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Original Paper

Practical Approaches for Cultural Awareness Cultivation in Discourse Teaching

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Abstract

Discourse teaching plays a pivotal role in reconciling the instrumental and humanistic objectives of the English curriculum. Taking Unit 3 Diverse Cultures from the PEP Compulsory Book 3 as a case, this paper investigates how discourse analysis can be applied to foster cultural awareness, examining the text along four dimensions: theme, structure, content, and meaning. This multi-dimensional approach enables teachers to uncover the cultural underpinnings of the text, identify effective ways of cultural interpretation, and ultimately align language learning with the cultivation of cultural awareness.

Keywords

discourse teaching, cultural awareness, language learning

1. Introduction

The English curriculum comprises six core elements: theme, discourse, language knowledge, cultural knowledge, language skills, and learning strategies. Among these elements, discourse serves as a major vehicle for language and cultural knowledge through which thematic meanings are constructed, while also exposing students to diverse cultural resources. Culture, in turn, provides rich contexts for language learning, and at the same time, the deeper understanding of discourse is inseparable from an appreciation of its cultural meanings. In other words, language learning and cultural learning are closely intertwined (Yu, 2019). If language teaching places excessive emphasis on the instrumental function of language and pays insufficient attention to the cultural factors involved in language use, it may lose both its vitality and sustainability. Such an approach not only limits the development of students' communicative competence and affective growth but may also undermine the effectiveness of language learning. Senior high school English textbooks, as important carriers of cultural content and key resources for fulfilling curricular goals, should embrace the diversity of world cultures and present multicultural perspectives (Zhang & Li, 2022). Consequently, in daily teaching, teachers should engage

in close discourse analysis, thoroughly exploring the cultural knowledge embedded in particular themes to help students learn English in an integrated manner.

2. Practice of Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis helps teachers gain an overall view of a unit theme, identify connections among texts, and explore the cultural meanings and educational values embedded in them. A systematic examination of discourse enables teachers to move beyond the surface information of a text and consider the relationship among language, organization, content, and meaning. This can provide a clearer basis for setting instructional objectives and designing activities. In particular, close attention to cultural elements can help teachers identify cultural information, differences, and values in the text, thereby supporting the development of students' cultural awareness through language learning.

Following the requirements for discourse analysis specified in the English Curriculum Standards, this study takes *Unit 3mDiverse Cultures* from PEP Compulsory Book 3 as an example and examines the unit from four dimensions: theme, structure, content, and meaning. These dimensions are closely related. The theme provides the overall direction for analysis, structure shows how information is organized, content presents the cultural information contained in the texts, and meaning reveals the ideas and values conveyed through them. Examining the unit from these four perspectives provides a more complete view of its instructional value and lays a foundation for developing students' cultural awareness.

2.1 Integration of the Unit Theme

Compared with traditional teaching approaches, unit-based holistic instruction takes full account of the connections among different sections and learning materials and enables teachers to coordinate instructional content across the unit. In doing so, it can effectively reduce the fragmentation of learning content (Wang, 2023). The texts in this unit are presented in multiple forms, including spoken, audio, and written discourse, and focus primarily on how cultural diversity is manifested in different aspects of life, such as native languages, customs and traditions, and cultural backgrounds. By guiding students to recognize the coexistence of diverse cultures, the unit aims to deepen their understanding of and respect for cultural similarities and differences, foster openness and inclusiveness, and encourage them to contribute actively to the harmonious development of cultural diversity.

In the newly issued senior high school English curriculum standards, thematic contexts are grouped into three broad domains: Man and Self, Man and Nature, and Man and Society (Jiang, 2018). This unit falls under the thematic context of Man and Society. Its texts are closely connected and arranged in a progressive sequence. Together, they present the theme of "diverse cultures" from multiple perspectives.

The first text appears in the Listening and Speaking section. It features a radio interview about food in the United States. Students explore the diversity of American food culture and its historical links to immigration. The familiar topic of food thus serves as an accessible entry point to cultural diversity.

The second text, *Li Lan's Travel Journal*, recounts Li Lan's one-day trip to San Francisco. It covers street art and local food, the history of immigration to California presented in a museum, and Chinese food culture in Chinatown. Through the traveler's perspective, students gain a vivid impression of San Francisco as a multicultural city.

