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## Підхід теорії світу тексту до уроку читання в контексті вивчення англійської мови професійного спрямування

### TEXT WORLD THEORY APPROACH TO A READING CLASS IN THE EFL CONTEXT

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**Анотація.** Теорія текстового світу привертає велику увагу в таких галузях, як лінгвістика та література. Вона фокусується не лише на самому тексті, але й на середовищі, в якому текст пишеться й використовується, включаючи наявні знання і досвід читачів у конкретних історичних та культурних контекстах. З моменту свого виникнення, теорія текстового світу використовувалася для аналізу різних типів дискурсу, а деякі вчені пропонували застосовувати її в таких галузях як літературознавство і лінгвістика. З огляду на це, у статті ми досліджуємо питання застосовування теорії текстового світу на уроках читання з метою підвищення ефективності викладання, а також розвитку критичної свідомості учнів. Виявлено, що така модель викладання дійсно сприяє розвитку здатності до критичного мислення в межах викладання англійської мови професійного спрямування. Очікується, що результати цього дослідження проллють світло на ефективність інтеграції методики у систему розвитку навиків читання англійською мовою. Зазначено, що вправи з використанням вказаної методики покращать здатність студентів розуміти й інтерпретувати тексти, сприяючи глибшому розумінню матеріалу. Крім того, дослідження має на меті виявити потенційні виклики та обмеження, пов'язані з впровадженням обраної методики на заняттях з англійської мови професійного спрямування. Результати дослідження поширюються на викладачів англійської мови професійного спрямування, розробників навчальних програм і практиків, формуючи уявлення про інноваційні педагогічні підходи до вдосконалення навчання й розуміння прочитаного. Впроваджуючи стратегію теорії текстового світу у свою практику викладання, педагоги здатні допомогти студентам вільно читати англійською мовою, сприяючи таким чином загальному розвитку їхнього мовного рівня. Наголошено, що вказана стаття виступає за інтеграцію теорії текстового світу у викладання читання англійською мовою як засобу розвитку ефективних навичок розуміння прочитаного у студентів. Застосовуючи принципи теорії текстового світу, викладачі можуть створити динамічне та цікаве навчальне середовище, яке сприятиме глибшому розумінню текстів та покращенню лінгвістичних навичок.

**Ключові слова:** теорія світу тексту, викладання іноземної мови, урок читання, художній текст, англійська мова професійного спрямування.

**Summary.** The theory of the textual world has attracted much attention in such fields as linguistics and literature. It focuses not only on the text itself, but also on the environment in which the text is written and used, including the existing knowledge and experience of readers in specific historical and cultural contexts. Since its inception, textual world theory has been used to analyze various

*types of discourse, and some scholars have proposed its application in such fields as literary studies and linguistics. With this in mind, this study applies textual world theory to reading lessons in order to increase the effectiveness of teaching and develop students' critical awareness. It was found that such a teaching model does indeed contribute to the development of critical thinking skills in EFL teaching. It is expected that the results of this study will shed light on the effectiveness of integrating the methodology into the system of developing reading skills in English. It is noted that exercises using this methodology will improve students' ability to understand and interpret texts, contributing to a deeper understanding of the material. In addition, the study aims to identify potential challenges and limitations associated with the implementation of the selected methodology in ESP classes. The findings of the study are of interest to ESP teachers, curriculum developers and practitioners, providing insights into innovative pedagogical approaches to improving learning and reading comprehension. By implementing the strategy of textual world theory into their teaching practice, teachers are able to help students read fluently in English, thus contributing to the overall development of their language level. It is emphasized that this article advocates the integration of textual world theory into the teaching of reading in English as a means of developing effective reading comprehension skills in students. By applying the principles of the textual world theory, teachers can create a dynamic and interesting learning environment that will promote deeper understanding of texts and improve linguistic skills.*

**Key words:** *Text World Theory, foreign language teaching, reading class, literary text, EFL.*

**Introduction.** Text World Theory, first proposed by Paul Werth in the second half of the last century and continuously developed and improved by Joanna Gavins, has attracted much attention in fields such as linguistics and literature. This theory not only focuses on the text itself, but also on the environment in which the text is written and read, including the existing knowledge and experiences of readers in specific historical and cultural contexts. In other words, Text World Theory focuses on examining how the text world can be constructed using the context.

