



EFL Learners' Perceptions of Contextual Adaptation Theory on Reading Task Performance

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Abstract. English as a foreign language (EFL) has resulted in significant ramifications for the second language learning in the college educational performance. A growing interest in second-language learning has resulted in remarkable empirical studies that attempts to explore the approach of improving reading abilities. Analyzing the traditional approached of the English reading teaching, it can be said that great progress has been made if we take it as an independent subject in reading production. While students' participation in reading performance in second-language learning has become everyday practice in college, there have been few studies examining how linguistic theory as fundamental guideline is adopted and applied in the reading practice in college. Thus, in our study, we provide the contextual adaptation theory into English reading practice, illustrating that the theory can guide to figure out the tactful meaning in the reading materials. Focusing on the reading materials, this paper examines how contextual adaptation influences the students' performance in reading tasks.

Keywords: EFL learning; contextual adaptability; three worlds; English reading competence

1 Introduction

Contextual Adaptation Theory was proposed by Verschueren.^[11] According to the communicative context, all elements of language use for adaptability are presented as physical world, social world and mental world. In the central part for communication in the contextual adaptability, the choice of language use needs to take the practical communicative context into consideration, which also a must for reading practices in college courses. The elements in communicative context are relevant to others elements of the contextual adaptability.

As shown in Figure 1, it is noteworthy that the three worlds are motivated by either side of the language users. Through a practical linguistic analysis, we examine the interactive influences in the reading practice to demonstrate how contextual adaptability has been applied in the English reading learning and we find that it is necessary to construct a study to figure out how the elements above affect the language comprehending of the language users. We argue that the three worlds are not only underrated

their true meaning but also ignored their active engagement in the language production. The phenomenon may lead to undermining efforts towards the development of a reading learning approach in the current education. Thus, we are aware that the readers ought to integrate overall elements or factors in the texts to consider the final meaning of the intended ideas the writers want to say. Specifically, the contextual adaptation theory, then, can be schematized as Figure 1:

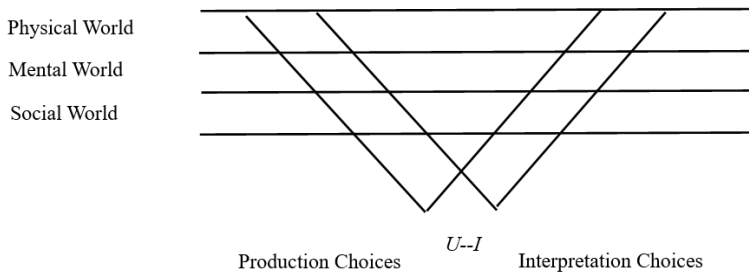


Fig. 1. Introduction of Contextual Adaptation Theory

2 Contextual Adaptation Theory as rhizomatic: English reading teaching and learning

One of the challenges emerged in ELF is the ignorance of a linguistic theory to lead the English reading learning. Noteworthy, many researchers have adopted a scientific-based approach for EFL study. Specifically, in the overall studies, second language reading procedure has received a notable emphasis. In reading learning procedures traditional methods as mainly addressed including the grammar, words or fixed sentence patterns are still the main route for language learning and teaching. Previous explorations mainly focus on the methods of improving reading ability through rule-governed strategies, adopting translanguaging practices in-class teaching at home and abroad,^{[6][8]} employing academic engagement in reading evaluation,^[10] less attention has been paid to how contextual adaptation theory gives another way to consider English reading practice. It shows that language choices must be adapted to the various context. These suitable choices hinge on language's variability, negotiability, and adaptability, offering the options and mechanisms for selection, with theory-based system ensuring these selections align with communicative requirements. Language's variability and negotiability lay the groundwork and method for making choices, while the recognized contextual adaptability steers us towards making appropriate selections among these options to satisfy communication needs. Contextual adaptability brings the essential dimensions to the pragmatic analysis and interpretation of linguistic phenomena. Through examining experiences and reflections on English reading instruction, this paper seeks to explore the effective integration of contextual adaptation theory into reading instruction and enhancement at different stages of English reading practice. The contextual relations highlight the alignment between word selection and

context in language use, especially in reading comprehension, where diverse language choices demonstrate the interlocutors’ adaptation to their physical, mental, and social worlds. This contextual adaptability, serving as a pragmatic strategy, is vital for grasping the dynamics of interaction for both the readers and authors.

