

An Analysis of Legitimization Strategies from the Perspective of the Discourse-Historical Approach and Its Enlightenment to Teaching of the Reading Course for English Majors

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Abstract: *The cultivation of critical thinking ability of English majors is a focus in English teaching. Legitimization is regarded as one of the most effective ways to make things accepted and generally recognized in society, mainly through discourse construction, and it is an important topic in the field of Critical Discourse Analysis. In the process of representing society, discourse realizes its legitimization function through selection, distortion and neglect. Legitimization strategy plays a key role in this process. An analysis of legitimization strategies in discourse is helpful to cultivate English majors' critical thinking ability. This paper gives a brief introduction to the legitimization strategies in discourse and discusses the enlightenment of an analysis of legitimization strategies in the frame of the discourse-historical approach to teaching of the reading course for English majors in combination with the characteristics of the course.*

Keywords: *Legitimization strategies; the discourse-historical approach; teaching of the reading course for English majors*

1. Introduction

An analysis of legitimization strategies in discourse is a research perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis. It mainly analyzes the relationship between discourse characteristics and context. The context here includes not only macro social context but also communication context. An analysis of Legitimization strategies in discourse pays much attention to the choice of language form and content by the text author, and explores the contextual factors behind the "choice". The earliest forms of legitimization research are Aristotelian rhetorical analysis and classical sociological research [1]. Legitimization is an important social function of language use or discourse, and discourse analysis is one of the important methods of legitimization research. The current legitimization research in this field pays special attention to the discourse strategies of legitimization. Scholars have explored different discourse strategies to achieve legitimization according to their own research perspectives. Van Leeuwen is one of the most influential representatives. Van Leeuwen (2007) distinguished four kinds of important strategies of legitimization in discourse when analyzing the social practice of discourse construction in mass communication and daily communication: authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization and mythopoesis [2]. Authorization is about quoting traditions, customs, laws and people who are authorized by institutions; moral evaluation is about quoting value discourses; rationalization refers to quoting the objective and function of institutionalized social behavior and social knowledge endowed with cognitive credibility; mythopoesis is a narrative that rewards legal behavior and punishes illegal behavior. Van Leeuwen's theoretical framework of strategies of legitimization in discourse has been widely used in the field of media and political discourse. However, since it mainly examines the discourse in the static context, later scholars made appropriate adjustments to Van Leeuwen's framework when studying the discourse in the specific dynamic context. For example, in the field of media discourse, Vaara (2014) analyzed Finnish media texts and summarized the commonly used legitimization strategies in media discourse: status based on authority, knowledge-based authority based on economic expertise, rationalization based on economic argument, moral evaluation based on unfairness, especially for loss of authority [1]. The mythical narrative involving the future scenario and the cosmological type of constructing inevitability; Marwah et al. (2016) investigated the discourse structure (authorization, rationalization and moral evaluation) mainly used by the Iraqi English newspaper Kurdish globe in legalizing the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq [3]. In addition, there are five verb processes used to

express this legitimacy, including material, verbal, relational and psychological. These findings reflect the relationship between linguistic features and legitimacy structure in revealing hidden ideology.

There are also many legitimization studies in China, which mainly analyze the discourse strategies of legitimization in the research objects from the pragmatic perspective^{[4][5][6][7]}. There are few examples of analyzing the strategies for legitimization function in discourse from the perspective of the discourse-historical approach to cultivate the critical thinking ability of English majors. This paper will explore the enlightenment of an analysis of discourse strategies for legitimization to the teaching of the reading course for English majors.

2. Legitimization strategies in discourse

Legitimization means “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions.”^[8] “Strategy” generally refers to a clear and intentional plan for practice in order to achieve a particular social, political, psychological, or linguistic goal.; “behavior” is the realization of the “strategy”, behind the behavior itself, we can identify the conscious or spontaneous strategy, and they have a specific purpose or help to achieve a particular goal; “discourse strategy” is the use of language system, embodied in the language structure on different levels of the organization^[9]. Legitimization strategies are very important strategies for persuading, and they are common in media discourse and political discourse. Authors of discourse often use the legal norms, moral evaluation such “world order” strategies to defend themselves or “we” group, provide reasonable and legitimate reasons, and answer to question of “why do you say or do this or that” in order to get the audience's understanding and support.

