

การประยุกต์ใช้ทฤษฎีสกีมมาในการเรียนวิชาการอ่านภาษาจีนเชิงธุรกิจ

The Application of Schema Theory in Business Chinese Reading Class

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บทคัดย่อ

จากความเจริญก้าวหน้าด้านการรวมตัวทางเศรษฐกิจของนานาชาติและการปฏิรูปทางเศรษฐกิจของประเทศจีนที่มากขึ้น ทำให้ในปัจจุบัน ภาษาจีน (ในบทความนี้ Chinese หมายถึงภาษาจีน-แมนดาริน) จึงเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศที่ใช้ในการเรียนการสอนมากที่สุดในประเทศไทยรองจากภาษาอังกฤษ ทฤษฎีสกีมมาบ่อยครั้งได้ถูกนำไปใช้เป็นวิธีในการเรียนการสอนภาษาที่สอง และเป็นที่น่าสนใจในกลุ่มนักวิจัยและอาจารย์ผู้สอนภาษามานานหลายปี อย่างไรก็ตาม การวิจัยการใช้ทฤษฎีสกีมมาในการเรียนการสอนวิชาการอ่านภาษาจีนเชิงธุรกิจในประเทศไทยยังคงมีน้อย การวิจัยนี้จึงมีวัตถุประสงค์ในการรวบรวมการอภิปรายรูปแบบที่ใช้ในหลักการเรียนการสอนด้วยการอธิบายการประยุกต์ใช้ทฤษฎีสกีมมาในวิชาการอ่านภาษาจีนเชิงธุรกิจในประเทศไทย การวิจัยนี้ได้ใช้วิธีการศึกษาวิจัยดังต่อไปนี้ ได้แก่ การสังเกตการณ์ในชั้นเรียน, การติดตามผลการสัมภาษณ์, การสรุปประสบการณ์การสอน, การศึกษาจากสื่อสิ่งพิมพ์, การวิเคราะห์เชิงเปรียบเทียบ และการนำทฤษฎีไปใช้ในการปฏิบัติจริง ซึ่งผลการวิจัยนี้แสดงให้เห็นว่า นักเรียนซึ่งเป็นผู้เรียนที่ภาษาที่สองที่นอกเหนือจากผู้ที่ใช้ภาษาจีนมาโดยกำเนิดและมีพื้นฐานทางวัฒนธรรมหลากหลาย มีความแตกต่างในโครงสร้างชุดความรู้ดั้งเดิม และมีอุปสรรคในการทำความเข้าใจเนื้อหาการอ่านเชิงธุรกิจอย่างชัดเจน ซึ่งทฤษฎีสกีมมาสามารถนำไปประยุกต์ใช้ได้อย่างเหมาะสมและมีประสิทธิภาพ ช่วยนักเรียนสามารถนำเอาโครงสร้างทางปัญญาที่มีอยู่ในแต่ละคนมาใช้งานได้ และช่วยนักเรียนสร้างโครงสร้างทางปัญญาใหม่ที่ใช้ในการอ่านทำความเข้าใจในภาษาที่สองได้มากขึ้น

คำสำคัญ: ทฤษฎีแผนผังรูปภาพ วิชาการอ่านภาษาจีนเชิงธุรกิจ

Abstract

With the progress of international economic integration and the deepening of Chinese economic reform, it is, therefore, no surprise that, today, Chinese (for the purposes of this paper, Chinese means Mandarin) is the most taught foreign language after English in Thailand. Frequently using as a method of instruction in the field of second language acquisition, schema theory has been attracting the attention of researchers and language teachers for many years. However, far less research has been carried out as to whether schema theory works for Business Chinese

reading class in Thailand. This study aimed to offer a unique contribution by uniting a discussion of schema-oriented pedagogical principles with descriptions of their application to Business Chinese reading class in Thailand. The study has implemented the qualitative analysis method; namely, classroom observation, follow-up interviews, teaching experience summary, literature review, comparative analysis, combination theories with practical experiences. The research result showed that, as a second language learners instead of Chinese native speakers, readers from various cultural backgrounds have different pre-existing schemata and inevitably have obstacles in comprehending business reading materials. It is practicable and efficient to utilize the schema theory in helping the students activate the schemata stored in their minds and help the students establish more new schemata in second language reading comprehension.

