

An Empirical Study on the Reform of College English Reading Teaching Based on Discourse Patterns in the Network Environment*

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This paper is committed to an empirical study on the application of common English discourse patterns in the English reading teaching for non-English major students at an average or lower proficiency level. A quantitative research method is adopted. The research results show that the application of discourse patterns in teaching in the network environment can help improve students' reading comprehension ability to a certain extent.

Keywords: discourse analysis, teaching mode, college English reading, empirical study

Preface

The reading part accounts for 35% of the College English Test Band 4 and Band 6, and 50% of the English test for the National Entrance Examination for Postgraduate Studies. To improve students' passing rates of the College English Test and the postgraduate entrance examination, it is particularly important to enhance their reading comprehension ability. The traditional grammar-translation method focuses on the analysis of the micro-structure of the text while ignoring its macro-structure, thus hindering students' understanding of the whole text. The discourse analysis teaching mode, on the other hand, focuses on grasping the macro-structure of the text.

However, if teachers directly apply this teaching mode to students with low proficiency levels, some problems may arise. Due to the limitation of their language ability, students are unable to understand the meanings of words and sentences in the context, and thus it is difficult for them to understand and grasp the entire content and deep meaning of the text. Students only have a superficial understanding of the information conveyed in the discourse and cannot achieve the expected goals.

The "discourse-based teaching approach assisted by the grammar-translation method" proposed in this paper in the network environment grasps the text from both micro and macro levels, combining grammar analysis and discourse analysis, enabling students to see both the trees and the forest, so that they can better understand the whole text.

Above of all, this paper briefly introduces the concept of discourse patterns and three common discourse patterns in English. Then, it successively states the research objectives, main research contents, research design, and application examples of discourse patterns in College English teaching. Finally, it presents the experimental results and conclusions.

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Discourse Patterns

In 1983, Hoey defined the discourse pattern as the combination of semantic relations that constitute a discourse (or part of a discourse), and proposed that there are three patterns of English discourse: the Problem-Solution Pattern (Situation → Problem → Response → Result/Evaluation) (Hoey, 2001, p. 127), the Claim-Counterclaim Pattern (Situation → Claim → Evaluation of Claim → Reason for Denial → Correction → Reason for Correction) (Hoey, 2001, p. 180), and the General-Particular Pattern (Generalization-Example Pattern or Preview-Detail Pattern) (Hoey, 1983, p. 134). The discourse pattern is the organizational mode of the semantic content of a discourse, which is the macro-structure of the discourse and reflects the author's thinking mode.

Research Objectives and Main Contents

Research Objectives

1. Apply the discourse analysis theory to the practice of College English reading teaching, and construct a teaching mode suitable for non-English major students at an average or lower proficiency level.
2. Verify the applicability and teaching effect of this teaching mode through experiments.

Main Research Contents

This project is dedicated to studying the application of English discourse patterns in the English reading teaching for non-English major students at an average or lower proficiency level in the network environment. A quantitative research method is adopted. In order to verify whether the application of the discourse pattern theory to College English reading teaching can improve students' reading comprehension ability, the author will conduct a teaching experiment with 30 students from each of the two parallel teaching classes of Yili Normal University in Xinjiang as the research objects. The teaching experiment consists of three parts, namely, the reading test before the experiment, the teaching stage of the experiment, and the reading test after the experiment. According to the pre-test, this study will form an experimental class and a control class with 30 students of comparable grades from each of the two classes. In the specific teaching stage, the control class is taught with the traditional teaching method, while the experimental class implements a teaching method that combines the traditional teaching method and the discourse pattern. After four months of teaching experiment, the author observes whether there will be obvious differences in their performance in the second reading test. The experimental data will be processed and analyzed through the SPSS (16.0) system software.

