

# Discourse Analysis-Based English Reading Teaching

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## Abstract:

In China elementary school, English teaching ways are developed from word-and-grammar-focused to discourse-focused one indicating discourse analysis in teaching. Most studies about discourse analysis-based English teaching were done in colleges and few practical approaches on discourse analysis for teachers in primary and junior schools are concerned. Thus in this paper, the authors attempt to discuss this field. First it introduced four approaches of discourse analysis, including the Descriptively-Structured Approach (SDA), the Social-Cultural Approach (SCA), the Cognitive Approach (CA) and the Critical Approach (CA). Generally speaking, in elementary English teaching, English discourse can be categorized into 4 styles, that is, story/narration style, argumentation style, explanatory style and conversation style. Based on the above introduction, the paper also attempts to use the four approaches to analyze English reading class.

## Keywords:

Discourse Analysis, English Teaching in Elementary School in China, Four Approaches

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## 1. Introduction

As the basic skills in English learning, listening, reading, speaking, and writing have been receiving extensive attention from teachers and researchers. And their teaching ways are developed from word-and-grammar-focused to discourse-focused one indicating discourse analysis in teaching. Many scholars abroad and at home gave definitions to discourse and discourse analysis from their own point of view. Halliday & Hasan (1976) defined discourse as any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does for a unified whole [1]. And Michael McCarthy (1991) stated that discourse analysis is concerned with the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used [2]. After 1980s, the research on exploring the relationship between discourse analysis and its application has getting a further step, more and more approaches are put forward then. For instance, Hu Zhuanglin (1994) suggested that cohesion and coherence are the most important factors in a discourse and divided them into 5 levels including phonological, syntactic, lexical, semantic, and social semiotic level [3]. Li Xueqian (2005) thought that teachers can analyze a

discourse from its micro and macro structure [4]. But most of the researches were done in the colleges, and there are few practical approaches on discourse analysis for teachers in primary and junior schools.

In this paper, in order to make it more feasible for English teachers in elementary school to analyze a discourse, the author introduced four approaches of discourse analysis, including the Descriptively-Structured Approach (SDA), the Social-Cultural Approach (SCA), the Cognitive Approach (CA) and the Critical Approach (CA). Generally speaking, in elementary English teaching, English discourse can be categorized into 4 styles, that is, story/narration style, argumentation style, explanatory style and conversation style. Based on the above introduction, the paper also attempts to use the four approaches to analyze English reading class.

## 2. Analysis of the Four Approaches

### 2.1. Descriptively-Structured Approach (SDA)

This is an approach which analyzes the structure of language organization in different types of discourse. In teaching the discourses in four styles in class, the analysis can be explained in Table 1.

*Table 1. DSA-based discourse teaching.*

Discourse Approach 4 Styles	Descriptively-Structured Approach (DSA)
Story/Narration style	In general, in the discourse with a story or narration style, DSA helps teachers to analyze its time, place, character as well as its development and ending. And the structure of the discourse is discussed in class teaching too.
Argumentation style	In an argumentation style discourse, DSA helps teachers to analyze the problem asked in it, the discussion made in it, and the solution proposed in it.
Explanatory style	An explanatory style discourse is usually constructed by step of methods, for example, a manual. DSA helps teachers to analyze this kind of discourse by identifying its step of methods.
Conversation style	In a conversation style discourse, DSA helps teachers analyze its structure that usually begins with a greeting, follows talks between two or more participants, and ends with an ending or an implication. And sometimes, a conversation has background information too.

### 2.2. Social-Cultural Approach

As is known to all, discourse not only includes language forms, meanings, and functions but also the social settings such as participants' social status, sex, racial and age differences, etc. Apparently, we need to explore what actually the speaker or writer wants to tell us. Social-Cultural Approach is the way that deals with the analysis about the speaker's intention or meaning, that is, the implied meaning in the discourse. In teaching the discourses in four styles in class, the analysis can be explained in Table 2.