Keywords: *Schema Theory Business Chinese Reading Class*

1. Introduction

Given China's significant role in the global economy nowadays, there is a boom in leaning Business Chinese language which helps foreigners to maximize their language potential to bridge the accessibility gap in Chinese market. Here in Thailand, growing number of Thai students in higher education institutions choose to learn Business Chinese preparing themselves for the future business opportunities in mainland China or other Chinese speaking countries/companies. Compare to the general Chinese language, more and more Thai students favorite business Chinese in order to enhance their capability of involving in cross-cultural business Chinese activities by using sales Chinese, negotiation Chinese, management Chinese, industrial Chinese, and office Chinese.

From academic perspective, business Chinese teaching and learning aims to develop a relatively high level of comprehension in reading, listening, speaking, writing and translation in the field of international trade and commerce. Among the five basic language skills, reading is considered as the most efficient channel of

linguistic and knowledge input. In this regard, training students to have a strong business reading proficiency in business vocabulary accumulation, business knowledge acquisition, and business information analysis should be given in priority in business Chinese teaching and learning.

The author has been teaching business Chinese subject in Assumption University of Thailand for more than six years. It's very happy to see plenty of Thai students have great interest in learning business

Chinese. However, in advanced Business Chinese Reading classes, there is an unusual phenomenon: many advanced level Thai students who have very good Chinese language abilities cannot understand a simple Chinese business article. From in class observation and after class follow-up interview, the result showed that shortage of various business Chinese vocabularies (linguistic schema), business Chinese background information (content schema) and business Chinese cultural knowledge (cultural schema) is still a big bottleneck facing by Thai undergraduates in business Chinese reading class.

2. Objectives

1. to compare and analyze schema-oriented teaching methodologies in business Chinese reading class.

2. to explore dynamic process of schema activation, schema construction, and schema application in business Chinese reading class.

3. to improve students reading proficiency by applying schema theory in business Chinese reading class in terms of linguistic schema, content schema, and cultural schema.

3. Materials and Methods

Based on the broad and extensive literature review of the schema theory, the author found out that a great deal of researchers, e.g. Bartlett (1932), Rumelhart (1980), Goodman (1988), Alvarez and Risko (1989), Nigel (2001), Parviz (2003), Tan (2004), Hesham (2005), Ahmad (2006), Abbas and Seyedeh (2011), Majid and Mohamad (2011), have conducted a lot of researches on the relationship between schema theory and reading comprehension which showed the significant role of schema theory in second language reading comprehension. However, far less research has been carried out as to whether schema theory works for Business Chinese Reading Class in Thailand. Therefore, this study aims to offer a unique contribution by uniting a discussion of schema oriented pedagogical principles with descriptions of their application to Business Chinese Reading Class in Thailand.

This study mainly implemented the qualitative analysis method namely classroom observation, follow up interview, teaching experience

summary, literature review, comparative analysis, combination theory with practical experiences.

4. Results

After comparing and analyzing schema-oriented teaching methodologies in business Chinese reading class, it was found that top-down approach, bottom-up approach, and interactive approach contribute directly to the successful comprehension of reading material. The top-down approach emphasizes students comprehending the text by using their preexisting schemata from prediction, confirmation, to new schema construction. The bottom-up approach emphasizes the students' ability to decode language into the thought which requires teaching vocabulary, common phrases, and idiomatic expressions concurrently. Reading is an interactive process which includes bottom-up and top-down interaction, low-level skill and high-level skill interaction; and reader's background knowledge and text background knowledge interaction. It is the readers' schematic knowledge working interactively together that makes them understand the meaning of the reading material. The activation, construction, and application of schemata can facilitate readers comprehend the reading material better. Also, the availability of linguistic schema, content schema, and cultural schema will influence students' reading proficiency. From the author's in class observation and after class follow-up interview, utilizing schema-oriented teaching method in business Chinese reading class can make students more active and improve students' reading proficiency accordingly.

