

# Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Reading

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**ABSTRACT.** *With the continuous integration of China's higher education into the internationalization process, the goal of talent training in colleges and universities has become more and more internationalized. The cultivation of English reading ability has always been the focus of college English teaching. However, for a long time, foreign language teaching has always regarded language as a pure information transmission tool, ignoring the role of ideology in social process and political, economic and cultural life. The cultivation of critical reading ability can enable students to recognize the meaning of discourse and decode discourse from a macro perspective, and reveal the relationship between ideology and power through the language form on the surface of discourse. Critical reading ability is essentially a critical thinking mode and attitude, which is open and cannot be reduced to a specific dogma, and its significance needs to be reflected in specific reading practice.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Critical discourse analysis; Critical reading; Ideology*

## 1. Introduction

Cultivating critical spirit, independence and innovative thinking is an important and urgent task for contemporary Chinese university education. Learning English is not only for the purpose of examination, but with the increasingly internationalized living and working environment, it requires higher quality of business talents [1]. For a long time, our traditional analysis method in reading teaching has a very limited influence on students' ideological development, resulting in a low level of students' understanding of articles. Modern reading theory recognizes that reading comprehension is not passive, but a positive communication and profound thinking process [2]. Based on the theoretical development of reading comprehension and the practice of reading culture teaching, this paper discusses the theoretical basis of critical discourse analysis as a new discourse analysis tool and the necessity of its application in English reading teaching practice.

## **2. Overview of Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical Discourse Analysis(CDA) is a discourse analysis method that has emerged in foreign countries in recent 20 years. It aims to analyze oral and written discourse in social situations [3]. It is not a concrete linguistic analysis method, but its methodology is mainly based on systemic functional linguistics represented by Halliday. "Critique" means "comment and analysis", which has no distinction between praise and criticism. Emphasis is placed on the sociality and ideological nature of language. By analyzing the linguistic features of discourse and the social and historical background of its formation, the ideological meaning behind language structure is examined, and then the complex relationship among language, power and ideology is revealed.

For a long time, language has been regarded as a simple and transparent tool for expressing content, and the content of the text can be interpreted without paying attention to language. However, in critical discourse analysis theory, language is no longer just a transparent tool, but has complex and constructive relations with political and institutional structures, social norms, cultural values and beliefs. From the level of reading comprehension, reading experts also divide it into three levels: superficial understanding, inferential understanding, evaluative understanding or appreciative understanding [4]. Different perspectives on discourse analysis also lead to different analytical approaches. In these studies, discourse is regarded as either a cognitive thing or a social thing. Ideology is another important concept in CDA. Ideology expresses itself with certain language. It is believed that the text carries ideology, which is hidden behind the text.

In the past 30 years, the research on critical discourse analysis has been enriched and developed, which mainly focuses on theoretical review, methodological summary, literature review and analysis of specific texts such as politics, advertising and economy. However, there are few studies on the combination of critical discourse analysis and reading teaching. Any text is inevitably restricted by language and society. Therefore, critical discourse analysis studies not only what language is, but also why language is like this. Understand the inequality of the speaker's status, purpose and rights, so as to help readers reflect deeply on the text. Critical Discourse Analysis provides a new perspective for discourse reading comprehension.

## **3. From Critical Discourse Analysis to Critical Reading**

English reading teaching is essentially a kind of cultural study. Culture is diverse, it permeates all aspects of people's social life and profoundly affects people's attitude towards the outside world, so it is difficult to find a definition that can cover all. Describe the formation characteristics of discourse, including vocabulary and grammar; Interpretation includes the relationship between discourse and communication; Language and context are inseparable, which is a kind of social practice. The language used in context is discourse; While reflecting social reality,

discourse is constructive to subject and social reality. Discourse is ideological, that is, it is intertwined with people's accustomed cultural values and beliefs, and has the function of maintaining or changing social power relations; We try to read the traces and functions of power in language and discourse, discourse and syntax; At the same time, in this process, a powerful reading method which endows readers with critical ability is formed as a part of effective critical strategy [5].

Although English in news reports has its own characteristics and structure, it still contains the basic units and rules of language use, just like other language texts. The use of language carries social meanings in vocabulary and syntactic structures, but most of these social meanings are hidden. Therefore, an analytical tool is needed to reveal these hidden ideological meanings. It analyzes the expression of social development and contradictions in language and other symbols from the social and cultural practice and structure, and does not talk about language for the sake of language.

