

Cultivation of English Majors' Humanistic Literacy from the Perspective of Cognitive Linguistics

—Taking the Literature Reading Survey of English Sophomores in Wuhan University of Technology as an Example

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Abstract: According to the “National Standard” and the “Guidelines”, humanistic education for English Majors is the foundation of comprehensive education. Reading English classics is an effective way to improve humanistic literacy of English majors. By means of data collecting on reading preference of English sophomores of Wuhan University of Technology, results demonstrate that only few students prefer English literary classics. After analyzing the reasons, this article comes up with three processes in the cultivation of humanistic literacy—humanistic awareness, humanistic adaptation, and humanistic aptitude. Meanwhile, corresponding teaching approaches and suggestions are proposed in each process under the guidance of cognitive linguistics to improve English majors' humanistic literacy through classic reading.

1. Introduction

While society is creating increasingly abundant material resources, it has also led to utilitarianism and neglect of the nourishment of humanistic spirit. In this social context, there has been a widespread phenomenon of emphasizing knowledge over culture in college English teaching Education. In the 21st century, quality education emphasizes the cultivation of innovative qualities, values the improvement of comprehensive talent quality, and attaches great importance on humanistic literacy which is a hot topic in the reform of English teaching and the “National Standard”^[6]. It is a very important task for universities to effectively enhance humanistic literacy of college students and cultivate high-quality talents for the future. Reading humanistic classics can cultivate language ability, critical thinking ability, cultural competence, and sound values which are required by the “National Standard”. Cognitive linguistic is based on human thinking. Applying cognitive linguistics theory to English teaching reform and guiding students to improve their humanistic literacy through reading is a new exploration that should be given attention by higher education.

2. Theoretical Foundation and Requirements

In 2018, the "National Standards for the Quality of Undergraduate Teaching of English Majors in Higher Education Institutions" were introduced, clarifying the requirements and guidelines for English majors in universities. "Teaching Guidelines for Undergraduate Foreign Language and Literature Majors" was launched in the spring of 2020 to provide measures and solutions for the humanistic development of English majors in universities^[8]. According to the "National Standard", humanistic literacy is divided into four dimensions: language ability, critical thinking ability, cultural cultivation, and sound values. Reading English classics can effectively enhance these four abilities.

Cognitive linguistics emerged in the 1980s under the context of the "cognitive revolution" in the United States and Europe, which is an important branch of cognitive science^[1]. In humanities education, teachers can adopt a sequential approach based on students' cognitive foundation.

Cognitive linguistics has a comprehensive and systematic teaching model that provides in-depth theoretical support for humanities education^[3]. It focuses on the comprehensive and step by step development of students. By rousing their humanistic awareness, strengthening their humanistic adaption, and enhancing their humanistic aptitude, scattered knowledge can be constructed to a systematic framework to form a comprehensive language learning system.

3. Status Quo in the Humanistic Literacy of College Students

3.1 Data Analysis

As students majoring in English, schools and teachers are constantly putting pressure on students, emphasizing the importance of certificates while neglecting the development of humanistic literacy. This has led to many students being too utilitarian, failing to appreciate the importance of reading English classics, or having no time to read them^[4]. To further understand the current situation and the causes of this problem, this study questionnaire surveyed 26 sophomore students of English major in Wuhan University of Technology about their favorite books and the reasons for liking them. This survey further discovered the problems faced by college students in English classics, providing some suggestions and solutions for teaching and learning in the future.

3.2 Data on Respondents' Preferences and Choices for Book

According to Figure 1, a survey questionnaire of the 26 English major students, 21.19% of students' favorite books are English literary classics, 3.8% of students' favorite books are literature in other language, 26% of students' favorite books are contemporary Chinese literature and 46.15% of students' favorite books are not literary works. This data shows that English majors prefer to read nonliterary works and only a few of students like English literary classics.