**Table 2.** *SCA-based discourse teaching.*

Discourse Approach 4 Styles	Social-Cultural Approach
Story/Narration style	In general, in the discourse with a story or narration style, SCA helps teachers reveal the truth, kindness, and beauty of the society.
Argumentation style	In an argumentation style discourse, SCA helps teachers identify the right or wrong of some policies or principles in the society.
Explanatory style	In an explanatory style discourse usually reveals some truth of the society and organized in steps of method. Teachers can analyze them with the help of SCA.
Conversation style	In a conversation style discourse, SCA can help teachers understand the interpersonal communication between two or more participants, and the concern between them from the perspective of society.

### 2.3. Cognitive Approach

This approach aims to analyze how speaker or writer constructs the discourse and how listener or reader interprets the discourse. In the Oxford Dictionary, cognition is defined as the mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses. Therefore, the understanding of a discourse may be affected by the listener or reader's social-cultural knowledge besides his or her linguistic knowledge. That's why the Social-Cultural Approach is the basis for this approach. In teaching the discourses in four styles in class, the analysis can be explained in Table 3.

**Table 3.** *CA-based discourse teaching.*

Discourse Approach 4 Styles	Cognitive Approach
Story/Narration style	In general, in the discourse with a story or narration style, CA helps teachers reveal the truth, kindness, and beauty of the society.
Argumentation style	In an argumentation style discourse, CA helps teachers identify the right or wrong of some policies or principles in the society.
Explanatory style	In an explanatory style discourse usually reveals some truth of the society and organized in steps of method. Teachers can analyze them with the help of CA.
Conversation style	In a conversation style discourse, CA can help teachers understand the interpersonal communication between two or more participants, and the relation between them from the perspective of society.

Although the analysis of this approach is almost the same as the Social-Cultural Approach, they are different. Using this approach, teachers can reveal the truth, kindness, and beauty in the discourse by their own linguistic knowledge and life experience. Different people have different interpretations to the same discourse because of their different cognition.

## 2.4. Critical Approach

This approach focuses on the analysis about the production and interpretation from the viewpoint of speaker's/writer's ideology, culture, and political environment. In teaching the discourses in four styles in class, the analysis can be explained in Table 4.

**Table 4.** CA-based discourse teaching.

Discourse Approach 4 Styles	Critical Approach
Story/Narration style	In a story/narration style discourse, CA helps teachers identify whether the writer or speaker intends to talk about the merits or demerits of the society.
Argumentation style	In an argumentation style discourse, teachers can identify whether the writer or speaker wants to advocate or criticize something spiritual in a society with the help of CA.
Explanatory style	Generally, in a discourse with explanatory style, CA helps teachers enrich some knowledge of the readers or listeners from it.
Conversation style	CA helps teachers know that a conversation style discourse intends to foster the conception that people should live in harmony together.

## 3. Analysis of Reading Discourse Teaching

In the light of the four approaches above, taking *section B 2b of unit 6, Year 7, "Go for it!"* as an example, the author will show how to analyze and implement a story/narration style reading discourse from three steps: before the class, during the class and after the class.

### 3.1. Reading Discourse

*Today's story is about Zhu Hui, a student from Shenzhen. He's now studying in the United States. He's living with an American family in New York. Today is the Dragon Boat Festival. It's 9:00 a.m. and Zhu Hui's family are at home. His mom and aunt are making zongzi. His dad and uncle are watching the boat races on TV.*

*Is Zhu Hui also watching the races and eating zongzi? Well, it's 9:00 p.m. in New York, and it's the night before the festival. But there isn't a Dragon Boat Festival in the US, so it's like any other night for Zhu Hui and his host family. The mother is reading a story to her young children. The father is watching a soccer game on TV. And what's Zhu Hui doing? He's talking on the phone to his cousin in Shenzhen. Zhu Hui misses his family and wishes to have his mom's delicious zongzi. Zhu Hui likes New York and his host family a lot, but there's still "no place like home".*

### 3.2. Teaching Design

#### 3.2.1. Before the Class

This is a preparation stage in which the teacher needs to identify the style of the discourse, then use the corresponding approach to analyze it. Table 6 is the analysis based on the four approaches.