**Analysis of recent publications.** Since its inception, Text World Theory has been used to analyze various types of discourse, especially literary discourse, due to its strong applicability [2; 6; 25]. In addition, some scholars have proposed the application of Text World Theory in fields such as writing and language teaching [9; 15; 18]. Existing studies have shown that Text World Theory can indeed become a powerful tool for assisting classroom teaching to some extent. However, there is a need to develop practical recommendations on how to use this method in the work of teachers.

**The purpose of the article.** In view of this, the study attempts to explore how foreign language teachers can apply Text World Theory as a teaching method to a reading class. Specifically, taking undergraduate-reading-class teaching as an example, this study attempts to combine Text World Theory with foreign language teaching by studying how teachers use this theory to teach literary text, aiming to widen the application scope of Text World Theory.

### **Presentation of the main material.**

#### *1. Overview of Text World Theory*

Text World Theory is an important theory in the field of discourse cognition, which is developed and established on the basis of disciplines such as cognitive linguistics and cognitive psychology.

Paul Werth began formulating a text-world framework in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and published its outline in a series of articles during this period [24]. His monograph *Text Worlds: Representing Conceptual Space in Discourse* (1999), which was compiled and published by Professor Mick Short of Lancaster University after his death, can be regarded as the foundation of Text World Theory.

According to Werth, all discourse situations could be divided into three manageable levels of conceptual activity, that is, the discourse world, the text world and the sub-world. The first level is the discourse world, which is the broadest level, consisting of «the situational context surrounding the

speech event itself» [24, p. 83]. The context includes both the immediate physical context perceived directly by the participants in the communicative situation and the set of beliefs, dreams, memories and, in general terms, the knowledge that the participants bring into the speech event [24, p. 49–52].

As the participants communicate, they create richly detailed mental representations, or text-worlds, of the discourse in their minds. The deictic and referential expressions used in any given discourse establish the spatial and temporal boundaries of the text-world and specify whether any entities or objects are present. The second level is that of the text world itself, the mental representation of the world created through a combination of text and background knowledge. Werth defines a text world as «the situation depicted by the discourse», a conceptual space that is constructed between the author and reader [24, p. 53]. The text world can also be viewed as a deictic space, defined by temporal and locative deictic expressions to give some idea of setting. Within the text world there may be different degrees of layering corresponding to sub-worlds, which have the general function of altering parameters introduced in the text world. The third level is the sub-world level, which takes the form of a departure from the parameters of the matrix text world [24, p. 215].

Overall, Text World Theory explains the relationship between language and conceptualization, providing insights into the mental processes of human communication, including online production and reception of discourse, psychological representation of discourse, management of discourse conceptual structure by the human brain, and the role of various contextual factors in discourse cognitive processing in language communication.

After Werth's death, some scholars in the fields of linguistics and literature recognized the important value of Text World Theory for discourse analysis, and therefore continuously improved the theory to increase its applicability. Joanna Gavins is the scholar who has made the greatest contribution to the development of Text World Theory. Gavins and Werth have significant similarities in their text world theory models, both believing that the text world originates from the inherent attributes of the text or discourse, and is also the mental representation of participants in understanding the text or discourse. However, there are also differences in their theoretical models, mainly manifested in the specific division of the narrator's world. Gavins did not recognize Werth's classification criteria and redefined and classified the sub-world, replacing it with «world switch» [4]. Gavins pointed out that the prefix «sub-world» implies that the newly generated text world belongs to the original text world, which can easily cause ambiguity. However, «world switch» can accurately express the meaning of a new text world generated by changes in spatiotemporal boundaries.

## *2. Text World Theory as Cognitive Grammatics*

Giovanelli proposed that some basic principles of cognitive science and linguistics combine psychological, experiential, and social factors to provide guidance for teachers on how to teach structure and meaning to students [8]. In fact, in the field of second language acquisition, teaching research based on cognitive linguistics is also receiving increasing attention [12].

Some studies have shown that Text World Theory can provide more assistance to classroom teachers. For example, researchers have demonstrated its versatility in supporting teaching of different genres and text types in various learning environments [10; 18]. The similarity of these methods lies in their student-centered approach, which enhances the value of learners using various aspects of theory (usually involving concepts of world-building and world-switching) for text analysis and supporting writing planning and drafting. However, the value of Text World Theory as teacher-oriented, as a resource for the teacher, has not received sufficient attention.

As demonstrated by Giovanelli & Mason, Text World Theory has the potential to become a powerful tool for teachers to think about classroom reading practices, participating in classroom interactions, and organizing classroom activities [10]. Similarly, based on Halliday's concept of «grammar»,

Giovanelli suggests that teachers can use Text World Theory as a cognitive discourse grammar to design meaningful teaching tasks and activities [9].