5. Discussion

According to traditional reading theory, reading is a passive decoding process. In traditional business reading class, students are required to translate the business article first, and then the teacher explains the new words, phrases, and sentences. As a consequence, this kind of teacher-directed approach has seriously frustrated students' reading enthusiasm and finally inhibited the further development of students' reading proficiency. During the process of teaching and learning, teacher is always the powerful controller without students' self-directed reading initiatives. Therefore, the student's reading interest cannot be activated since they are just a passive translator and interpreter in reading comprehension.

Following the introduction of schema theory in second language teaching and learning, reading class has undergone a fundamental change to a large extent. As one of the most influential theories in the field of reading comprehension, schema theory was developed by Cambridge University psychologist Bartlett (1932) who proposed that the schema is a positive response to the preview experience which means the schema is composed of the related experiences. Tianjin Nankai University researcher Tan (2004) suggested *"reading practice based on schema theory is highly recommended for students not only because it focuses on training for culture-specific texts but also because it trains students to use a top-down process in reading."* Researcher Ahmad (2006) declared that *"both content and formal schemata are necessary for a complete understanding of written texts in a reader's first language, and has been suspected to be true in a reader's second language."*

The schema is a unit of knowledge. In human's brain, there is a lot of knowledge not only including the scientific and cultural knowledge obtained from the books, but also including ordinary daily life experience. For example, talking about business feast, people will automatically think of business invitation letter, banquet menu, professional etiquette, welcome dinner, reciprocal feast, business attire (suits and dresses), business network meeting, negotiation skill, etc. American psychologist Rumelhart (1980) has described schema as an interactive activation model, *"when individuals obtain knowledge, they attempt to fit that knowledge into some structure in memory that help them make sense of that knowledge."* Alvarez and Risko (1989) claimed *"readers rely on their prior knowledge and world experience when trying to comprehend a text. Readers make use of their schema when they can relate what they already know about a topic to the facts and ideas appearing in a text."*

As a second language learner instead of Chinese native speaker, readers from various cultural backgrounds have different preexisting schemata and inevitably have obstacles in comprehending business reading material. From the above literature review, numerous researches have proved that it is very practicable and efficient by utilizing the schema theory to help the students activate the schemata stored in their minds and help the students establish more new schemata in second language acquisition.

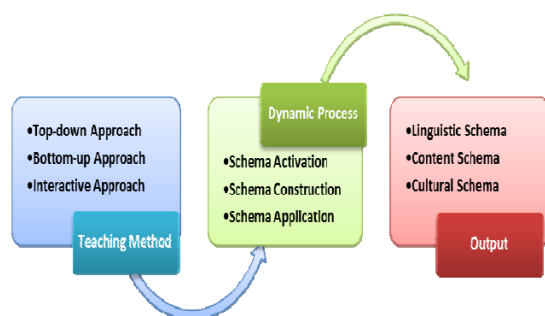


Figure 1 Schema-Oriented Reading Comprehension

Schema-oriented Teaching Methods

The “top-down” approach is in direct opposition to the “bottom-up” approach. The “top-down” strategy encourages students to interpret the reading material based on their preexisting schemata in order to make sense of written language. Just as researcher Goodman (1988) claimed, “*the writer encodes thought as language and the reader decodes language to thought.*” Here “top” refers to the prior knowledge of the reader. “Down” refers to the reading material. Top-down reading approach indicates that readers make a hypothesis about the meaning of the reading material first, and then the readers to identify and confirm their hypothesis about the meaning of the text. Bottom-up approach emphasizes the basic language tips such as vocabularies, phrase common usage, complex sentence structures and grammar as well.

