

摘 要

自从 Sperber 和 Wilson 于 1986 年提出关联理论以来,人们就开始运用这一先进的理论来解释和解决社会生活中存在的各种各样的现象和问题,语言学家们也用它来解释各种各样的语言现象,比如:广告,双关,幽默,反语,讽刺等等,但是却很少有人把这一理论用来指导英语教学实践中的阅读活动。

在英语教学活动中,阅读理解占据着非常重要的位置。现在的初、高中、乃至大学英语四、六级考试中,阅读分值设计的也非常高,几乎成为了决定考试成败的关键。如何在这些考试中取胜成为了每个学生关心的焦点。本文从关联理论的角度为阅读理解活动提出了一个新观点,打开了一个新的视野,并将阅读理解这一实践活动置于理论的指导之下。

在关联理论中, Sperber 和 Wilson 提出,人类交际实际上是一个明示-推理过程,本文提出了一个非常重要的观点,那就是,阅读也是一种明示推理活动,是作者和读者之间的一种互明行为。本文强调了语境在阅读理解的过程中所起的重要作用,最后,在文章的结尾部分,笔者结合自己多年来在词汇速记方面的一些研究成果提出了解决阅读理解常见问题的一些方法。

关键词: 关联理论 阅读理解 互明 语境

Abstract

Since RT proposed by Sperber and Wilson in 1986 came into existence, people have begun to make every attempt to use this theory to explain a variety of phenomena and solve all sorts of problems existing in our social life. Linguists and scholars also employ it to explain all kinds of linguistic phenomena such as: advertisement、pun、humor、satire and so on. Few people focus on the instruction of RT on the reading comprehension.

In English teaching activity, reading comprehension occupies a very important position. In the present junior、senior、even college English CET4 and CET6 examinations, reading comprehension is designed to occupy a high percent, almost becomes a key factor which decides the success or failure of the examination. How to succeed in these examinations has been what the students show their great concern for. This paper proposes a new point of view and opens a new horizon from the angle of RT, and puts this kind of practice activity under the guidance of the theory.

In *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, Sperber and Wilson put forward that human communication is an ostension-inference process. In this paper, the author maintains that reading comprehension is also a kind of communicative activity of ostension-inference. The concept “mutual manifest ness” is employed to explain this process. The author places an emphasis on the importance of the context in helping students improve their English level and their reading speed and the ability of guessing new word. In the end, the author introduces some of her research results in the aspect of word memorization method as a solution to solve the current problems in reading comprehension.

Key words: RT, reading comprehension, mutual manifest ness, context

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学位论文作者签名：牛志珍

导师签名：李靖民

签字日期：2007年12月20日

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Chapter One Relevance Theory

1.1 The Definition of Relevance

Relevance is defined by Sperber and Wilson in terms of contextual effects and processing effort. It runs:

Relevance

Extent condition 1: an assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that its contextual effects in this context are large.

Extent condition 2: an assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that the effort required to process it in this context is small. (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 125).

To put it more clearly: other things being equal, the greater the contextual effects, the greater the relevance; the smaller the processing effort, the greater the relevance. In addition, relevance, which is the relationship between contextual effects and processing effort, cannot be calculated or measured; it has only a certain psychological property.

1.2 The Principles of Relevance

Language communication is an *ostensive-inferential* communication. In such communication, people tend to process words and cognize things according to relevance. If the newly-presented information is not relevant to the hearer's cognitive environment, he will put his back upon it. If the contextual effects achieved by an assumption is worth while the hearer's time and vigor to process, the effort required will be rewarded by some corresponding contextual effects. The greater the processing effort, the greater the contextual effects. Therefore, when we interpret such speech act as metaphor, irony or humor, we will make greater effort, and then achieved greater contextual effects.

The speaker intends to communicate a set of assumptions I. Of course, the hearer hopes that assumptions I should be the most relevant information available to the speaker. However, the interests of the speaker and the hearer may not be coinciding. He may be not willing to convey the most relevant information, and he wills communicative information less relevant. Suppose that B in the following example is fired by the boss the other day, and he doesn't want to tell A about this, he will choose B1 instead of B2:

Ex: A: what happened at work today?

B1: oh, the usual.

B2: I got fired.

Next, the author wants to give another example, Xiao Ming went to pay a visit to a friend of his, in order not to bring trouble for his friend, he chose to answer “I’ve had lunch at home” when asked if he wanted to have dinner together with him. Perhaps at that time he was really very hungry.

That is, the speaker wants to communicate not just any arbitrary set of assumptions, but some particular set of assumptions I. This phenomenon is also common in our daily life:

Ex: friend: would you like having dinner together with me?

Xiao Ming: I’ve just had lunch at home.

Sperber and Wilson revise their former principle of relevance into two (cognitive and communicative) principles. Relevance theory assumes that every aspect of communication and cognition is governed by the search for maximal relevance (that is, the smallest possible effort for the greatest possible effects). Here are the two principles of relevance appeared in the second edition of *Relevance* (1995: 260):

(1)The first (cognitive) principle of relevance; human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance.

(2) The second (communicative) principle of relevance: every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance.

The two authors distinguish relevance into the maximal relevance and optimal relevance. The maximal relevance means in the interpretation of discourse, getting the greatest contextual effects for the smallest possible effort. Whereas the optimal relevance means in the interpretation of discourse, getting adequate contextual effects for efficient effort (He Ziran & Ran Yongping 1998:96) .whatever the hearer demands, it’s impossible for us to hope that the speaker could always utter the maximal relevant sentences. The speaker perhaps doesn’t want to or can’t or needn’t give the maximal relevant information.

According to the communicative principle of relevance, every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance. In the post face to the second edition of their book, Sperber and Wilson revise the notion of “presumption of relevance.” Does relevant here means “just relevant enough” or does it means “as relevant as possible?” In the first edition, Sperber and Wilson argue for the lower limit; that is to say, if the first interpretation that satisfies the hearer’s expectation is accepted, the processing will stop. In the second edition, an utterance may turn out to be more relevant than expected. Thus it achieves not the lowest level of relevance, but some higher level. Therefore, Sperber and Wilson put forward their better formulation of the presumption of optimal relevance (Sperber

and Wilson, 1995: 270):

Presumption of optimal relevance (revised)

(a) The ostensive stimulus is relevant enough for it to be worth the addressee's effort to process it.

(b) The ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences.

Jucker (1997: 117) holds that this revised presumption of optimal relevance is the most substantive modification proposed in the post face to the second edition of *Relevance*, we can say that this reformation has practical results for the analysis of communication. Consider this example by Sperber and Wilson (1995: 273-274):

Ex: A. Peter: where does Gerard live?

B. Mary: somewhere in the South of France.

C. Mary does not know where in the South of France Gerard lives.

D. Mary is reluctant to say exactly where Gerard lives.

Assuming that (B) is the most relevant utterance that Mary can use to communicate the information. The hearer—Peter would be led to infer (C). But if it is mutually manifest for both communicators that Mary does know where Gerard lives, her utterance would imply (D). If we use the traditional analysis of *implicatures* in the framework of Grice's CP, we could not say that Mary is "cooperating"; if we put it into the old version of presumption of optimal relevance, the hearer would not be expected to reach (D), once (C) is found satisfactory in the balance of effects and effort (Yus 1998: 323). Thus both Grice's CP and the old version of presumption of optimal relevance are problematic. We could solve the problem with the revised premise (B) of the presumption of relevance, because it does not state that the utterance is the most relevant that the communicator could use, but the one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences. In other words, the communicator is simply unwilling to be more specific.

To sum up, relevance theory has proved to be a very powerful theory which can explain a large range of linguistic and cognitive problems. It replaced Grice's cooperative principle because it could explain not only *implicatures* but also *explicatures*.

Until now, we can say that producing some contextual effects of an assumption is a necessary condition for relevance, Sperber and Wilson (1995, 122) claim, "an assumption is relevant in a context if and only if it has some contextual effect in that context."

However, contextual effects do not come free and are not the only factors producing relevance. Contextual effects are yielded by the psychological process, and the psychological process includes certainly the effort done by the hearer during processing (for example, consuming of time and vigor), the second factor producing relevance is the processing effort.

Whether the processing effort could achieve some contextual effects depends on the following three factors: (i) if the speech is complex or not; (ii) if the context is certain or not; (iii) how much effort is processed in inference to get enough contextual effects.

Greater complexity or greater uncertainty implies greater processing effort. For example:

Ex: A: what time is it?

B1: it's ten o'clock.

B2: the postman has come.

It is clear that understanding B1's reply does not need more inference or reasoning. Because the words itself is not complex, it requires less processing effort and then has a greater relevance with A's question. The contextual effects of the conversation, thereby, are greater. Comparatively, when A processed B2's reply, he will have to use more contextual assumption and make greater effort to get contextual effect, and finally understand B2's meaning: what time is it now. If A does not know such the known information as "what time does the postman usually come every day," he will not know the time now. On the contrary, if A does know "what time does the postman usually come every day", it will be very easy for him to know the time now.

1.3 Contextual Effects and Processing Effort

The exact meaning of an utterance depends on not only its semantic content, but also on the context in which it is interpreted. Sperber and Wilson regard context as "a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer's assumptions about the world... It is not limited to information about the immediate physical environment or the immediately preceding utterance. Expectations about the future, scientific hypotheses or religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumption, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker, may all play a role in interpretation"(ibid, 15). In addition, context is also called "contextual assumptions" in RT; the environment which is known by the speaker and the hearer is called "cognitive environment."

In verbal communication, it is a set of assumptions constituting the hearer's cognitive environment that plays a major role in the interpretation of utterance. Context in verbal communication is dynamic (or fluid), rather than fixed or known in advance. Since context in RT is a set of assumptions existing in human brains, which differ from each other according to different utterances, the hearer will constitute a new context for every utterance in interpretation.

Contextual effects refer to the relationship between the information presented by utterance and context (He Zhaoxiong 2000: 192), which are of great importance for

describing relevance. By Sperber and Wilson, contextual effects (also called cognitive effects) are achieved when newly-presented information interacts with a context of known information in one of the following three ways:

(1) Newly-presented information strengthens an existing assumption.

Ex: Sue is happy today. She got a phone-call.

Even though such information as a phone-call is not certainly cheering, this example shows that the newly-presented information “Sue got a phone-call” further explains the reason of Sue’s happiness, which certainly strengthens the then contextual assumption and produces a new contextual effect.

(2) Newly-presented information contradicts or eliminates an existing assumption.

Ex: Max can’t read, he is a linguist.

Obviously, the second sentence will not strengthen the existing contextual assumption made by the first sentence; on the contrary, “he’s a linguist” contradicts or eliminates “Max can’t read.” In this situation, the hearer will make different interpretations or contextual effects according to respective contextual assumption, such as, if Max is really a linguist, the first sentence will be a joke; if Max is illiterate, he should not be called a linguist (may be an irony).

(3) By combining with an existing assumption, newly-presented information yields a contextual implication.

Ex: A: Is there any shopping to do?

B: we’ll be away for most of the weekend.

B only presents the information of “no staying at home,” and his intention could not be easily understood. If we take “no staying at home” as an assumption, we are not quite sure whether B wants to go shopping or not. Only by combining B’s information with various contextual assumptions, can A infer some possible contextual implications:

(1) If we are away for the weekend, then we won’t need food.

(2) If we are away for the weekend, then we won’t be able to go shopping.

(3) If we don’t go shopping, then we won’t have any food on our return..

1.4 Mutual Manifestness: its Definition and the Classifications

When we talk about RT, we have to mention the concept of the mutual manifestness,

because it is a very important concept that we should understand in RT. Here, the author wants to let you know something about mutual manifestness, especially wants to place an emphasis on its classifications.

According to Goodman (1973), the efficient reader “relies on strategies which yield the most reliable prediction with minimum use of the information available”, he perceives “only partly what he sees... And partly what he expects to see...Because he has learned to organize his predictions according to what is and is not significant in the language,” and also because he knows not only “what to pay attention to” but also “what not to pay attention to”. That is, the efficient reader does not read every word in a text. He only picks up the key words in reading, which increases his speed and comprehension. The major task of EFL reading course is to cultivate efficient readers. One of the best ways that the teacher can help her students is to teach them how to improve their reading comprehension with the help of the notion of mutual manifestness.