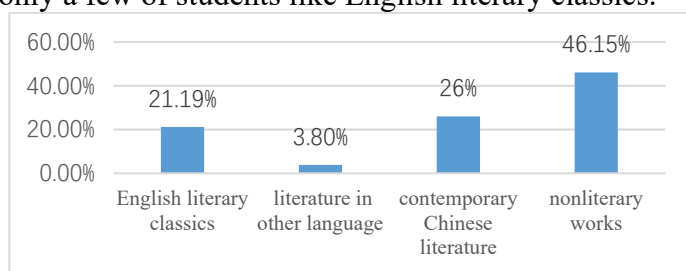


Figure 1. Book categories

3.3 Data on the Reasons of Favorite Books

Figure 2 illustrates the reasons of reading preference. The study arranges the motivation of reading English classics in the following order: (A) the Inspiration of Value of Life, (B) Interesting and Dramatic Storyline, (C) Revelation of Social Phenomenon, (D) the Praise for Women's Independence, (E) the Description of Pure and Romantic Love.

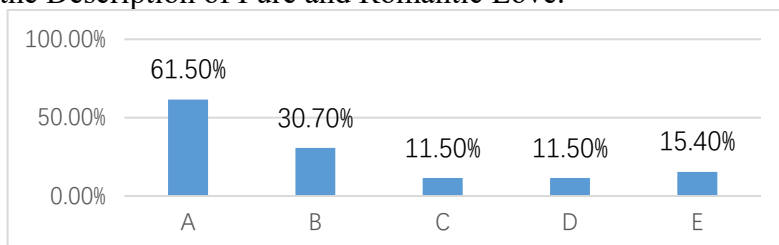


Figure 2. Reasons of preference

From the above figure, most of the students choose (A) as the reason why they like the book, which accounts for 61.5%. (B) Interesting and Dramatic Storyline, which accounts for 30.7%. (C) Revelation of Social Phenomenon, which accounts for 11.5%. (D) the Praise for Women's Independence, which accounts for 11.5%. (E) the Description of Pure and Romantic Love, which accounts for 15.4%. Therefore, it can be concluded that the reasons why the students of English

major like to read the book is mostly because it can bring them inspiration courage and enlightenment in life. Because of the ups and downs of the story, the attractive and interesting storyline is the second reason that why students like the book. A small part of students giving the reason of their favorite books is that it can reveal the dark side and the problem of the society, or it praises independent and tough women. And other students are attracted by the romantic love of their favorite book.

4. Humanistic Literacy from the Perspective of Cognitive Linguistics

Cognitive linguistics in English reading teaching adopts a progressive approach based on students' cognitive foundation, including embodied view, prototype category, conceptual metaphor, and image schema^[3]. It focuses on the humanistic development of students, unleashes their consciousness in learning, values their understanding of language, and emphasizes the cultivation of students' thinking. Cognitive linguistics focuses on the flexible use of language, considering that cognition is the reflection of consciousness, formed by the process of thinking and practice^[1]. Guiding by the theory, cultivation of humanistic literacy by reading English classics has three processes showed by Figure 3: humanistic awareness, humanistic adaption, and humanistic aptitude. At the beginning, it is suggested that teachers help students to establish humanistic awareness. Then students gradually adapt to the humanistic environment by constantly reading and critically thinking in humanistic classics. At the end, students will achieve humanistic aptitude based on the two stages. These stages will also interact with each other in reverse. During the process of reading English classics under the guidance of linguistic literary, students can develop four abilities (cultural cultivation, language ability, critical thinking ability, and sound values) which are required by the "National Standard".

