

Context Theory in English Reading Teaching

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Abstract: As one of the most important parts of English teaching, reading has attracted widespread attention. The development of reading ability has always been one of the key goals of English teaching, and it has high requirements in various graded tests. What is reading? Reading is the process of mentally interpreting written symbols. It involves a range of factors that the reader brings to the text. Reading is an important way to acquire foreign language learning information. It is considered the most basic and useful skill for foreign language learners. Improving reading comprehension must be the first priority in language teaching. Therefore, teachers should know how to improve students' reading ability and successfully improve students' reading ability.

Keywords: English Teaching; Reading Ability; Reading Ability

1. Introduction

The current state of English reading teaching is far from satisfactory, as China's teacher-centred, exam-oriented, grammar- and vocabulary-based approaches predominate. Teachers spend most of their time explaining words, grammar, and translating each sentence into Chinese. Reading is thought of as the process of translating a foreign language verbatim into the target language. By teaching in this way, students are good at memorizing words and analyzing sentence structure, while they are at a loss when faced with paragraphs or articles. Context has become a key concept in many fields of research since Malinowski introduced it. Many linguists at home and abroad have put forward their theories to illustrate the importance of context in learning foreign languages^[1].

2. Context Theory

2.1 Language context

Linguists' knowledge of context or language is fundamental to reading comprehension. It is the internal relationship of the units within the language system. It belongs to the environment in discourse and can be further divided into the category of language itself. Therefore, this background is more focused on language, including word meaning, text structure, etc. The reader must sometimes construct this context in terms of concrete expression.

2.2 Situational context

Situational context is an actual phonetic situation in which words, phrases, sentences appear. It includes objective factors such as time, place, occasion, participants, professional status, educational background and subjective factors such as author's point of view, self-cultivation, common sense, emotion, etc.

According to Halliday, the context of the situation consists of three parts: the setting, the modality, and the communicator. These elements interact and limit the choice of form, which occurs in a certain situation should each utterance be understood according to the situation^[2].

2.3 Cultural background

Cultural context is the occurrence of words, phrases, sentences, etc. in the overall cultural context. It involves factors such as beliefs, custom thoughts, value systems, family patterns, mindsets, and more.

For Malinowski, cultural context refers to the social and cultural context on which language forms can depend. Language is the carrier and part of culture. Malinowski believes that "a language must be deeply rooted in a specific culture. On the contrary, social culture is inevitably reflected by the context." (Zhang Xueqin, 2006) In the specific context of culture, when people use language to communicate. When they are, they must follow certain traditional rules of social interaction.

3. The application of context theory in English reading teaching

3.1 Applying language context theory to English reading

3.1.1 Infer the meaning of new words

Since the English vocabulary is very large, it is inevitable that students will encounter new words when reading certain materials, regardless of the size of their vocabulary. As a result, quite a few students spend a lot of time consulting dictionaries, which often leads to their frustration and exhaustion. Therefore, teachers have the responsibility to teach students to infer the meaning of new words from the language context. Here are some linguistic clues that can be used to achieve this.

3.1.2 Predict the content of reading materials

Prediction is an important skill in reading. As we read, we keep asking questions. As long as these questions are answered, our uncertainty is reduced, and then we can understand. Forecasting benefits us in two ways. First of all, it speeds up our reading process and therefore saves a lot of time, as it tells us which parts are important and should be digested and which parts are secondary and therefore just need to taste. This feature is critical for students, especially when taking English exams that require high speed. Second, it can deepen our understanding of the text. We are constantly predicting what will happen next based on the linguistic context. If the

next part meets our expectations, we get executed and gain more confidence; if it turns out our predictions are wrong, we need to check it, thus deepening our understanding^[3].

3.2 The application of situational context theory in English reading

3.2.1 Teaching grammar in a situational context

Grammar is the basic rule of language. It is also a very important part of English reading teaching. In some reading materials, new grammatical knowledge becomes a barrier to students' understanding. Therefore, in order to clearly understand the reading material, grammar teaching cannot be ignored. How to teach grammar effectively? In traditional grammar teaching, grammar is usually presented out of context, and learners are asked to memorize the grammatical rules of the language and produce grammatically correct sentences^[4].

Today, however, it is important to teach grammar in meaningful contexts. Teaching grammar in context would be an effective way to link grammar knowledge to language use in practical situations. Therefore, English teachers should create vivid situational contexts in grammar teaching.

3.2.2 Understanding the text in its context

Situational context is very helpful in understanding text. Text always appears in a certain setting at a specific time. In general, text must have its own time, place and character. Sometimes the understanding of a text depends entirely on the situation in which it is placed. If this information is not given, readers will find themselves at a loss. Without context, we have no idea what they're talking about.

Therefore, in order to understand the text, students should first understand some difficult sentences. For a difficult sentence, teachers should ask students to find out the situational information and gain some relevant knowledge, and then try to understand according to the situation. Meaning is determined by context. Without the help of contextual context, people are more likely to have misunderstandings and misunderstandings. Everything happens under certain circumstances. Each text should be understood on a case-by-case basis.

3.3 Applying cultural context theory to English reading

3.3.1 Learning of culturally loaded words

Culture-loaded words refer to expressions and idioms that have typical meanings in a certain culture, and teachers should strive to develop students' cultural awareness. Due to the diversity of cultures in different countries, lack of cultural knowledge often leads students to misunderstand some words that embody cultural meanings. Therefore, it is very important for students to obtain contextual information so that they can capture the meaning of words and use vocabulary freely. Teachers should introduce relevant cultural background knowledge and keep culturally loaded words as far as possible in English reading teaching. In addition, students can learn more about it by reading more after class and other channels^[5].

3.3.2 Cultural background knowledge learning

Cultural background knowledge is very important for students to improve reading comprehension. A student with a large vocabulary is still unable to understand many passages, especially culturally relevant passages. It is the teacher's responsibility to allow students to relate the meaning of the reading material to the cultural factors involved. Teachers can introduce relevant cultural background knowledge before reading. It is well known that authors generate texts according to their own cultural assumptions, and students interpret texts according to their own cultural assumptions; therefore, misunderstandings are inevitable. Therefore, in reading practice, it is necessary for teachers to introduce relevant cultural background knowledge, such as knowledge about authors, culturally loaded words, and knowledge related to topics. By doing this, students' misunderstandings will be reduced.

4. Conclusion

Language and context are inseparable from each other. People's language activities cannot be separated from their context, which is indispensable for understanding words. From the close relationship between context and language, context plays an important role in foreign language teaching. All in all, in an English classroom, contextual teaching will help students understand texts and, where appropriate, use language to express themselves with accurate words. As one of the most important areas in foreign language teaching, reading can also be taught better and more effectively if it is placed in context.

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