Due to the fact that Text World Theory is essentially a reader-response theory, it is highly likely to provide new perspectives for students on how to participate in text reading. Teachers need to adjust their role from transmitters of linguistic knowledge to informed users of that knowledge in order to promote their classroom teaching. Teachers can promote a more authentic reading experience by avoiding placing their knowledge of the text above their students.

Specifically, Giovanelli believes that Text World Theory can help teachers promote classroom teaching based on the following points [9]: (1) It focuses on the contextual and textual aspects of communication. (2) It can explain the textual elements and the way readers interact with these elements during the reading process. (3) It emphasizes the dynamic nature of context as an interpersonal construct, as well as the situational and social dimensions of reading, which is consistent with the theoretical and educational focus of participatory learning theory [17]. (4) In learning activities, the diagrammatic aspect of Text World Theory emphasizes how meaning primarily derives from spatial and physical images [12], and is a prototypical virtual embodied learning activity [9]. (5) It emphasizes textuality, context, and negotiated meaning, which means that Text World Theory is ideally placed to cultivate students' own process-driven thinking.

In view of the above points, this study applies Text World Theory into the reading classroom, aiming to improve the teaching efficiency as well as student's critical awareness.

### 3. Methodology

This study proposed a reading model based on Text World Theory which was oriented in reading classes in an EFL context. The main design of this study is based on Giovanelli's and Mohammadzadeh's Pedagogical Stylistic Model of Text World Theory [7; 8; 9; 14; 15].

#### 3.1 Reading Texts

This study focused on the reading text of literary types, especially the short novels. Mohammadzadeh pointed out that literary texts must be carefully chosen, otherwise, students will not respond to the text enthusiastically [14]. Linguistically difficult literary texts will eliminate students' motivation and stop them to work on the text for a long time. Therefore, this study selected those literary texts that were interesting and would attract the attention of students in terms of topics and themes. Specifically, this study mainly focused on short stories in novels which are easy to read in contemporary language and which are more likely to be chosen.

Based on the above standards, those novels like Jane Austin's *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, O. Henry's *The Gift of the Maggie*, *The Cop and the Anthem*, Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, and J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* were chosen as the reading texts of this study.

#### 3.2 Pedagogical Model based on Text World Theory

This study proposed that Text World Theory can be applied to foreign language teaching, helping teachers improve students' critical understanding abilities. According to this theory, meaning is created through the conscious joint efforts of discourse producers and receivers. The discourse world, text world, and sub-world are the three levels of this theory. Participants, namely the author/speaker and the reader/audience, jointly create and construct a world in their minds to negotiate the meaning of the context:

(1) the discourse world: In this layer, the connection and communication occur between the text (writer/speaker) and the reader (reader/listener) as participants of a discourse. It is the first interaction between the interlocutors, the narrator/speaker/writer and reader/listener. This layer «offers a means of exploring how a range of contextual factors have the potential to impact upon both the construction and comprehension of a given discourse» [4, p. 10]. An active communication between participants needs the personnel and cultural knowledge [15].

(2) the text world: In this layer, discourse participants endeavor to create mental constructions, which occurs when they transmit the physical description into conceptual worlds through world-building elements (as time, place, characters and objects). These conceptual spaces «form the basis of our understanding of the physical space in which we exist, the passing of time, and even the societal structures and constraints which govern our behavior» [4, p. 36].

(3) the sub-worlds: This layer involves a number of switches temporarily and/or spatially from the text world into the sub-worlds. Moreover, «attitudes expressed through modalised constructions form boulogmaic modal worlds (stressing desire), deontic modal worlds (stressing obligation) and epistemic modal worlds (stressing belief or degrees of certainty). Sub-worlds are formed by text world triggers» [7, p. 219].

Since Text World Theory paves the way for readers to examine texts and construct conceptual formations, it is applicable to the analysis of literary text. The main aim of this study is to offer a model based on Text World Theory for English teachers in their reading classroom teaching.

### *3.3 Teaching Design*

#### *3.3.1 Learning Objectives*

At the end of the whole semester, after teaching the reading class using the model based on Text World Theory, students will be able to:

(1) examine how Text World Theory applies to the reading course, and how the text world and deictic shifts function in short stories;

(2) examine how creating mental and conceptual constructions occurs in interpreting and analyzing texts;

(3) analyze reading objectively, fully considering fortetual and contextual causes and effects.