1.4.1 Mutual Manifestness of Cognitive Environment

Communication requires some degree of co-ordination between the communicator and the audience. Co-ordination in this respect must be secured by the mutual manifestness of cognitive environment. Mutual manifestness of cognitive environment refers to the fact that the communicators may in some cases mutually share part, if not all, of their respective cognitive environment. It is the result of each individual's cognitive environment overlapping and intersecting during communicative interaction.

Ex: A: Do you like rugby?

B: I am a New Zealander.

Here, the mutually shared part of their cognitive environment is mainly the encyclopedic information that “New Zealanders like rugby”, and both A and B are mutually aware that they share this knowledge.

Under some circumstances when B cannot guarantee this mutual manifestness, she or he will probably try to modify A's cognitive environment by adding “and New Zealanders like rugby” to make this fact mutually manifest. Otherwise there will be no understanding.

It is clear that members of the same linguistic community converge on the same language, and plausible that they converge on the same inferential abilities. However cases are different with respect of their assumptions about the world. Then how does the subjective interpretation of the outside world in two individuals relate?

As Nuyts (1992) argues, this question is neither a matter of identity, nor a matter of fundamental difference. It is true that no two humans have an identical background

(individual, social, or cultural), in that the variety of environments in which they have been, and the interactions they have had with their environments, can never have been the same. However this is not the whole story. Humans are highly idiosyncratic on the one hand; they are the social products on the other. Therefore cognition does not at all exclude the social dimension of linguistic behavior. Quite to the contrary, there is no opposition between these facets; they are complementary and inextricably linked together like two sides of the same coin.

Communication is basically possible because there is partial correspondence between the subjective reality of two individuals, and it is necessary because there is a partial discrepancy between their realities. And of course, the more and the larger the differences, the greater the need for communication, but also the harder it becomes. "This is basically the problem of social stratification, of intercultural and international communication" (Nuyts, 1992:87). For personal and social reasons, humans have an interest in and desire for a clear definition of their understanding of the world relative to others' understanding. Meanwhile they also have an interest and desire in/for closing the gap between different subjective interpretations of reality. In principle, their aim is to find the largest possible inter-subjective consensus about their interpretation of reality. And communication itself is subject to interpretation by those involved in it. Each individual makes a personal interpretation of the acts performed and the social and personal relationships holding within the situation, and hypothesizes about the communication partner's judgment of these factors. The possibility to communicate fully depends on these interpretations and hypotheses.

As discussed above, communication is grounded in the fact that an individual is a social being related to and dependent on other individuals. This is reflected in the conventions of his or her speech community, which automatically offers possibilities of communicative interaction but at the same time creates restrictions concerning possible roles and related behavioral patterns for the interaction partners.

All the conventions are, of course, internalized in each individual's cognitive environment, lexically or encyclopedically. By "lexically" we mean that some conventions are linguistic conventions which restrict one's production and comprehension of utterances during verbal communication. And by "encyclopedically" we mean that some other conventions are extra-linguistic conventions (e.g. politeness convention) which create specific social and interpersonal relations. Conventions in a certain speech community regulate its individuals' performance and interpretation of linguistic behavior on the one hand; they also open up the possibility for achieving mutual manifestness in communication on the other.

Conventions, being an important part of group consciousness of cognitive environment, therefore deserve our study. For these, we will discuss in some details. Conventions include two kinds: linguistic convention and extra-linguistic convention.

According to Morgan(1975), there are two kinds of language-related

convention: conventions of language, that jointly give rise to the literal meaning of utterances; and conventions of usage, that govern the use of utterances, with their literal meanings, for certain purposes. Compare.

Ex: A: Can you pass the salt?

B: Are you able to pass the salt?

In the case of A, it is conventional to use it with its literal meaning for purpose of requesting. In normal circumstances people share this mutual manifestness and the audience will eliminate the need to calculate the implicature linking A with the actual request, which makes it possible for A to be used for requesting in any context.

The same implicature can exist between B and the request, yet it always has to be calculated, and an appropriate context is required since it is unconventional to use expression for requesting. Conventions of usage are usually culture-specific. In English societies, for instance, it is conventional to greet someone by inquiring after the other person's health, while in Chinese culture it is conventional to greet by asking after the other person's gastronomic welfare.

Morgan (1975) claims that conventions of usage can be considered to contain three elements: occasion, intention, and means (the means is specified as the utterance of a particular expression). The audience's task is to discover or reconstruct the details of the connection between occasion and intention on the one hand, and linguistic means---the utterance articulated ---on the other.

Extra-linguistic conventions "involve a complex and often very subtle interplay of rules concerning matters such as politeness and deference power, prestige, fame, etc." (Nuyts, 1992:53). Since there is a wide range of literature on this kind of conventions, we will avoid repeating the discussion of this issue. What we want to suggest is that these internalized conventions function as, using the notion of Escandell-Vidal(1996), a default context of stereotypical knowledge---knowledge from the stereotypical assumptions and expectations about frequently encountered objects and events. And this kind of context, being part of an individual's encyclopedic entry, also serves as a foundation of mutual manifestness in communication.

1.4.2 Mutual Manifestness of Intention

Intention is a psychological concept from which semantic meaning derives (Wang Chuanjin, 1995: 34). In verbal communication an utterance produced invariably bears a certain intention besides its semantic meaning, which the speaker expects the audience to recognize. Intention in this sense, unlike the semantic meaning, is a subjective entity in that

the hearer may identify it correctly or incorrectly. Only when it is mutually manifest can it become an objective entity and then form part of context. By mutual manifestness of intention we mean that both the communicator and the audience are mutually manifest about communicator's informative intention.

Naturally this definition will lead us to ask: what difference does it make whether an informative intention is merely manifest to the communicator or mutually manifest to the communicator and the audience. Why should someone who has an informative intention bother to make it known to the audience that she or he has this intention? In other words, what are the reasons for engaging in ostensive communication? The answer is: mere informing alters the cognitive environment of the hearer. Ostensive communication alters the mutual cognitive environment of the audience and the communicator. Mutual manifestness in this respect may be of little cognitive importance, but it is of crucial social importance. A change in the mutual cognitive environment of two people is a change in their possibilities of interaction and, in particular, in their possibilities of further communication.

The way of achieving mutually manifest intention, as Sperber & Wilson propose, is not decoded but non-demonstratively inferred by a process of hypothesis formation and confirmation. This means that it is the communicator's responsibility to be careful to follow his/her intention with respect to the state of affairs in making clear to the audience in which way they are relevant. And it is the audience's task to recognize this intention by judging the contextual evidence they mutually share.

Of course, there are cases when the communicator wants to hide the real intention (which is an intention again, anyway), communication in this sense will be almost impossible. A simple demonstration of this comes from the work of the psychologists Bransford and Johnson (1973). They asked subjects to read the following paragraph:

The procedure is actually quite simple. First you arrange things into different groups. Of course, one pile may be sufficient depending on how much there is to do. If you have to go somewhere else due to lack of facilities that is the next step, otherwise you are pretty well set. It is important not to overdo things. That is, it is better to do too few things at once than too many. In the short run this may not seem important but complications can easily arise. A mistake can be expensive as well. At first the whole procedure will seem complicated. Soon, however, it will become just another facet of life. It is difficult to foresee any end to the necessity for this task in the immediate future, but then one can never tell. After the procedure is completed one arranges the materials into different groups again. Then they can be put into their appropriate places. Eventually they will be used once more and the whole cycle will then have to be repeated. However, that is part of life.

Subjects found the paragraph difficult to understand and hard to recall, although there is nothing difficult about any of the words or sentences, when subjects were given the information that the author intended to text as a description of doing laundry, the text was

comprehended and recalled much better.

It is clear that the communicator has to make his or her intention explicit, for if the audience does not grasp it, she or he cannot comply with them.

Briefly stated, mutually manifest intention restricts the speaker's decision on which information should be included in the utterance she or he produces and which part should be made explicit and which implicit. It also restricts the hearer's evaluation of the information, and ultimately his/her interpretation of the utterance.

Meanwhile intention in this sense determines to a certain degree which category an utterance used to perform, whether informing, persuading, or promising, etc.

1.4.3 Mutual Manifestness of Context

By mutual manifestness of context, we mean that the communicator and the audience jointly select a context which is most relevant for the production and interpretation of an utterance. A mutually manifest context of communicators includes their mutually manifest assumptions about the previous utterances, extra-linguistic situation, encyclopedic information, and intention. Here again, mutually manifest context is a dynamic one. That is to say the context they mutually choose is not fixed, but rather, it is on constant changes to adjust to the necessity of maintaining optimal relevance during communication.

The principle guiding the choice of context is, of course, the principle of relevance. Recall that the principle of relevance entitles the audience to expect that she or he can obtain adequate contextual effects for a minimum cost in processing. Processing costs are affected by the cost of accessing and using the context, so that the larger and less accessible the context, the greater the processing cost. This means that in achieving mutual manifestness of context the communicator and the audience jointly search for the most immediate available information, whether linguistic or extra-linguistic, to maximize relevance.

In most cases context, being on dynamic changes, consists of several components:

Initial context: known information, that is, an adequately selected set of background assumptions, combined with new information constitutes the initial context which can be extended in different directions according to the task of comprehension.

Context 2: initial context plus further new assumptions processed from new information forms a new context, namely, context 2.

Context n: previous contextual assumptions combined with new information constitute another new context, and so on indefinitely.

Take, for example, the interpretation of the following text:

Ex: Bright red costumes, with hats, shoes and stockings to match, are to be the entire

craze in the spring. Smart women will have to be careful not to yawn in the street in case some short-sighted person is on his way to post a letter.

The choice of context for the interpretation of this text may proceed as follows:

Initial context: assumptions about the fashion of red costumes;

Context 2: initial context plus assumptions about the postbox in Britain retrieved from the encyclopedic entry in the cognitive environment.

Since the intended readers are expected to be British, the writer can reasonably believe there is mutual manifestness among them-----they will probably choose the most relevant contextual assumptions for the interpretation of the text.

As Escandell-Vidal (1996) argues, the advantage of using a cognitive notion of context is that it permits us to give a unified analysis of both external factors and internal assumptions. Previous utterance, extra-linguistic situation and encyclopedic knowledge have all the same status: they are all internal representations mutually selected for the interpretation of a discourse. Understanding an utterance is actually a matter of making inferences that will connect what is said to what is mutually assumed or what has been said before. The hearer or reader's task of interpretation then falls into two basic categories: the identification of explicatures and the recovery of implicatures.

1.5 RT' Ostensive-Inferential Communication

In the whole process of communication, explicature and implicature are included in the communicative pattern of ostensive-inferential act (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 50-54). On the speaker's side, communication is a process of ostension, which makes his intention manifest to the hearer. On the part of the hearer, communication is a process of making inference, which is based on the manifest information offered by the speaker.

1.5.1 Ostension from the Speaker

Sperber and Wilson define ostension as "behavior which makes manifest an intention to make something manifest" (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 49). In their book, two intentions are mentioned and described respectively. One is informative intention and the other is communicative intention. In relevance theory, informative intention is "to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions I" (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 58). And communicative intention is "to make it mutually manifest to audience and communicator that the communicator has this informative intention" (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 54). Let's borrow an example from Sperber and Wilson. When Mary says to Peter that "the store is closed", she intends to let Peter know that the store is closed. This is Mary's informative

intention. And his communicative intention is that Mary intends to make it manifest to Peter that she has this informative intention so that Peter will not go to the store. In summary, there are two intentions in every utterance and relevance theory gives a satisfactory explanation to the understanding of the two intentions.

1.5.2 Inference by the Hearer

On the part of the hearer, the process of ostension-inferential communication is an inference process. Inference refers to the process in which a hearer infers a speaker's communicative intention from an utterance. The inferential process can be described as the following:

First, the hearer decodes the information offered by the speaker, and then he combines the decoded information with his own cognitive environment, taking into consideration the speaker's communicative intention and finally gets the right interpretation of the speaker's communicative intention.

In relevance theory, the inference has two characteristics. One is that the inference process is non-demonstrative. It is quite different from the logical inference. The other characteristic is that the inference process is global. Any relative information in memory can be used as evidence in the process of inference.