We argue that as for EFL, language users should recognize and properly comprehend the meaning of the reading materials and proceed to figure out the tactful meaning based on the analysis in the whole reading procedure. It is vital for teachers to guide the students to employ the contextual adaptation theory in English reading. Additionally, three worlds, namely, physical world, mental worlds and social worlds can contribute to the recognition of the exact meaning of the lines in the reading texts.

According to the Figure 2, in order to observe the inherent meaning of target language, language users should firstly conduct a reasonable prediction of the text based on the title or the opening lines. Then by applying contextual adaptation theory into the reading analysis, they can efficiently process precise meaning hidden in the expressions. Thereby, the three worlds indicate the exact meaning of various kinds of reading materials and help students to explore the proper meaning of the contents they read and make reasonable judgments to determine the writing purpose that the author wants to express. As shown in the figure below, the process of students understanding reading texts is concerned fully with the contextual analysis of the reading texts.

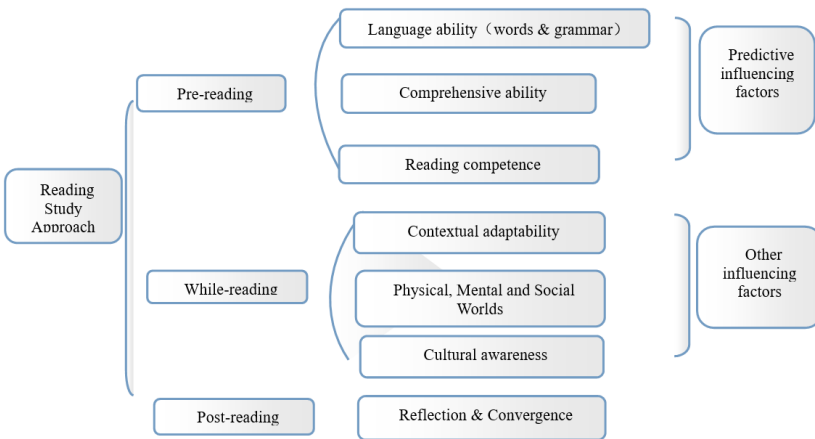


Fig. 2. Major factors of Reading Study

3 Practical Application of Contextual Adaptation Theory in English Reading Study

According to He Ziran, every utterance contains information, and the information structure can be realized at the phonological, lexical and syntactic level.^[4] In the English reading study, different information presents itself with a suitable context among the lines of the texts. Information is mainly received through lines in reading, rather than relying on students’ own common sense. The recognized information may make

an impact on the unknown information. That is, known sentence meaning is secondary, whereas unknown or new information is primary. The former one can be easily received by the language users, but the latter receives the information focus, i.e. the core.

A number of the variety of English such as Chinese English has emerged and attracted much more attention,^[12] which is a realization of the cultural integration.^[1] The general genres of an article involve various categories such as culture, history, biographies, education and social issues, etc. The main factors presented below in Figure 2 may set a sample for EFL learning in college. In some cases, however, the reading information recognition and focus may vary according to different contexts. For writing purpose of the emphasis to some extent, the meaning of the target language may also make an influence on the choice of the expressions. Generally speaking, the focus of known information often falls on the lexical items, but the new or unknown information hidden in the texts needs more recognition and analysis. That is the reason why we employ the contextual adaptability into the EFL teaching and learning. It may be true that writers achieve their intentions through underlying the implications of the known information. The implication may be explored at various levels. Nevertheless, the observations have been focused mainly on the tactful changes of the sentence meaning lied in the tones, various writing devices, etc.

Thus, students need to identify both the known and unknown information, then combine the factors in Figure 2 to ultimately derive the author's purpose. It has been shown that reading is crucial in second-language acquisition. If students do not make efforts to strengthen comprehensible input, they would fail in non-native writing.^[2] Undoubtedly, the practical contextual adaptability study especially will provide high potentials for EFL learning.