In conscious discourse, presupposition is defined as the message that the addressee has to agree with under the persuasion of the speaker: ideology is not a purely critical concept, it is neutral, has extensive sociality and universality, and is implied in all social activities and institutions. The main goal of discourse analysis is to make readers realize the significance of language in social relations. It also lists books for them to study and consult after class, so as to strengthen students' theoretical foundation and expand their knowledge and multidimensional vision. CDA insists on interdisciplinary and interdisciplinarity, opens up two links: macro social theory and micro discourse practice, and starts with the "key" of language analysis to deeply analyze and interpret various major issues related to social justice, power and control. The research includes transitivity, theme, modality, metaphor, word meaning and word expression. The research of discourse practice process includes intertextuality research and presupposition research. Social practice research mainly involves discourse order, ideology and political influence of discourse.

Every language has its own unique way to express thoughts and feelings. The language forms used in the overall structure of a text are the result of the speaker's choice from the whole language system under the influence of his communicative purpose, ideological tendency and various social factors. The following examples illustrate the specific application of these linguistic form analysis methods in critical discourse analysis theory in discourse reading.

#### (1) Preset

Presupposition is information that both parties have already known, or at least information that can be inferred from context after hearing or reading. In conscious discourse, presupposition is interpreted as the information that the addressee has to agree with under the persuasion of the speaker. When explaining the culture in the theory of cultural hegemony, he emphasized its political aspect. In order to gain political hegemony, winning cultural hegemony is an effective method. The producers of texts cleverly regard presupposition as something self-evident and hide it behind their statements or propositions. The presupposition of persuasion often

subtly makes the addressee accept a proposition as true content, but in fact it is not true at all. Psychological process means psychological activities such as "feeling", "reaction" and "cognition". In this kind of articles, students should focus on the psychological analysis of the author, and try to figure out the intentions of the author and the characters in order to enhance the overall understanding of the articles.

Language structure describes, strengthens and regenerates the right and dominant relationship in society, rationalizes it or challenges it; In the information age, a great deal of information emerges, and good and bad coexist, so people must make correct choices and judgments. The language order in modern society is characterized by the fact that power relations are increasingly acting through language at the implicit level, and language practice is increasingly becoming the object of power interference and control of social and cultural changes. Discourse analysis should be carried out in an interdisciplinary sense, involving not only the generation, dissemination and acceptance of discourse, but also the social cognitive process of creating idioms and interpreting discourse. For example, in today's world, a group of people can be called "terrorists" in the English-speaking world and "freedom fighters" in the Arab world [6].

## (2) Metaphor

Linguists believe that transitivity is a semantic system, and its purpose is to divide what people see, hear and do in the real world into several kinds of "processes", that is, to classify experience through grammar, and to indicate "participants" and "environmental components" related to various processes. Discourse means a process in which a social group spreads its meaning to society according to certain social rules, thereby establishing its social status and being recognized by other groups [7]. We believe that it is realistic to cultivate students' critical language ability in the concrete practice of language teaching. Such discourse order as medical discourse order, legal discourse order and historical discourse can reflect different ideologies and the social relations behind them. In this process, the critical spirit and innovative consciousness of the learners are encouraged, and the ultimate goal is to guide the students to critically understand and think about the course content, teaching process and evaluate the social reality in which they live, thus creating conditions for changing the power relations that are not conducive to themselves.

In a researcher's article, it is written as follows: When defending the market mechanism, we should analyze what the market mechanism can be responsible for and what it cannot be responsible for. The author uses two metaphors here: "invisible hand" and "visible foot". The ability of critical reading is the basis of forming the ability of selective decision-making, and the level of critical reading will definitely affect people's ability of selecting, judging and distinguishing information. However, speaking discourse is an ideological tool, which does not mean that all viewpoints in discourse have ideological propaganda nature. To judge this, it is not enough to analyze discourse, but also to examine how discourse is interpreted and what social consequences they produce.

## (3)Transitivity

The article uses too many material processes to describe objectively ongoing and occurring processes, while the sum of other processes is only half of the total process, which is consistent with the characteristics of the expository article. Critical reading is to reveal the hidden ideology and power relationship behind the text by analyzing the language forms when reading the text. Transitivity is the cornerstone for people to describe reality in language. It describes what people do and what they see and hear as different processes, and points out the participants and environmental components of each process. Linguistically, the same process in the real world can be described by different types of processes in transitive system, or by using the same process but changing the position of participants. Systemic Functional Linguistics is different from Structuralism Linguistics in that it attaches importance to the use of language, which is helpful to grasp the textual connotation in different cultural contexts and obtain the textual meaning accurately. More importantly, it can release some information without being noticed, and instill the viewpoints expected by the media into the audience in a roundabout way.

In text reading, it is necessary to make an effective description of language forms, that is, text analysis. Linguistically, the same process in the real world can be described by different types of processes in transitive system, or by using the same process but changing the position of participants. For example, when reading news discourse, while understanding the reported content, we should analyze the nature of the reported media, as well as the era background, social and cultural background, etc. Discourse analysis grasps the central idea of discourse, which is helpful for students to understand discourse and improve their reading ability and ability to obtain information quickly. The sociality of language requires English readers to read texts in the context of social institutions, which is consistent with the theory of critical discourse analysis.