1.6 The Informative Intention and the Communicative Intention

Ostensive-inferential communication consists in making manifest to an audience one's intention to make manifest a basic layer of information. It can therefore be described in terms of an informative intention and a communicative intention.

The definition of these two types of intention given by Sperber and Wilson follows:

(a) Informative intention: to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions I (Sperber & Wilson, 1995: 58).

(b) Communicative intention: to make it mutually manifest to audience and communicator that the communicator has this informative intention (Sperber & Wilson, 1995: 239)

Their main ideas about the informative intention and the communicative intention are as follows: First, communication cannot be successful and effective unless it combines both types of intention. Second, communication can be regarded as a matter of degree. That is to say, there are the strongest possible form of communication, the weakest possible form of communication and a continuum of cases in between. When the communicator makes strongly manifest his informative intention to make some particular assumption strongly

manifest, then that assumption is strongly communicated. By contrast, when the communicator's intention is to increase simultaneously the manifestness of a wide range of assumptions, so that his intention concerning each of these assumptions is weakly manifest, then each of them is weakly communicated (Sperber & Wilson, 1995: 59). To illustrate, let us take Shaffer's play *Amadeus* as an example. When Salieri asks Mozart, "What do you think of my music?" Mozart answers, "I never thought music like that was possible." Hearing this answer, Salieri is still unable to decide what Mozart's informative intention is, for this answer does not seem to imply either that Mozart is praising or criticizing him. This is one of the cases of very weak communication, which often give rise to ambiguity. However, if Mozart's answer were either "Your music is wonderful!" or "Your music is terrible!" things would be quite different. In this case of strong communication, Salieri would be able to pin down Mozart's informative intention to a single strongly manifestness with no alternative worth considering at all. Third, there are some possible situations where communication is non-reciprocal. The communicator may be so authoritative and superior, compared with the audience, that the success of his informative intention is mutually manifest in advance. For example, a teacher is a case in point. For the students, in most of the case, the teacher will order or instruct their students to do something such as fulfilling the assignments, cleaning the classroom and so on. This situation doesn't need the students to respond to the teacher, so the mutual manifestness comes naturally ahead of time without any effort.

To sum up, Sperber and Wilson maintain that a communicator who produces an ostensive stimulus is trying to fulfill two intentions — the informative intention and the communicative intention. Moreover, the only purpose that a genuine communicator and a willing audience necessarily have in common is to have the communicator's informative intention recognized by the audience.

1.7 Optimal Relevance

It is assumed that communication, like many other activities, is determined by the desire for optimization of resources, for the best possible balance of the effort against effect. Sperber & Wilson proposes the concept of "optimal relevance" to express this kind of balance. According to relevance theory, the central factor that makes communication successful is the pursuit of optimal relevance on the part of both the communicator and the audience. An utterance is optimally relevant 1) when it enables the audience to find without unnecessary effort the meaning intended by the communicator and 2) when that intended meaning is worth the audience's effort, that is, when it provides adequate benefits to him or her. (ibid: 270) these benefits are psychological in nature; they consist in modifications of a person's knowledge and are referred to technically as "positive contextual effects". The function of optimal relevance in communication is captured in the principle of relevance, which is

believed to be an innate constraint in our human psychological make-up. According to this principle, whenever a person sets out to communicate something, he or she automatically communicates the presumption that what he or she is going to say is believed to be optimally relevant to the audience.

In some cases, “optimal relevance” is equal to maximum relevance. For example, when reading some instructional text which is simple and clear in language and has little figures of speech in it, reader can gain the author’s intention through little processing effort. In this case, optimal relevance equals maximum relevance.

However, this is not always the case. Suppose the communicator or audience finally manages to achieve the relevance at the price of his or her utmost effort, then what they have achieved can not be considered as optimal relevance. Since one of the most important principles of human behavior is to save effort, People commit themselves to this minimum effort rule to achieve good contextual effect and optimal relevance. In fact, the principle of relevance is the pragmatic rule in communication. It explains why communication could be carried out.

Chapter two the Relation between Relevance Theory and Reading Comprehension

2.1 Reading Comprehension as a Special Kind of Communication

In *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, Sperber and Wilson see verbal communication as involving a speaker producing an utterance as a public interpretation of one of his thoughts, and the hearer constructing a mental interpretation of this utterance, and hence of the original thought. The speaker who produces the utterance is trying to fulfill two intentions: the informative intention and the communicative intention. According to Sperber and Wilson, the speaker's informative intention is an intention to modify directly not the thoughts but the cognitive environment of the hearer and the speaker's communicative intention is an intention to make it mutually manifest to the hearer that the speaker has this informative intention. As for the hearer, his task is to recognize the speaker's intention. In carrying out this task, the hearer is guided by considerations of accessible to the hearer (Yus 2002: 625). Whenever the hearer has difficulty in understanding or misunderstands his utterance, the speaker can adapt his utterance on the spot and help the hearer grasp the speaker's intention. The author, by contrast, is unable to do so, because most, if not all, of the readers will be unknown to him. Moreover, in most of the case, during the process of reading, the writer and the reader almost have not any chance to meet each other, that is to say, there is nearly no possibility that the writer can have a face-to-face or an eye-to-eye contact. It is very difficult for the writer to estimate those contextual assumptions that his hypothetical readers can provide. Of course, under such kind of circumstance, the author has to use a form of words that will arouse certain thoughts in an imagined reader and employ his written language to evoke his reader's literary feelings and emotions. So both the author and the implied reader will make great efforts to cooperate with each other to achieve successful communication. On the one hand, the author will choose the most relevant utterance compatible with his abilities and preferences, on the other hand, the implied reader will often apply more cognitive efforts in exchange for a wider array of aesthetic effects in reading comprehension

Taking into consideration the similarities and differences between verbal communication and reading comprehension, reading comprehension can also be accounted for by using the same psychological principles that explain communication in general. This thesis will focus

on the application of relevance theory in reading comprehension.

2.2. Reading as a Process of Making Inference in the Ostension-Inference Communication.

As we may have known, it is nearly impossible and unnecessary for the writer to write down everything in the text. If communication between the writer and the reader is to be achieved, they should have something in common. The minimum requirement is that they should share the same code. Since the writer thinks that the reader must have something in common with him, he takes for granted that he will leave something unsaid, with the view that if he spells everything out, the article will lose its attraction and aesthetic effect, and even seem to be so boring that the reader is reluctant to read it. However, for those who shares little in common with the writer, they will struggle to make inferences based on their relevant cognitive environment and the existing context knowledge. He Zhaoxiong holds that inference is made through a series of procedures by which the listener or the reader derives the speaker or the writer's intention (He Zhaoxiong, 1999: 127). Making inferences means forming opinions of the writer's intention based on not only what is directly stated but also on what is indirectly suggested or implied.

Reading is regarded as an ostension-inference communication because it shares the same characteristics with utterance. How could the hearer, especially the reader make inference? Here are five types of information Wood devises in making inferences.

1. Add the purpose when the author does not state it. Writers usually have a main purpose for writing a text, but they do not always describe it. Therefore, it is necessary for the readers to infer the writer's purpose in writing it. Usually the writer's purposes are to inform, persuade, entertain, describe or express personal thoughts or feelings to readers.

2. Add impressions about the author's personality, beliefs and values. Usually, the author expresses their own personal thoughts, reactions, beliefs, values and feelings, but they do not state them directly in the writing. Therefore, readers have to look for clues in the writing or even go to outside resources to make inferences about the author.

3. Add ideas of the author's attitude and feeling as reflected by tone and level of style. You can infer the writer's attitudes and feelings by determining whether the author's language communicates an attitude and a resulting tone that are happy, angry, unemotional, objective, passionate, sarcastic, serious, respectful, disrespectful, discouraged, approving and so on. You can also infer additional information about the writer's attitudes by observing whether the material is written in informal or formal style. Informal style communicates the attitude that the author feels close to you. On the contrary, formal style is usually unemotional, respectful and objective.

4. Add connotative meaning to some of the words and illusions. Some of the words have two types of meanings associated with them, their denotative meaning and connotative meaning. Denotative meaning is the literal meaning that can be found in the dictionary, while connotative meaning includes all the negative and positive meanings. Writers expect you to make deep association when you read such words to contribute the meaning of the text. Allusions are references to people, places, events, etc that the writer expects you to know it. When you meet such references, you need to infer why they are included in the text and how the meaning associated with it contributes to the meaning of the text.

5. Add the conclusion when it is not stated. Everything you read has a point or conclusion. However, the conclusion is not always directly stated. In fact, a conclusion you sometimes have to infer is more impressive and unforgettable than what is explicitly stated.

(Wood, 1991: 208-212)

The above-mentioned five types of problems often appear in a variety of tests, such as CET-4 or CET-6, College Entrance Test, and all sorts of examinations during our junior or senior middle school phases. This shows that we must grasp the writer's attitude or feeling towards things, his or her purpose to write this article, the connotative meanings of some particular words or phrases through careful or earnest inference, and at last, we should reach a right conclusion what the writer expect of by all means we can employ such as our cognitive environment, our profound knowledge and so on. If we want to do a good job, we should make every minute count, horizon our eyesight, strengthen our knowledge construction, pay more attention to the difference and the similarity between the different cultures, and try to share the same knowledge with the writer, especially the foreign writer. Only through this can we easily make sense of the writer's article and can we have a good performance in our exams.

2.3 Mutual Manifestness of Cognitive Environment as a Premise to Reading Comprehension

According to relevance theory, successful communication between both parties depends on whether the communicators' cognitive environment is manifest or mutually manifest to each other.

Ex: What would the weather forecast be without a map of highs and lows? How could the weatherman guarantee us a sunny weekend or predict a blizzard if it were not for a barometer? This is of course one of the meteorologist's most useful tools, but there is nothing magical or complex about it-its precursor was invented 300 years ago.

In this paragraph, different readers have different opinions on how to infer the mercury's

change with atmospheric pressure changes. That is why the readers' interpretation to the same information may vary greatly. This is in agreement with Sperber and Wilson's definition about cognitive environment: a cognitive environment of an individual is a set of facts that are manifest to him (Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 35). It consists of objective factors, which refer to the concrete material life in the world and subjective factors, which refer to the varied cognitive abilities to the objective world.

For the above paragraph, the readers who possess enough cognitive environments about weather forecast or barometer will gain better insight into the comprehension of this passage than those who lack of the cognitive environment. Current English reading covers a wide area of material from various fields. College English learners are faced with more challenges in reading than before. They could improve their reading comprehension by means of expanding their knowledge of cognitive environment.

2.4 Reading Comprehension Based on Context Assumption

Language is used in a particular communicative context. The understanding of a word, a sentence and a discourse is based on their context; it will be quite difficult to get its genuine meaning without any context. To some extent, we may say it is context that determines the meaning. In relevance theory, the notion of "context of an utterance" is a "psychological construct", "a subset of the hearer's assumptions about the world". More specifically, it is "the set of premises used in interpreting that utterance" (Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 15). Under this definition, context is a very wide notion that can include virtually any phenomenon that can be attainable by human mind.

Context in this sense is not limited to information about the immediate physical environment or the immediately preceding utterances. Expectations about the future, scientific hypotheses or religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker, will play a very important role in interpretation.

Ex: My daughter smokes. While she is doing her homework, her feet on the bench in front of her and her calculator clicking out answers to her geometry problems, I am looking at the half-empty package of Camels carelessly tossed carelessly close at hand. I pick them up, take them into the kitchen, where the light is better, and study them—they're filtered, for which I am grateful. My heart feels terrible. I want to weep. In fact, I do weep a little standing there by the stove holding one of the instruments, so white, so precisely rolled, which could cause my daughter's death. When she smoked Marlboros and Players I hardened myself against feeling so bad; nobody I knew smoked these brands.

