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语言认知研究

Cognitive Studies of Language



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Preface

This book attempts to study language issues from a perspective of cognitive linguistics. The authors hold the fundamental view that language is basically a psychological and cognitive phenomenon, and at the same one of the basic means of expressing human ideas and thoughts.

The purpose of language analysis and study is not simply to describe people's linguistic behavior, but rather to explain the psychological structure and process for these behaviors, and further to discover and reveal the inherent and deep devices behind these behaviors.

Cognitive linguistics, which is often taken to refer to the approaches and methods to the study of language, began to emerge in the 1970s and has been increasingly active since the 1980s. Most of the cognitive study of language focused on almost every aspect of language, covering organizations of conceptual structure, conceptualization and construal operations, categories, concepts and meanings, polysemy, sense relations, metaphor, construction grammar, to name a few. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, natural language is the result of human mind, language is not an autonomous cognitive faculty, grammar is conceptualization, and knowledge of language emerges from language use. Language structure relies on and reflects the processing of concepts, based on human experiences. The structure is relevant to and motivated by conceptual knowledge, embodied experiences and functions of their utterances.

Language reproduces reality. Every linguistic expression of an event denotes a restart of another event.

The authors intend to study some major language issues particularly on cognitive device, meaning construction and interpretation in EFL reading, ordering of multiple attributives of English sentences, embodied attributes of gradient features of English spatial prepositions and generations and comprehension of verb-particle constructions, cognition of color codability in trilingual settings, ECM analysis of reciprocal functions of news headline interrogatives, textual functions of passive sentences in abstracts of English academic papers, cognitive features of discourse markers *well* and *you know*, and embodiedness of preposition *over*.

Each of the chapters of the book was independently written, but jointly discussed.

Gao Zhidong is responsible for chapter 1 and jointly responsible for the rest of the nine chapters, proofreading and verification of the whole book. Guan Zhijing (chapter 2), Lang Qian (chapter 3), Wang Wanfei (chapter 4), Gao Huan (chapter 5), Gao Wenlu (chapter 6), Cao Qiangqiang (chapter 7), Hao Jianlian (chapter 8), Wang Lihua (chapter 9), and Li Shaofei (chapter 10) are jointly responsible for the respective chapters.

The authors would like to thank Professor Ma Zhenduo, Shaanxi Normal University, Professor Jiang Yue, Xi'an Jiao Tong University, and the postgraduate program members of School of Foreign Languages of Yan'an University for their comments on earlier versions of independent chapters. Gao Zhidong would like to thank the postgraduate students of successive classes of School of Foreign Languages of Yan'an University on cognitive linguistics, who used relevant materials and discussed topics that eventually became part of the chapters presented in the present book. Of course, all responsibility for the final product remains with the authors. Last but not least, Gao Zhidong would like to thank Education Department of Shaanxi Provincial Government for its scientific project support (2013JK0298), and Yan'an University for its publishing fund without which the press of the book would not be possible.

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1 Metacognitive Awareness

Guidance in the Teaching of EFL Reading

Abstract: The study of metacognition has been largely historical and reconstructive in nature. Educators and researchers have used the ideas, writings and significant instructional events shaping reading teaching norms as the lens for understanding present conditions and even for projecting foreseeable futures in EFL reading instruction. Recent trends within the domain of reading comprehension have led to an increasing emphasis on the role of metacognitive awareness of learners' cognitive and motivational processes while reading. Researchers agree that awareness and monitoring of one's comprehension processes are critically important aspects in skilled and effective reading. From this perspective, reading is understood to be an active, fluent, complex and cognitive process in which reader and text interact to build meaning and to (re)create meaningful discourse.

The purpose of the study is to explore the effects of using Metacognitive Awareness Guidance (MCAG) as a psychological tool designed to prompt the Chinese EFL students to think reflectively and metacognitively about their learning goals, motivation, understanding, learning strategies on their learning performance and metacognitive awareness in EFL reading class. The main questions to be answered in the present study are: (1) Are there any significant differences of metacognitive awareness in EFL reading for university students in China? (2) Does Metacognitive Awareness Guidance, as a "psychological tool", positively affect the Chinese EFL learner's reading achievement? and (3) What are the effects of using the MCAG on the three components of learner performance: (a) achievement on reading assessment tasks; (b) performance on metacognitive awareness guidance; and (c) awareness of metacognitive reading strategies? Or what is the correlation among each of the three segments of the EFL learners' "triarchic assessment"?