#### *3.3.2 Teaching Objectives*

Within the whole semester, the teacher will be able to:

(1) provide with students an applicable model for analyzing literary texts based on Text World Theory;

(2) help students to develop and improve their critical literacy awareness;

(3) allow opportunities for, evaluation of and reflection on learning processes and skills learnt.

#### *3.3.3 Reading Activities*

In pre-reading activities, the teacher can ask some questions based on the text to activate students' background knowledge. After activating students' knowledge of the key points of the story, the teacher can lead them to start reading the text. After reading several paragraphs of the short story, the teacher can begin to ask students questions related to the focus. The focus issue will mainly help students understand Text World Theory and apply it to the short story reading. The focus questions consist of three parts, which are about the discourse world, text world, and sub-worlds.

(1) focus questions related to the discourse world

To help participants, readers, and authors start communicating and constructing a discourse world, the following questions can be asked: 1) Can you establish a connection with the narrator or protagonist of the story? 2) Can you use your background knowledge and textual details to construct a conceptual space with the narrator as the protagonist?

(2) focus questions related to the text world

These questions will help the students to transmit physical text into mental constructions. In fact, «mental image calls for a retracing, step by step, of the paths of meaning laid out in the original text» [16, p. 22].

These sample questions can be asked: 1) When does the story happen? 2) Where does the story happen? 2) Who is the enactor or the main character? 3) What are the surroundings and objects, and what are the main events? [15].

(3) focus questions related to the sub-worlds

The following questions should be asked: 1) What changes in time, space, or attitude do you observe while reading short stories? 2) Are there any shifts in boulomaic modal worlds? 3) Are there any shifts in deontic modal worlds? 4) Are there any shifts in epistemic modal worlds?

In this stage, students express their feelings towards the narrator's desires. They also express emotional reflection on the challenges and obligations they encountered. Then, they will share their views on the situation. After the students answer these questions, the teacher can ask them to switch to the current time and replace who, where, when, and what to do.

After completing the entire reading task, the teacher can ask the students to dramatize the conceptual world they have created in the reading part. When they dramatize these worlds, they will use language and improve their communicative language skills [15].

#### *4. Teaching of Reading Class Based on Text World Theory*

This study will take the first chapter «Found Objects» in Jennifer Egan's novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad* as an example, to show how to teach reading class based on Text World Theory.

##### *4.1 Text World Theory and the Reading Class*

During the process of reading the short story, the students and Egan share a split discourse world of discourse since they are separated in space and time. Actually, the teacher is a participant in discourse world, although her status as a teacher, authoritative figure, and academic knowledge implies that she plays a privileged role. In fact, this privilege, including biographical, historical, and literary criticism knowledge related to the novel, means that the text world constructed by the teacher herself may be much richer than that of her students [9]. There is a danger that this kind of knowledge can in itself be used to downplay or over-ride students' initial responses to the story so that these responses are marginalized in favour of the stronger teacher reading [10]. To avoid this situation, the teacher initially concealed contextual information from the students, including the title of the story. In the second part of the course, the teacher first gave them some brief information about this author. The teacher instructs the students to begin position themselves as either an implied reader and/ or implied narrator in relationship to an implied author (Egan) and an implied narrator (Egan). Although the teacher does not want to introduce unnecessary and complex terminology to students, she is still enthusiastic about utilizing their potential to help them understand that this story may represent a perspective in a scene. This provides an important teaching point and approach for the teacher in future work. As their discussion of the story deepens in the group, students are clearly able to reflect on how and why they are involved in various types of perspective projection [23], enrich the actors, and explore their various connections with them [9].

According to Scott [19, p. 142], Text World Theory can be used to interrogate and itemize the internal coherence of individual text-worlds; e.g. ensuring a consistency and acceptability of point of view, checking how much a character knows or does not know about another character or situation, or tracking the progression and consistency of narratives with complex structures. Text World Theory might also be put to service in revealing how multiple text-worlds interact with one another and how this interaction can be used, for example, to enhance themes or emphasize dramatic irony.

##### *4.2 Analyzing the Story «Found Objects»*

When Text World Theory is used to analyze literary works, it mainly explains why interlocutors - authors and readers, who are far apart in time, space, and culture, can enter the same world through the text world, achieving effective communication [13]. Using Text World Theory to guide students in analyzing the story «Found Objects» can reproduce the various worlds constructed online by readers during reading, understand the protagonist Sasha's past, understand her personality and psychology in the text world, and thus better understand the text.