In this paragraph, the author saves the place for the relevant introduction about "Camels",

“Marlboro” and “Players”. Here, the writer supposes that the reader possesses the subset of assumptions of the brands of cigarettes and differences between the filtered cigarettes and the unfiltered ones. The fact is that some students know about the assumptions but many others know nothing about it. Under this circumstance, the text clues are the only context resources that the readers could depend on. The topic sentence of this paragraph and the classifier measure word “package”, coupled with the capitalized letter “C” provide clue that “Camels” is not a kind of animal but a brand of cigarettes. Many students feel puzzled about why the mother is grateful when she finds that the cigarettes her daughter smokes are filtered. The students who share the assumption with the writer quickly give the answer: it is because the filtered cigarettes are less harmful to one’s health. Another problem they encountered in this paragraph is that they don’t know the accurate meaning of “instrument”. Some of them tend to consult it in the dictionary, but the Chinese definition “仪器, 乐器” will make them even more puzzled. Others, however, do not turn to the dictionary, but depend on the context clues, and finally they will get the answer. The meaning “香烟” is not shown in the dictionary but displayed clearly in the context by the following assumptions, “so white, so precisely rolled, that could cause my daughter’s death.”

The above examples indicate clearly what an important role context plays in reading. Without context knowledge, one would fail in reading comprehension and, of course, all kinds of exams.

2.5 Optimal Relevance as the Ultimate Goal of Reading

As is mentioned in 2.3.2 of this thesis, reading comprehension is a process in which the reader searches for optimal relevance.

In defining the principle of relevance, Sperber and Wilson (1995: 158) state that: every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance. And the presumption of the optimal relevance is: (a) the set of assumptions I which the communicator intends to make manifest to the addressee is relevant enough to make it worth the addressee’s while to process the ostensive stimulus; (b) the ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one the communicator could have used to communicate.

In written communication in particular, when a writer writes to a reader, the optimal relevance is already guaranteed by the writing behavior itself. That is, the writer aims at the purpose of the optimal relevance that the reader should be directed to achieve adequate contextual effects by using the smallest effort during the comprehension process. When beginning a text, the target readers who he assumes will read the text. On the one hand, the writer will try to adapt his language to the ability of the target readers so that they can make minimal processing effort. On the other hand, he will not waste time spelling out information that he assumes is already in the reader’s mind. Therefore, what the reader needs to do in

order to communicate successfully with the writer is to find out the optimally relevant point by selecting the most relevant assumptions from his cognitive environment, recovering the lacking information and enlarging the area of the mutually manifest cognitive environment of the writer and reader.

To illustrate, consider the following sentence, which is extracted from an advertisement for an employment agency that used to appear in the *London Understood*:

Ex: "If you're looking for a good job, we're offering a thousand a week" (Wilson, 1994:38)

In this sentence, some information is lacking. By using linguistic knowledge alone to retrieve the lacking information, readers may have at least two possible interpretations: it may be offering a thousand pounds a week, or it may be offering a thousand jobs a week. Which one is the optimally relevant interpretation? Then they search from their cognitive environment for the most relevant assumptions to do the inference. Very naturally, a thousand pounds a week is an awful lot of money--- too much, in fact, to be handed out by advertising in the *London Underground*. The first interpretation contradicts with this old assumption to produce contextual effect but it causes the reader to take more effort to understand it. By contrast, offering a thousand jobs a week sounds more reasonable and acceptable, which strengthens the second interpretation to produce contextual effect too. In comparison, the reader will make less effort to understand it. Therefore, readers would reject the first interpretation and infer the advertiser's intention: what is being offered is merely a thousand good jobs a week. In this way, the communication is successful. If readers could not find out from his assumptions the optimally relevant information and assume that the advertiser means the first interpretation, the advertiser's intention could not be fulfilled, which will lead to the failure of the communication.

To read is to search for the optimally relevant assumptions to form a context for inference. The failure of reading comprehension is always the failure of finding out the optimally relevant information inside the reader's cognitive environment.

Chapter three the Application of Relevance Theory to

Current Problems in Reading Comprehension

3.1 The Definition of Reading

Before coming to the definition of reading, there are a few questions worthy of attention. Why do we read? What do we want from the reading? It is not likely because we are interested in the pronunciation of what we read. It is less likely because we want to learn the grammatical structure of what we read, either. Although pronunciation and grammar is important in learning English, it is not our aim of reading. Most educators and scholars agree that the major purpose of reading is the construction of meaning---comprehending and actively responding to what is read. We read because we want to get some information or some message the writer intends to convey. So reading is an interaction between the writer and the reader. One of the most widely cited and an accepted definition is: "reading is the process of constructing meaning from written texts. It is a complex skill requiring the coordination of a number of interrelated sources of information."(Anderson, 1997: 368)

Based on relevance theory, we can understand reading in this way: Reading is a process of communication between the reader and the writer; a process of seeking optimal relevance on the part of the reader; a process of making inference in the ostension-inference communication.

3.2 The Nature of Reading

3.2.1 Reading as a Communication Between the Writer and the Reader

To some extent, reading shares the same characteristics as conversation. A speaker or writer may encode a message in mind which he wants to convey or express. To achieve this aim, he first put it into words or writes it into words, that is, he encodes it. Then the encoded information is accessible to the hearer or to the reader. It is the hearer or the reader's job to decode the encoded information. After being decoded, the information enters the brain of the hearer and the writer. Consequently, communication is achieved.

However, this simple model cannot fully describe the process of communication, especially the complicated process of reading communication, for neither the spoken text nor the written text can be decoded only in a literal, rigid or word by word manner. Whether the

listener or the reader has got the speaker or the writer's information or intention is still unknown since the decoder's role is not a passive reception. That is why there is a question mark in the decoder's mind. Therefore, reading is understood to be an active and complicated process in which the reader and the text interact to create meaningful communication.

In utterance communication, the hearer can ask the speaker to stop and give some explanation when he meets some obstacles in understanding and can get feedback immediately, while the reader cannot ask the writer for help when he meets similar problems. The only helping assistant he can resort to is the written text itself. In order to resolve the problems in communication, he has to interrogate the written text himself, seek the optimal relevance and try to make inference from it.

3.2.2 Reading as a Process of Seeking Optimal Relevance

During the reading process, every reader expects to get the appropriate understanding of the text and the writer's intention. Consciously or unconsciously, he is involved in the process of seeking optimal relevance. Wilson thinks that our main purpose in reading is to find an interpretation that can satisfy the expectation of optimal relevance (Wilson, 2001: 8). The most critical conception in relevance theory is that communication and cognition are governed by relevance. Reading is a communication between the reader and the writer. The reader uses his cognitive environment and the known information as the premises, combining the new information, seeks the optimal relevance, and figures out the meaning of the text and the intention of the writer.

3.3 The Importance of Reading

As is known to all, reading plays a very important role in our daily life. Without reading, it's impossible for us to know much about the world, we won't imagine what kind of life we will live, what a miserable role we will play in this society. We will not have an access to obtain the knowledge. If we want to adapt ourselves to this society, to realize our life value, and don't want to fall behind others, we will have to read and try to improve our reading level. Next, the author wants to indicate the importance of reading from the following three aspects.

3.3.1 An Indispensable Part of English Teaching

In the area of language arts, namely, reading, listening, speaking, writing, reading is the key element. Other skills are also very important, of course. It is when all of the four of language arts areas, that is to say, reading, listening, speaking, writing, come together and make a final product. Each area needs to be focused on and given room to make

improvements. When all the areas have equal amounts of strength, which is when a student can be successful, we should admit that reading plays a vital role in language arts because students understand words and meanings that allow them to express their thoughts and ideas.

Reading is one of the first things that should be taught in language arts because from there students grow in the other areas.

3.3.2 The Channel to Obtain Information

Reading is more important today than it ever was. It is crucial to being an informed citizen, to succeed in one's chosen career, and to personal fulfillment. Research has shown that within the limited means of getting information of human kind, more information reaches us through the eye than the ear. There is a greater amount of information source through the means of reading than that of listening.

3.3.3 Challenges from China's Admission to WTO

With China's admission to WTO, there is an urgent need of people who have a good command of English. Students of all kinds must pay special attention to their English training. How to improve their skills of bettering their English in all areas of language arts becomes a great concern from English educators. A good reading skill enables one to cope with various kinds of learning materials as well as the flood of information in the English language.

3.4 Three Models of Reading Comprehension

How does reading happen in the reader's mind? This has been a controversial issue and has been studied by numerous researchers. Up to now three models of EFL reading have been proposed to account for the comprehension process: bottom-up model, top-down model and interactive model. It is the interactive model that fundamentally promotes the development of the teaching theories in reading.

3.4.1 Top-Down Models

The top-down theories suggest that processing the print begins in the mind of the reader with meaning-driven processes or with a hypothesis about the meaning of some units of the print. The top-down model proposed by Goodman and Smith is founded on a conscious prediction. From this perspective, a reader identifies letters and words only to confirm his or her hypotheses about the meaning of the text.

This process is mainly based upon the prior knowledge and concepts of the reading.

Gove (1983) suggests that the advocates of the top-down models believe that (a) readers can comprehend a text even though they do not recognize all the words; (b) readers should use meaning and grammatical cues to identify the unrecognized words, (c) processing for meaning is the primary objective of reading comprehension rather than the mastery of letters, letter-sound relationship or words. In the top-down theories, Reading becomes an inferential, constructive process, characterized by the formation and testing of hypothesis about a text. Readers are said to scan the surface structure and to proceed directly to the deep structure.

3.4.2 Bottom-up Models

The bottom-up processing models affirm that reading should begin with code-driven processes or with the processing of the letters and words. the bottom-up theories operate on the principle that the written text is hierarchically organized on the graph phonetic, phonemic, syllabic, morphemic, word, and sentence levels, and that the reader first processes the smallest linguistic units, gradually compiling the smaller units to decipher and comprehend higher units. Reading thus begins with the sensing of graphic symbols on the retina, the analysis of letter features, the linking of these features to recognize letters, the combination of letters into letter clusters and spelling patterns, the linking of spelling patterns into words, and organization of words into sentences, paragraphs, and a whole text.

Gove (1983) suggests that the advocates of the bottom-up models believe that (a) readers must recognize each word to comprehend the text, (b) readers should place primary emphasis on words and sound-letter cues in identifying unrecognized words, (c) reading acquisition requires a mastery of a series of word-recognition skills, (d) accuracy in recognizing words is significant, and (e) knowledge of discrete sub-skills is important.

3.4.3 The Interactive Models

The interactive models, which we prefer, suggest that meaning comes from many sources, that the reader simultaneously and in parallel uses all levels of processing, that any one source of meaning can be primary at a given time, that utilizing information from one source often depends on utilizing information from others, and that the reader constructs meaning by the selective use of information from all the sources of meaning without adherence to any set order. From an interactive view, the sources of meaning include all the meanings and the within-word cues: lexical, semantic, schematic, syntactic, logographic, phonological, orthographic, morphemic, and graph phonemic information.

Leu and Kinzer have observed that reading proceeds as each knowledge source in one's mind interacts simultaneously with the print on the page and with other knowledge sources.

3.5 Current Problems in Reading Comprehension

For so many years, college English teaching in China has mainly focused on the fields of semantics, course design and pedagogy. Teaching and learning activities are mainly concerned with pronunciation and intonation, vocabulary and sentence patterns and grammatical rules. Although both teachers and students have devoted their efforts to teaching and learning, the result is not so satisfactory. They can seldom reach the goal they aim at. In reading comprehension, college students remain deficient. When asked why they are poor in reading, almost all the students think it is because of their shortage of vocabulary. But the fact is that even if they can look up the new words in the dictionary, they still feel puzzled about the whole text. It indicates that the students themselves could not find out the genuine reasons of their deficiency in reading comprehension. It's up to the teacher to analyze and explore the current problems and figure out the solutions.

In most cases, both the students and the teachers meet the following problems, which form a great obstacle and make them feel confused in the process of reading.

3.5.1 Shortage of the Ability to Understand Words and Sentences in the Context

From the above, we have learnt that context is a very important concept in the process of reading and we must give enough attention to it. During teaching, the teachers should try to help their students understand the significance of this phenomenon.

In reading comprehension, it's of great importance to understand the accurate meaning of the vocabulary and the sentence. Natural language possesses the property of indeterminacy. The same word has different meaning in different situations and different contexts. If readers depend too much on dictionary, ignoring to analyze the meaning in a dynamic context, it is difficult to achieve the aim of understanding. One of the problems in reading comprehension is probably the shortage of vocabulary understanding in a dynamic context. We may take an example from a text in Unit 7 which is entitled Face to Face with Gund in New Horizon College English book 1. It's about a robbery. The victim walked out of the garage with KFC chicken in hand when the robbery took place. The robbers robbed him of watch and wallet. At the sight of KFC chicken, the two robbers took it and fled away. The victim called the police and the police said, "Taking your chicken, that's rough."

