Cultivation of Discourse Competence from the Perspective of Key Competencies: Taking Senior English Reading Instruction for Example

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ABSTRACT: *Discourse knowledge and competence is a vital part of key competency in English. This paper examines the definitions of discourse competence, and proposes that senior English reading instruction should be key competency-oriented and focus on multiple-interpretation of text, that is, clarifying the communicative purpose, semantic structure and language features of text, distinguishing viewpoints from facts in text, understanding developing pattern of text, and mastering coherence means of text, so that discourse awareness can be developed and discourse competence cultivated.*
KEYWORDS: *Key competencies, discourse competence, senior English, reading instruction.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The General English Curriculum Standardsfor Senior Middle School (2017 Edition) sets the key competencies of English subject from four dimensions: language competence, thinking quality, cultural consciousness and learning ability. Language competence includes language knowledge and language skills. The former adds discourse knowledge and pragmatic knowledge based on the original phonetics, vocabulary and grammar; the latter also places special emphasis on responses to discourse (Cheng Xiaotang&Zhao Siqi,2016).It can be seen that the acquisition of discourse knowledge and the cultivation of discourse competence are important manifestations of the implementation of the key competencies of English subjects. However, at present, English teaching in senior high schools still emphasizes the excavation and practice of knowledge points, and neglects the profound analysis of text and the interpretation of text level, which leads to the serious lack of students' discourse competence. In view of this, this paper attempts to use English reading teaching in senior high schools as a medium to explore new ways to cultivate discourse competence, aiming at promoting the effective achievement of the goal of "Key Competencies of English Subject".

II. REASONS OF DISCOURSECOMPETENCE

The General English Curriculum Standardsfor Senior Middle School (2017 Edition) clearly adds discourse knowledge to the language knowledge project, which makes it a factor of language competence, reflecting the return of English curriculum goal setting to science and compatibility, and also recognizing the mainstream views of scholars at home and abroad on the connotation of language competence, which highlights the new trend of language research in the field of linguistics today. Accordingly, we can be verified from the writings of scholars at home and abroad. The model of language competence constructed by Bachman divides language competence into organizational competence and pragmatic competence. The former includes grammatical competence and discourse competence, and the latter includes practical competence and social linguistic competence (Bachman,1990:87);The Common Reference Framework for European Languages classifies discourse competence as a pragmatic competence which is the component of communicative language competence (Liu Zhuang et al.,2012); Zhang Jianqin and Zou Weicheng (2010) point out that language competence includes language knowledge, discourse knowledge, pragmatic and stylistic knowledge, strategic knowledge and emotional factors of learners. Especially, the McCarthy &Carter (1994)'s language view "language as discourse" has a great impact on the discourse-based teaching.

III. CONCEPTS OF DISCOURSE COMPETENCE

Kaplan &Knutson(1993) define discourse competence as the ability to generate and understand verbal and written features that promote coherence and cohesion in non-interactive reports/monologues or interactive conversations. Hatim(2001) believes that discourse competence refers to the ability to use the lexical and grammatical rules of a certain language to produce perfect sentences; the ability to know when, where and with whom to speak before using these sentences; and the ability to know how to make sentences play a certain role

in a well-established text.Bhatia(2008 : 144) points out that discourse competence refers not only to the ability to master code, but also to the ability of employing discourse, context and pragmatic knowledge to construct and interpret contextually appropriate texts. Thus, in Kaplan and Knutson's view, discourse competence involves cohesion and coherence and stylistic appropriateness in the process of text generation and interpretation; Hatim focuses on sentence generation, pragmatic competence and textual competence; Bhatia focuses on the importance of context, discourse and pragmatic knowledge and emphasizes contextual appropriateness in the process of constructing and interpreting discourse.

