英语教学研究文集

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A Collection of Researches into English Language Teaching

英语教学研究文集

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开启创造性思维人才培养的工程

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记得有一次乘出租车,一上车,就听驾驶员大大咧咧地说开了:"现在美国人是有文化,连扫马路的也会说英语!"当然,这是一个笑话,这位出租车驾驶员不知道美国人的母语就是英语。然而,如果我们的英语教师仅仅把语言作为一种交际的工具,那么岂不是光是口语就不如美国扫马路的清洁工?这里就很自然地出现了一个问题——英语教学的主要任务究竟是什么?

新中国建立以来,我国英语教学的发展至少经历了两个阶段:一是培养专业化人才阶段,二是培养复合型人才阶段。第一阶段主要是解放初期至改革开放以前。在这一时期,英语往往是作为一个专业,招收和培养专业化人才,培养的重点在于提高学生的语言实践能力。第二个阶段大致是改革开放以来。这时随着全民英语水平的不断提高,特别是中小学英语教学水平的大幅度提高,高等学校的英语专业已经不满足于专业化人才的培养,开始尝试"英语＋专业英语＋专业知识"的培养模式,以期培养既能够较为熟练地运用英语又能够初步掌握一门专业知识的复合型人才,例如开设了商务英语等专业。

然而,在我国综合国力不断增强的今天,不少原来在海外学习或工作的留学生和专家学者纷纷涌进了我国高校的各个专业,这些"海归派"不仅英语水平高,而且在各自的专业领域内均有很高的学术造诣,他们可以直接用英语讲授自己的专业课。同时,在我国高校,尤其是在重点高校,非英语专业的学生也能够较为熟练地掌握英语。这样一来,高校的英语专业究竟还具有什么样的优势?

我们的英语专业应该培养什么样的人才？

这些问题长期以来一直困扰着我们，逼着我们不得不去思考、探索，不断改进我们的英语教学。《英语教学研究文集》就是近些年来我院英语专业教师集体研究和探索的成果，收录了 40 名教师各自的研究论文，其中绝大部分作者是我院的中青年教师。他们分别从语言学理论、语言教学理念与教学方法、技能教学理念与方法等方面，对专业英语的教学进行了认真而又深入的探讨。尽管论文的观点各不相同，然而，在总的改革思路和培养目标上，大家基本达成了共识。这就是要变传统英语教学中的"服务"理念为"研究"理念，要开创英语人才培养的新阶段，即"开启创造性思维人才培养的工程"。

在现阶段，我国高校专业英语教学的目的虽然在很大程度上仍然是培养学生的语言实践能力，但是，仅仅如此是显然不够的。我们不只是要培养能够起到"服务"和"沟通"作用的、能够掌握英语语言技能的人才，而且还应该培养善于"研究"英语国家的文化（包括语言学、文学等）的人才，使其能从中汲取有益的部分为我国的现代化建设服务。这种由"服务"转向"研究"的理念，就要求我们培养的人才不仅要具备良好的英语基本功和较广的知识面，更重要的是要善于独立思考，能够拥有一定的创新思维能力。围绕这一培养目标，我们进行了一些专业英语教学改革的尝试，当然还只是起步阶段，还需要相当长的时间去摸索。

创新思维能力产生的基础应该是较为宽广的知识面，是对异域文化和本国文化的了解，并且善于敏锐地感受到异域文化的精髓。因此，在英语专业的教学过程中，我们增加了文化方面的课程，既有美国文明等异域文化领域中的课程，也有中国传统文化方面的课程。本论文集的一个明显特征就是探讨英语教学与文化的关系和文化内涵语言，而语言又是文化传播的载体。"英语语言与文化"已经成为我院英语专业承担的国家"211 工程"重点建设的

项目。我院与中国社会科学院世界文明比较研究中心、澳门基金会联合发起和主办的"世界文明国际论坛"已经先后于 2003 年和 2005 年在我校和澳门理工学院举办了两届。在此基础上,我们注重培养学生分析问题和解决问题的能力,开设了外国语言文学导论、当代西方文论以及语言学理论等一级学科的平台课程,以激发学生的学习兴趣和思考的主动性,引导学生去进行研究性的学习。

本论文集的另一个明显特征就是注重语言学理论在英语教学中的应用,关注理念和方法的探讨,即便是"听、说、读、写、译"等语言技能的训练,也侧重学生综合能力的培养。

应该说,培养学生的创造性思维能力是与提高学生的综合素质分不开的。我们正在尝试英文写作课的改革,例如为本科生开设英文创作课,即打破传统的写作课模式,尝试用英文来创作小说、散文、诗歌、剧本等,以此来提高学生的创造能力和综合素质。同时,我们还安排了大量的第二课堂活动,例如排练英文戏剧等,为全面提高学生的综合素质创造机遇。本论文集在这些方面也有涉及。