The sentence is short, but the meaning of the word "rough" here is confusing. Many students can't understand the word and consult the dictionary, which defines it as adj. 粗糙的, 粗略的, 大致的, 粗野的, 粗暴的, 粗略叙述的 v. 大体描述 adv. 粗糙地. Since the dictionary just tells them the literal meaning of "rough", they still cannot get a satisfactory answer. When we give some hints that they should combine the word with the context, the situation is another one. Generally speaking, what the robbers are interested in is money,

watch and valuable things. They seldom pay any attention to the valueless things such as KFC chicken. But these two robbers valued KFC chicken probably because they were too hungry. It's not strange that the police sighed "taking your chicken, that's rough." After considering the context, many students would not be puzzled any longer. It becomes very easy for them to understand the meaning of the word "rough". Here it means "unbelievable, incredible, unusual, etc." All these answers are completely right. So in reading comprehension, dictionary may not be as helpful as we have imagined. The context will give us more clues to reading comprehension.

Another example is about the understanding of a sentence in a dynamic context.

Ex: the weatherman in his TV broadcast repeated this to millions of people and then said that there would be no hurricane, the next day he had a very red face. (Smallwood, 2003: 131)

In this sentence, what does "the next day, he had a very red face." imply? And why did he have a very red face? According to the phrase, "have a very red face" means someone is very embarrassed about his experience. So in this context, the weatherman had a very red face because he was embarrassed with the weather report, which is not in agreement with the factual weather of the next day. We can come to the conclusion that the hurricane came the next day and the weatherman felt so embarrassed that he had a very red face. So we can understand the meaning of the sentence depending on the dynamic context.

3.5.2 Large Gap between Reader's Cognitive Psychology and the Writer's

In constructing the inferential system, it is important to be in the state of cognitive psychology. That is to say, without the similarity between the speaker's state of cognitive psychology and the reader's, it is impossible to interpret the utterance and impossible to accomplish the communication (Zhou Jian'an, 1997). As far as reading comprehension is concerned, when the reader reads the reading material, he will have his cognitive inferential system operated, and he will get the relevant interpretation of the accepted limited lexical information. If he has the similar cognitive psychology with the writer's, he may do the further inferences and may get the correct pragmatic inference more easily. But in most cases, students cannot get the correct inferences. This indicates there is a large gap between the reader's cognitive psychology and the writer's. So the reader cannot understand the writer's intention. There are many factors affecting one's state of cognitive psychology, such as the level of background knowledge, life experience, social psychology and long-standing social culture. It's necessary for readers to accumulate and practice these psychological factors. Also in teaching, it's important to emphasize the cultivation of cognitive psychology.

3.5.3 Lack of Understanding of the Dynamic Context

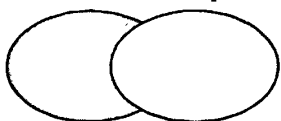
Pragmatic inferences should be done on the basis of context (QianGuanlian, 2002).

In the process of reading comprehension, the accomplishment of pragmatic inferences is actually the process of reader's searching for the context consciously or unconsciously, also the accomplishment of pragmatic inferences of the irrelevance with the given linguistic information is actually the process of searching for the audience's context. Sperber and Wilson think that what matters most for utterance interpretation is the cognitive context consisting of a series of the audience's assumptions, because the audience needs the contextual assumptions to deal with the new assumptions based on the communicator's utterance, and get the contextual effect of the new assumptions from the strengthening of previously held assumptions and from the elimination of false assumptions. As to the reading comprehension, the reader's choice of the contextual assumptions is constrained by reader's structure of encyclopedia memories and his or her mental activities(Miao Xingwei, 1997). So in the course of reading comprehension, correct analysis of the context depends on the dynamic exchange of the old assumptions and the new ones as well as the reader's existing encyclopedia knowledge. The fact that most students are poor in pragmatic inferences also shows their poor ability of searching for context and shortage of encyclopedia knowledge.

According to the analysis above, we can see it is necessary for us teachers to apply the concept "mutual manifestness" to reading teaching.

3.5.4 Large Gap Between the Writer's schemata and the Reader's

We have mentioned earlier that having something in common is one of the requirements for successful communication, and reading is no exception. On the part of the writer, he takes something for granted and leave them unsaid. On the part of the reader, he has to supply in his mind those unsaid parts to achieve understanding. But what if the reader cannot supply the things that writer has taken for granted? This is most likely to take place in reading comprehension. Especially for EST learners, they grow up in different societies with different beliefs, values and culture backgrounds from those of the natives. They have less in common with the native writer, which cause more difficulty in reading comprehension. Nuttall describes the shared assumptions as follows:



This figure is a simple way of showing how, for any two people, some kinds of

experience are shared while others are not. The shared area where the circles overlap represents what the two people have in common. In this area it is all the knowledge, including knowledge of language that they share. It also includes more intangible things like attitudes, beliefs, values and all the unspoken assumptions shared by people brought up in the same society. In the unshaded areas are the things not shared: the experience and knowledge that are unique to each individual.”

(Nuttal, 2002:7)

From the statements above, we can make a comparison between Nuttal’s point of view and Sperber and Wilson’s and come to the conclusion that the shared assumption by Nuttal is similar to mutual manifestness of cognitive environment in relevance theory.

A large gap between the writer’s schemata and the reader’s is another barrier of reading comprehension. There must be problems for readers who do not share the relevant schema. The writer will not waste time spelling out the facts he assumes are already in the reader’s mind. So the reader may be left with too little information to make sense of the text. In the following example, if the reader has no relevant schema, it will not be so easy for him to catch the main idea.

Ex: Most systems use synchronous satellites that stay in one position over the Earth. Synchronous satellites are launched to an altitude of 22,300 miles. At this altitude, the satellite revolution is synchronized with the earth’s rotation.

In interpreting this short reading passage, whether we interpret successfully depends on whether our schemata are sufficiently similar to the writer’s. It’s obvious that the writer assumes that the reader has a schema about satellites, so he spares places for explanation about satellites. We make connections between these three sentences because we have a schema about satellites. It includes the fact that satellites are launched to a position over the earth and they rotate around the Earth, if we share the schema of this short passage. Conversely, if the reader has no relevant knowledge and shares no assumption with the writer, to make sense of this short passage is of no possibility.

In reading activity, many students meet no vocabulary problems but they still feel puzzled about the text. I hold that one of the reasons is due to the large schema gap between the reader and the writer. The issue about how to solve the problem will be discussed in the following part of this paper.

3.6 The Application of Relevance Theory to the Current Problems in Reading Comprehension

Just now, we summarized some current problems in reading comprehension. Since reading plays such an important role in English learning, as teachers, we have the responsibility to analyze the reasons of the problems and offer some solutions.

3.6.1 Training the Students to Be Able to Guess the New Word

When encountered with a new word in reading, many students' first choice is to look up the new word in the dictionary. This is actually a faulty reading habit. On the one hand, we cannot depend on dictionary to improve our reading comprehension; on the other hand, we cannot always get satisfactory answer from the dictionary because the context is dynamic. We have discussed this issue when talking about the current problems in reading comprehension. So students should be discouraged from using the dictionary before using inference from the dynamic context. But after the process of making inference, we may consult the dictionary to check whether our inference is right or wrong. If it is right, it will bring the reader great joy and numerous inferences may make his reading comprehension improved greatly.

There are basically two ways of finding out word meanings. One is from word part clues - stems and affixes help to find out word meanings. The other is from context clues. Most experienced readers try to guess or make out the meaning of unfamiliar words through context clues, which is also our focal point of the following part. Here are some examples for illustration of the two ways of guessing the word meaning.

Ex: Online courses require students to make decisions based on facts as well as experience. It is absolutely necessary for students to assimilate information and make the right decisions based on critical thinking. In a positive online environment, students feel valued by the instructor, by their classmates and by their own work.

The freshmen readers are required to guess the meaning of the underlined word. This can be done by the first way. Although as freshman, they are not familiar with the underlined word, they have learned another word "similar". According to the word-formation and the sentence pattern, we can conclude the word is a verb, which means "make similar" or "take in".

Word-root and affix memorization are important and worth the students' great attention. It's safe to say that if a student can master the word root and the affix very well, it will be a very easy job for him to enlarge his vocabularies greatly, because when we possess such kind

of knowledge, we can analyze the meaning of the word very easily. For example, for a primary school student or a middle school student, he or she knows the meaning of the word “sit” very simply. As a teacher, you can tell the students, “-as” = “-ad”, it means “to”, “-ous” means that this word is an adjective, and “-sid”, as an affix, it means “sit”, so the meaning of the word “assiduous” is very easily memorized. It indicates that a person always sits beside the table to read or study something, so it means “勤奋的”. Even if he or she is very young, it won’t be a hard job for him or her to remember this difficult word. In fact, this word is a “GRE” word. For the primary or middle school student, it is not a hard task to memorize such kind of words. We can imagine how incredible or unusual the teacher will feel if he meets this word in a primary examination or a middle school exam. Frankly speaking, perhaps the teacher doesn’t know the exact meaning of this word; he will have to consult the dictionary. The students always hope that they can write an English composition of high level, and the problem of how to write such kind of composition always haunts them. The author maintain that in your composition if these “difficult” or “unusual” words always appear, the examiners will have to give you a high score, because they will be overcome by your English level and your large vocabularies. The examiners will think how different you are from others, because they dare not or can’t make use of these complicated words to express themselves freely, but you dare or you can, more important, you can employ these difficult words accurately or freely to express yourselves.

Another passage is also designed for the freshmen students to guess the meaning of the underlined word.

Ex: Many people hold that the online method requires them to use their experiences and that online learning offers them a place to communicate with each other. This forum for communication removes the visual barriers that hinder some student from expressing themselves.

According to relevance theory, when the newly-presented information interacts with the contextual assumptions in one of the following ways, the new contextual effect will result: (1) The newly-presented information strengthens the existing contextual effect. (2) The newly-presented information contradicts the present assumption. (3) The newly-presented information combines with the present contextual effect, thus produces a kind of contextual implication.

In this passage, we may infer that the sentence with the underlined word is used to strengthen the known information or the existing contextual effect because “this” could be regarded as such a discourse marker. We read back and find that the known information which is closest to “forum” is “a place to communicate with each other”. So the meaning of the underlined word is explicit, that is, “such a place”.

The following is a passage in which the underlined word can be explained powerfully by relevance theory:

Ex: (a) The first bite was delicious, but once the toffee was gone one was left with nothing, neither toffee nor lust. (b) Besides, the whole to toffee ness of toffees was imperceptibly diminished by the gross act of having eaten it. (c) No, the best was in wanting it, in sitting and looking at it when one tasted an inexhaustible treasure-house of flavor.

In this passage, we can work out the meaning of the underlined word by the combination of the clues of word formation and context. From word-formation clues, we know “toffee-ness” is obviously the derivative of toffee. We cannot find this word in the dictionary because it is a rhetoric word made by the writer to achieve a special literature purpose. Only the word-formation clue can hardly give us enough evidence for the profound meaning embedded in the word “toffee-nesses”. We can refer to relevance theory to help us figure out the word “toffee-ness”.

If sentence (a) is considered as the existing contextual assumption, sentence (b) can be viewed as the newly-presented information. Here, there is a clear discourse marker “besides”, which indicates sentence (b) is to strengthen the existing contextual effect made by sentence (a). It is not difficult for us to conclude that “toffee-ness” is closely related to “delicious”, which appeared in the existing contextual assumption. Similarly, if the second sentence is the known information, the third sentence becomes the new contextual assumption. The explicit negative word “no” suggests that the third sentence is a contradiction to the meaning expressed by the second sentence - the best was in eating it. We can infer that “toffee-ness” is connected with “best”. Combining the word-formation and the deep message the writer tries to convey, we come to the conclusion that “toffee-ness” is some wonderful feeling or happiness that toffee brings us.

Learners of foreign language can reap a lot from making out the word meaning from the dynamic context. Just as when we begin to learn our mother tongue, we learn the vocabulary imperceptibly from the context. So the most natural way of learning a language is learning and making inference from the context. Not only can our reading comprehension be improved, but also our vocabulary could be enlarged. Students should be greatly encouraged to guess the word meaning in reading activity.