Chinese scholars generally regard the ability to understand and generate coherent texts as the main content of discourse competence. As Wen Qiufang (1999:22) puts it, discourse competence is the knowledge of making discourse cohesive, coherent and complete and the ability to use such knowledge. Specifically, language learners organize subject-related language materials and form texts with formal cohesion and semantic coherence. According to Sun Yu (1998), discourse competence refers to the ability to use various forms of Cohesive Devicesto coherently connect the sentence logic that expresses a certain topic and to understand and complete the corresponding illocutionary behavior while understanding and expressing the meaning of the proposition.Zhang Xiyong and Li Zhiwei (2007) elaborate discourse competence from the perspective of language teaching. They believe that discourse competence can be understood as the ability to make sentences into a text and to form a meaningful whole of a series of utterances. Specifically, in listening and speaking, it refers to the ability to understand each other's intentions and meanings, and to speak coherent and cohesive utterances in order to form smooth communication. In reading comprehension, it refers to the ability to regard the text as a whole and to form a schema consciousness in understanding the author's purpose and the pragmatic meaning of words, sentences and the whole text. In writing, discourse competence is regarded as the ability to use appropriate discourse patterns in organizing articles, connect sentence groups by grammatical and rhetorical devices, and make articles coherent and cohesive.

In view of this, we may wish to generalize the discourse competence as the ability to interpret and construct coherent texts using discourse knowledge and the ability to use language appropriately in various contexts.

IV. PROBLEMS IN ENGLISH TEACHING IN CHINA'S SENIOR MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Since the new curriculum reform, China's English teaching in senior high schools has improved as a whole, but it is still limited to the teaching of language knowledge and skills. Taking reading teaching as an example, the teaching focuses on the explanation and training of knowledge points, and lacks the multiple interpretation of text at the discourse level. As Professor Wang Qiang said, high school English classroom teaching reveals modelization, surface and stylization, lacks in-depth analysis of text, teaching for examination and learning for examination lead to the dislocation of subject value (Wang Qiang ,2015). High school English reading teaching plays an extremely important role in the whole high school English curriculum system, and its teaching reform has a direct impact on the effectiveness of high school English curriculum reform. Therefore, it is a bridge and cornerstone to accomplish the goal of cultivating the key competencies of English subject to conduct the discourse-based teaching, which is worthy of in-depth research by English teachers.

V. DEVELOPMENT OF DISCOURSE COMPETENCE BASEDON ENGLISH READING TEACHINGIN SENIORMIDDLE SCHOOLS

Mastering certain discourse knowledge is not only the purpose of reading teaching, but also the necessary means and assistant for in-depth analysis and interpretation oftexts, which can play a bridge role in improving language competence. As Dubin &Olshtain(2002 : 164) put it ," skilled readers always use the organizational and stylistic components of the text as important assistants to understanding, although they may not be aware of these textual features when reading. However, it is necessary to guide the second language and foreign language readers to consciously understand how the text is constructed —— which is conducive to their reading ". In view of this, we think that English reading teaching in senior high schools is an effective way from the following aspects:

1. Clarifying the communicative purpose, semantic structure and linguistic features of a text
English texts of different genres have their different communicative intentions, specific semantic structures and obvious linguistic characteristics. Based on the following questions, we can interpret the text in depth:
(1) What's the writing purpose of this essay?
(2) What semantic elements are necessary according to the writing purpose?
(3) What's the relationship between the writer and the audience?
(4) What are the language features for this genre?
Take Part Reading "Festivals and Celebrations"in Unit 1, Book 3, *English for High School* for example, through the discussion of the above questions, the students understand:(1) The communicative purpose of the

text is to explain the origin of modern festivals ;(2) The text belongs to an exemplification expository essay, whose semantic structure isOrientation (background information) ^thesis statement (informing the reader what is the point) ^elaboration with specific examples (explaining and clarifying the point) ^ coda (reinforcement of the thesis). Among them, the elaboration with specific examples part can be repeated;(3) understand that the social distance between the author and the reader is not close, and the language expression is formal;(4) know the characteristics of language use of the text, that is, the general present tense, the present perfect tense, the passive voice, the modal verb and the declarative sentence are usually used.