**Table 6.** Analysis based on the four approaches.

Discourse style 4 Approaches	Story/Narration style reading discourse
Descriptively-Structured Approach (SDA)	-Time & place: China: 9:00am on the Dragon Boat Festival America: 9:00pm the night before the DBF -Characters: Zhu Hui, his host family and Chinese family; -Development of plot: background-event: activities Chinese family are doing-activities Zhu Hui & host family are doing. -Ending/implication: there's still "no place like home".
Social-Cultural Approach	-Time difference. -Culture & customs difference between China & America.
Cognitive Approach	-Time difference. -Culture & custom difference between China & America. -Home sickness.
Critical Approach	-Respect different customs. -Cherish the time we can spend together with our family.

### 3.2.2. During the Class

This is the stage when the teacher implements the discourse analysis. First, the teacher leads students to discuss the text based on the preparation before the class, then the teacher and students work cooperatively to turn the analysis into a mind map as Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** A mind map of text analysis.

In Figure 1, from the perspective of Descriptively-Structured approach, students analyzed the structure of this reading discourse to get the fish bone part easily, that is, the head of this fish is the place-China and America, the middle part includes the time, characters and the development of the plot-the activities Zhu Hui's Chinese family and host family are doing, and the tail of this fish is the ending or the implication-there is "no place like home". For the Social-Cultural approach, students analyzed the discourse to make the fishbone on both sides the differences in time, culture, and customs between China and America. For the Cognitive approach, in fact, there are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people's eyes. Students can have different opinions

towards a same discourse because their cognition depends on their language competence and life experience. Therefore, the students understood it from different perspectives such as customs difference, time difference, or homesickness shown in the Figure 1. For the Critical approach, students not only were guided to think critically during the teaching process but also sublimated the theme of the discourse. For example, for Zhu Hui's homesickness, students were guided to know that they should cherish the time they can spend with their family.

### **3.2.3. After the Class**

This stage is for both the teacher and students to summarize and reflect on what have taught and learnt in the class. For the story/narration style discourse above, the teacher and students can get its structure from Descriptively-Structured Approach, the implied meaning expressed by the writer from Social-Cultural Approach, the way the writer constructs and interprets the discourse from Cognitive Approach and the merits the writer approves from Critical Approach. In this way, different from the traditional one which focuses on the teaching of words, phrases, sentences, and grammar, the students can not only grasp the style, the structure, and the writing intention of a discourse, but also cultivate their critical thinking ability in the process of analysis. That is, the students now can understand between the lines and even beyond the lines instead of only understanding the lines in a reading discourse [5]. By using these four approaches to analyze the reading discourse, the teachers and students can take the discourse as a whole and understand it from a whole picture rather than understand the meaning of the discourse by simply combining the meaning of words and sentences which will lower students' reading initiative in a long run. As well, the students will be aware of the fact that these approaches can be used in any discourse styles and apply them when they are reading so as to improve their reading ability.

## **4. Conclusions**

This paper attempts to offer the clue for English reading discourse teaching based on four approaches of discourse/text analysis. From the discussion, it is found out that four approaches are possibly efficient aids for guiding both teachers and students in English teaching and learning, from which there are several implications.

First and foremost, the teacher needs to identify the style of a discourse once he or she gets one and guides the students to pay attention to it. This is the premise to use the four approaches in analyzing a discourse. English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools (2017 Edition) suggested that the students should be engaged in and learn different types of discourses to deepen their understanding and improve their ability to communicate with others using different types of discourses [6].

Secondly, as an English teacher, we should input more cultural knowledge at home and aboard to ourselves and the students, so as to enhance the intercultural sensitivity [7], better understand the true intention of the writer or speaker and better use the social-cultural approach and cognitive approach to analyze the discourse.

Last but not the least, critical thinking ability is crucial in both learning and teaching nowadays. Critical thinking is defined as the ability and disposition to improve one's thinking by systematically subjecting it to intellectual self-assessment [8]. English teachers should put themselves in the writer or speaker's shoes, taking into account the ideology, culture, and political environment, to analyze the discourse critically.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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