3.6.2 Enhancing the Students' Ability in Finding out the Implied Main Idea

Being able to find out the main idea is one of the most useful skills the students can develop. It is the skill that can be applied to any kind of reading. The main idea is the thought that is present from the beginning to the end. In a well-written paragraph, most of the

sentences support, describe or explain the main idea, that is, most of the sentences serve for the main idea. When the main idea of a single paragraph is stated in a complete sentence, it is called the topic sentence of the paragraph. When the main idea of a longer work such as article, essay, term paper, and editorial is stated in a complete sentence, it is called the thesis statement. For non-English major students, it is of significance to be able to discover the main idea of a paragraph, which is also the emphatic point of this part.

Topic sentence of a paragraph may appear in one of several places in the paragraph. Most frequently the first sentence of a paragraph states the main idea.

Ex: Consequently, we work hard at the task of saving time. We produce a steady flow of labor-saving devices; we communicate rapidly through faxes, phone calls or emails rather than through personal contacts, which though pleasant, take longer-especially given our traffic-filled streets. We, therefore, save most personal visiting for after-work hours or for social weekend gatherings.

The topic sentence is obvious. The first sentence states the main idea. The next sentences are written to explain how we work hard at the task of saving time.

However, the main idea may not always appear in the first sentence. It is also likely to be found in other places such as in the middle or at the end. Examples for each place will not be given here. Sometimes we cannot find out the main idea in a stated sentence. It is implied and we have to summarize and determine the main idea based on the ostensive supporting part.

Ex: What exactly does the word “religion” or “religious” mean? Some people think a religious person is one who is a member of an established religion, believes its creed, and engages in formal worship. Others would call “religious” anyone who consciously follows certain moral and ethical principles in his behavior, even if not a member of an established sect. To still others, religion is a broader term, covering any set of beliefs that presupposes a force or spirit that is greater than man, which perhaps explains the universe, life and death. Finally it is even possible to call “religious” anyone whose life is ruled by a deep respect for nature, for all creatures including man and for certain universally accepted her values.

In this paragraph, the first sentence offers us some hints of the main idea, but it is not the exact main idea. The underlined signal words are quite useful in summarizing the implied main idea, that is, different people have different understanding of the word “religion” or “religious”. From the example above, we may determine the main idea with the help of the signal words with little effort.

To sum up, there are several tips that may help us find out the main idea. Firstly, identify the topic that the writer chooses to write about. The writer not only writes about the topic, but

also must have a focus, a main point to make about the topic. Secondly, look at the likely places that the topic sentence may appear in the paragraph if the main idea is directly stated. Thirdly, find out some signal words to determine the main idea if it is not stated in the topic sentence, as is illustrated in the example above. Thirdly, for the longer work, notice any repetition of the main idea in the same or redundant words. If the writer repeats a supporting detail, he is trying to be emphatic. Finally, analysis of the text structure is also helpful to identify the main idea, as is to be explained and illustrated in the following part.

3.6.3 Employing the Discourse Markers to Accelerate Reading Speed.

The ease with the meaning of words is also an important factor in reading comprehension. When reading, the reader should not only get the meaning out of the passage accurately but also quickly. RT points out the possibility of fast reading for the reader.

In order to communicate successfully, the writer will try his best to produce the kind of utterances with optimal relevance so as to have the reader get the optimal contextual effect without making too much effort. Therefore, he may strive for this purpose in the passage by using some special words called procedures. And as for the reader, reading is the process of seeking optimal relevance without additional processing effort. So in the reading process, the reader should quickly spot and make full use of these procedures. In this part, we would like to discuss how readers can quickly guess the writer's meaning with the procedural meaning (here refers to some discourse markers) under the framework of Relevance Theory.

"Inferential comprehension involves the construction and manipulation of conceptual representations: linguistic decoding feeds inferential comprehension; linguistic constructions might therefore be expected to encode two basic types of information: concepts or conceptual representations on the one hand, and procedures for manipulating them on the other."(Sperber & Wilson 1993: 10)

In relevance-theoretic terms, apparently similar linguistic items may differ as to whether they encode concepts, which directly figure in logical forms, or procedures, which constrain the inferential phase of utterance-interpretation. To illustrate the relevance theoretic distinction between conceptual and procedural meaning, let us compare the following sentences.

Ex: A1 Ben is working hard now. I suppose he's going to have an exam.

B1 Ben is working hard now. So, he's going to have an exam.

A2 Ben needs an aspirin. I know he's got a headache.

B2 Ben needs an aspirin. After all, he's got a headache.

In A1, the information that the second part of the utterance is a conclusion is

conceptually encoded by means of “I suppose”, but it is procedurally activated in B1 by means of “so”. Similarly, in A2, the information that the second part of the utterance is a premise is conceptually encoded by means of “I know”, but it is procedurally activated in B2 by means of “after all”.

On the basis of this crucial distinction, it has been discovered that several particles and phrases (for example, certain non-truth-conditional connectives) alert addressees to the type of inference procedure they are expected to go through in processing the next stretch of discourse : language provides some devices whose encoded meaning has the special property of reducing the number of interpretive hypotheses the hearer needs to consider in order to arrive at an optimally relevant interpretation. This is what happens to certain types of discourse markers which do not, as standardly claimed, affect the propositional content of the assertion to which they are attached for instance, with linking words or phrases such as *so, or, and, but, as well as, in short, and for example*, etc. These linguistic expressions may impose procedural constraints on the inferential phase of comprehension. Let us look at the following example in order to have a deeper understanding about the distinction between the conceptual and procedural meaning.

Ex: A: He is an Englishman, so he is brave.

B: He is brave; he is, after all, an Englishman.

Here connectives “so” and “after all” are projected as constraining the inferential processing of propositions, namely, constraining the inferred conclusions from linguistic expressions containing the connectives. Whereas “so” introduces a proposition which is understood to be proven or justified by the preceding one, “after all” introduces a proposition which is understood as proof of the preceding one.

In the same group of connectives as so, “but” makes no contribution to the proposition expressed by A; instead it constrains the interpretation of the utterance by activating the contextual assumption in B, which combines with the first part of A to yield the conclusion in C, which—as is indicated by the use of but—is constrained and eliminated by the second part.

Ex: A: Shelia is rich but unhappy.

B: All rich people are happy.

C: Shelia is happy (Blakemore 2002: 92-94)

On the other hand, similarly, some other discourse connectives such as *that is, in other words, in short, and for example* communicate essential pragmatic information along the lines of “this is a reformulation of ...”, “this is a summary of...”, “this is evidence in support of...”

So far, the author has shown that in the framework of relevance theory, discourse are also analyzed in terms of whether they encode concepts (conceptual meaning) or indicate to the hearer what type of inference process he is in (procedural meaning). For example, *but, nevertheless and however* prime a so-called “contrastive” (weakening-effect) procedure whereas *moreover, in addition, and for example*, prime an “accumulative” (strengthening-effect) procedure; and clearly, the processing of the discourse markers will yield the respective (opposite) cognitive effects and at the same time implement the presumption of optimal relevance by saving the hearer/reader gratuitous effort in attempting to identify the intended interpretation of a text (a single utterance, a paragraph of longer constructions). As Blakemore (1987) pointed out, such expressions contribute to relevance by guiding the hearer towards the intended contextual effects, hence reducing the overall processing effort required.

The following is an extract from CET4; let’s see whether RT can be applied to help quicken reading comprehension (2000/1).

Ex: At one time, trains were the only practical way to cross the vast areas of the west. Trains were fast, very luxurious, and quite convenient compared to other forms of transportation existing at the time. However, times change and automobile became America’s standard of convenience. Also, air travel had easily established itself as the fastest method of traveling great distances. Therefore, the task for DDB Needham was to encourage consumers to consider other aspects of train travel in order to change their attitudes and increase the likelihood that trains would be considered for travel in the west.

The paragraph is composed of 5 sentences. Except for the first one, all the other sentences are joined by discourse connectives: however, also and therefore. The second sentence tells us that trains were America’s standard of convenience because of its luxury and convenience. But when it is joined with the third sentence by the connective however, which introduces a contrastive (weakening-effect) procedure, we can understand quickly that trains are replaced by automobiles in one way. The next sentence is connected by the word “also”, which introduces “accumulative” (strengthening effect) procedure, telling us trains are replaced by planes in another way. Finally comes the connective therefore to introduce a conclusion derived from the previous sentences (regarded as premises): It is the task for DDB to encourage customers to travel by train.

From the viewpoint of utterance interpretation, the appearance of discourse markers can ease the reader’s search for relevance of utterances, their cognitive constraining functions concerning contextual effects have been evidenced to some degree, i.e. They are related to the derivation of contextual implications, consequentially the use of discourse markers is cognitively to minimize the reader’s processing effort by providing an effective means of

constraining his interpretation of utterances in discourse in terms of the principles of relevance. The effort made here has presented an account of how Discourse Markers pragmatically function as guidelines or road signals contributing to the reader's interpretation of the ongoing conversations, and how Discourse Markers help the reader achieve a pragmatically-oriented understanding of the utterances in discourse, and ultimately how they constrain his interpretation or understanding by cognitively helping the reader make less processing effort for achieving cognitive effects.

3.6.4 Shortening the Information Gap between the Writer and the Reader

According to relevance theory, reader's cognitive ability is very important. To the foreign language learners, the readers' cognitive ability is challenged because they grow in different cultural backgrounds with the writer. That is, to some extent, they have different cognitive environment, which will increase the reader's difficulty in the process of comprehension and results in lexical gap and cultural gap.

(一)、Vocabulary Gap

Because of the cultural difference, in English and in Chinese, many words have the same conceptual meaning but their relative meanings are quite different with different association. The lack of awareness in this respect will add the difficulty in reading comprehension.

Under some circumstances, we cannot judge the meaning of a word directly from its word information. Especially for some compound words or some phrases, its meaning is not always equal to the combination of the single words. Let's take the phrase "political campaign" for example, many Chinese think it means some political activity such as the struggle between different parties or different groups in the same party since we Chinese experienced such political activities such as Cultural Revolution in 1960s and 1970s. In fact, political campaign means election campaign, which is associated with equality and democracy in the eyes of the westerners. There are many such kinds of words as street-walker, which does not mean the person who walks on the street but prostitute. A baby-kisser is not the person who kisses the baby but the politician who is good at drawing the voters to his side, which is also connected with politics and election. Many other similar words should be worthy of our attention.

For the other group of words, they have different association and different sentimental colors although they share the same conceptual meaning. A typical example is "peasant". In English, if you say someone is a peasant, you put him down more or less, but in China, the generation who has grown up with the education that being a peasant is most honorable, and much more honorable than the landlords will associate this word with positive association. For another word "ambition" or "ambitious", westerners try to be as confident as possible. So in their eyes, being ambitious is being positive towards life. But for the Chinese who

appreciate the principle of modesty, being ambitious is not so good and the ambitious person will not be popular. There are other similar words with different association such as politics, propaganda and so on.

From the examples stated above, to understand a word is not only connected with linguistics, but also culture and politics background and other aspects. Students should be cultivated to learn English from the aspect of linguistics and culture as well.

(二)、Cultural Gap

On the other hand, the writer will omit the information he considers redundant and leaves cultural default. For the readers from the same country as the writer, it is easy to fill in the cultural default. But for the second language readers, it is no easy job. The omitted information is indispensable for the readers to achieve the aim of comprehension. If the readers know nothing about the omitted information especially the omitted cultural information, the cultural gap comes into being, which causes many problems in reading comprehension. For example:

Ex: a generation of reluctant grown ups is raising children, caring for aging parents and beginning to worry about their retirement.

This sentence seems easy. But if the readers don't know "a generation of the reluctant grown ups", they cannot comprehend the communicative intention conveyed by the writer completely. If the reader is familiar with the American social history, it is no problem at all. "A generation of reluctant grown ups" is used to burn satire to the Baby boom Generation. In 1960s, they are so crazy that they involve themselves in the movement of counter-culture and become Hippies. Not until they are middle-aged persons do they grow up and realize their responsibilities and their worries. So this phrase seems easy but it is meaningful. Under such circumstances, cultural gap should be bridged to achieve further meaning.