#### **4. Theoretical Basis and Enlightenment of Critical Discourse Analysis in English Reading Teaching**

Reading is a necessary way to acquire information and learn knowledge, especially for students majoring in business English, who need to follow the development of the times and learn the latest business information by reading a lot. It studies not only what language is, but also why language is like this. I'm interested not only in the meaning of discourse, but also in how it comes into being. Teachers should guide students' understanding of objective facts more than trying to figure out the author's intentions. In reading comprehension, objective data are mostly investigated, and teachers should also train reading skills in a targeted way. In fact, people always see and experience events and talk about their contents and meanings through language, and always see and talk about signified through signifier.

Discourse is a systematic viewpoint statement expressing the meaning and values of social institutions, which defines, describes and limits what is possible and what is impossible, thus inevitably embodying ideology [8]. This intermediary is discourse

order, that is, the principle of discourse practice related to specific occasions or situations. As the master of educational activities, teachers are the possessors and imparting of knowledge; As the object of educational activities, students are the recipients of knowledge, passively and blindly accepting knowledge, and rarely pursuing the ins and outs of knowledge, lacking the intrinsic motivation for in-depth study. Orthodox linguistics and philosophy of language emphasize the neutral symbolic meaning of language and ignore the contextual meaning of language [9]. How to enable students to identify the ideology implied by various genres and related western social and political thoughts, and to have the ability to analyze and think independently are the new challenges facing reading teaching. Sometimes an image in an English news may not explain any problems, but if a series of images in related reports are collected, sorted and classified, the hidden meaning of the media will naturally emerge.

In reality, the usage characteristics and regularity of news English with the specific intention of transmission are not all as clear as those revealed above, but more subtle and hidden. Text is not the only goal of discourse analysis, and the relationship between text interaction and social practice is also very important. Discourse includes the generation, transmission and acceptance of discourse. The enlightenment to the reading process is that the text is not the author's monologue but a potential dialogue, and each text invites the potential readers to respond and give feedback in an explicit or implicit way. Speech process is a process of exchanging information through speech, which can express the truth of facts more vividly, vividly and profoundly, and explain the author's intention. That is to say, ideology is realized through this intentional or unintentional choice of language form (that is, discourse production process). This also shows that the language form itself does not have a fixed ideological meaning, and it is the purposeful use of it by language users that gives it ideological meaning. In this process, students have no doubts and no thoughts, and the knowledge they have acquired is only stored with the help of their minds, which is not integrated into their own thoughts, and they will not criticize and question textbooks or authorities. As a result, they are dominated by knowledge, which ultimately suppresses the exertion of students' personality, and makes people become blind obedience and one-dimensional people who lack critical spirit and creative spirit.

Language is not a neutral, subjective and independent system, and it cannot be separated from other social factors, such as class, gender and race. Through various textual materials, study related social themes such as gender, race and identity; Education, language teaching, employment and justice; War, military and political tactics, business behavior and other inequalities, we should examine the ideology and values that are often hidden in discourse and enhance the anti-control awareness of discourse. Of course, the purpose of reading is obviously not to stipulate right and wrong; The key point is to guide students to engage in critical reading, thinking and judging, to form their own unique opinions and highlight the subjectivity of learners. When the author's viewpoint, position and tendency cannot be clearly seen by analyzing an English news, students can be organized to compare and analyze English reports on the same event published by more than one media or media from different countries. Critical reading requires us to re-examine and re-evaluate the so-called

truth and authority in reading [10]. Critical reading advocates skepticism, and requires students not to blindly believe in books, blindly follow authority, and have a wise mind to distinguish right from wrong. In fact, people always see and experience events and talk about their contents and meanings through language, and always see and talk about signified through signifier.

## 5. Conclusion

Today, with the explosion of information, many foreign cultures and ideas have poured into our country, and they spread their ideology through the internet, books, newspapers and magazines. Language is never objective and neutral. People as social cells face the world through words every day. Language is between us and our world, which influences, constitutes or distorts our perception of the world. Guided by the theory of critical discourse analysis, students' critical reading ability can be effectively improved, and students can actively establish the relationship between language form and social context.

The goal of English teaching is to cultivate students' intercultural communication ability and comprehensive English application ability, enhance their autonomous learning ability and critical thinking ability, and improve their comprehensive cultural accomplishment. "Criticism" means revealing various presuppositions hidden in discourse, and it also means an intervention. Language teachers should guide students to understand the basic theory of critical discourse analysis, put reading in the social context, change passive reception reading into active critical reading, improve critical language awareness and gradually cultivate critical English reading ability.

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