English majors should pay attention to the legitimization hidden in English texts when they are reading, cultivate their critical thinking ability and enhance their critical consciousness in the process of English learning. Legitimization is usually hidden in discourse in the form of words, propositions, topics, discourse strategies and so on. At first, topics are very important to the interpretation of a text. They often constitute a coherent narrative of the text. They may distort the facts in a biased way and affect the readers' cognition of the “truth”. Next, propositions may also be the result of the discourse author's deliberate selection of contextual information based on his own interests, and the biased construction of his position and attitude, which is likely to be accepted by the readers. Next, the vocabulary used for conceptual expression is an important way for writers to express their ideologies. Legitimization may construct “WE group” and “THEY group” by respectively using positive and negative vocabulary, which greatly affects readers' objective cognition of things. Finally, identification of discourse strategies (authority, morality, rationality, hypothetical future and altruism) helps writers persuade readers and realize the rationalization of views.

Thus, the emergence of legitimization strategies in discourse puts forward requirements for English Majors to cultivate critical thinking ability.

3. An analysis of legitimization strategies from the perspective of the discourse-historical approach

This paper analyzes the discourse construction method by legitimizing within the framework of the discourse-historical approach. The discourse-historical approach was proposed by Ruth Wodak in the process of analyzing the anti-Semitic tendency in post-war Austria. It mainly focuses on the social problems to be studied and examines the diachronic changes of a certain discourse in a specific period of time; then, it interprets and analyzes the social issues to be studied in combination with the situational context, social politics and historical context of relevant discourse^[10]. The discourse-historical approach explores how discourse changes with the development of social politics and economy by focusing on and tracking the influence of contextual factors and “them” through positive self-representation and negative other representation in the discourse, thus clarifying the attitude tendency historical tracks on discourse events; it reveals the intention of the discourse to construct “us” and of the discourse author^[11].

Legitimization refers to “the process by which a speaker approves or permits a certain social behavior”^[12]. It is aimed at the justification of a certain behavior, which is related to the goal. It explains social behaviors, opinions, thoughts, statements, etc. through argument. In most cases, it is to seek the support and consent of the audience to obtain or maintain power, social recognition, reputation, etc., and answer the question of “why do you do this” implicitly or explicitly. Van Dijk regards legalization as a social political act. He believes that the speaker can achieve his legitimacy purpose by using reasonable reasons or acceptable motives to defend social practice^[13]. Legitimization has several basic characteristics:

legitimization is mainly constructed through discourse, which is an important function of discourse, and language is the most effective tool for establishing legitimate beliefs ^[14] ^[2]; legitimization has the characteristics of contextualization, and it is completed through specific context and gives rationality to specific practical activities; legitimization is essentially a process of debate, which is often used by the speaker as the purpose of persuading others, and the purpose is internalized in the legitimization discourse ^[7]; legitimization is rooted in ideology, based on laws, norms and values, and is related to power.