A total of 130 college sophomores studying in three independent classes from Xi'an Innovation College of Yan'an University participated in the research. The study used three modalities: a control group (N=42) which received no intervention, a placebo group (N=43) that received only content instruction (CI) guidance and the treatment group (N=45) that was given the Metacognitive Awareness Guidance during the four-week experiment.

Two research steps were conducted. Study 1 used an instrument of MARS1 at the outset of the study to investigate whether significant differences exist among the three groups of subjects in their metacognitive awareness and perceived use of specific strategies when reading for general purposes in English. Study 2 was carried out with the MCAG and an instrument of MSI designed to measure the subjects' awareness of metacognitive reading strat-

egies.

The results of Study 1 showed no significant difference among the three groups in metacognitive awareness strategies. Study 2 demonstrated that there was a significant difference in the achievements of both reading tasks and MSI between those who used MCAG tool and those in the placebo group and the control group who did not. Engaging the students in the MCAG affected their performance on assessment tasks, they attained a higher level of achievement on these tasks. Subjects' achievements on assessment tasks were significantly and positively correlated with their level of achievement on the MCAG. The subjects who received the metacognitive awareness guidance also demonstrated a significantly higher level of awareness of metacognitive reading strategies. Finally, the implications and the function of this revealed linkage were discussed. The major assumption of the study was confirmed: increasing the EFL students' metacognitive awareness by means of well-planned guidance, built on prior knowledge, will facilitate their learning and improve the outcomes on assessment reading tasks.

Keywords: metacognitive awareness guidance (MCAG), EFL reading, prior knowledge, Zone of Proximal Development

1.1 Introduction

For nearly three decades the study of metacognition has been largely historical and reconstructive in nature. Educators and researchers have used the ideas, writings and significant instructional events shaping reading teaching norms as the lens for understanding present conditions and even for projecting foreseeable futures in EFL reading instruction. Traditional reading theories maintained that instruction focused on the content in the domain (Gredler, 2004: 254). Students are expected to master, in a preordained sequence, sets of facts and procedures that represent the content domain. Thus, the emphasis is on getting the right answer to problems and experiments. Currently, the emphasis is on "doing reading" and understanding. This focus involves developing rich, integrated knowledge structures that result from an emphasis on the various strategies that may be used to solve basis representational problems. Implementing curricula that emphasize developing rich knowledge structures and integrated understandings by all students requires a reorganization of teacher beliefs and practices. Teachers must have an extensive knowledge structure of both academic disciplines and the ways that students think and learn. That is, "If the finger points to the problem, the educator will study the finger" (Wiles & Bondi, 2004: 4).

Recent trends within the domain of reading comprehension have led to an

increasing emphasis on the role of metacognitive awareness of learners' cognitive and motivational processes while reading (Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Guterman, 2002, 2003; Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002, 2004; Pressley, 2000; Yang Xiaohu & Zhang Wenpeng, 2001, 2002; Huang Qiaoyun, 2004; Li Guangfeng, 2004; Liu Huijun, 2004; Guo Yan, 2005; Wang Jinxin & Zhang Kuo, 2005). The readers are actively organizing their cognitive resources so as to maximize comprehension. One issue in the regulation of cognition is the differences between metacognitive and cognitive strategies. The major difference is that they fulfill different goals. Cognitive strategies are applied to content or information whereas metacognitive strategies are applied to one's thinking (Gredler, 2004: 234). Researchers agree that awareness and monitoring of one's comprehension processes are critically important aspects in skilled and effective reading.

Such awareness and monitoring processes are often referred to in the literature as metacognition, which can be thought of as the knowledge of the readers' cognition about reading and the self-control mechanisms they exercise when planning, monitoring and regulating text comprehension. From this perspective, reading is understood to be an active, fluent (Anderson, 2004) and a complex cognitive process (Silberstein, 2002) in which reader and text interact to build meaning and to create meaningful discourse.