我院出版学术论文集已经有不少次了,但是仅凭一个专业的力量来组织出版论文集却是第一次。我们要感谢学校领导和相关职能部门给予的大力支持,要感谢参与此项工作的我院大部分英语专业的教师。这表明我们南京师范大学外国语学院的英语专业教师集体是一个无比团结的坚强集体,是一个善于思考、勇于攻关的战斗集体。我为能够置身于这样的集体而感到骄傲和幸福!我从心底里为我们的团队拍手叫好,为这支队伍所取得的成绩喝彩!愿大家继续努力,在今后的教学研究和改革中不断创造新的辉煌!

目　录

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第三部分 技能教学理念与教学方法探讨

第一部分　语言学理论在英语教学中的应用

Schema Theory and EFL
Reading Comprehension

Xin Bin

Abstract：This paper intends to present a brief discussion of schema theory and its impact upon the teaching of reading comprehension in EFL. We will argue for an interactive model of reading comprehension in which the reader plays an active and creative role extracting information from the text both through bottom-up and top-down processing. Such a view requires the teaching of reading in the classroom to simulate a realistic reading situation and this implies，among other things，the use of meaningful texts which allow the learners maximum use of their schematic knowledge of the subject，the type of text and its context.

Key words：schema theory；EFL；reading comprehension

Ⅰ. Introduction

For a long time people were puzzled by the fact that listeners/readers normally manage quite successfully to interpret passages such as the following：

(a) John went to the jeweler. Mary enjoyed the present.

(Rayner & Pollatsek, 1989: 264)

(b) Mary heard the icecream man coming down the street. She remembered her birthday money and rushed into the house . . .

(Rumelhart, 1977. Quoted in Carrell, 1983: 558)

Most listeners/readers are able to conclude that the present referred to in (a) was a piece of jewelry bought by John for Mary and that in (b) Mary rushed into the house to get her birthday money in order to buy an icecream. How can listeners/readers reach such conclusions since they are not explicitly expressed in the texts? This question has been the central concern of many theories in the past two or three decades and one of them is schema theory. This paper intends to present a brief discussion of schema theory and its impact upon the teaching of reading comprehension in EFL. I will first give a very brief introduction to the gist of schema theory and then demonstrate the significance of the theory to reading comprehension, and finally I will make some suggestions for teachers of EFL reading comprehension.

Ⅱ. The schema theory

There is no fixed definition for the concept of schema. Loosely defined, it is used by most contemporary schema theorists to refer to the general knowledge that a person has about a particular domain. Schemas are said to be "higher-level complex (and even conventional or habitual) knowledge structures" (van Dijk, 1981: 141), which are supposed to function as "ideational scaffolding" (Anderson, 1977) in

the organization and interpretation of experience. In the strong view, schemas are thought to determine the ways in which we interpret our experience. The term schema itself was employed by Bartlett (1932) to explain the way in which we organize the knowledge of the world in the memory on the basis of our previous knowledge and experience. According to Bartlett, when we read we were not merely reproducing the meaning encoded in the text by the writer, but rather we were constructing meaning on the basis of the information on the page and our knowledge from past experience. He claimed that this knowledge couldn't be stored in the memory haphazardly, it must be structured in some way and hence made manageable, and that what gave structure to this knowledge was schema.

Alba and Hasher (1983) identify four central assumptions held by current schema theorists: selection, abstraction, interpretation and integration. They are believed to be the basic processes involved in "schema - driven encoding of complex information" by the memory. According to the principle of selection, not all the information conveyed in a text is encoded by the memory and only some of the incoming stimuli are selected for representation. This selection of information by the memory is determined by three conditions: (a) the existence of a schema, (b) the activation of that schema, and (c) the relative importance of the incoming information with respect to the schema (for a detailed discussion of these conditions, see Alba & Hasher, 1983: 205—207). The information selected undergoes further reduction via the process of abstraction in which only meaning, not the formal features, is encoded. During the

process of interpretation the semantic content is interpreted in such a way that the resultant message is coherent, unified and consistent with the schema. Finally, what is left from the former three processes is integrated with the relevant previously acquired knowledge which was activated during encoding. Integration takes place either when a completely new schema is formed or when a pre-existing one is modified or updated by the incoming information. It is assumed that the above four processes account for the following observed characteristics of the memory: inaccuracy, incompleteness and distortion.