Research Design

Research Objects

The research objects are the classes of the 2022-level hierarchical teaching in Yili Normal University in Xinjiang. The experimental class is from Class Physics B2, and the control class is from Class Network and Electronics B2. There are 34 students in the experimental class, and 30 students participated in both the pre-test and the post-test; there are 33 students in the control class, and 30 students participated in both tests. The teachers, teaching time, teaching materials (*New Horizon College English Reading and Writing Course 3*), and test questions (the pre-test and post-test questions are respectively selected from the reading comprehension parts of the College English Test Band 4 in December 2022 and June 2023) of the two classes are the same, and only the teaching methods are different.

Research Methods

This study adopts a quantitative method, taking 30 students from each of the two classes in Yili Normal

University in Xinjiang as the research objects. First, a pre-test of reading comprehension ability was conducted; then, the researcher adopted different teaching methods for the two classes in the teaching process. The experimental class adopted the “discourse-based teaching approach assisted by the grammar-translation method”, and the control class adopted the grammar-translation method; after four months of teaching practice, a relevant post-test was conducted on the research objects. This experiment uses the “pretest/posttest non-equivalent groups design” (Wen, 2007, p. 145). After the test, the author collected and processed the relevant data and analyzed them with the help of the SPSS software package (16.0).

Experimental Process

This teaching experiment mainly includes three stages:

1. Before the start of the experiment (August 28, 2023), both the experimental class and the control class participated in the pre-test. After the pre-test, the researcher collected the relevant data of the two groups and analyzed them using SPSS 16.0.
2. The second stage is the experimental stage, from August 28, 2023 to December 28, 2023. During this period, the researcher adopted different teaching methods for the experimental class and the control class respectively.
3. The last stage is the post-test. Both classes participated in the post-test at the end of the experiment (December 18, 2023). The researcher collected and analyzed the relevant data in the same way.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection

The collection of experimental data mainly includes the scores of the experimental class and the control class in the pre-test and post-test. The pre-test consists of 20 questions, with five points for each question, and a full score of 100. The scores of the experimental group and the control group in the pre-test are shown in Table 1:

Table 1

The Scores of the Experimental and the Control Group in the Pretest

Score (100%)	Experimental group		Control group	
	N	P	N	P
0~10	3	10.00	2	6.67
11~20	6	20.00	4	13.33
21~30	6	20.00	11	36.67
31~40	8	26.67	8	26.67
41~50	6	20.00	4	13.33
51~60	1	3.33	1	3.33
61~70	0	0.00	0	0.00
71~80	0	0.00	0	0.00
81~90	0	0.00	0	0.00
91~100	0	0.00	0	0.00
Mean	31.67		30.83	

Notes. N = number of students; P = percentage.

The post-test also includes 20 questions, with five points for each question, and a full score of 100. The scores of the experimental group and the control group in the post-test are shown in Table 2:

Table 2

The Scores of the Experimental and the Control Group in the Posttest

Score (100%)	Experimental group		Control group	
	N	P	N	P
0~10	0	0.00	0	0.00
11~20	2	6.67	2	6.67
21~30	6	20.00	4	13.33
31~40	7	23.33	8	26.67
41~50	0	0.00	10	33.33
51~60	7	23.33	4	13.33
61~70	2	6.67	2	6.67
71~80	4	13.33	0	0.00
81~90	2	6.67	0	0.00
91~100	0	0.00	0	0.00
Mean	49.50		43.00	

Notes. N = number of students; P = percentage.

Data Analysis

This study uses SPSS 16.0 to process and analyze the collected data. The study needs to compare the average scores of the experimental class and the control class in the pre-test and post-test respectively. Therefore, it is necessary to use the Independent-Samples t-Test in the statistical procedure “Compare means” to first compare whether there is a significant difference in the average scores of the two classes in the pre-test, and then compare their average scores in the post-test.

As mentioned above, in the second stage of the experiment, the researcher adopted different teaching methods for the experimental class and the control class. Now, the researcher take a lesson in College English as an example to explore how to apply the discourse pattern to the actual teaching in the network environment.