Along these lines, the primary purpose of the present study is to test the effect of involving learners and text in a cognitive reading process by using Metacognitive Awareness Guidance (MCAG) as a vehicle for activating and engaging readers' existing prior knowledge before they begin a reading assessment task. One of the central beliefs underlying the study is that the assessment of reading ability should be based on a model of cognition and learning which itself rests on the best available understanding of the learning and reading process. The other belief is that the instruction of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reading is not a practice of prescriptions, where teaching is approached in terms of methods, or products that offer teachers predetermined models to follow. Rather, teaching of EFL reading is approached as a dynamic process. This study hypothesized that the use of the MCAG will help teachers better understand the needs of their students and will aid the EFL teachers and students in their personal journeys toward effective teaching and learning of EFL reading.

Current models of reading process focus on the interactive relationship of reader and text. Like contemporary reading theory, the present study puts text and reader at its center. It is organized around the types of texts typically encountered by the Chinese EFL college students.

The main research questions to be answered in the present study are: (1) Are there any differences of metacognitive awareness in EFL reading for university students in China? (2) Does Metacognitive Awareness Guidance, as a “psychological tool”, positively affect learner’s reading achievement? and (3) What is the correlation between each of the three segments of the learners’ “triarchic assessment”?

1.2 Literature review

This part presents the theoretical background necessary to develop and evaluate Metacognitive Awareness Guidance (MCAG). The MCAG described in this study was a set of open questions assigned to the Chinese EFL students before they were to perform a reading assessment task, which serves as “ideational scaffolding” aimed to ask their metacognitive awareness, and prepare them for dealing with the reading task. The MCAG affords students the opportunity to engage in higher order operations: to test their knowledge, discover new links, anticipate, ask questions and suggest possible answers. Thus, Metacognitive Awareness Guidance (MCAG) serves as an ‘advance organizer’ which establishes an “anchorage point” between the new and the old ideas by providing a conceptual framework and facilitating encoding, functions within the zone of proximal development, and addresses the learner’s potential level of development. It was constructed on the basis of five contemporary theories of learning and knowledge: schema theory, metacognitive awareness theory, the Vygotskian “zone of proximal development (ZPD)”, Bandura’s self-efficacy and constructivist view of learning.

1.2.1 Prior knowledge and schema theory

A reader’s prior knowledge can influence reading comprehension skills (Anderson, 2004: 11). Prior knowledge is defined in the research as the various kinds of information contained in readers’ long-term memory that they need in order to construct meaning from written text. It includes all experience that a learner brings to a text: life experiences, educational experiences, knowledge of how texts can be organized rhetorically, knowledge of how one’s first language works, knowledge of how the second/foreign language works, and world knowledge. Prior knowledge provides a framework that allows readers to organize text information more efficiently and effectively and to integrate the new information into the old, which facilitates retention. It allows readers to make inferences about what happened is likely to happen in the text, thus helping readers to fill in gaps in the material (Guterman, 2003: 634). Prior knowledge also helps readers to e-

laborate upon material. It influences how the teacher and students interact with the learning materials as both individuals and a group. It is the proper entry point for instruction, which should build on what is already known, and a major factor in comprehension—that is, making sense of learning experiences (Kujawa and Huske, 1995). Students learn more effectively when they already know something about a content area and when concepts in that area mean something to them and to their particular background or culture. When teachers link new information to the student's prior knowledge, they activate the student's interest and curiosity, and infuse instruction with a sense of purpose.

Prior knowledge is also referred to as schema (schemata for plural) in the reading literature. Schema theory attempts to explain how knowledge is represented in the reader's mind, and how that representation facilitates the use of reader's knowledge (Anderson, 1980, 1983; Rumelhart 1980). Schemata are built up from experiences; new experiences, including those derived from reading, change existing schema. Reading, at the same time, makes use of existing schemata and modifies them. In a responsive reader—one who is alert and actively processing the ideas in the text—the relevant schemata are activated. That means they are ready to be called on to explain unstated relationships and also liable to be modified by new ideas (Nuttall, 2002). In accordance with schema theory, all the reader's knowledge is packed into units referred to as schemata. Each of these is a "pack of knowledge" which includes; first, what one knows about a concept, subject or issue; second, how other, different kinds of information are related to that concept, subject or issue; and third, how this knowledge is to be used (Rumelhart, 1980). According to schema theory, comprehension is the use of knowledge to create new knowledge. Without prior knowledge (which must be activated to be useful), written material would be meaningless. The more knowledge a reader can bring to a text, the more likely it is that the written material will be understood (Rumelhart, 1980; Wilson & Anderson, 1986). These and other researchers do not simply argue that the activation of appropriate prior knowledge is useful; they assert that it is fundamental to comprehension and performance. Other researchers (Carrell, Devine & Eskey, 1988; 4; Wallace, 1992) claim that schema theory has provided numerous benefits to ESL/EFL teaching and, indeed, most current ESL/EFL textbooks attempt schema activation through prereading activities. Theories on the contribution of schemata to the reading process are discussed in the latter part of the chapter.