3.1 Recognizing Contextual Adaptability in the Reading Study

Based on a recent report, a large number of English learners, 276 million current users in total, would be looking for a better way to master the second-language.^[4] English, as an international language, has received much more investigations from various perspective in various educational contexts.^[7] As is known, the meaning of a language pragmatically presupposes a proposition or implication if the proposition is appropriate. We should focus on the implication when it is mutually known by readers and authors. For the authors, they choose to use different items to express their intentions. According to contexts in various reading materials, a sentence is appropriate used and understood under the condition of a combination of three worlds of the communication context. Such properties of practical presupposition of the sentence meaning, we can understand in this way: the pragmatic properties refer to appropriateness and mutual knowledge or common ground of implication for both sides of readers and authors. But the practical conditions may vary according to mental world, physical world and social world the authors provided in their texts. Students should interpret the implication of the texts based on the properties and they would be very sensitive to contextual factors in ways of appropriate usage of language choices and mutual knowledge. Noteworthy, though recognizing the three worlds coming from some words and expressions which

we call implication-triggers. And there are various kinds of triggers hidden in the reading materials.

In Figure 2, it is an English reading instruction on the basis of contextual adaptation theory. In the first stage of reading practice, readers' ordinary senses of presupposition in the reading materials would be conducive to make well-preparation for the next stage of while-reading. For a better application of the contextual adaptability factors to the English reading, it is no doubt that the teachers are required to illustrate the information focus to the students. Besides the three worlds are equivalent to the actual linguistic structure of sentence meaning. However, such kind of inferences or implication cannot be thought of as semantic merely in the narrow sense, we should consider the exact meaning within the sensation to contextual factors so as to take the unknown information into the overall implication.

In the second part, various reading materials are chosen for the language learners for online or offline practices. To begin with, a distinction should be made between the ordinary senses of prediction and the actual context in the texts. In contrast, the sense of presupposition or prediction is restricted to certain pragmatic implications that seem to be built into the linguistic expressions. English reading is viewed as a linguistic communicative contextual-based process, necessitating students to exhibit an active learning motivation, develop learning goals, broaden their cultural knowledge, and improve reading competence. According to contextual adaptation theory, contextual adaptability is essential for reading comprehension. Thus, it's crucial for teachers to foster an understanding of contextual factors. In teaching reading materials, teachers should concentrate not just on vocabulary usage and sentence patterns but also on grasping the hints of contextual adaptability, examining the author's perspectives, and understanding the rationale for language choices within the texts. With the teacher's thorough explanations, students can enhance their comprehension of the texts. Hence, understanding linguistic meanings in reading should depend heavily on inter-textual context to uncover the text's deeper meanings and the author's intentions. While reading, it's crucial to first understand the article's central idea from a macro perspective, without overly concentrating on details that might overshadow the overall understanding. Teachers should develop students' awareness of inter-textual context, guiding them to leverage connections and relationships in lines to identify the article's theme and essence, thus enhancing their comprehension of the reading material. In the other hand, extra-textual context refers to the wide-ranging sociocultural factors that are implied in the reading texts. It is highlighted that language isn't isolated. It's a crucial reflection of various cultures. In EFL learning, numerous cultural terms stem from genres like Greek mythology, biblical narratives, legends, fairy tales, and classic literature, idioms, proper nouns, and metaphors with deep cultural and historical meanings. Thus, readers shouldn't merely observe the literal meanings but probe the cultural connotation of the target language. Students often ignore cultural terms in texts due to their unfamiliarity with cultures, hampering comprehension even in the absence of new vocabulary. To acclimate students to the extra-textual context, teachers should stress different cultural knowledge, highlight frequent cultural references in readings, encourage the exploration of extra-textual context, and underscore important historical and cultural events to boost reading comprehension.