Let's look at the next example:

Ex: "Dragon", which we Chinese people respect and value, calling ourselves "the descendants of dragon". is always looked on as a positive thing in China. Our ancient emperors wear the clothes with the pictures of dragons. In China, "dragon" symbolizes "happiness" and "luckiness" and "greatness". Chinese parents hope their children to be "dragons" in the future. So, Chinese idiom "望子成龙" has a very positive meaning.

However, in western countries, "dragon" symbolizes some negative thing, associated with some disaster. People there avoid mentioning it.

Therefore, culture plays a vital role in our reading comprehension. The more you share the same cultural knowledge with the writer from other countries, the more easily you

understand their articles or works. On the contrary, the cultural default will become a big obstacle influencing the reading speed and its quality. In order to improve our English level, especially reading comprehension ability, we should try to broaden our knowledge structure, horizon our eyesight, and be exposed to different culture. Through all kinds of efforts, we can polish our English level. Only when our English level has been improved can we meet the challenge from every aspect of social life, especially from our country's entry into the WTO, can we perform better in our short life journey, and can we make our country stronger and stronger.

Many other similar examples will not be given here to illustrate the point. But we should realize that cultural gap is a big barrier to reading comprehension. In the teaching process of reading comprehension, the teachers themselves should be experts not only in linguistics but also in the culture. Only when the teachers are very knowledgeable or learned can they provide the better service for their students, and can they do great help to bridge the gap between the lexical gap and cultural gap, and can the students benefit a lot from them. Of course, the students themselves also should try to depend on themselves to improve their English level, try to be more knowledgeable or horizon their eyesight, and read more and more books to learn about the difference between the different cultures. If they want to be a very successful or a useful person in the future, they must make every effort to improve themselves in all aspects, because however knowledgeable or learned the teachers are, at length, they still can't replace the students to behave in the society. On the part of the teacher, they only function as an instructor. If a person really wants to do a good job, the teacher only can help you improve yourselves but not replace you. The author maintains it should be a fact that everyone should know clearly. In order to be somebody in the future, the students must work hard from now on, and begin with themselves.

3.6.5 Analyzing the Discourse Structure to Promote the Reading Skill

To comprehend written material means to understand its meaning. To understand the meaning, the reader must retrace the writer's path. Trained writers present their ideas in a structured way. The current English learners pay their efforts on the meaning. They are not conscious of the fact that analysis of the structure can help unlock the meaning. In our college English teaching, some teachers also ignore to do this job. The significance of English teaching and learning is far more than literal understanding of words and language.

Writers always organize the supporting material in one or more recognizable way, which are called writing patterns or patterns of organization. To further help us, writers often expose its way with some signal words, phrases, or sentences. When the learners recognize these writing patterns and signals, they can understand the meaning more clearly and thus faster. In a paragraph, several writing patterns will be working at a time, one of them is dominant. In

this paper, ten basic writing patterns are introduced as follows:

1. Time sequence pattern. It is also called chronological pattern. In this pattern, the writer develops the thesis in time order, in a series, or step by step. Time sequence pattern is the dominant pattern in narrative, anecdote, story, biography, or autobiography, etc. The common signals are: first, second, third, and so on; now, later, next, soon, then, finally, afterward, before, after, etc.

2. Reasons pattern. This pattern is common in opinion, persuasion, and argumentation. The writer begins with an assumption that it exists and then tries to show why it exists. Or the writer presents a conclusion or an outcome and supports it with reasons. The common signals are: so, reasons, why, because, hence, therefore, as a result, etc.

3. Cause-and effect pattern. This pattern is used to show a casual connection between two or more events. A is believed to lead to B, or B is the result of A. This pattern is commonly used in social sciences, physical sciences, medicine, laboratory research, biography and auto-biography. This pattern is sometimes hard to distinguish from reasons pattern. "Why did this happen" is not very different from "What caused this to happen?" The common signals are: cause, effect, because, lead to, result, results in, brings about, ends in, traced back to, contributes to, brings about, thereby, hence, since, etc.

4. Examples pattern. In this pattern, the writer lists two or more specific examples to illustrate the main idea. Examples are often facts, figures, or actual persons, places, dates, events, things, numbers and so on. The common signals are: for example, to illustrate, to give just one example of, for instance, specifically, in particular, especially, one example is, as in the case of, etc.

5. Compare-contrast pattern. The writer discusses differences, similarities, or both differences and similarities of two or more subjects. These are usually points or features or aspects of the two subjects. The passage may describe the features of one subject, then the features of the other subjects in separate sections. Or the writer may proceed one by one through the features, alternating between the two subjects. The common signals are: also, like, compared with, similarly, in the same way, as, just as, likewise, similar to, resemble, however, unlike, in contrast, whereas, but, while, on the contrary, opposite, opposing, on the other hand, unlike, differing from, contrary to, dissimilar, unique, unusual, etc.

6. Spatial pattern. The writer organizes the details according to physical placement and spatial relationships. Like other patterns, this pattern is found in all reading and in every field. But it is especially common in the natural and life sciences, medicine, mathematics, engineering, and so on. The common signals are: left, right, up, down, in the rear, behind, in front; upper, lower, outward, inward; east, west, north, south; bordering, adjacent, next to, etc.

7. Definition pattern. The writer tries to explain or define a concept or object by delineating its qualities or aspects. A pure definition is usually fairly brief. But when

connotations or specific examples and anecdotes are used to help explain the term, the pattern may verge on general description rather than definition pattern. The common signals are: define, definition, describe accurately, explain exactly, mean, meaning, aspects of, discuss, analyze, is, etc.

8. Process pattern. The writer tells how something works or functions, or how something came about. This pattern is often found in history, the physical and social sciences and vocational courses. A process by its nature occurs chronologically; it probably also involves some other patterns. The common signals are: process, procedure; first, second, third; next, then, later, finally; when, as, during; after, afterward, following; steps; dates and times; interactions; lead to, etc.

9. Classification pattern. The writer discusses a subject by breaking it down into parts, which are then organized on the basis of traits, interrelationships, or some other systems. Groups, classes, categories, types and so on lend themselves to the classification pattern. It is often the dominant pattern in botany, biology, and linguistics and other fields. The common signals are: classify, group, type, sort out, analyze, order, arrange, etc.

10. Description pattern. The writer uses this pattern to describe a person, place, event, experience, mood, object, time and so on through many specific details. Descriptive can make an agree or abstract discussion more concrete. They help the reader see or experience the topic. In this pattern, the writer may use such signals as describe, description, the appearance, the look, in detail and so on. Or the writer may use no signals. He may begin to describe with many specific details.

Different language experts or linguists may name the patterns in different terms, or they may add other patterns to the list. But the above ten patterns are among the most commonly used patterns by writers. College students should be not only satisfied with the process of obtaining the meaning, but also be encouraged to learn to analyze the writing pattern used by the writer, which can help students understand the writer better.

3.6.6 Forming a Good Habit of reading

When reading, in order to understand the article or the paragraph better, it's unnecessary for us to read the article or the paragraph word by word, or sentence by sentence. We should try to accelerate the reading speed, form a habit of ten lines by ten lines when reading, and grasp the general or main idea of the article or paragraph. We often can hear the students' complaint such as "time is so limited, but the content is so much", thus it will lead to a very deficient reading. Until at last, they only can get a very low score.

Today, whatever English exam it is, such as the college entrance examination, CET4, CET6 TOFEL or GRE, reading occupies a very important position. If you are very good at

reading, for example, you have a very good reading habit; it will help you perform well in your exam. Taking a good friend of the author's for example, both her pronunciation and grammar are not very good, when asked why this sentence is organized like this, she feels very dumbfounded about such kind of problems. But she can pass her CET4 and CET6 only once, most of the people must argue that she has large vocabularies and she must be good at grammar, on the contrary, her vocabulary is so limited and her grammar is that poor, she has such kind of achievements just on account of her good reading habit. In reading, she can get 36 or 38 from 40. You can imagine how easily for her to pass her examination. So the author maintains that a good reading habit will help you a lot to get a high score in your exam, whatever English exam or Chinese exam it is.

3.6.7 Forming a Habit of Consulting the Dictionary.

The author remembers that when we were exposed to English first time, most of the teachers seldom demanded the students to consult the dictionary, thus making the students not accustomed to looking up the new word in the dictionary, which caused them not to be able to enlarge their vocabulary very quickly, at last, their English level was so low partly because of their bad habit. This kind of thing always caused the author to think a lot. When the author had an access to the second language, she tried to make full use of the method that she employed to study English. She focused on looking up the new word in the dictionary. Within less than half a year, she mastered a lot of German words, helping her reach a good level in German. She had ever experienced big German exams three times, during which she had almost always been the top one in Tianjin city, which strengthened her viewpoint that when exposed to a foreign language, the teachers should emphasize the importance of consulting the dictionary and encourage the students to form a habit of looking up the words unfamiliar to them in the dictionary. Gradually, the students will be able to enlarge the vocabulary greatly, thus making a good score in their examinations, more and more interested in the foreign language, reading and looking through a variety of the articles written by the foreign language freely, smoothly and without any difficulty. This is her profound feeling during studying the foreign language, which she hopes attracts great attention from the scholars、linguists、the teachers、the students and so on, especially those who want to improve their foreign language level quickly and greatly.

Here, the author wants to propose a very important opinion: dictionary should be regarded as a required course, but not a selected course not only in college education but also in middle and primary school education. By means of consulting the dictionary can the students be trained to have a kind of study ability, thinking habit, and can the students be trained to be one armed with some kind of exploring spirit and strong appetite for further knowledge. The author believes that the function of a good dictionary outweighs a teacher's

to some extent. Of course, we should combine consulting the dictionary and the teacher's teaching job perfectly, thus the students will benefit more. English teaching situation in our country will be improved greatly and on vast scale. Zhang Haidi, owing to her own disability, has to stay at home to study by herself without any access to teachers. But for the dictionary, how can she work a miracle? The author argues that this phenomenon should be placed an emphasis on. While we admire Zhang Haidi's spirit, we should explore other causes that lead to her success. The dictionary must be the best teacher for her, so the author agrees with some scholars who encourage the students to copy the whole dictionary. It is not a dull and unnecessary job, but a very interesting and useful job, through which the students can improve their ability in all aspects.

All in all, the dictionary is very important for the students to master all kinds of knowledge and broaden their horizons.

3.6.8 Enlarging your Vocabulary

As a Chinese, we all know the importance of Chinese characters. In fact, English words play the same role in English as characters in Chinese. In the past, we used to mention "illiterate". It meant a person with little knowledge. That was to say, he or she could know extremely few letters. Of course, in modern life, "illiterate" has been given new meaning; it indicates a person who is not proficient at English, computer and driving, which occupy the significant position in modern life. It is safe to say that when a person only has mastered extremely few words, it is impossible for him or her to gain a good achievement in the exams.