2. Distinction between views and facts

The content of the article has points of view and facts. A point of view is a way of thinking of and judging people, things and events. It is the position or attitude of observing things. The fact is what has actually happened or is happening, and is the true situation of things. As mentioned earlier, the thesis statement and the topic sentences are the views of the text, and the facts exist in the paragraph supporting sentences, which usually directly support the topic sentence with the help of concrete examples, and indirectly serve the thesis statement. It should be noted that not all supporting sentences express facts, and sometimes they also express opinions and elaborate further on the topic sentence. Also as an example of the text "Festivals and Celebrations", the following issues are discussed:

(5) What's the thesis statement of this essay?
(6) What're the topic sentences of the body paragraphs?
(7) What're the examples in the body paragraphs?

By answering question (5), students understand that the theme of the text is "Today's festivals have many origins,some religious,some seasonal,and some for special people or events."Of it, "today's festivals" is the topic, which is the topic of discourse discussion, and then thecontrolling idea, which plays a controlling and constraining role in the content of discourse. By answering question (6), students know that the first sentence of each paragraph of body part is the topic sentence, which is the sub-view point of the text and directly serves the theme of the text. Through the answer to question (7), students understand that these examples belong to the facts, playing a supporting role in the topic sentence, and indirectly serving the thesis statement.

It can be seen that the viewpoint is the author's view and attitude towards things, with obvious subjectivity; the fact reflects the objective existence and does not adulterate the author's emotional factors. Therefore, clarifying and distinguishing their relationship is helpful to understand the thematic meaning of the text.

3. Understanding the Developing Pattern of Discourses

The developing pattern of a discourse is the organizational form and logical structure of the discourse. English discourse of different genres has its steady pattern of discourse development, such as exemplification, process analysis, causal analysis, etc. As an example of the text "Festivals and Celebrations", we still discuss the following questions:

(8) What kind of paragraph developing pattern is used in this essay?

Obviously, this text uses the "examples" to expand its main paragraph. Exemplification is the most widely usedin English discourses. Moreover, the expository essays can also use other forms of discourse developing patterns, such as, "How Life Began on the Earth" in Reading in Unit 4 in Book 3, High School English (PEP) belongs to the "process analysis exposition", that is, in chronological order to explain and explain the evolution of the relevant life body. It can be seen that understanding the pattern of discourse developing patterns is helpful to interpret the logic and rigor of the text.

4. Understanding Means of discourse coherence

Discourse coherence is a measure of the unity, consistency, and even overall integrity and quality of discourse (Zhang Delu&Liu Rushan,2003: XV). Therefore, understanding and mastering the coherence means of discourse is the basic element of discourse competence. As we all know, cohesion is closely related to coherence, which is often reflected by cohesion. There are many means of coherence, or cohesion mechanism. Hu Zhuanglin (1994) put forward the multi-level idea of discourse cohesion and coherence from the social conformity layer, semantic layer, lexical layer, syntactic layer and phonological layer. Using cohesion mechanism to analyze coherence is a common method of discourse analysis, which is also helpful to cultivate students' awareness of discourse analysis. We also analyze the cohesion mechanism of the text by taking the How Life Began on the Earth Unit 4, Book 3. First, students can be asked to mark out all the connectors in the text, including the discourse markers, such as however,next,after that and sentence connectors, such as and,but. Then, students can be asked to point out referenceof "it"and"they"respectivelyin the text.

VI.   CONCLUSION

The turn of comprehensive language competence to the key competencies of English subject is not the recombination of original content, but the optimization and integration of more connotation, which not only embodies the characteristics of English learning, but also points to the ultimate goal of talent training. Therefore, English reading teaching in senior high schools must be guided by the key competencies of English subject, the core position of discourse knowledge established, and the formation of discourse consciousness and the cultivation of discourse competence highlighted, so as to break through the barriers of traditional teaching and play the key role of reading teaching in cultivating the key competencies of English subject.

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