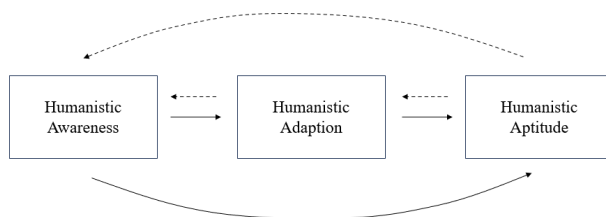


Figure 3. Three processes of cognitive linguistics

4.1 Humanistic Awareness

At the beginning, teachers need to cultivate students' awareness of humanistic literacy. According to cognitive linguistics, schema refers to an organized knowledge structure that involves people's views on typical features and relationships that will appear among a category^[7]. Therefore, the construction of humanistic awareness is first step. Strengthening the application of cognitive linguistics in English reading teaching and its combination with teaching methods can better promote the overall enhancement of students' reading ability and humanistic literacy. Better humanistic awareness will have a direct impact on students' humanistic aptitude and enable them to better adapt to the humanistic environment. The stronger the humanistic awareness of students, the stronger their humanistic abilities will be. Promoting the application of cognitive linguistics in teaching mainly involves the following aspects:

4.1.1 More Output of Foreign Culture

Foreign culture is the foundation for reading foreign classics, and the two complement each other. Many students who cannot understand foreign classics and lose interest in reading are due to unfamiliarity with the relevant culture. It is preferred for teachers to introduce more foreign customs and habits, which is beneficial for students to understand foreign knowledge and culture. Through this way, it helps them to think as a foreigner and invisibly improve the reading level of college English. According to the schema theory of cognitive linguistics, when students encounter similar

English reading again, they can quickly recall relevant knowledge. If there is no analysis and understanding of foreign culture, there will be no accumulation of relevant knowledge in the mind, and therefore no corresponding understanding of the article. Therefore, it is advised that college English teachers timely impart foreign ideas and cultures to students to help them understand foreign customs and habits based on their existing language cognition. The main purpose is to improve the existing foreign knowledge of students, enrich their horizons, help them communicate in cognitive language, and systematize their knowledge to enhance their English reading ability.

4.1.2 Heuristic Reading Materials Preference

From the analysis of the survey questionnaire results, a minority of students like English classics. If teachers want to awaken students' humanistic awareness, teacher need to effectively stimulate students' learning interest and enable them to conduct reading based on their own cognitive level^[7]. Therefore, appropriate reading materials are particularly crucial. The survey can be concluded that many students like a book because the inspiration of that book. College students have just reached adulthood and have not yet stepped out of society. During this period, many students feel confused and like to think about the meaning of life. College students' views of life have not yet truly matured. Teachers could use reading to recommend classic original works with positive life values to students. For example, Harper Lee's *"To Kill a Mocking Bird"* vividly portrays the warmth and understanding between people. This book reflects the situation of that time in southern American society and satirizes the issue of racial discrimination and encourages students to become kind, responsible, and upright person. After reading, students can know more about North and South American Culture and learn to tolerate and understand others, especially those minorities. At the same time, books are supposed be recommended based on the different levels of professional abilities of each student, so that students can better read literary classics.

4.2 Humanistic Adaption

Humanistic adaptation generally refers to the attempt to “establish (or reestablish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal and functional relationships with humanistic environments”^[2]. According to the schema theory of cognitive linguistics, students will combine different related concepts based on their existing experience to form a new cognitive pattern^[7]. Due to cultural differences, after gaining basic humanistic awareness, it is necessary to strengthen the input of humanistic knowledge in this stage to help students adapt to different cultural environment, consolidate, and continuously update existing humanistic frameworks. The more students adapt to the humanistic environment, the easier it is for them to improve their humanistic aptitude. Humanistic adaptation will in turn enhance humanistic awareness. Reading is a unique cognitive activity process of human beings, which is a dynamic interaction process. Under the guidance of cognitive linguistics theory, teachers can enhance students' humanistic adaption through the following methods.

4.2.1 Occidental & Oriental Cultural Comparison

According to the theoretical perspective of cognitive linguistics, people can only better perceive the external world by relying on the perception of prototypes, thus forming cognitive patterns. There are many slang, customs, values, and other idioms in English, which reflect the cultural characteristics of different ethnic groups. Therefore, teachers need to pay attention to cultivating students' ability to analyze cultural differences in their daily teaching. In daily teaching activities, teachers can develop students' ability to independently accumulate and learn different culture. Teachers should provide patient guidance and answers to questions raised by students during reading. Arrange data collection tasks to help students understand more about cultural differences between China and the West through detailed comparisons^[7].