The author has ever attended a lecture in Hebei Tech University. When asked what is the most difficult in the process of learning English, the students are almost unanimous in their opinion. They all believe that vocabulary is so difficult to memorize that it significantly reduces their interest in English and cuts down the chance for them to pass their exams in CET-4 and CET-6. At that moment, the author feels very excited because they share the same viewpoint in studying English with her. The author always maintains that when a person can have enough vocabularies, in any way, it will benefit the students a lot. When the author says these words, she doesn't want to deny the importance of any theories, including RT. She only wants to point out that the amount of vocabulary shouldn't be ignored. We can imagine that if a primary student has mastered three or four thousand words even more, his or her English level must be very high. The author holds that if you meet a primary student communicating with the foreigners very freely and smoothly in English, it will astonish you. The author herself really has met such kind of situation, and at that moment, she felt embarrassed and sad. In our country, how many students can talk with the foreigners like that? The author has to say it is our sadness and failure in educational circle. Although the educators and scholars try to reverse this situation and always place an emphasis on oral English, we really do a bad job

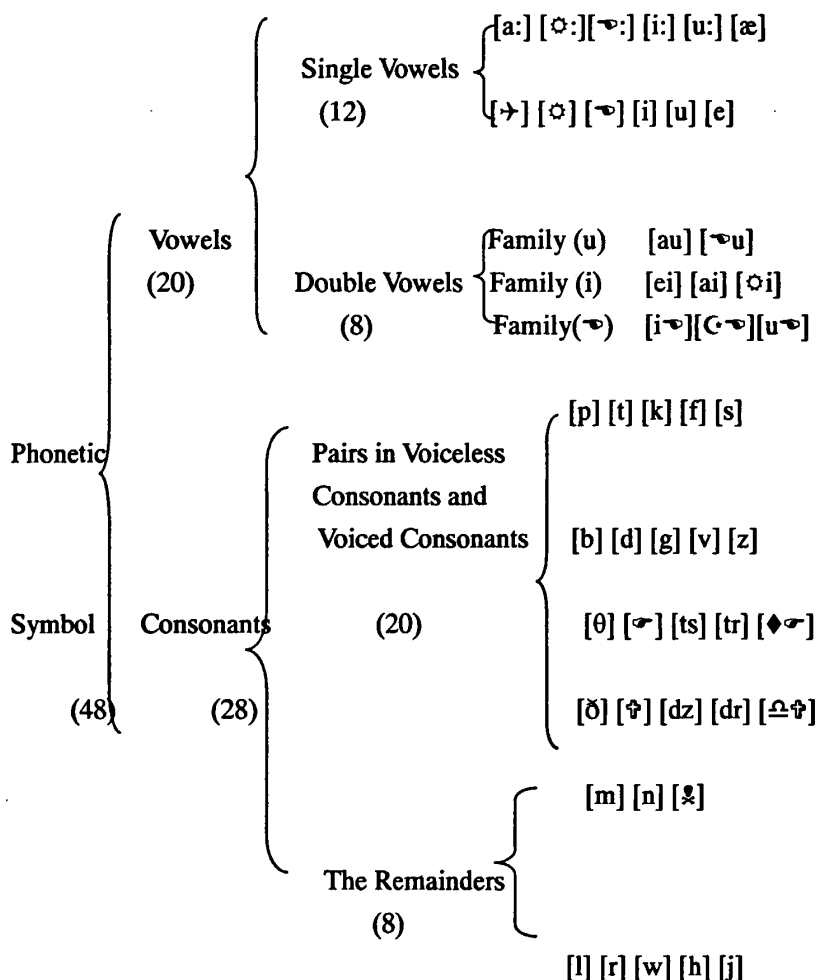
in this aspect.

Next, the author wants to introduce some word memorization methods, her own research result on the basis of several years of hard work.

(一)、The Significance of the Phonetic Symbol

In Chinese English teaching, few teachers emphasize the importance of the phonetic symbol. In most of the case, the teachers function as transfer devices, while the students act as receivers, which makes the students have not the ability of spelling the vocabularies counting on themselves. The only thing that they can do is ask the teachers to help them; however, they will get into trouble without the teachers' help. This kind of phenomena is universal in our country, which makes the author feel that our country's foreign language teaching situation is not successful and pessimistic. When asked if they can self-confidently spell the vocabularies, what's more, very accurately and standardly, almost none of the students are certain that they can do it very well. For many years, the author has concentrated on the study of how to master a foreign language within a very short time. The author feels that phonetic symbol, which to English learning was as important as Pinyin to Chinese learning, should be placed in a key position, which the author hopes will draw great attention from both the students and the teachers. Ignoring the importance of phonetic symbol will result in failure in foreign language learning, thus causing a great loss. When asked how many phonemes there are in English, many college students feel at a loss about this question. What makes the author dumbfounded is that most of the scholars and the educators turn a blind eye to this kind of situation.

To make a long story short, here the author wants to introduce her own experience. The author tries to build association between English phonetic symbol and Chinese Pinyin. When putting them together with Pinyin, we can witness that they are very similar. The author maintains that, generally speaking, we can imagine that English vowel is equal to Chinese final sound, whereas English consonant is similar to initial consonant of a Chinese syllable. During the process of English teaching, we can try to encourage the students employ Pinyin to simplify the study of phonetic symbol, which the author believes is the teachers' duty. The author wonders if both the teachers and the students have observed that five vowels *a, e, i, o, u* in English in accord with five single final sounds in Chinese. Is it only a coincidence? The author doesn't believe so. It just shows that there is some kind of undividable relationship between Chinese and English. Next, the author wants to show a form to you, which the author herself establish through thousands of observation and on the basis of summarizing the experience of our ancestors.



When observing this form carefully, we can easily find that these English vowels are so similar with Chinese final sounds that we are always confused about whether they have something in common. Similarly, English consonants are in such harmony with Chinese initial sounds that we can build some kind of relationship between them. It reminds us that when studying English, we can make full use of the association between English and Chinese to reach a purpose of learning English well. Here, the author wants to give an example. To memorize 12 single vowels, through observation, we can see that these phonemes are very similar to final sounds *a, o, e, i, u* in Pinyin. Taking the vowel [ɔ] for example, we can imagine it is the deformation of *o*. when its left part is digged by something, it will be changed into [ɔ]. The rest of the vowels are more easily imagined as the Pinyin *a, e, i and, u*. Here, the author won't list more examples. The author only wants to give a thought way for Chinese people to utilize the advantages of Chinese to study English.

(二)、For Group Memorization and Against Disperse Memorization

We often hear that the teachers tell the students to memorize ten or twenty words within

a day. They worry that if they demand the students to afford a great burden such as memorizing 50 or 100 even more in a day or a unit time, the students can't fulfill this task, because in their eyes, the less the students are required to remember, the more easily for them to memorize these words. Is it really so? So many years of hard work makes the author maintain that group memorization compared with disperse memorization is more efficient. Finding, taking advantage of rules, summarizing and inducing from some angle should impenetrate the whole study process, which is often considered as a job only before examination by both teachers and students, which is an extremely wrong viewpoint during the study process, which helps the author finish school work quickly and excellently, which helps the author more self-confident of her study. In the following parts, the author wants to introduce some of her classifying angles in detail, combined with other scholars and experts' views.

At present, the author is working on summarizing vocabularies on the basis of these methods and the thought way, taking all of the junior and senior English words and expressions for example, which is hoped to publish in the future days, which is believed to benefit the students significantly.

(三)、Letter- number Comparative Method

We have observed that in the primary and junior textbooks, most of the words are very short while only a few words are long; whereas in senior and college English books, it's another situation, which should attract our cerebation whether we should summarize the vocabularies according to letter numbers. As a matter of fact, when doing such kind of job, it will be very easy to distinguish the easily-promiscuous words, form-close words. The author considers this kind of method as very important and has compiled a booklet about junior and primary English textbooks from this angle.

(四)、Three Important Parts of Speech Concluding Method

There are altogether ten kinds of parts of speech in English vocabularies, among which verbs, nouns and adjectives occupy the most important position because of their overwhelming majority proportionally. The author establishes this angle to classify the words, which benefits her a lot. Of course, when we classify the word lists into these three parts, we still can further them more at length. Taking the nouns for example, we can further assort these words according to professions, animals, plants, human bodies, traffic and transportation, aid to learning and so on. Through several times of repetition, it will help us memorize these words more easily, precisely and permanent.

By classifying these vocabularies according to parts of speech can we master the knowledge about word suffix better, however, knowing the word suffix can help us use these words more accurately and more scientifically. For example, nouns and prons can be used as the subjects or the objects, adjs as predicatives, while verbs only can be used as predicates.

(五)、Forming a Dictionary of your own

A lot of students, even the teachers look on summarizing the vocabulary as an extremely dull job. As a result, they can't have their own dictionary, resulting in their bad performance in the examinations and the

teaching jobs. When you can view editing your own dictionary as a great interest, it will not be far from your success in English field. According to the author's own experience of studying English and German, it takes some little time to summarize the vocabularies and the grammars and form her own dictionary, leading to my outstanding achievements. When necessary, you can consult your own dictionary, but needn't to resort to the word lists at the back of the textbooks, and at the same time, it will also be able to bring you a great sense of achievement. As time passing by, your English level will be improved rapidly and perfectly.

(六)、Knowing About English Word-Building Method.

Generally speaking, the most common word-building methods include synthesis method, derivation method, and simpleness method, among which the author wants to place an emphasis on the importance of the derivation method. Of course, the author doesn't mean other methods are insignificant. In fact, derivation method is also called word-root and affix method. The word-root is the central part of this sort of vocabularies. The prefix indicates the meaning of the word, while the suffix shows that this word is noun, verb or adjective and so on. Accumulating massive information in this aspect can alleviate the burden of word memorization. Some scholars have ever put forward that a person can remember 1,000 words within a day, which in most of the people's eyes, seems so incredible that they think it's only a kind of imagination or a myth. As a matter of fact, it's extremely possible when we grasp the word-building knowledge and employ it to memorize the words. In this respect, the author advocated that the above-mentioned word-building method should attract great attention from both the students and the teachers, especially from the reputed educators and experts and scholars. The author always thinks it's our sadness and failure in educational circle. When asked how to memorize the words accurately, rapidly and permanently, most of the teachers themselves are also very confused about this question, which leads the teachers to answer this question only with working hard and industriousness. Of course, on the road to success, diligence really plays the most important part, without which nobody can be related to success. But it's only a kind of necessary condition, not a kind of enough condition. Another condition is an excellent method, which is half done. The most common word-roots and word-affixes are about over 600. We can look on these roots and affixed as words, which will promote us to remember them, but not ignore the significance of these roots and affixes. People should set up a kind of viewpoint: word-roots and word-affixed are the foundation and the source of memorizing the words, because it tells us about this information that English words originate from Greek and Roman languages, making us know what it is and why it is so, providing us with a clearer conception, leading us to step out of the embarrassment and confusion. In most of the people's eyes, the longer the vocabulary is, the more difficult to memorize it. The fact is opposite. The shorter the vocabulary is, the more difficult to memorize it. Perhaps lots of people will be confused about this opinion. Please look at the following "long vocabularies". (Accelerate, abbreviate, aggressive, dormitory and so on.) At the first sight of them, you will

be frightened by these words. It's really too difficult to remember these words letter by letter, however, if a person has done the first thing to remember the word-root and the affix, it will be an easy job for him or her to remember these words. (-celer=rapid, -ac=to, -ate shows that this word is a "verb", so "accelerate" means 加速。-brev=short, -ab=to, so "abbreviate" means 缩短。-gress=go, -ag=to, -ive shows that this word is an adjective, so "aggressive" can be analyzed that a person goes to another person, with some provocation, thus the meaning of "aggressive" is "侵略的"。The last word "dormitory" is also very easy. "Dorm" means "sleep", "-ory" means "a place", so "dormitory" can be explained by "place of sleeping. (宿舍)". In fact, the short vocabularies are a little hard to memorize, because we can't find any word-roots and affixes in these vocabularies, we can't analyze them by means of dividing them into several parts. We can adopt other methods to remember these words, such as compiling a story, children's songs, and sense of rhythm. For example, we can put these short words together: rat, cat, bat, fat, eat, hat, mat, pat, sat, vat and so on. We should think of the most efficient way to "eat" them quickly. "a fat cat with a hat pats a rat sitting (sat) on a mat, telling it that the bat has fallen into a vat, then the cat and the rat laugh at the bat. How interesting it is! In the middle of relaxing atmosphere, the students master these words. Let your interests lead you, and you will succeed. So the interest is the necessary condition leading to success.

Chapter Four Conclusion

As stated above, RT, as a very advanced and profound theory, which can be employed to construe all kinds of phenomena in our daily life, can also be used to explain and analyze the problems existing in reading comprehension, thus helping improve the ESL teaching situation in our country. This paper focuses on the importance of the context, a very important concept in RT, pointing out that without the consciousness of the dynamic context, one will fail the understanding of the article or reading material. Communication is a process involving a speaker producing an utterance as a public interpretation of one of his thoughts and the hearer constructing a mental interpretation of this utterance, and hence of the original thought. Reading comprehension is also a communicative process of ostension-inference. Applying the RT to the practice of reading comprehension will put this practice activity under the instruction of the theory. It will have a profound meaning. Finally, at the end of this paper, the author's opinion is that a good word memorization method will also play a very important part in the whole English study process, which should attract great attention from both the teachers and the students. This method can work a miracle of 100 vocabularies a day, making a primary school student fulfill the task of a college student (that is to say, a pupil can complete the task of owing 6000 vocabulary). Large vocabulary will help them become a winner in all kinds of exams. Only combined with other things and being used to instruct the practice can such theory bring its function into play.

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