

Discourse analysis and High School English Reading Teaching

Jingkun Yan^{1*}, Jingling Jiang

Nanning Normal University, Nanning, 530100, China

Email: 213859127@qq.com

How to cite this paper: Yan, J. K., & Jiang, J. L. (2025). Discourse analysis and High School English Reading Teaching. International Journal of Educational Development, 1(2), 72–79. ISSN Print: 3104-4263; ISSN Online: 3104-4271.

<https://doi.org/10.63313/IJED.9019>

Published: 2025-09-24

Copyright © 2025 by author(s) and Erytis Publishing Limited.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Abstract

This study explores the application of discourse analysis in high school English reading teaching, aiming to enhance students' reading abilities and critical thinking skills. By incorporating discourse analysis, teachers can help students better understand the structure, main ideas, and implicit meanings of texts, thereby improving their reading comprehension and language skills. The re-search shows that a reading teaching model combined with discourse analysis can strengthen students' awareness of discourse, improve classroom teaching efficiency, and promote a deeper understanding of English reading materials. This approach provides effective strategies and theoretical support for improving the quality of high school English reading teaching.

Keywords

Discourse Analysis; Reading Teaching; Discourse

1. Introduction

Reading has always been a big deal in English learning—it's not just a skill, it's pretty much the backbone. And honestly, everyone in foreign language teaching keeps talking about how to boost reading literacy. It's like this never-ending hot topic.

The English Curriculum Standard for General High Schools (2020) makes it pretty clear: high schoolers need to step up their reading game. We're talking understanding different types of articles, spotting how they're built, digging out key info—the whole package. And here's the thing: knowing how a text is structured actually helps students read between the lines. It lets them grasp stuff that isn't just lying on the surface.

The standard even suggests that teachers use discourse analysis to help students break down a passage—find the main idea, see how arguments develop, figure out how everything connects. Sounds good, right? But the problem is, in real classrooms,

things often look different. A lot of reading lessons still feel kinda broken—bits and pieces here and there, no big picture, themes skimmed over, and not much deep thinking going on. Students often end up just memorizing instead of actually analyzing.

So that's where this paper comes in. We're trying to see if weaving discourse analysis into high school English reading classes can make a difference. The goal isn't just theory—it's about giving teachers useful ideas, making them realize how helpful discourse analysis can be, and coming up with ways to teach that kids actually respond to. In the end, we hope this makes English reading classes more engaging, boosts understanding, and yeah—gets students thinking more critically.

2. Definition of Core Concept

2.1. Discourse

There is still debate in academia over the definition of discourse, and in different research fields, discourse is assigned various meanings. In the book *Cohesion in English*, Halliday and Hasan defined discourse conceptually as: "Discourse may be spoken or written; it is a unit of meaning." According to this definition, even a single sentence can be considered as a discourse. Based on Halliday's research, Cook (1989), in his book *Discourse*, defines discourse as "a stretch of language perceived to be meaningful, unified, and purposive".

This definition builds on Halliday's concept of discourse, emphasizing that discourse is not merely a combination of sentences but a unified whole of language connected by meaning, structure, and purpose.

Discourse was defined as an internally connected structural system and emphasized its role in expressing multi-level meanings. Discourse refers to a language unit composed of several sentences with a specific theme, context, and purpose. Other experts stated that discourse is made up of language units (such as sentences and paragraphs) and achieves overall meaning through cohesion and coherence at grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic levels.

Although different linguists have slight variations in their definitions of discourse, it is generally agreed that not all random combinations of sentences can be considered as discourse. Only language units that form a meaningful context can be called discourse, which can be either spoken or written.

2.2. Discourse Analysis

The concept of "discourse analysis" developed based on the concept of "discourse," and it was first introduced by the scholar Harris. In 1952, structuralist linguist Harris first introduced "discourse analysis" in his article "Discourse Analysis", marking the birth of the concept of discourse analysis. After more than seventy years of research, it has become an important methodological approach in linguistics.

From the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics, Halliday views discourse

analysis as the study of how language functions in a specific socio-cultural context. It examines how different linguistic resources, such as syntactic structures, grammatical relationships, and contextual backgrounds, are used to achieve communication and construct meaning.