4.2.2 Communicative Teaching Approach

Cognitive linguistic attaches importance to the experience of language, believing that the human body is the intermediary between the objective world and human cognition^[3]. The process of

language learning also has an experiential aspect. Based on this theory, teachers can design role-playing teaching activities. In the teaching process, reproducing some of the text content through theatrical performances can help stimulate students' understanding of humanistic knowledge and language, and promote their absorption and understanding of knowledge^[7]. Students need to focus their attention on language communication tasks at this stage to promote adaptation to the humanistic environment. This teaching approach can help students better adapt to the humanistic environment, form a good language learning awareness, mobilize their learning enthusiasm, and improve their pragmatic competence.

4.3 Humanistic Aptitude

Humanistic aptitude is formed after the two steps mentioned before. The stronger the humanistic aptitude, the better students can adapt to the humanistic environment, and they will also have a higher humanistic awareness. Guided by the teaching philosophy of cognitive linguistics, the ultimate objective is to cultivate students' humanistic aptitude, enabling them to equip humanistic literacy and sound values in and beyond the class by reading English literacy. The fundamental goal of education still revolves around the cultivation of "people". Education, as for the goal, is to tap out the 'humanity' of 'man' in an effective way, to unleash his potential, so that human nature can achieve the best^[6]. According to the requirements of the "National Standard", in addition to language proficiency and cultural cultivation, students is required to have the ability to think critically. The "National Standard" defines critical thinking ability as critical thinking quality and cognitive skills; The former refers to diligence, inquiry, objective rationality, cautious judgment, and fair evaluation, while the latter refers to the ability to articulate, analyze, and evaluate input information as well as reflective thinking skills^[5]. The following methods would help teachers to improve critical abilities of students.

4.3.1 Book Report

Cognitive linguistics suggests that students should summarize and generalize the language patterns in the material. In this process, students will establish their own semantic radiation network and explore the relationship between language use and meaning^[7]. According to cognitive linguistics, language teaching should use asymmetric frequency input. Asymmetric frequency input is more effective for learners to acquire new schema. The so-called asymmetric frequency input refers to the fact that the frequency of typical members of the target construct appearing in language input is higher than that of atypical members^[3]. Based on the theory, when assigning reading report tasks, teacher had better first consider literary classics with typical humanistic connotations. Reading reports can highlight the subject status of students and effectively cultivate their thinking, analytical, and summarizing abilities.

4.3.2 Scientific Aptitude Assessment

Cognitive linguistics requires teachers to pay attention to both macroscopic and microscopic aspects of language teaching. So scientific teaching evaluation need also consider the principle of holistic teaching. Micro level teaching evaluation is to evaluate specific knowledge such as language ability. Macro level teaching evaluation refers to the evaluation conducted from social, cultural, and cognitive emotional perspectives^[7]. The evaluation mechanism of humanities has characteristics such as complexity, relative abstraction, lag, and difficulty in quantification. Therefore, multiple evaluation methods should be adopted to evaluate English major teaching. Such as peer evaluation, self-evaluation, teacher evaluation, a combination of process evaluation and summative evaluation. Scientific teaching evaluation can help students discover problems in a timely manner and encourage them to cultivate a questioning spirit to improve their critical thinking quality.

5. Conclusion

The humanistic literacy of the people is closely related to the fate of this nation. College students

in the new era shoulder the future of our country and should possess a certain level of humanistic literacy. This requires teacher to cultivate students' humanistic awareness, humanistic adaption and humanistic aptitude consciously and purposefully, so that they can become high-quality talents with both professional knowledge and cultural heritage in the new era. However, due to the limited number of participants and viewpoints in the survey data in this study, which limits the investigation of other various factors and influence of reading, such as reading time, methods, and attitudes. In future research, more detailed survey questionnaires should be designed, and participants should be added.

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