

The Application of the Transactional Theory of Reading to Reading Instruction in the 21st Century Context

การประยุกต์ใช้ทฤษฎีการอ่านแบบทรานแซคชันนอลกับการสอนการอ่าน ในบริบทของศตวรรษที่ 21

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Abstract

Second language (L2) readers in the 21st century have to deal with the influx of L2 digital information and L2 texts. There is a concern that formats of digital texts and the huge amount of online information may lead into the shallow reading behavior among L2 learners where they take the role of a passive reader to seek for the information out of L2 texts. These L2 readers might ignore the in-depth reading that involves critical thinking and read without appreciation of reading. The Transactional Theory of Reading, though was first posited in the 20th century, fits with the instruction of L2 reading in the 21st century context. First, the theory emphasizes the active role of readers by positing that readers construct their own meaning of texts by relying upon their cultural, social, and personal history. Second, the theory enhances readers' higher-order thinking skills which are necessary for reading in the 21st century context.

Keywords: Teaching L2 reading, the Transactional Theory of Reading, Reading in the 21st century context

บทคัดย่อ

ผู้อ่านภาษาที่สองในศตวรรษที่ 21 ต้องประสบกับข้อมูลและบทอ่านในภาษาที่สองทั้งในรูปแบบดิจิทัล และรูปแบบเอกสารเป็นจำนวนมาก ซึ่งลักษณะดังกล่าว ก่อให้เกิดความกังวลว่ารูปแบบที่หลากหลายของบทอ่านแบบดิจิทัลและการมีแหล่งข้อมูลดิจิทัลจำนวนมากอาจนำไปสู่พฤติกรรมกรรมการอ่านแบบผิวเผินของผู้อ่านภาษาที่สองโดยผู้อ่านภาษาที่สองอาจเลือกใช้บทบาทการเป็นผู้อ่านเชิงรับเพื่อค้นหาข้อมูลที่ต้องการจาก

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เรื่องที่อ่านเท่านั้น ผู้อ่านภาษาที่สองอาจจะเลยการอ่านเชิงลึกที่ต้องใช้ทักษะการคิดวิเคราะห์ และขาดความสนใจในการอ่านเพื่อสุนทรียภาพ ทฤษฎีการอ่านแบบแทรนแซคชันนอล ถึงแม้ว่าจะได้รับการกล่าวถึงครั้งแรกในศตวรรษที่ 20 แต่มีความเหมาะสมกับการเรียนการสอนการอ่านภาษาที่สองในศตวรรษที่ 21 ประการแรก ทฤษฎีดังกล่าวให้ความสำคัญกับบทบาทเชิงรุกของผู้อ่านโดยผู้อ่านเป็นผู้ที่สร้างความหมายให้กับเรื่องที่อ่าน โดยใช้ความรู้ทั้งด้านวัฒนธรรมและสังคมรวมถึงประสบการณ์ของตนเอง ประการที่สอง ทฤษฎีดังกล่าวมุ่งเสริมสร้างทักษะกระบวนการคิดขั้นสูงซึ่งเป็นทักษะที่สำคัญในการอ่านในบริบทของศตวรรษที่ 21

คำสำคัญ: การสอนการอ่านในภาษาที่สอง ทฤษฎีการอ่านแบบแทรนแซคชันนอล การอ่านในศตวรรษที่ 21

1. Introduction

Teaching reading for comprehension has been one of the most challenging tasks for teachers, especially when it takes place in a second or foreign language classroom. In the 21st century, teaching second language (L2) reading comprehension is even more challenging when the communication technology has brought in the influx of information to L2 learners. L2 reading is, then, no longer limited to merely L2 printed materials provided in classrooms by teachers but comes in various forms of digital texts such as online blogs, websites, e-advertisements, electronic books, and emails. Many scholars (Nathan, 2010: p. 6-9; Wagner, 2008: p. 20-24) are concerned that the changing formats of texts and the huge amount of online information may lead into the shallow reading behavior (i.e. when readers skim and scan texts to seek for the information). Such readers are simply “decoders of information” (Nathan, 2010: p.6) or the meaning-receiver, who lose the ability to read and think deeply. If our L2 learners become familiar with their roles as a passive reader, their active reading skills in meaning making such as analyzing information, critical thinking, and problem solving which are necessary for productive citizens in the 21st century (Alexander, 2012: p.259-280; Wagner, 2008: p.20-24) will be limited.

Thus, besides focusing on L2 linguistic knowledge and cognitive strategies, the instruction of L2 reading in these days needs to vigorously encourage L2 learners to be an active reader who can think critically about texts, not just attain the information from texts. The Transactional Theory of Reading (Rosenblatt, 1969: p.41-47), though was posited in the 20th century, fits with the instruction of L2 reading in the 21st century context because of the following reasons. First, the theory emphasizes the active role of readers by positing that readers construct their own meaning of texts by relying upon their cultural, social, and personal

history. Therefore, readers are not a passive receiver of the information but play an important role in a meaning-constructing process (Rosenblatt, 1990: p.97-107). Second, the theory enhances readers' higher-order thinking skills (Bloom, 1956: p.10) (i.e. application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation) which are necessary for reading in the 21st century context. For example, when dealing with the huge amount of online texts, readers have to be able to analyze and synthesize the information from multiple sources and to evaluate the reliability of texts. The Transactional Theory of Reading encourages readers to read aesthetically (i.e. reading that involves ones' own life and linguistic experiences) so they become critical in their own reading process, which will later improve their critical reading ability and higher-order thinking skills. Also the theory recommends that teachers provide students opportunities to discuss with peers their interpretations of texts. Through this meaningful discussion, students develop their higher-order thinking ability such as summarizing and applying information, logical reasoning, text analysis, and argumentative thinking (Pennell, 2014: p.251-260; Wichadee, 2014: p.59-71).

It is remarkable that though the Transactional Theory of Reading has been proposed since 1969, its concepts of active reader and aesthetic reading can promote 21st century skills (Wagner, 2008: p.20-24) such as critical thinking, problem solving, and analyzing information. Then, this article aims to discuss salient features of reading in the 21st century context and their challenges to L2 reading classrooms as well as how the Transactional Theory of Reading is applied into classroom practices.

2. Features of reading in the 21st century context

In this 21st century, reading has been changing in many ways including its format and readers' reading behavior. For an L2 teacher to deliver an effective instruction of L2 reading, he or she has to understand how and what their students read in this 21st century. This section summarizes salient features of reading in the 21st century context based on the review of literature and previous studies.

2.1 Multimodal Text

In this age of print and digital technology, L2 readers do not read just a traditional text with only black and white colors, but they also encounter with multimodal texts that contain a variety of meaningful elements, such as images, colors, animated movements, sounds, music, different letter fonts, etc. These add-on elements of a multimodal text impact the meaning-making process and increase a variety of readers' interpretations of texts (Jewitt, 2005: p.316). When L2 readers read a multimodal text, they need to critically analyze the whole

text and direct themselves where or what elements in the reading text they should pay more or less attention on. Also, L2 readers in the 21st century must be aware that multiple interpretations are possible depending on the way they approach and transact with elements of a multimodal text. For example, when L2 readers read an online text that contains links to another webpage, some readers might click on these links and read directed texts before getting back to finish their first reading text. These L2 readers may get more information from that directed reading and have different interpretations of the first text from L2 readers who do not further their reading to another text.

In addition, most multimodal texts do not offer a single starting point and does not require a linear reading path; therefore, readers need to make the decision on a reading path by themselves (Jewitt, 2005: p. 315-331). With these demanding characteristics of multimodal texts in the print and digital technology age, L2 readers cannot depend only on their traditional skills of reading such as L2 linguistic knowledge to comprehend such texts (Coiro and Dobler, 2007: p. 214-257). Higher level of thinking skills including locating information, critically evaluating information, synthesizing information are considered necessary for reading in the 21st century (Kingsley, Cassady, and Tancock, 2015: p. 91-134).

2.2 Reading Comprehension from Multiple Sources

In the 21st century, readers are likely to draw comprehension from synthesizing the information from multiple sources as L2 reading becomes more accessible to L2 learners than it was. According to Nielsen Book's press release, the number of World English language books and digital texts published worldwide has been gradually increasing since 2001 (Nielsen Book, 2011: p.1). Also, E-learning business now is also expanding, and its global market was expected to grow to \$365 billion in 2003 (Web-Based Education Commission, 2000: p.2). The increasing number of print and digital texts indicates that our L2 learners might access more than one source of information for reading a topic. However, reading to gain comprehension from multiple sources can be an important challenge for many L2 learners because such reading needs to involve the application of various higher-level reading skills such as inferential reasoning and self-regulated reading strategies along with their prior knowledge on various topics, such as website structure and the reading topic (Coiro and Dobler, 2007: p.214-257). Therefore, L2 reading instruction needs to improve students' higher-level reading skills so they can cope up with reading for comprehension from multiple sources.