1.2.2 Metacognitive awareness

The design of Metacognitive Awareness Guidance (MCAG) in this study was based on current theories of human cognition and learning, dealing with metacognitive skills, and their functions and roles in understanding, learning, constructing new meanings, creating new knowledge and solving problems (Flavell, 1976, 1979; Anderson, 1980; Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Guterman, 2002, 2003). The construct of metacognition has been richly built and provided a foundation for developing a valid and reliable instrument aimed at measuring readers' metacognitive awareness and control of the strategic processes invoked while reading.

Researchers generally agree that metacognition refers to the "knowledge about cognitive states and abilities that can be shared among individuals while at the same time expanding the construct to include affective and motivational characteristics of thinking" (Paris & Winograd, 1990: 15). Flavell (1979), in his classic article "Metacognition and Cognitive Monitoring," defined metacognition as "knowledge that takes as its object or regulates any aspect of any cognitive behavior" and described the process of cognitive monitoring as occurring through the actions and interactions of four classes or interrelated phenomena: metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive experiences, goals (or tasks), and actions (or strategies). Examples of students' reflections about their thinking while reading have been used (e. g., Wade, Trathen, & Schraw, 1990; Mokhtar & Reichard, 2002) to illustrate what students do when they read. Readers' reflections show that they plan, monitor, evaluate, and use information available to them as they make sense of what they read. Such reflections unveil judgments about the readers; thinking processes that serve as conventional descriptions of metacognition. Recent conceptions of reading comprehension depict efficient readers as strategic or "constructively responsive" readers who carefully orchestrate cognitive resources when reading (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995; Chen Qi & Liu Rude, 2005; Yuan Zhenguo, 2005).

One of the main conclusions here is that metacognitive awareness actually refers to the knowledge and knowing, to being aware of knowledge in order to know. A reader's knowledge and awareness of this knowledge will determine the level of his or her understanding, performance and achievement.

One reason that metacognition is significant is that if learners are not aware of when comprehension is breaking down and what they can do about it, the strategies introduced by the teacher will fail.

Within the framework of the present study, the author examined the extent to which

providing readers with the MCAG prior to reading a text would improve their comprehension of the text. The fundamental purpose of the MCAG was to raise learners' metacognitive awareness of their prior knowledge; both specific knowledge and over-all prior knowledge, before they engage in processing their reading tasks. However, the main theoretical rationale underlying the combination of metecognitive awareness guidance with a reading assessment task was Vygotsky's notion of a zone of proximal development (ZDP) (Vygotsky, 1978; Moll, 1990).

1.2.3 Vygotsky's zone of proximal development

Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) offers a framework for studying relationships between development and educational intervention. As defined by Vygotsky (1978), the child's zone of proximal development is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). He argued that measuring the level of potential development is just as crucial, if not more so, as measuring the level of actual development because the potential level of development may vary independently of the actual level.

This concept served as a major guideline for developing and using the MCAG; performance must be assisted and assisting performance by combining a psychological tool and a stimulus with an assessment task will make a difference in the learner's performance and outcomes (Brown & Ferrara, 1985; Guterman, 2003). In Vygotsky's own words, a 'psychological tool' serves "as a conductor of human's influence on the object of their activity. It is directed towards the external world; it must stimulate some changes in the object; it is the means of humans' external activity directed towards the subjugation of nature" (Vygotsky, 1960, in Wertsch, 1985: 78).

1.2.4 Bandura's self-efficacy

Since the 1980s, the concept of self-efficacy has become a major focus of Bandura's social-cognitive theory which addresses the social, cognitive, and personal agency factors that influence learning and motivation. Self-efficacy refers to personal beliefs about one's capabilities to be successful in tasks with novel or ambiguous elements and includes teacher efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1997). Bandura (1995) noted that four types of influence contribute to individuals' beliefs about their personal efficacy. They are mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological