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Review Article

Pragmatic Presupposition and College English Writing

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Abstract: Among four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, writing is a comprehensive reflection of one's English level. The traditional teaching of English writing mostly emphasizes semantic aspects such as vocabulary, sentence pattern and grammar, which leads to the phenomenon of lacking of the coherence, simplicity and reader's awareness in English writing. While presupposition refers to the preconditions that must be satisfied by the writer in order to ensure the appropriateness of the discourse. Pragmatic presupposition, a pragmatic concept of presupposition, is the hypotheses made by the writer to the common ground and discourse appropriateness before communicating, which provides a good training method of discourse organization for college student's English writing. It is of great importance to improve the coherence, simplicity and reader's awareness of college student's English writing. Under the perspective of the theory, this paper mainly analyzes the students' CET 6 writing from three aspects of coherence, simplicity and reader's awareness of pragmatic presupposition. It aims to verify the feasibility of pragmatic presupposition in college student's English writing. Moreover, it provides important guidance for improving the coherence, simplicity and reader's awareness of college student's English writing.

Keywords: pragmatic presupposition, college student's English writing, coherence, simplicity, reader's awareness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Many researchers started to research the semantic presupposition in the end of 1900s. Frege (1892) initially presents the concept of presupposition and signifies that no matter people makes what kind of assertions, there must be obvious presupposition. Russell (1905) claims that when the noun of one sentence doesn't have the referent, the truth or false value of a sentence still could be judged. Strawson (1950) maintains that an abstract sentence doesn't have the truth or false value, but the assertion could be judged. Levinson (1983) argues that one of the primary advantages of presupposition theory is that can explain people's intuition towards language. Until 1970s, researchers focused on the pragmatic attribute of presupposition and made the definition of pragmatic presupposition. With the development of pragmatic presupposition, it has been applied into various fields, such as literary works, advertisement, translation, etc. Wang Shouyuan & Miao Xingwei (2003) explores the important role of pragmatic presupposition in the construction of literary discourse. Kuang Yao (2009) discusses the enlightenment of pragmatic

presupposition to English writing teaching. Wang Shuxia (2010) uses presupposition theory to analyze English advertisements and make some suggestions. Geng Zhi & Wang Yuping (2013) investigate the relationship of presupposition and translation. Under the theory of pragmatic presupposition, this paper makes an analysis of students' CET 6 writing from three aspects of coherence, simplicity and reader's awareness, which equips two levels of research significance. In terms of theory, it verifies the feasibility of pragmatic presupposition in college student's English writing. For practice, it provides important guidance for improving the coherence, simplicity and reader's awareness of college student's English writing.

2 Pragmatic Presupposition Theory

Pragmatic presupposition contains three kinds of basic concepts from different angles as proper condition, two parties and context. The first view recognizes that pragmatic presupposition is a proper condition to be fulfilled for a speech act (Fillmore, 1971). The second view illustrates that it is the common knowledge or the background information known by

both parties (Stalnaker, 1991). The third view suggests that it is a kind of pragmatic reasoning, which denotes what is sensitive to the context or what has a prerequisite relation with speaker's belief, attitude and intention (He, 1997). What's more, pragmatic presupposition covers two major characteristics summarized by Levinson (1983). One is the felicity, the other is the common ground. Felicity is equivalent to three suitable conditions, that is, the speaker must equip the right to perform certain behavior, keep sincerity to own speech act, and can't go back to what he says (Austin, 1962). Common ground directs the mutual knowledge or background information known by both parties and it will be hinted by writer's text, which gains the comprehend of the reader (Wei, 2014).

Pragmatic presupposition includes three types of discourse functions as coherence, simplicity and reader's awareness. Presupposition coherence could be presented by two ways that the presupposition imposes information constraint on discourse flow. One means that it presupposes to limit the linear arrangement of the propositions in discourse, that is, the arrangement of information must conform to the principle of increasing information. The other shows that it presupposes continuation constraint on the development of discourse flow, that is, the subsequent proposition should not contradict the precondition of the previous proposition (Giora, 1997). Presupposition simplicity indicates that presupposition is embedded in sentences or phrases in an implicit way, that is, a "language reduction" that follows an "economic principle". When constructing discourse, the writer should highlight the main information and background the minor information in the form of presupposition that mainly expressed by subordinated clauses (Dillon, 1981). Reader's awareness means that the author sets the reader object in the writing process, tries to establish and maintain a smooth communication relationship with the reader to realize the purpose of writing, or refers to the author's need to think about the reader's needs in writing and try to cater to the needs and the psychological factors of the reader (Fillmore, 1971).

3 Pragmatic Presupposition and College English Writing

Among four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, writing is a comprehensive reflection of one's English level. The traditional teaching of English writing mostly emphasizes semantic aspects such as vocabulary, sentence pattern and grammar, which leads to the phenomenon of lacking of the coherence, simplicity and reader's awareness in English writing. Pragmatic presupposition is the hypothesis made by the speaker to the common ground and discourse appropriateness before communicating, which provides a good training method of discourse organization for college student's English writing. This part attempts to take the specific problems of student's writing as example to explore the significance of pragmatic presupposition in college English writing from three aspects of presupposition coherence, simplicity and reader's awareness. Through analyzing student's writing, it is obvious that the writing exists a great many problems in the levels of coherence, simplicity and reader's awareness.

As for the coherence, the first example of the student's writing is seriously lack of logical and discourse coherence, for example, the first sentence mainly talks about the waste phenomenon on the campus, but the second clause gives the conclusion of the waste, which doesn't fit in the coherence principle that the following content should not contradict the previous proposition. When one thing doesn't clearly state in detail, two or even three different things are written in the first paragraph, which contradicts the precondition of the previous content. Moreover, there is little relevance, contact and cohesion between sentences and sentences and between paragraphs and paragraphs, especially for the first and second paragraph, the last sentence of the first paragraph gives an example of the waste on campus but the second paragraph starts with the negative effect of waste, showing the loss of a coherent common ground. Nevertheless, the expression of the second example is much clear and the text coherence is more prominent, for instance, the second and third sentences properly describe the detailed phenomenon on the campus in the first sentence of the revision one, and the last sentence is a conclusion drawn from the former clauses that relates with the negative effects of waste in the following paragraph. The common ground of presupposition coherence is that when texts all keep the principle of informative constraint following the rule of increasing information and presupposition consistency, which can greatly improve the coherence of English writing.

1) **A:** Recently there has been a phenomenon on our campus--waste, too much waste. **B:** Students of today has forgotten the past of China and discarded the great virtue of plain lifestyle.
C: In the dining hall, you may hear a student say:"gosh, this food is so bad. I don't wanna eat it." And she just dumps everything.
D: Take up my classmate's notebook as an example, he uses only one or two pages of each notebook and changes new ones at the beginning of every semester.

E: Waste Leads To Negative Effects.

2) **A:** Recently there has been a phenomenon on our campus--waste, too much waste. **c:** In the dining hall, you may hear a student say:"gosh, this food is so bad. I don't wanna eat it." And she just dumps everything.
D: Take up my classmate's notebook as an example, he uses only one or two pages of each notebook and changes new ones at the beginning of every semester.

B: Therefore, students of today has forgotten the past of China and discarded the great virtue of plain lifestyle.

E: Waste Leads To Negative Effects.

In terms of the simplicity, the example three of student's writing has some repeated parts to make the writing like a journal account that seems to deliberately piece together words as if there is nothing to say, for instance, " I don't wanna eat it" already supposes "she just dumps everything" and vice versa; "we should advocate all our schoolmates" overlaps with " We will ask them to reduce waste voluntarily ", which not only emphasizes the main information but focuses on the minor information leading to whole writing in disorder. In general, it is inappropriate for the detailed and abbreviated writing, which affects the quality of the article. In addition, numerous students in college English writing will write lots of simple sentences to repeat one thing, which leads to redundant sentences, loose structures and unobtrusive theme. This style of writing will not add color to the content, but will make the article messy and chaos. However, the revision of sample four has a clear thinking, brief expression and coherent content by applying the presupposition simplicity, for instance, it changes the first paragraph in the student's writing through deleting and merging the repeated presupposition information. It is essential for expressing concisely and compactly on account of the presupposition, highlighting the significant information and slightly showing the relevant background information.

3) In the dining hall, you may hear a student say: "gosh, this food is so bad. I don't wanna eat it." And she just dumps everything.

First, we should advocate all our schoolmates. We will ask them to reduce waste voluntarily.

4) In the dining hall, a student may say:"gosh, this food is so bad." And she just dumps everything.

First, We Should Call On Students To Voluntarily Reduce Waste.

With regard to the reader's awareness, sample five of student's writing makes the mistake of the identity confusion, creating a great obstacle to the reader's understanding as the student uses "waste" at first, changes it into "our country" that seems to discuss the effect, then turns it as "any children", and becomes " the materials in China", and at last shows "everyone". The changing perspective seriously affects the transmission of information text, which hinders the reader's comprehension of the article. What's more, the student over-strengthens the expression of his own subjective intention and doesn't take into account the reader's factor, which obstructs the effective transmission of textual information on the whole.

Presupposition reader's awareness implies that the writer should estimate the reader's social background, cultural level, thinking mode and psychological factor by pragmatic presupposition in advance in order to construct the target context and proper discourse avoiding the improper wording, inappropriate tone, incorrect writing. Moreover, the writer needs to consider the relationship with the reader, so as to determine whether the text is constructed from the perspective of self or from the angle of the reader, narrow the distance from the reader and regard the reader as the same group as the writer.

5) <u>Waste</u> leads to negative effects. As can be seen, <u>our country</u> is still in his initial period. That is to say, <u>there are still any children </u>who do not have enough money to feel themselves or get the opportunities for education. Further, <u>the materials in China</u> are very limited. <u>If everyone</u> wastes a little, that amounts to a great amount.

4 CONCLUSIONS

In general, this CET 6 writing has certain shortcomings in the discourse function of pragmatic presupposition as coherence, simplicity and reader's awareness. As for the coherence, the writer disobeys the principle of the information increment and non-contradictory content. In terms of the simplicity, the writer depicts information that duplicates with the previous presupposition. As regard to the reader's awareness, the writer describes a topic from a disorderly view, which interrupts readers' thinking and hinders readers' understanding. The research indicates that applying pragmatic presupposition into English writing teaching is of great concern in improving the coherence, enhancing the simplicity and increasing reader's awareness of college students' English writing. Besides, there are some revelations for writers. Firstly, the writer should broaden the presuppositional culture and background knowledge in order to improve the discourse coherence. Secondly, the writer can make use of several presupposition trigers to succinctly organize the structure of texts. Finally, the writer is able to play the meta-pragmatic function of pressupposition in the discorse to culitivate reader's awareness. However, there also exists a limitation in this study that the selection of corpus is small and may not be representative. Bearing it in mind, the pragmatic presupposition also plays a guiding role in English writing teaching. Any researchers who are interested in the pragmatic presupposition could do some scientific empirical researches in English listening, speaking, reading and writing for promoting the development of English teaching.

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