The two salient features of reading in the 21st century; multimodal texts and multiple source comprehension can possibly change L2 learners' reading behavior in some extent. When L2 learners confront the pool of information, they might ignore deep and critical reading and apply just skimming and scanning strategies to seek for the information from L2 texts. Studies found that when readers read electronic texts, they tend to read selectively and non-linearly by scanning and spotting keywords and spending less time on in-depth and critical reading (Liu, 2005: p. 700; Shabani, Kharaji, and Abedi, 2012: p.14). These readers would rather be considered as viewers than readers as they have little contact with texts and do not attain much information from texts (Nicholas and Clark, 2012: p.95).

When taken into account the two important features of L2 reading context in the 21st century; multimodal texts and multiple source comprehension, it is undeniable that reading for gist alone cannot lead L2 readers to success. A competent reader in the 21st century needs to be capable of; a) using both surface-level and deep processing strategies that fit with their purpose of reading, text structure, and context b) using relational reasoning strategies (Alexander, 2012: p.259-280) in order to derive relations of concepts between and among pieces of information, and c) making a self-justification based on the knowledge synthesized from multiple texts and on their prior knowledge on that topic. L2 teachers need to encourage L2 learners to be active readers rather than being simply a receiver of information.

3. The Transactional Theory of Reading

Though Rosenblatt proposed the Transactional Theory of Reading in 1969, its concepts of reading as transaction and readers' stance can serve as springboard for a discussion on reading instruction in the 21st century. First, the concept of reading as transaction has strengthen the active role of readers. Rosenblatt (1988: p. 2-3) explains that reading is a meaning-making process, occurring when readers transact with text in a particular context. In addition, each reader brings different experiences, background knowledge, and culture to each reading task; therefore, each reading event results in a different meaning (Rosenblatt, 1969: p.41-47). In short, readers construct meaning by drawing upon three key factors: the reader, text, and context. Then, it is possible that a text can mean different things to different readers or even to the same readers when reading in different contexts. Accordingly, the Transactional Theory of Reading views that reading is not a passive act of getting the information out of texts but it emphasizes the reader's active part of a meaning-making process.

Second, the Transactional Theory of Reading promotes the application of both superficial reading and deep-processing reading skills or named by Rosenblatt (1988: p. 3-4) as the efferent and aesthetic stance respectively. Rosenblatt (1988: p.3-4) proposes that the reading process is determined by the reader's stance which can be explained as a continuum where one end is the predominantly efferent stance, and the other end is the predominantly aesthetic stance. When a reader adopts an efferent stance, he or she focuses only on the public or surface meaning of texts. When he or she adopts an aesthetic reading, he or she involves the sensations, images, feelings, ideas, experiences, etc. to response to the text and to reach private aspects of meaning (Rosenblatt, 1988: p.3-4).

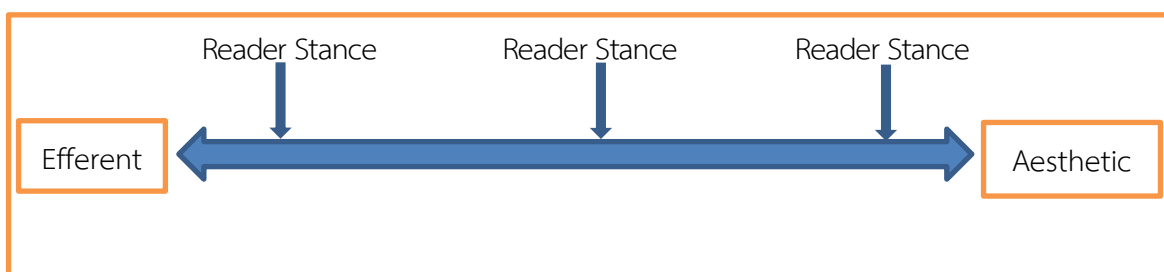


Figure 1. Efferent-Aesthetic Continuum.

4. How to apply the Transactional Theory of Reading to L2 reading Instruction in the 21st Century

“The teaching of reading at any level should become, first of all, the creation of environments and activities in which students are motivated and encouraged to draw on their own resources to make ‘live’ meanings (Rosenblatt, 1988: p. 13).”

As reading in the 21st century is moving towards a digital-based reading, it is likely that L2 learners now adopt more of the efferent stance when seeking for specific facts or ideas from the pool of L2 digital texts. These L2 learners might focus attention mainly on the public meaning and ignore the in-depth reading that involves the analyses and synthesis of the factual information with their own experiences, feeling, attitudes, etc. Parenti (2013: p.16-17) suggested that teachers should foster students’ use of both efferent and aesthetic reading when encountering with any kinds of texts in order to expand their understanding, critical and analytical reading, feeling, and perceiving of texts or to make ‘live’ meanings. So, regardless of types of texts, students should be encouraged to comprehend text by both acquiring facts and

analyzing how such texts relate to them. Rosenblatt (1969: p.41-47) suggested that group interchange about texts can be a powerful means to develop growth in reading ability and critical thinking skills. When students share their responses with peers and find that their interpretations differ, they will return to the text to find out why they arrive at such interpretations and reconsider whether their interpretation is well-constructed from enough textual information. Through this process, students are self-critical on their own reading process and will later become active, critical readers.