The combination of linguistic guiding and traditional teaching methods in EFL contexts has been recognized as an effective pedagogical strategy.^[5] We argue that the theoretical terms also help readers to catch the ultimate meaning correctly and quickly. As for the last stage, reflection and integration are significant compared to the other two stages in improving the reading ability. Teachers and students should keep interaction after reading practice which the fruits are reflected by reviewing the application of the contextual adaptation theory to make a full explanation of how to put the theory in use during the reading practice. Take the article *Inaugural Address* as an example, "We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution. Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans". The sentence understanding involves the mental and social factors, that is, in Kennedy's mental world and in that society, he exhorts his countrymen and forcefully declares his determination to "pay any price" to defend human rights and liberty at home and around the world.

3.2 Analysis of the Three Worlds Based on Various Circumstances in the Texts

The contextual adaptation theory, as an utterer-based theory,^[3] should also be taken into consideration with reader-based reactions. We ought to clarify the contextual adaptability, including physical world, mental world and social world in the texts, to cultivate a comprehensive understanding that boosts students' English reading comprehension. Using reasoning and inferential questioning as a base, and guided by contextual adaptation theory, we should prompt students to merge diverse contextual elements, recognize the linguistic context, and precisely interpret texts' implicit meanings. This process starts with identifying the context from an initial text review, followed by students constructing contextual assumptions via a thorough analysis of writing settings. It's essential to recognize that although known information often are provided by communicative literal meanings, students may miss the unknown information or secondary information during reading due to its subtlety. The reasoning behind context construction is complex, especially for EFL learners, who might depend on common sense to more precisely capture the text's intended meanings. Authors weave contexts into subtle linguistic signals, leading students to identify the most pertinent links between the explicit context and deduced assumptions. This analytical method results in a thorough evaluation of the text, facilitating a deeper grasp of its primary themes and subtleties.

Teachers need to consider the influence of mental factors on reading comprehension within the contextual framework. Mental world like personality, emotions, and desires develop the interaction between communicators, as evident in character descriptions in texts. During reading process, students need to thoroughly comprehend these factors, alongside other physical factors, to precisely understand the texts' deeper meanings and real intentions. In English reading practice, the emphasis on contextual adaptability especially the vital role of socio-cultural factors in reading comprehension, is essential for teachers. Language serves not merely as a medium for expressing thoughts but also as a reflection of culture. Hence, acquiring a profound understanding of the cultural backdrop that the language embodies is imperative in the learning

journey. An in-depth comprehension of the history, culture, and traditions of the country of the target language will significantly influence students' understanding of the reading materials' authentic meanings. In summary, the selection and usage of language need to be aligned with the communicative context's physical, mental, and social worlds, necessitating students to not only master the language but also to profoundly comprehend and assimilate the actual context linked to the language.

At the same time, teachers still need to pay attention to the guiding role of psychological factors in contextual adaptation in reading comprehension. The psychological world includes cognitive and emotional factors such as personality, emotions, and desires of both parties involved in communication. The characters in the reading text, namely the communicators, reflect to varying degrees the process of interaction between the communicator's thoughts and language. Students should pay attention to understanding the communicator's psychological factors when reading, combine them with other contextual adaptation elements, and correctly understand the connotation of the reading text, clarifying the true writing purpose of the text.

3.3 Improve the Inferential Ability on the basis of Contextual Adaptability

Nowadays, there is much evidence that English poses an official language with the chance for it to be used for lingua franca communication.^[9] In college in China, there is an requirement for students to boost the inferential abilities of the target language. They should, within the realm of contextual adaptability, connect more intimately with the authors' three worlds by tapping into common background knowledge, encompassing both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects, and utilizing the readers' rational and inferential ability. For an accurate understanding of the text's contents, students must take into account the contexts and the pertinent factors above. This involves concentrating on the known and secondary information within the text's explicit context and any constructed contexts to draw inferences. Fundamentally, students should employ the text's explicit expressions to make logical inferences, thus enhancing their reading comprehension and analytical ability.