McCarthy (1991) believes that discourse analysis is the study of language use beyond the sentence level, emphasizing the importance of context in the process of meaning construction. In his book *Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers*, McCarthy points out that discourse analysis involves examining how language users construct meaning in both written and spoken texts through cohesion, coherence, and interaction. Based on discourse linguistics, McCarthy proposed a discourse-based approach to language teaching. He argued that the goal of teaching is to develop students' discourse competence and help them master discourse strategies.

Discourse analysis started a little late in China, and it wasn't until the 1980s that it became a field of specialized study.

In conclusion, discourse analysis is not only crucial for linguistic research but also provides valuable insights for language teaching. These studies have highlighted the importance of discourse competence in language teaching. In addition to theoretical development, they have also greatly advanced teaching practice.

2.3. Previous Research

Discourse patterns play a significant role in English reading teaching. Risko, J. & Dalhouse, A. (2011) conclude from their examples of discourse structure that analyzing discourse patterns is one of the key factors affecting students' reading comprehension. By analyzing discourse patterns, students' classroom participation can increase, and their reading skills can be improved.

Herbert (2014) concludes from his study of students' performance in reading classes that when discourse patterns are used in reading teaching, students guided by these patterns are often able to recognize the grammar and sentence structures of the discourse more quickly.

In addition to discourse patterns, genre, cohesion, and coherence of discourse are also highly emphasized. Adelnia and Salehi applied discourse genre analysis to reading teaching for 80 second language learners in Iran. Through practical teaching experiments, they found that students taught using the discourse genre approach performed significantly better than those taught with traditional methods. Therefore, this study highlights the important role of discourse genre in English reading (Adelnia & Salehi, 192).

The concepts of coherence and cohesion in discourse were first introduced by Halliday and Hasan. Building on this, many foreign scholars have explored the role of coherence and cohesion in English reading teaching. Lehman and Schraw, through practical teaching, taught students cohesion techniques in reading clas-

ses and tested their effectiveness. They successfully demonstrated that teaching cohesion in discourse can promote students' deeper understanding of texts (Lehman & Schraw, 742).

Rosado and Rey, through their research on discourse, explained that using coherence and cohesion techniques in reading teaching effectively enhances students' critical thinking and reading comprehension skills.

Overall, many scholars abroad have studied the role of discourse analysis in English reading teaching from both theoretical and practical perspectives. In conclusion, the findings consistently show that discourse analysis contributes to English reading teaching and can improve classroom efficiency and students' reading comprehension.

3. Theoretical Basis

3.1. Discourse Pattern

Discourse patterns refer to a method of classifying texts based on their formal and structural content. Hoey defines discourse patterns as "a combination of relationships that make up a discourse." It can be seen that the linguistic structural features of a discourse are influenced by cognitive patterns, and there are significant differences in the cognitive patterns between Chinese and English. Therefore, the discourse patterns in English, shaped by its cognitive patterns, also differ greatly from those in Chinese. Based on the research of previous linguists, scholars generally classify common discourse patterns into the following categories:

(1) General--Particular Pattern

This pattern is commonly found in the writing of native English speakers and often follows a top-down logical structure. In other words, it starts with a general overview from a broad perspective, and then gradually narrows down to focus on the central topic. The first sentence of the paragraph is usually a general statement, often defining a viewpoint, opinion, or concept, and the rest of the paragraph develops the argument based on this initial sentence. This pattern is most commonly used in argumentative writing.

(2) Problem-Solution Pattern

The problem-solution discourse pattern is characterized by the author always presenting a series of problems at the beginning, analyzing the causes of these problems, and then offering possible solutions. This pattern is commonly found in narrative essays, explanatory texts, such as research reports, news articles, literary works, and various types of advertisements.

(3) Claim-Counterclaim Pattern

This pattern is commonly found in argumentative essays. It usually follows the structure of "introducing a viewpoint—clarifying the viewpoint—presenting a new viewpoint." In other words, the author first presents a widely accepted

viewpoint, then clarifies and explains it, and finally introduces their own viewpoint and develops an argument. The main purpose is to refute the errors in widely accepted views.

3.2. Cohesion and Coherence

Halliday first introduced the concept of "cohesion" in 1964. In *Cohesion in English*, Halliday and Hasan stated, "Cohesion refers to the network of lexical, grammatical, and discourse-related relationships that connect parts of a text." Similarly, Hoey defines cohesion as the means and ways that connect two sentences. As for coherence, Nunan defines it as, "Coherence is what makes a text more than just a random collection of sentences. It enables the reader to interpret the text as a whole rather than as a mere jumble of sentences without logical connection." From this, it can be seen that coherence is the key factor that makes a discourse a unified whole. It helps the reader interpret the text as a complete structure with internal logical relationships. Cohesion mainly consists of two types: lexical cohesion and grammatical cohesion.

(1) Lexical Cohesion

Lexical cohesion refers to the way that certain words are repeated in a discourse, either through direct repetition or substitution with other words, to create semantic continuity in the text. There are four main types of lexical cohesion: repetition of the original word, repetition of synonyms or near-synonyms, repetition of antonyms, and repetition of superordinate and subordinate terms.

(2) Grammatical Cohesion

Grammatical cohesion refers to connecting parts of a discourse using grammatically correct forms, making the text a grammatically current. Grammatical cohesion mainly includes reference, ellipsis, and substitution.

4. Pedagogical Strategies Based on Discourse Analysis

4.1. Integrating Discourse Analysis into English Reading Teaching

(1): Enhancing Teachers' Awareness of Discourse Analysis in Reading Teaching

Currently, there are many issues in high school English reading teaching. For example, when preparing lessons, teachers often interpret texts mechanically by focusing on "what", "how", and "why", without analyzing specific questions in depth. For instance, some texts, such as advertisements or invitation letters, have clear writing purposes that do not require detailed analysis. However, some teachers still analyze these texts and ask unnecessary questions like "why" for students to discuss.

Therefore, teachers' knowledge of discourse analysis plays a crucial role. It is also a key factor in determining whether reading teaching can be effectively implemented. The improvement of teachers' abilities plays a crucial role in enhancing teaching

efficiency in reading teaching.

Through interpreting texts and applying discourse analysis skills in actual teaching, teachers can determine the starting point of students' learning and the objectives of reading teaching. This approach also allows them to focus on fostering students' independent learning according to the new curriculum standards.

(2): Emphasizing Multidimensional Analysis in reading teaching

Discourse is a foundational resource in high school English reading teaching. It endows language learning with themes, content, and contexts, organizing and presenting information through its unique internal logical structures, linguistic forms, and stylistic features, all serving the expression of thematic meaning. Reading teaching based on discourse analysis should focus on the diverse interpretations of texts, fully explore their potential value, and conduct enriching reading activities. This helps students grasp the organizational structure and logical forms of the text on the basis of a holistic understanding, ultimately aiding the development of their language skills, cultural awareness, and critical thinking. In guiding students through discourse analysis, teachers should analyze discourse patterns, the author's perspectives, and semantic dimensions of the text, effectively utilizing and interpreting discourse to enhance the efficiency of reading teaching.

4.2. The Design of Reading Teaching

(1): Analyzing Reading Tasks Based on Discourse Content

In addition to improving teachers' abilities related to discourse knowledge, the development of students' skills in discourse analysis is also crucial. In the design of reading tasks, it is essential to consider enhancing students' abilities to analyze discourse. Teachers can design tasks that involve information analysis to help students grasp the discourse from an observer's perspective, such as: identifying conditional relationships、identifying referential relationships、completing missing information in the text、inferring meaning and making judgments、arranging information chronologically and so on.

