reading Course” (second edition), edited by Weidong Dai, there is a sentence like this :

And it is exposing its forces to multi-national military exercises outside its own borders, while undertaking internationally sanctioned operations.

The word “sanction” is special, because it has two meanings and most importantly the two meanings are totally opposite.

“sanction”

□ 1. official orders or laws stopping trade, communication etc. with another country, as a way of forcing its leaders to make political changes ; measures taken by countries to restrict trade and official contact with a country that has broken international law ; a form of punishment that can be used if someone disobeys a rule or law

□ 2. formal official permission, approval, or acceptance: if someone in authority sanctions an action or practice, they officially approve of it and allow it to be done

Facing such a context, if the students just know that the meaning of “sanctioned” is a form of punishment, the information they can get in the paragraph could be “China has focused on modern technology and weapon systems to take part in some unreasonable multi-national military exercises which are disagreed by the world”; on the contrary, if students just know the meaning of the special word “sanctioned” is the second one (formal official permission, approval), the information they can get could be “China has tried so hard to upgrade modern technology and weapon systems in order to make contribution to the righteous multi-national military exercises which are supported by the world.” So from the analysis above, we can see that the totally opposite meaning of the word “sanction” may cause serious misunderstanding for students and even make some students make big mistake in getting key information from the article. It is crucial that teachers make a summary, or even conduct relevant research on such special linguistic phenomenon to help students know that there is such a linguistic phenomenon: auto-antonyms, which could help students to make sure which meaning of the word is more suitable according to certain context, so as to help them to get the correct information and avoid making serious mistakes in understanding the whole article. [3]

CASE STUDY 3:

The book “Reading Course” (second edition), edited by Weidong Dai is commonly used in English reading in many universities, but most of the articles of this book is from foreign authors (or even some unheard-of writers), foreign newspapers and foreign websites, so it is considerably difficult to find relevant analysis, exploration and some useful background information. What is worse is that, according to many students in our university, teachers just ask students to find in article the answer to some exercise questions in the book, and seldom refer to the text analysis. Therefore, there is a common situation for students that they can choose correctly the answers to some questions, but they just do not know what the article is all about, the reason of which lies in that students cognitive structure is relatively limited, so they cannot understand how the paragraphs are developed, how the author uses details to support the subject sentence, and how the subject sentences support the topic of the article; they do not know what is the logical connection between paragraphs, and the denotative and connotative meaning of words and lines, etc. Therefore, the teacher’s proper guidance is crucial. For example, the article “The Changing Sino-American Relationship” by Shahid R. Siddiqi in 2009 [4] is so difficult that many students find it is hard to understand it. And at this time, the teacher should tell them some difficult but important information: the logical connection between paragraphs.

The author use first two paragraphs to tell the background information of Sino-American relationship: changed from “adversarial policies” in Cold War into today’s “close bilateral, mutually beneficial economic partnership” because of “Kissinger’s initiative of visiting Beijing”; the next two paragraphs tell that today’s relationship is conducive to both countries; then comes the key information: paragraph five and the next paragraph’s first sentence are actually the turning point, that is America’s economic crisis adversely impacted China, making China start to find alternative solution to decrease the dependence on US and the risk from US dollar, which is the main content of the next part; then from paragraph ten to fourteen it is about China’s rise in economy, politics and military, which naturally lead to the next part that “China’s taking its place among super powers” forms a new strategic basis for closer Sino-US relations; after that, the first word in paragraph eighteen “But...” is the turning point indicating the third change between US and China, the reason of which mainly lies in the different ideology; ... So, this is the logical connection between paragraphs, and this is how the author develops these paragraphs, students should know it is the “two turning points and three changes” that makes the topic: The Changing Sino-American Relationship.

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