The third text appears in the Listening and Talking section and focuses on discussing the cultures of China's ethnic minority groups. Through pictures and other multimodal resources, students are guided to learn about and discuss the distinctive cultural features of different ethnic groups in China. In this way, the unit shifts students' perspective from multiculturalism in the United States back to cultural diversity within China.

The fourth text asks students to describe a place with distinctive cultural identity. Using an introductory text about Chinatown as a model, it guides students to examine how a particular place can embody a distinctive cultural identity and then transfer what they have learned to their own written expression.

Across the four texts, listening, speaking, reading, and writing are progressively integrated. Such integration helps connect different levels of knowledge through value-oriented learning (Jiang & Li, 2025). Students move from perceiving cultural phenomena and understanding cultural meanings to comparing cultures and expressing cultural identity. In this process, they gradually develop respect for cultural differences and openness to cultural diversity.

2.2 Analysis of Discourse Structure

An analysis of discourse structure helps reveal how information is organized and how the different parts of a text work together. By examining the overall organization, teachers can identify the main narrative line, clarify the function of each part, and trace the development of the text. Such analysis also helps students locate key information and follow the writer's train of thought. This section takes Li Lan's Travel Journal as an example. Figure 1 presents the structure of the text.

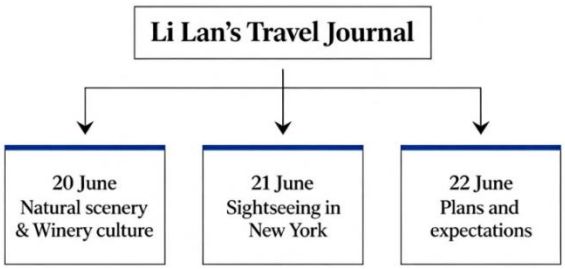


Figure 1. Structure of *Li Lan's Travel Journal*

As shown in Figure 1, the text is organized in chronological order. Time expressions and changes in location serve as important structural markers, linking different stages of Li Lan's journey. This organization is consistent with the conventions of a travel journal, in which events are usually presented according to the order in which they occur. The chronological framework makes the sequence of events easy to follow and gives the narrative a clear direction. It begins with descriptions

of natural scenery and a visit to a winery, which introduce both the landscape and local culture. The narrative then moves to the city tour, where the writer experiences diverse culture. Finally, the text reflects on the journey, outlines future travel plans, and expresses expectations for further cultural exploration. The organization also shows a clear movement from description to reflection. At first, the writer focuses mainly on what she sees and experiences. As the narrative develops, more personal responses are included. By the end of the text, the focus has shifted to what the journey means to the writer and what she plans to explore next. This change in focus adds depth to the narrative without interrupting its chronological flow. The structure therefore serves more than a sequencing function. It shapes the pace of the narrative and connects individual experiences into a complete travel account. Examining this organization can help students recognize how chronology, transitions, and paragraph functions contribute to textual coherence. It also provides a structural basis for further analysis of the content and thematic meaning of the text.

2.3 Examination of Discourse Content

After identifying the structure, teachers need to conduct a close reading of the text. Key textual information can then be organized and presented visually to support deeper comprehension. This approach helps students quickly locate relevant information and gradually build their knowledge of cultural diversity through reading. Such knowledge may include traditional culture, ethnic cultures, local cultures, and intercultural communication (Jiang & Wang, 2020).

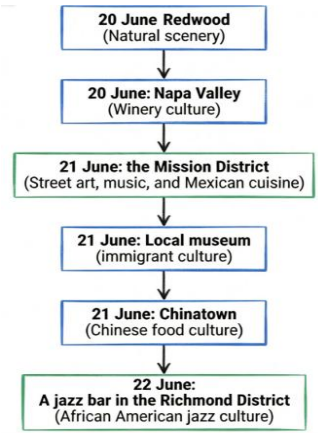


Figure 2. Travel Route and Its Represented Cultures

As shown in Figure 2, Li Lan's travel route provides the main narrative structure, while her cultural experience forms an underlying thematic line. The text describes what she sees, hears, and experiences in San Francisco and nearby areas. Each stop on the route represents a different cultural community. The Mission District reflects Latino immigrant culture, the museum presents the history of immigration in California, Chinatown highlights Chinese immigrant culture, and the jazz bar in the Richmond District draws attention to African American cultural contributions. Together, these locations show the cultural diversity of San Francisco. The arrangement of these locations gives the text a clear

progression and helps illustrate how different cultures coexist in the city, reinforcing the theme of "diverse cultures."