According to schema theory, reading is an interactive process which includes bottom-up and top-down interaction, low-level skill and high-level skill interaction; and reader’s background knowledge and text background knowledge interaction. Researchers Abbas and Seyedeh (2011) declared that “*reading is an interactive process in which readers construct a meaningful representation of text using*

their schemata.” Another researcher Hesham (2005) stated “*the reader interacts dynamically with the text as he/she tries to elicit the meaning and where various kinds of knowledge are being used: linguistic or systemic knowledge (through bottom-up processing) as well as schematic knowledge (through top-down processing).*” Effective reading requires both top-down and bottom-up approaches functioning interactively in second language reading comprehension. From the perspective of schema theory, it is the readers’ schematic knowledge working interactively together that makes them understand the meaning of the reading material. From the author’s own observation and teaching experience, utilizing schema-oriented teaching method in business Chinese reading class can make students more active and improve students’ reading ability accordingly.

Schema activation, schema construction, and schema application

Schema theory views reading as a dynamic process which means students interact with the reading tasks. Schema theory emphasizes the reader’s prior knowledge which is necessary to activate the related schemata in the teaching of reading. Researchers Majid and Mohamad (2011) stated “*the schemata of the past experiences and prior knowledge that are contained in the readers’ memory are critical in assisting readers to construct meaning from the text.*” When a self-schema is available, the readers can take advantage of that preexisting schema facilitating reading comprehension. The schemata matching and correlation play a key role in new schema mapping.

Researcher Parviz (2003) pointed out “*schema-based pre-reading activities should be used for activating and constructing background knowledge.*” Before reading, ask the students to prepare some background knowledge as well because the background information can form a schema in students’ mind which helps students to understand the business reading material better. In the classroom, teacher should make full use of existing teaching materials and high technology, (e.g. story, poster, map, picture, book, song, poetry, video, slide, projector, PPT, and website) to introduce the business Chinese cultural characteristics, psychology and behavior. In this way, it is easy to activate the relevant cultural schemata in students’ mind. On top of that, teacher should encourage students to participate in different kinds of extracurricular activities organized by business Chinese department, such as Chinese Bridge Competition, Chinese Speech Contest, Chinese New Year Celebration, Chinese Camp, China Town Tour, etc. As a result, Thai students can easily understand China and Thailand social, cultural and lifestyle differences and characteristics.

For example, when talking about Chinese stock market, students didn’t know A share, B share, H share, N share, or S share. The teacher asked Thai students to brainstorm Thai stock market first (related schema). One student was also interested in the China’s stock market (available schema). According to his description, the classmates filled in the below table listing different characteristics of five shares in China. (schema activation) Then group discussion, oral presentation, and written report. (schema construction and application)

Table 1 Common Chinese Stocks

Stock	Listed in	Traded in	Bought and Sold by
A Share 人民币	Mainland China	Chinese	Mainland Chinese
人民币股票	stock exchanges	Renminbi	organizations or nationals
B Share 人民币	Mainland China	Foreign	Investors abroad or in HK,
人民币股票	stock exchanges	currencies	Macao and Taiwan
H Share	Hong Kong	Foreign	Investors abroad or in HK,
外委股	stock exchanges	currencies	Macao and Taiwan
N Share	New York stock	Foreign	Investors abroad or in HK,
外委股	exchange	currencies	Macao and Taiwan
S Share	Singapore stock	Foreign	Investors abroad or in HK,
外委股	exchange	currencies	Macao and Taiwan

For a given topic, if the students have more preexisting schemata which will help them to comprehend the topic and interact with the reading material easily. Because the reading material usually is not completely fresh content, the students can find preexisting schemata to interpret the content. Good students always spontaneously use their preexisting schemata to facilitate their reading comprehension. The reading process is a two-way communication process between active reader and writer. During the reading comprehension, good students always actively interpret and think comprehensively about the writer’s thought. For the poor students, the teacher should give explicit instructions. To encourage schema construction and schema application, teacher-directed methodology and student self-initiated activities are two possible means.