All of the four central assumptions have been under attack for quite some years because of its inability to account for findings from some experiments (see Alba & Hasher, 1983). For instance, it was found that memory was not inevitably abstractive and that far more information was encoded by the memory than the principles of selection would suggest and details of both content and form might be encoded and remained accessible for a fairly long period of time. Facing such problems, some schema theorists saw the strength in Kintsch and van Dijk's (1978) model of the representation of knowledge. Perhaps the most important feature of their version of schema theory is the distinction between two types of structures: the microstructure and the macrostructure. The former represents a level of text in which propositions are put together in a connected structure and the latter is the gist of the text which consists of macropropositions derived from the propositions of the microstructure, "by deleting or generalizing all propositions that are either irrelevant or redundant and by constructing new

inferred propositions" (Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978: 372). The macrostructure thus formed is then incorporated into the schema activated from the long term memory. A central idea of the model is the concept of level: propositions are linked to each other in a hierarchical manner with more important ones put on higher levels. The relative importance of propositions is determined by (a) some formal criteria of simplicity, (b) how close it is to the title (the one closest to the title is on the top level), and (c) the schema or background knowledge. The macrostructure is formed by attaching the high level propositions of the microstructure to a pre-existing schema.

It seems that Kintsch and van Dijk's distinction between microstructure and macrostructure can account for both the observation that the gist of a text is usually better remembered than the supporting details and the observation that some details remain accessible long after the reading comprehension task is finished. In the former case, the explanation may be that important propositions are those which are referred to by less important ones and hence tend to be called into the short term (or working) memory more often and/or stay longer in it. It is reasonable to assume that the more a proposition undergoes rehearsal the better it will be remembered. In the latter case, the reason may be that, on the one hand, much of the details of a text may not be represented by propositions and may get lost completely as soon as they left the short term memory, but on the other hand some other details may actually be represented by unimportant propositions which are incorporated into the microstructure and hence form part of a long term memory representation of the information, but they are

far less retrievable than those important propositions which are part of the macrostructure.

There are many other versions of schema theory besides the ones mentioned above. The most influential ones are "frame" and "script". Very briefly, a frame refers to our knowledge about the structure of a thing or an event. For example, a house -frame will contain the knowledge of the parts, substances and uses that a normal house has. A script refers to the knowledge which contains instructions for the participants of an event as to how they should act or behave in their respective roles. For example, a restaurant - script contains instructions about the normal duties and behaviors of the waiter, the cashier and the customer (for more details of different types of schema theory, see Brown & Yule, 1983: 238—245; Beaugrande, 1980: 163—164; Alba & Hasher, 1983: 203—204). So far we have been concerned with schema theory mainly in terms of acquisition and storage of information in the memory. Then in what ways is such structured knowledge in our mind significant to the interpretation of a text or discourse? This is the central concern of the second section in which we will see how important the existence and/or retrieval or activation of an appropriate schema is to the understanding of a text.

Ⅲ. The importance of schematic knowledge to reading comprehension

Under the influence of structuralism, reading comprehension both in native and foreign language teaching were generally regarded as "a one way traffic system in which everything flows in one

direction only" (McDonough & Shaw, 1993: 105). The learners were treated merely as a recipient or an empty vessel who had nothing to contribute to the reading process except receiving whatever there was in the text. Reading materials used in the classroom were often designed or written with special emphasis on particular items of grammar and/or vocabulary which either had just been learned or were going to be learned in a unit. Thus written texts were not used to develop the learner's reading abilities but to introduce or review new vocabulary and/or structures. Consider the following example:

It is eight o'clock in the morning. Mr. Smith is in the dining-room of their house. Mr. Smith is sitting at the table reading his newspaper. He is waiting for his breakfast. Mrs. Smith is in the kitchen cooking breakfast for Mr. Smith, her husband and their two children—John and Mary.

(McDonough & Shaw, 1993: 103—104)

A mere glance at the passage shows how artificial and dull it is. Sentences are put together with little consideration of coherence; the same structure is repeated again and again. I think the preoccupation with vocabulary and grammatical structures is one of the reasons why for a long time the only approach advocated for teaching reading comprehension in the classroom was bottom-up processing in which the learners were taught to start from the bottom level of the text to work out the meaning of each individual word and the structure of a clause/sentence first and then arrive at the composite meaning of the sentence. I am not here arguing against bottom-up processing