Application Examples of Discourse Patterns in College English Teaching

Taking Text A “Connection or Conversation” in Unit 1 of *New Horizon College English Reading and Writing Course 3* edited by Zheng Shutang as an example, students are arranged in advance to preview the words and the text through the U Campus platform. The specific arrangement of the discourse teaching process is as follows:

1. Warm-up activity: Students discuss the following questions in groups of three or four:

Q1: How has the Internet changed our lives?

Q2: What are the problems the digital age has created?

2. Students discuss the information conveyed by the text title in groups: What can we predict from the title?

3. Explain the text:

The teacher divides the article into several parts according to the text structure for teaching activities. Now, the teacher takes the first and second paragraphs of the article as an example to illustrate the specific teaching process.

First, the teacher asks students to quickly browse the first and second paragraphs and answer the following questions:

Q1: What are the different activities the family do on the “offline days” and in the “always on” lives?

Q2: Why does the author say “we have sacrificed conversation for connection”?

Q3: What is the main idea of this part?

Q4: In your opinion, is it necessary to have “offline days”?

Then, the teacher explains the language points of this paragraph, such as “absorbed in; be immersed in; sacrifice ... for”, etc. When necessary, some sentences are translated into Chinese to help students understand. For the other parts of the article, the teacher can adopt the same method.

4. Briefly introduce three common discourse patterns in English.

5. Analyze the text structure:

The teacher asks students to judge which pattern the article belongs to according to the relevant knowledge of discourse patterns. This article generally belongs to the Claim-Counterclaim Pattern.

Experimental Results

Comparative Analysis of the Average Scores of the Experimental Class and the Control Class in the Pretest

The descriptive statistical Table 3 presents the average scores: Mean (X), Standard Deviation (S.D.), and sample size N of the scores of the two classes before the experiment.

Table 3

Mean (X), Standard Deviation (S.D.), and Numbers of Subjects for the Scores of the Experimental and the Control Group in the Pretest

Group statistics				
Gr1 = B5...	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest 1	30	31.67	13.021	2.377
2	30	30.83	10.992	2.007

Notes. Gr1 = experimental group, Gr2 = control group.

As shown in Table 3, the average score of the experimental class in the pre-test is 31.67, and that of the control class is 30.83, with a difference of only 0.833 points (see the Mean Difference column in Table 4). In order to determine whether there is a significant difference between the two groups statistically, it is necessary to check the Independent Samples Test table (Table 4).

Table 4

Independent Samples Test of the Experimental and the Control Group in the Pretest

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for equality of means					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
									Lower Upper
Pretest	Equal variances assumed	0.990	0.324	0.268	58	0.790	0.833	3.111	-5.394 7.061
	Equal variances not assumed			0.268	56.413	0.790	0.833	3.111	-5.398 7.065

It can be seen from Table 4 that the significance difference of Levine's Test for Equality of Variances is 0.324, which is much larger than 0.05, indicating that the variances of the two groups are equal. Therefore, it is necessary to check the data in the row of “Equal variances assumed” as the result data of the t-test. Since the average score of the experimental class is higher than that of the control class, both the t-value and the difference

in average scores are positive. Sig. (2-tailed) is the significance probability of the two-tailed t-test. In the pre-test, Sig. (2-tailed) is 0.790, which is greater than the significance level of 0.1, indicating that there is no significant difference between the two groups in the pre-test. In addition, the 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference is the 95% confidence interval of the difference in average values. This confidence interval contains 0, which also indicates that there is no significant difference in the difference in average values between the two groups (Qin, 2003, pp. 40-47).

Comparative Analysis of the Average Scores of the Experimental Class and the Control Class in the Posttest

The descriptive statistical Table 5 presents the average scores: Mean (X), Standard Deviation (S.D.), and sample size N of the scores of the two classes after the experiment.

