

Application of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics in College English Reading Teaching

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Abstract: Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL for short) is put forward by Professor Yin Wang after over 20 years' in-depth thoughts and studies of cognitive linguistics. Putting more emphasis on materialism and humanism, ECL is more comprehensive, multilevel and practical. Its kernel principle is "reality-Cognition-Language". This paper tries to explore college reading teaching based on the principle and analyse teaching practice by using the theory.

1. Introduction

After over 20 years' studies and thoughts about cognitive linguistics, one of the mainstream theories at home and abroad, Professor Wang proposed that such cognitive and scientific research methods as scientific experiments and data survey connoted by the word "cognition" are significantly different from the research methods of theoretical linguistic studies. [1] Moreover, cognitive linguistics studies in foreign countries don't stress materialism and humanism in language studies. Therefore, Professor Wang put forward Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics with the characteristics of Chinese native theory. Its core principle is that cognition is based on reality and then expressed by language. Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics derives from the theories of cognitive linguistics and will make further progress based on it. This paper tries to apply Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics to college English reading teaching by analysing teaching practice from the perspective of interactive perception and personal experience.

2. About Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics

Before its climax since the 20th century, linguistic studies have experienced three revolutions, which began with structuralism linguistics initiated by Ferdinand de Saussure who strongly advocated analysing the relationship and laws of the internal elements of the language system from a synchronic perspective. Structuralism linguistics is definitely opposed to what historical comparative linguistics studied in the 19th century, that is, speech, external, diachronic and entity. Saussure believes that meaning is only generated from the internal part of language system and is determined by the intersection of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations. However, Professor Wang believes that Saussure only focuses on the language system, ignoring the relationship between language and society and that between language and human. The second revolution was started by Noam Chomsky in the 1950s. Based on Saussure's structuralism linguistics, Chomsky founded Transformative-Generative linguistics (or TG Linguistics), which not only analyzes the language system but also explores the origin of language from the viewpoint of human's mind. According to Chomsky, language derives from the inborn "universal grammar" in human's mind. That is to say, language is produced from human's mind and is as innate as mind. Chomsky attaches more importance to human's role in language studies while ignoring the relationship between language and the physical reality. [2] In the 1960s, post-modernism philosophy advocates to study philosophy and language from the perspectives of "physical world" and "humanism". Influenced by this, the third revolution of language studies came with cognitive linguistics, which resolutely criticized Saussure's transcendental theory of language system and Chomsky's theory of language being innate and autonomy.

In recent years, Professor Wang has been proposing that the theories of cognitive linguistics be

adjusted and further developed with Chinese characteristics and the name of Cognitive Linguistics be changed as Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (shortened as ECL). One reason is that the word “cognitive” is not clearly defined and cannot show its theoretical orientation exactly, while the name “Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics” highlights the shift in language studies from rationalism to materialism. The other reason is that the word “cognition” is generally relevant to such research methods of the first generation cognitive science as scientific experiments or data surveys, which are significantly different from the theoretical linguistic studies nowadays. However, “Embodied-cognition” highlights the experiential view of the source of language, which is consistent with the core value of the second generation of cognitive science.

The kernel principle of Embodied-cognitive Linguistics involves three elements, that is, physical reality, cognition and language. It believes that language is created and used only by human based on the interaction with the physical reality, which fully reflects the key characteristic of human-focused orientation of post-modernist philosophy. Its human-orientation means that language is created by human beings in the interaction with the physical world and on the basis of cognitive processing. As for the relationship of embodiment and cognition, embodiment lays basis for the cognition, while the latter represents a higher level. Therefore, both embodiment and cognition complement each other. It's believed that language derives from human beings' life experience and is also generated by human's mental operation. By integrating the objective world with humans' role, embodiment-cognitive linguistics can explain the nature of language in a more effective way.

As one of the qualities of language, embodiment is much more universal instead of an individual case. Hence, it can explain different linguistic units like speech sounds, grammar, sentence pattern, etc. As for speech sounds, intonation and different speech rates are generally used to express people's emotions. For instance, a rising intonation usually means a question while a falling tone suggests being certain and confirmed, which all come from people's experience in real life.[3] Moreover, grammatically speaking, there are various tenses, aspects and voices. It's known to all that tense in grammar also comes from people's experience of how time passes in real life. How people's action is processing and whether it has finished or not are expressed by the aspect. An action's subject and object are indicated by means of voice in grammar. In addition, people's attitude towards a piece of information can be seen from the sentence pattern like a statement, an imperative sentence or a subjunctive sentence. Furthermore, different languages have various ways of combining sentence elements, which completely depends on peoples' conceptualization and grammaticalization of the event. For example, in Chinese sentence elements are usually combined in the order of people's action which fully reflects how Chinese people live their life by relying on time. As it can be seen that embodiment-cognitive linguistics is applicable to all levels of language analysis including phonetics, vocabulary, morphology, syntax, texts, semantics, rhetoric, translation and the like.

3. Embodied-Cognitive View of College English Reading Teaching

For many years, the education policy in China has been stressing the integration of theory and practice, which is completely reasonable and applicable in language studies. One of the major criteria judging one linguistic theory being significant or not is whether it can boost the language teaching. As any other language, English also reflects how English peoples recognize and interact with the physical world. Starting from this, ECL aims at revealing the cognitive process of English expressions so that English teachers can explain how the language is created and why it's spoken and written in a certain way. Hence, learners will make it clear how the words and sentences are generated and combined. Helping learners know about the thinking mode of English people is also consistent with what quality education advocated in China requires.

The biggest drawback of traditional teaching is that it cannot give full play to the language learners' subjective initiative [4], which reveals a fact that the linguistic theories supporting the traditional teaching approaches haven't given sufficient importance to the subjects who are using the language. That is to say, those theories have ignored the significant roles played by human

beings in language generation, employment and evolution. However, embodied-cognitive linguistics attach great emphasis to the active roles played by human beings in language using, which lays a solid theoretical foundation for boosting learners' motives, improving foreign language teaching methods and the teaching efficiency.

As far as college reading teaching is concerned, the biggest problem lies in the following four aspects: 1) vocabulary; 2) long and difficult sentences; 3) passage structure; 4) background information. Due to the limitation of space, this paper tries to approach the third question by applying embodied-cognitive linguistics. Professor Wang believes that how individual sentences are combined into a passage is completely determined by the way people experience in the physical world, like developing by time or in a flashback. [5] The sentences can also be organized by the order of weight, size or distance. From the logic perspective, the organization of the sentences adopts a deductive method or an inductive method. Both them reflect the embodied cognition of the language users.

4. College English Reading Teaching Guided by Embodied-Cognitive Teaching View

In order to illustrate how to apply embodied-cognitive linguistics in college reading teaching, this paper chooses the text from Reading Course 2 (Second Edition) edited by Shouren Wang and Hong Gao in May, 2018. The passage entitled "The Law vs. the Piano" is mainly about the disagreement between father and daughter about career choice. This phenomenon is universal among students and their parents, so it can easily activate students' cognitive motives and background. Based on the kernel principle of "reality-cognition-language", the teaching can begin with students sharing their personal experiences in groups. Then skimming through the passage to find the time markers like "When Susie was in kindergarten (Para. 1)", "By the time Susie could read and write (Para. 2)" and "when she finished high school (Para. 3)". The third steps is for students to find what happened at these moments and try feel and summarize the changes of their relationship and the conflicts between the father and daughter from "one day(Para. 5)" to "Finally (Para. 7)", from "many tears later (Para. 8)" to "years later (Para. 11)" in the end. Reading the passage by following the time order, students will find a dictator father and an obedient daughter at the very beginning, the development of the daughter's autonomy, the explosion of their conflicts, their compromise and the father's final recognition of the daughter's choice. Furthermore, the writer doesn't make any comment about their conflicts, but students can find the writer's attitude from the last two sentences, that is, "Father was almost as proud of her as he would have been to see her lawyer." and "But he never did admit that Susie is a reasonable woman". Besides, students are supposed to discuss the critical questions like whether parents should plan for their children's life or whether children should obey their parents' advices about career choice. The climax of the passage is the break-up of the conflict described in the seventh paragraph, so students can make a role-play, imitating the bitter arguments between the father and the daughter. Only by constructing a similar context, the students can achieve an almost real emotional experience and build a dynamic cognitive model.

Reading teaching should begin from the students' cognitive background. What teachers need to do is to activate their available cognitive schema first and then help them reorganize the relevant concepts and information based on the teaching contents. In this way, with the existing knowledge correlating and interacting with the relevant information network, a new cognitive model will be established. The model may be built by an individual student or by students in groups, but they must be involved in with an active mind. Students use their existing knowledge to deal with the new information and build relationship between them, and then rebuild a new knowledge network. In this process, teachers play an important role. A good teacher knows about the existing cognition model of their students, knows how to reorganize the text information, knows to lead students find how passages organize in different ways.

5. Conclusion

Professor Wang put forward Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL) based on his in-depth studies of cognitive linguistics and linguistic philosophy, which is a major theoretical contribution to cognitive linguistics. It's a pity that there is no theoretical system nowadays. Its kernel principle is that language is generated by human beings' interaction with the physical world and their mental processing. By applying the principle, the paper explores how to highlight the human-orientation, embodiment, and interaction views in college English reading teaching.

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