In high school English reading instruction, a variety of task types are designed to enhance students' comprehension and analytical abilities through discourse-based activities. For instance, students may be asked to identify conditional relationships by analyzing sentences such as “Anne could have been less lonely, if she had made some friends...” ,where they locate conjunctive words like “if” and examine how conditionality shapes meaning. Another common task involves detecting referential relationships, wherein learners trace pronouns like “these” or “they” back to their antecedents within a passage to enhance coherence awareness. Tasks that require completing missing information, such as filling in key words like “ruins” or “trapped” based on contextual clues from a text, help students reconstruct semantic integrity and visualize narrative scenes. Furthermore, students are often prompted to infer implied meanings and make judgments—for example, interpret-

ing the emotional undertones of a underlined sentence or deducing the meaning of unfamiliar terms from context. Finally, having students arrange events in chronological order based on a narrative's development encourages an understanding of textual temporality and logical sequencing. Through these varied tasks, learners are not only engaged in localized text analysis but also guided toward deeper interpretive and critical engagement with the material.

(2): Integrating Reading Strategies for Development

The ultimate goal of reading teaching is to cultivate students' critical thinking, language skills, and more. To strengthen the role of discourse analysis and enhance the quality of students' reading learning, teachers should integrate reading strategies into the discourse analysis-based reading process to improve teaching efficiency. Teachers can follow the PWP teaching model, combining discourse content to guide students at different stages.

Pre-reading: At this stage, teachers should help students clarify the purpose of reading and stimulate their interest in the discourse through the article's title, charts, and keywords, thereby guiding them to predict the content of the discourse. During this process, teachers can guide students to skim the article to grasp the main idea of the paragraphs and activate the students' existing background knowledge.

While-reading: Guide students to use the scanning strategy to accurately obtain factual information from the article and teach them how to infer the author's implicit meanings and writing intentions through the content of the article. Assist students in learning how to deal with difficult or new words encountered during reading by guiding them to use causal relationships and contextual clues to deduce word meanings and apply them.

Post-reading: Design activities to expand the content of the discourse and deepen students' understanding of it. Engage students in rewriting and continuing the article to foster their creativity and allow them to practice applying newly acquired knowledge, enhancing their reading efficiency and self-learning abilities.

References

- [1] Cook, G. *Discourse* [M]. Oxford University Press, 1989.
- [2] Developing genre awareness in collaborative academic reading: A case study of novice academic learners[J]. *English for Specific Purposes*, 2024, 74: 9-22.
- [3] Grifenhagen J F, Barnes E M. Reimagining discourse in the classroom[J]. *The Reading Teacher*, 2022, 75(6): 739-748.
- [4] Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, R. *Cohesion in English* [M]. Routledge, 2014.
- [5] Hazaea A N. Process-Genre Approach in Mixed-Ability Classes: Correlational Study between EFL Academic Paragraph Reading and Writing[J]. *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)*, 2023, 17(2): 1-12.
- [6] Hoey, M. *Patterns of Lexis in Text* [M]. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- [7] Jiang C, Mu X. A Study on the Application of Discourse Analysis Theory in English Reading Teaching in Senior High School[J]. *GBP Proceedings Series*, 2025, 3: 144-153.

- [8] Li C, Arumugam N, Du G, et al. Multimodal Discourse Analysis Theory Applied to Senior High School English Reading Teaching[J]. *Environment-Behaviour Proceedings Journal*, 2023, 8(26): 101-106.
- [9] Pickren S E, Stacy M, Del Tufo S N, et al. The contribution of text characteristics to reading comprehension: Investigating the influence of text emotionality[J]. *Reading research quarterly*, 2022, 57(2): 649-667.
- [10] Spivey N N. Discourse synthesis: Creating texts from texts[M]//*Reading Empirical Research Studies*. Routledge, 2020: 469-509.
- [11] Tong Z, An F, Cui Y. Exploring teacher discourse patterns: Comparative insights from novice and expert teachers in junior high school EFL contexts[J]. *Heliyon*, 2024, 10(16).
- [12] Wang D, Ye Z. Genres of Reading Comprehension Passages in Chinese Mainland National Matriculation English Test (NMET): A Systematic Analysis of the Last Twenty Years (2004–2023)[J]. *SAGE Open*, 2025, 15(1): 21582440251323524.
- [13] Wakasa D B. Discourse Analysis and its Role in Enhancing ESL Learners Reading Comprehension Competencies: A Literature Review[J]. *Journal of Frontiers in Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2024, 2(2): 63-75. Deng Y, Lei J, Jin T, et al.