Linguistic Schema, Content Schema, and Cultural Schema

According to the schema theory, if the reader has the more linguistic schema, content schema, and

cultural schema, it will be better to comprehending the reading material. Linguistic schema refers to the phonetic, vocabulary, grammar, pragmatics and discourse this kind of language knowledge which is the basis of reading comprehension. Linguistic schema focuses on the key vocabulary and grammar structure. During the reading comprehension, students read the linguistic schema and interpret it into the content schema after reading. Only by establishing a pre-linguistic schema, in the reading process, through the activation of the existing linguistic schema, then the reader can comprehend a text.

For example, talking about housing reform in China, the students cannot understand Chinese changeable housing system due to lack of background information. So the teacher asked students to do pre-research from the website or other resources. In combination with class discussion, students understood that China has experienced dramatic development in its on-going housing reform nationwide.

- **公房** State-owned house: before open and reform policy, the government linked housing distribution with employment. The state-owned house was provided to the government officials and employees at normal rents.
- **已购公房** Purchased public housing: the reform of the housing provision system has changed the nature of housing from a welfare-oriented good to a commodity. According to the favorable housing policy, one urban household can only buy one apartment at the preferential price.

- **商品房** Commercial housing: The commercial housing can be sold to the public at the market price. Both Chinese and foreigners can buy this kind of housing. The affordability of commercial housing is too high for the ordinary salary-earning class.
- **经济适用房** Economic housing: According to China's affordable housing plan, the economic housing aims to enable many medium-and low-income families to buy their own houses. The prerequisite of the buyer is their lower annual income.
- **廉租房** Low-rent housing: this project is provided a large number of migrant workers and low-income urban residents with low-rent apartments to ensure that low-income families have houses to live in.

Once the student's existing schemata is activated, reading comprehension will be successful. If lacking of background information especially cultural schemata, the students may not fully understand the true meaning of reading material. Japan researcher Nigel (2001) suggested "*all readers carry different schemata (background information) and these are also often culture-specific.*" For example, when talking about Chinese e-commerce, use Alibaba group as an example. The Alibaba Company, publicly traded company in e-commerce for small businesses, has its unique corporate culture.



Figure 2 Alibaba Corporate Culture

In order to enrich the cultural schemata in students' mind, teacher should enhance students' cross-cultural awareness. For example, in China, in order to show the host's hospitality and generosity, Chinese people will urge the guests drink as much as possible for creating a friendly and enjoyable atmosphere. However, in Thai culture, it is definitely impolite to force others to drink more. Undoubtedly, Thai students can hardly understand this kind of cross-cultural differences before they study Chinese drinking culture.

6. Conclusion

In summary, by means of literature review and analysis directed by the schema theory, this paper has attempted to compare and analyze schema-oriented teaching methodologies; to explore dynamic process of schema activation, schema construction, and schema application; and to improve students reading proficiency by applying schema theory in business Chinese reading class in terms of linguistic schema, content schema, and cultural schema.

Based on the above analysis, we can come to the conclusion that, as a second language learner instead of Chinese native speaker, readers from various cultural backgrounds have different preexisting schemata and inevitably have obstacles in comprehending business reading material. It is practicable and efficient by utilizing the schema theory to help the students activate the schemata stored in their minds and help the students establish more new schemata in second language reading comprehension.

In conducting this research, the author hope business Chinese reading can make the meaningful progress in the field of schema theory, thereby improving the quality of second language reading proficiency. Further research is needed to evaluate the efficiency of schema theory in enhancing students' business Chinese reading proficiency.

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