The storyline in the text world is very simple. Sasha was on a date with her boyfriend Alex, and she stole a wallet in the bathroom. Later, because the owner was searching everywhere, she went back to the bathroom to quietly put back the wallet, but was discovered by the owner. Sasha told the owner that stealing was her mental illness, and the owner promised that she would not speak up. Then Sasha and her boyfriend returned to their apartment.

In this text world, the characters mainly include Sasha, Alex, and the owner of the wallet. The most prominent objects are Sasha's stolen wallet and a pile of scattered stolen items on her home table. In this world, the narrator directly refers to characters by name, as if telling the stories of the people, she is very familiar with. The time when the story takes place is very vague, and there is no specific «one night». The location is vaguely explained at the beginning of the story, and the narrator only mentions the Lassimo Hotel. In the following text, we gradually understand that the story takes place in New York, in the triangle south of the Manhattan Canal. The narrator then uses familiar architecture to explain the location of the story. This building appears in Sasha's attitudinal sub-world: «But she hates coming to this neighborhood at night, when she can't see the World Trade Center, and the dazzling lights of the World Trade Center always make her hopeful». The world-renowned building of the World Trade Center seems to make this story a real story that happens instantly, allowing readers to construct the text world that the narrator intends to describe and walk to the side of the World Trade Center.

A mundane day, familiar locations, and familiar characters, these world constructs guide readers into an ordinary and familiar world, understanding the fate of several characters near the World Trade Center. However, the most prominent object in this text world is «Found Objects». It makes readers realize that this is an abnormal world, prompting them to explore the reasons why Sasha in the text world has developed this terrible habit. The narrative of the text world is constantly interspersed with Sasha's memories, indicating the sub-world. This sub-world has appeared five times in total. The frequent appearance of the sub-world indicates a close relationship with Sasha's personality and lifestyle described at the text world level.

#### *4.3 Teaching the Story «Found Objects»*

The students are those that are majoring in English in China, who choose the reading class centered on literary texts. During the whole semester, the students are required to finish the pre-reading activities, reading activities and post-reading activities.

The pre-reading activities will stimulate students to understand the key points of the story and activate their background memory and recall. It will help students engage in cognitive thinking and connect the themes of short stories with the real world. Reading activities mainly help students understand and comprehend Text World Theory, applying it from multiple aspects. It will deepen their understanding and recognition of this theory, and will enhance their literary and language awareness, creative reading skills, and reader response skills. The awareness they gain also helps them «become more reflective as learners, that is, that they become more conscious of texts and stretches of language as containing messages which need to be negotiated for meaning» [1, p. 167–168]. Post-reading activities will help the students retain and maintain the theory, thus improving their reading skills.

#### *4.4 The Effect of Reading Teaching based on Text World Theory*

The ability to think critically is one of the goals of talent cultivation in higher education. Strengthening the cultivation of critical thinking ability among English major students has become a consensus in the language community. The traditional teaching model mainly relies on teacher explanations, with students passively receiving knowledge and lacking sufficient opportunities for language practice. Therefore, students lack critical thinking ability and cannot fully exert their subjective initiative. This study utilizes a new teaching model and approach which is guided by Text World Theory, seeking

a solution to the problem of «speculative absence», emphasizing student-centered and teacher-guided teaching model, thus fully mobilizing students' learning enthusiasm, and value and encourage their independent thinking and innovative spirit.

After the whole semester, the teacher tested the students' critical thinking ability through several ways and found that it was improved to some extent. After the questionnaire and the interview, the teacher further got the feedback from the students and most of them thought that this kind of teaching was more likely to accept and indeed did benefit to them, especially their creative and critical thinking.

**Conclusions.** Since its inception, Text World Theory has been used to analyze various types of discourse due to its strong applicability. In recent years, some studies have also shown that Text World Theory can provide guidance for foreign language teachers in classroom teaching. Based on these studies, this study proposed a new approach based on Text World Theory to teach reading class in the EFL context. It is found that this kind of teaching model is indeed good to the cultivation of critical thinking ability.

Due to the fact that most of these studies are student-centered and focus on helping foreign language learners utilize Text World Theory for text analysis, future research can focus more on the value of this theory as a teacher-oriented approach. Future research can examine how Text World Theory can assist teachers in participating in classroom teaching and help students improve classroom learning efficiency.

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