Once the explicit expression does not arise with secondary information, this maintains, quite simply, that we assert that this is implied meaning to be explored based on the three worlds of the authors. It is a close connection between known information and secondary information that cause the exact implication for a truth-based theory. Different focus of the information may result in different comprehension. We might reasonably argue that in reading tasks, gleaning information about the setting is vital to the entire process. Students should also explore implicit contextual connections within their perceived context, depending on their cognitive skills. Notions of cognitive skills can be seen or analyzed from the angles of logic and extra-textual contexts.

3.4 Focus on the reflection and cultural integration, Improve the Reading Competence

In Figure 3, from contextual adaptability, the implication should be appropriate or at least appropriate for both readers and authors. Otherwise, no reasonable or proper

expressions would be produced. After reading practice, beside the words and expressions for an article have been taken notes for the reasons of being chosen with the consideration of contextual adaptation theory which should be accepted by both sides of the readers and authors, we should emphasis the cultural integration or convergence.

Cultural factors considerably impact language understanding, requiring that language use be evaluated within its distinct cultural, social, mental, and physical contexts. Texts dealing with language expressions inevitably involve topics pertinent to societal or cultural elements. For instance, figurative usage in the texts in different languages may have different associations. In cultural communication, we may see what images of them can be brought about, and what context should be considered to observe the exact meaning of words and expressions from English to Chinese. Reading deals with cross-cultural communication, with the context which is formally encoded in the structures of the language, and with cultural integration, with words and expressions usage, so understanding and exploring appropriateness in the cultural context is a must for EFL learners. Understanding the texts in full depend on the readers' social and cross-cultural knowledge and all the properties addressed in the former parts. The constrains for the EFL learners vary a great deal in the cross-cultural expressions when they attempt to figure out the true meaning of different sentence patterns across a cultural or linguistic barrier. The involving aspects may be the expressions of the language structures, cultural specifics and tones of languages as well.

The cultural equivalent effect in reading aims at understanding implication in full, taking overall account of differences between the target language and source language in reading practice. The whole process of reading principles includes recognizing the appropriate forms of language to convey the intended meaning and linguistic force of the given message. Authors use language to communicate messages, rendering reading a cognitive activity that includes interpreting original contexts, reconstructing them, and utilizing readers' cognitive capacities. Among these aspects, students should particularly focus on the intercultural application of language in texts. While engaging with reading materials, students are charged with identifying authors' intended meanings, whether literal or metaphorical, based on phenomena unique to the originating society and culture. This holistic reading approach boosts students' capacity to rasp and value the intricate relationship among language, culture, and meaning.

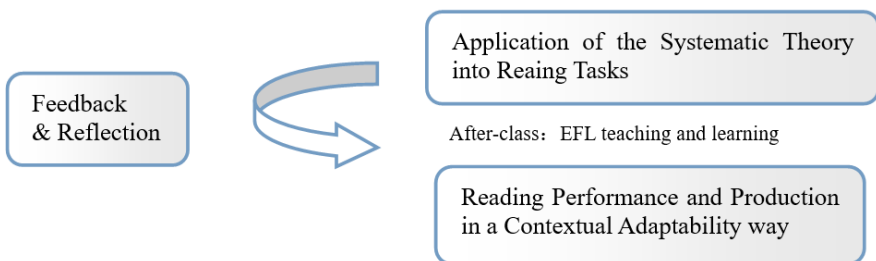


Fig. 3. Feedback and reflection in English reading teaching and learning

4 Conclusion

To conclude, we highlight the necessity for a practical usage of the application of contextual adaptation theory within the procedures of EFL learning and teaching. With the potentiality to encourage students to conduct the reading practices they are suggested to use the systematic theory tools for enhancing second-language engagement, promoting college educational experiences. Chinese and English, with their different systems and structures, pose unique comprehension challenges arising from variances in learners' linguistic knowledge, reading strategies, and the diverse elements addressed in this paper. Integrating contextual adaptation theory into teaching and learning methodologies can help overcome some of these challenges. I argue that reading's ultimate aim is to attain a thorough understanding of the text by considering all pertinent factors throughout the reading journey. This comprehensive strategy guarantees that learners can completely comprehend the textual meaning, accounting for the nuances of language use, cultural connotations, and contextual indicators.

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