Table 5

Mean (X), Standard Deviation (S.D.), and Numbers of Subjects for the Scores of the Experimental and the Control Group in the Posttest

Group statistics				
Gr1 = B5...	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest 1	30	31.67	13.021	2.377
2	30	30.83	10.992	2.007
Posttest 1	30	49.50	20.314	3.709
2	30	43.00	12.704	2.319

Notes. Gr1 = experimental group, Gr2 = control group.

As shown in Table 5, the average score of the experimental class in the post-test is 49.50, and that of the control class is 43.00, with a difference of 6.5000 points (see the Mean Difference column in Table 6). In order to determine whether there is a significant difference between the two groups statistically, it is necessary to check the Independent Samples Test table (Table 6).

Table 6

Independent Samples Test of the Experimental and the Control Group in the Posttest

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for equality of means				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower Upper
Pre-test	Equal variances assumed	0.990	0.324	0.268	58	0.790	0.833	3.111	-5.394 7.061
	Equal variances not assumed			0.268	56.413	0.790	0.833	3.111	-5.398 7.065
Post-test	Equal variances assumed	13.287	0.001	1.486	58	0.143	6.500	4.374	-2.256 15.256
	Equal variances not assumed			1.486	48.673	0.144	6.500	4.374	-2.292 15.292

It can be seen from Table 6 that the significance difference shown in Levine's Test for Equality of Variances is 0.001, which is much smaller than 0.05. This indicates that the variances of the two groups are not equal. Therefore, it is necessary to check the data in the row of "Equal variances assumed" as the result data of the t-test. Since the average score of the experimental class is higher than that of the control class, both the t-value and

the difference in the average scores are positive. The P-value (Sig.) is the significance probability of the independent samples t-test. In the post-test, Sig. is 0.001, which is much smaller than the significance level of 0.05, indicating that there is a significant difference in the average values between the two classes.

From the above analysis, we can draw the following conclusion: Before the experiment, there was no significant difference in the average values of the two classes in the reading comprehension level test of the pre-test; after four months of the experiment, the experimental class performed better than the control class in the reading comprehension level test of the post-test. With all other conditions being the same, there is only one difference, that is, the two groups adopted different teaching methods. The experimental class adopted the discourse teaching mode based on the grammar-translation method, while the control class adopted the traditional grammar-translation method. Thus, it can be seen that the better performance of the experimental class than that of the control class in the post-test is mainly attributed to the application of this new teaching mode.

Conclusions

The major findings of the paper are summarized as follows:

First, discourse patterns play an important role in the teaching of college English reading. Students can grasp the macro-structure of an article and furthermore, get the main idea, and comprehend the article better when knowing common discourse patterns.

Second, according to the results of the experiment carried out in the paper, the application of discourse patterns to the teaching of college English reading can be taken as a necessary and effective reading strategy.

Finally, the discourse-based teaching approach assisted by grammar-translation approach in the network environment, in which linguistic analysis is combined with discourse analysis, can help students comprehend an article from both micro and macro perspective. This teaching approach and the traditional one are complementary to each other, thus leading to better teaching effects.

The study shows that the discourse-based teaching approach assisted by grammar-translation approach in the network environment can effectively improve low-level non-English majors' reading competence in a short time. Therefore, teachers can introduce discourse patterns to the teaching of reading course and help their students know common discourse patterns so that they can accomplish the reading task efficiently.

However, there still exist some limitations in this study, so it is necessary to point them out, pay more attention to them, and overcome them in the future research.

1. Although the teachers, teaching materials, and teaching time of the experimental class and the control class are all the same, subjective factors such as students' learning attitudes, learning motivations, interests, and subjective initiative, which are highly likely to affect the experimental results, have not been involved in the research process.

2. Due to the limited number of participants, the experimental results need to be further verified.

Through the teaching experiment, the researcher realizes that discourse patterns can also be applied to College English writing teaching. Students' mastery of the macro-structure of the article will help them better conceive and organize their compositions and further improve their writing level. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct further empirical research in the field of how to apply discourse patterns to College English writing teaching.

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