In short, the Transactional Theory of Reading emphasizes that the instruction of reading needs to guide students to be able to adopt an appropriate reader stance and that discussion on reading interpretation is a vital classroom activity that fosters an active role and critical thinking among students. These 2 main concepts are applied into the L2 reading instruction in the 21st century as follows.

First, peer reading and a discussion of the interpretation of multimodal texts between teacher and students and among students themselves should be a focus of reading instruction in the 21st century since texts, especially multimodal texts carry various meaningful elements which can bring in different meanings to different readers. When students share and discuss their responses to texts with peers, they have to be able to identify particular elements or parts of the text that support their interpretation. Arriving at different interpretations encourages students to reexamine their interpretations of the multimodal text before making justification of interpretation of text. Then, they become “aware of and critical of their own processes as readers” (Rosenblatt, 1988: p. 13).

Second, reading instruction in the 21st century has to teach students to be able to adopt an appropriate stance when reading. Young readers have to be encouraged to read from both efferent and aesthetic stance. For some L2 students, reading from multiple L2 text sources can be boring and tiring because of factors, such as unfamiliar vocabulary and sentence structure. As a result, some L2 students tend to adopt an efferent stance, speeding their reading and reading simply to seek for some facts from those multiple sources without considering whether or not an efferent stance fits with their reading purposes. For example, when L2 students are assigned to write a paper on the analyses of cultural diversity among Asian countries, some students may adopt only an efferent stance when reading. As such, their paper might present only a combination of facts attained from different text sources. However, if students adopt both efferent and aesthetic stances when reading text sources, their paper may

present the analyses of such facts and their personal experience which serve the objective of the assignment. The latter group of students adopt a more appropriate reader stance so they do not read just to attain facts but read critically to gain an insight into reading. Therefore, teachers of L2 reading in the 21st century should provide classroom activities that encourage students to read from both stances, especially aesthetic reading because it requires students to employ higher-level reading skills such as critical reading and synthesizing which are necessary skills for reading in the 21st century. For example, teacher may assign students to read a text with 2 different sets of guided questions. The first set of questions consists of questions that focus on efferent reading, asking facts, such as what happened? where did it happen?, and when did it happen? A second set of questions has questions that focus on aesthetic reading, such as how do you feel after you read the story? If you were ...(name of a character), would you do or think the same way as him or her? When students get familiar with reading from both stances, it will become their reading habit. When they have to read for comprehension from multiple sources, they are likely to take risks to employ higher-level reading skills to gain insight into reading though it is more time consuming comparing to skimming and scanning for facts.

5. The Instructional approaches based on the Transactional Theory of Reading

The following section delineates the instructional approaches which are based on the Transactional Theory of Reading: Transactional Literature Discussions (Dugan, 1997: p.86-96) and Transactional Strategy Instruction (Casteel, Isom, and Jordan, 2000: p.67-74).

5.1 Transactional Literature Discussions (TLD)

The TLD approach (Dugan, 1997: p.87) is based on the beliefs that reading is a social act, and meaning is constructed when readers respond to a text and reflect on their responses. It suggests reading instruction consists of 6 cyclical events; *getting ready*: group reviews and predictions, *reading and thinking aloud*: group reading and sharing thoughts, *wondering on paper*: students' and teachers' writing on short responses to the story, *talking*: group discussion on responses and reflections, *thinking on paper*: writing journals, and *looking back*: group reviews what was learned (Dugan, 1997: p.87-88). These cyclical events of Transactional Literature Discussions might be illustrated as in Figure 2.

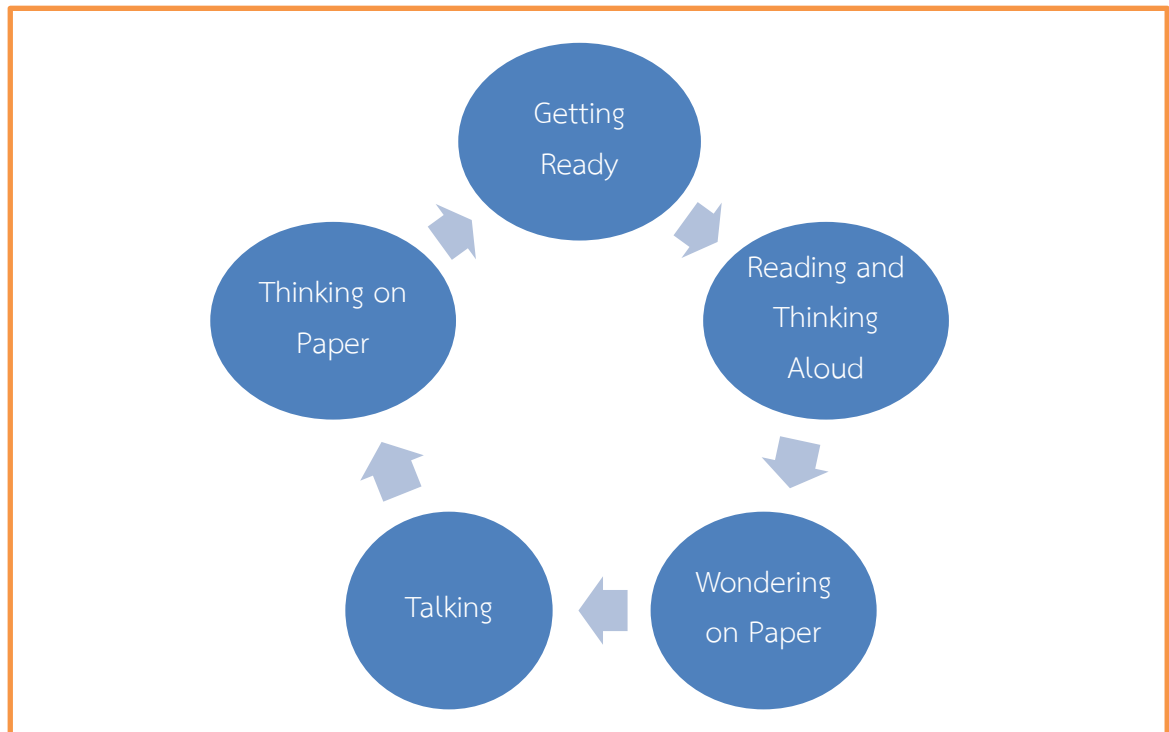


Figure 2: The Cyclical Events of Transactional Literature Discussions

Dugan (1997: p. 86-96) put an emphasis on the *talking* event as a crucial part for learners understanding. The approach posits that reflecting on responses can help students make the decision to modify, reject, or accept such responses. Students, then, synthesize the information from their responses, thoughts from the talk sessions, and textual clues to comprehend texts. This activity can effectively enhance students' critical and synthesis reading skills.

5.2 Transactional Strategy Instruction (TSI)

The Transactional Strategy Instruction (Casteel, Isom, and Jordan, 2000: p.67) aims to develop 6 reading strategies throughout 3 instructional phases including *explanation and modeling*, *practice and coaching*, and *transfer of responsibility*. The reading strategies include predicting, monitoring and fix-up, question and answering, summarizing, organizing, and personal application of information. During the explanation and modeling phase, teachers define, explain, and model how to use strategies, and teachers' think-aloud methodology is suggested in this first phase. In the second phase, students practice the strategies along with teachers' coaching. In this phase, teachers may consider re-modeling the strategies or asking process questions (e.g. Why did you choose that strategy? How is it helpful?) (Casteel, Isom, and Jordan, 2000: p. 67-

74). In the final phase, teachers let students select and apply strategies by themselves, and they may model their use of the strategies for their peers.

Throughout practicing these strategies, readers improve higher level of reading skills such as analytical and synthesizing reading skills. The reading strategies focused in this instructional approach also develop students' in-depth reading behavior and encourage readers to develop personal contact with texts.

6. Conclusion

Our L2 learners in the 21st century have to deal with the changing context of L2 reading. Besides the influx of L2 information, L2 texts nowadays are more complex and demanding, and a competent L2 reader requires higher-order of reading skills such as synthesizing and critical reading in addition to their L2 linguistic knowledge. As a result, the L2 reading instruction can no longer focus only on improving students' ability to extract meaning from texts but also on developing students to be an active reader who can deal with a multimodal text and synthesize knowledge from multiple sources. The Transactional Theory of Reading fosters this active role of readers. Two instructional approaches: Transactional Literature Discussions (TLD) and Transactional Strategy Instruction (TSI) might be used as a framework for teachers of L2 reading to develop a reading curriculum or to design a classroom activity that can enhance the active role of readers among their L2 students.

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