Legitimization is not only related to discourse structure, but also involves discourse communication, cognition, ideology, power and social order ^[1]. These political aspects of Legitimization can be analyzed from different perspectives. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a particularly effective perspective to analyze these political aspects, because it focuses on power and ideology; in addition, the existing CDA oriented legitimization studies have clarified the important role of discourse practice and strategies in legitimization ^[1]. In particular, Reyes (2011) based on van Leeuwen's legitimized discourse strategy, using the analytical tools of systemic functional linguistics, and from an interdisciplinary framework, elaborated an important use function of language in society: the process of legitimization ^[12]. This special research develops and proposes some key strategies for legitimizing the process of action: emotion (especially fear), hypothetical future, rationality, professional authority and altruism. These legitimization strategies can be used alone or in combination with other strategies to prove the legitimacy of social practice ^[1]. Almost all legitimization strategies will create positive or negative emotions to achieve the goal of legalization ^[7]. Emotions are often related to morality. Therefore, this paper will replace emotional legalization with moral legitimization of van Leeuwen's legitimization strategy theory. Based on the five discourse strategies of authority legitimization, moral legitimization, rational legitimization, future legitimization and altruism legitimization, this paper examines the diachronic changes of discourse strategies in the discourse, thus illustrating the analysis process of the discourse-historical approach and its value to teaching of the reading course for English majors.

4. Reading project design for English majors based on an analysis of legitimization strategies

At first, the students in the class were divided into three groups: A, B and C, they were asked to analyze an English article containing biased cultural information by writing, and the teacher collected the written texts of the students. Next, the 16 keynote speeches of Shangri La dialogue were collected as the research corpus, and were divided into groups 2005-2010a, 2011-2015b and 2016-2020c according to the year, and sent to students of groups A, B and C. Then, Students were allowed to use antcoc35.8 make statistics on the five legitimate discourse strategies in the corpus, and observe and summarize the language characteristics of each legitimate strategy. After that, the members of each group were required to verify the contextual information behind the legitimization strategies of the group. The contextual information includes the social background information and communication related information of the text generation. Later, let each group of students summarize the relationship between the number and use of the legitimization strategies in discourse and the contextual information. The teacher helped the students to sort out the social and historical reasons for the changes of discourse legitimization strategies in the three time periods. Finally, the students were asked to reanalyze the original English articles in the way of writing. By comparing the two analytical articles of each student and combining the speculative reading questionnaire, it was found that the students' speculative awareness was significantly improved. It indirectly demonstrates that critical thinking ability of English learners will not automatically improve with the improvement of English, and it needs special cultivation and training ^[15]. Under the online and offline mixed teaching mode, it can effectively improve students' critical thinking ability by consciously cultivating students' critical thinking awareness when they are reading through an analysis of legitimization strategies in discourse ^[15].

5. Enlightenment to teaching of the reading course for English majors

Reading is a process of constructing readers' psychological meaning, and the meaning of a text originates from society. Therefore, readers can construct the meaning of a text from three aspects, namely, social context, text and readers' psychological cognition. The application of analysis of legitimization strategies in reading texts will help students grasp the construction of discourse meaning in these three aspects and improve students' speculative consciousness.

Firstly, from the social perspective, the analysis of legitimization discourse strategies aims to reveal the truth behind the language, which is rich in the spirit of exploration and truth-seeking, and has a positive value orientation. It enables students to dialectically view the content and views of the text, learn

to think in future study and life and have the unique power of logical and meticulous thinking. Secondly, from the perspective of discourse, “the choices of content and form of language are driven by social factors, and discourse has the functions of selection, distortion and neglect when it represents society”^[16]. In the process of reading, students learn to identify the discourse strategies of writers, and understand that the choices of language forms are driven by the legitimization discourse strategies. The essence of reading process is the process in which the author tries to persuade the readers, in which the legitimization strategy plays an important role. Thirdly, from the cognitive level, the construction of reading meaning is the result of the interaction between readers’ psychological cognition and discourse. In the reading process, students can understand the western cultures, cultivate their international view, and maintain their confidence in Chinese culture.

6. Conclusion

English majors focus more on the forms and contents in reading texts but they may neglect the contexts of texts’ production, spread and consumption. Contexts are involved in shaping texts. Especially, the historical context and social context need more attention for the English majors to understand the texts in a deeper way. Contexts may tell English majors more about texts. An analysis of legitimization strategies in the frame of the discourse-historical approach provides a new perspective for English majors to explore the contexts behind the texts and learn the relationships between texts and contexts. This is quite helpful for teachers to cultivate the students’ critical thinking ability.

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