However, because of its limited length and genre, the passage provides little cultural background information. Students who lack relevant background knowledge may find it difficult to understand some of the emotions and cultural meanings in the text. Teachers can address this problem by providing essential cultural information at key points during close reading. Specifically, cultural background information can be added at the following two points.

At the beginning of the text, Li Lan writes, "Today was my first day back in San Francisco. I have to admit that it definitely feels good to be back in the city again." She then exclaims, "What a city!" Yet the text does not explain what lies behind this reaction. It briefly mentions that "the city rebuilt itself after the 1906 earthquake," but this single reference may not give Chinese students a clear sense of the devastation caused by the disaster or the challenges of rebuilding the city. As a result, they may miss the admiration expressed in Li Lan's exclamation. At this point, teachers can show a short video about the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. Images of the city after the disaster can then be contrasted with the lively modern city described in the text. This contrast helps students understand the city's recovery and the admiration conveyed by "What a city!" It also provides an emotional context for their later exploration of San Francisco's cultural diversity.

A second point for cultural supplementation can be placed in the third paragraph. The text includes a key sentence: "When these immigrants left their countries, they carried a bit of home in their hearts, and built a new home here." The word "home" appears twice, but the two uses carry different meanings. "What is the specific meaning of 'home'?" can be seen as a kind of context-related question. It focuses on the relationship between linguistic forms and the contexts in which it is used (Liu, 2025). Students are expected to consider contextual factors such as cultural background and communicative situations, examine whether such expressions are appropriate in the context, and explore the meanings they convey. This process can further lead students to identify the writer's intended purpose. In terms of the meaning of "home", the first refers to an emotional and cultural sense of belonging, including memories of one's homeland, language, customs, and ethnic identity. The second refers to a new place of belonging, together with new work, new prospects, and the new ideas and practices that Chinese immigrants developed in their new environment. Without some knowledge of Chinese migration to the United States in the nineteenth century, students may struggle to understand the tension between these two meanings of home. Why did the immigrants leave their homeland? What did they experience after arriving in the United States? How did they establish new lives in an unfamiliar society? To provide this context, teachers can assign a short reading on Chinese immigrants during the Gold Rush before the lesson. The reading may introduce their labor on the Central Pacific Railroad, the discrimination and exclusion they faced, and their efforts to preserve Chinese cultural traditions in Chinatown while adapting to a new society. With this background, students can return to the sentence "carried a bit of home in their hearts, and built a new home here" with a fuller understanding. They can see that it

describes more than the immigrants' physical relocation. It also reflects both the preservation of cultural traditions and the formation of a new cultural life. Such background knowledge helps students understand not only how San Francisco became culturally diverse, but also the historical experiences and emotional memories behind that diversity.

The two additions address gaps in students' historical knowledge from two perspectives: urban reconstruction and immigration. The first helps students understand how San Francisco developed into a multicultural city, while the second draws attention to the experiences and emotions of the communities. By identifying key points that require cultural context and providing relevant background information, teachers can create a foundation for developing students' cultural awareness.

2.4 Exploration of Thematic Meaning

A text is not only a form of language but also a reflection of the writer's thinking (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009). When analyzing a text, teachers should look beyond the connections among its ideas and examine the cultural meanings it conveys. This helps reveal the deeper significance of the theme. Besides, the exploration of thematic meaning involves the broader insights that students develop through reflection on the content of a theme. Close analysis of discourse can help students move beyond surface information and develop a deeper interpretation of the theme (Guo, 2026). *Li Lan's Travel Journal* presents the cultural diversity of San Francisco. In analyzing the text, teachers can consider two questions: Why has San Francisco become a multicultural city? What impact has cultural diversity had on the city's development? These questions encourage students to move beyond identifying examples of cultural diversity and explore the historical and social factors that have shaped it. Teachers can also connect the text with students' home culture. China is a multiethnic country with rich cultural diversity. Students can explore the diversity of Chinese food cultures and ethnic minority cultures and compare them with those of San Francisco. Such comparisons help students gain insight into the cultural contexts of different societies and reinforce the meaning of the unit theme. They also broaden students' awareness of cultural diversity and foster a stronger sense of identification with and confidence in their own culture.

3. Conclusion

Developing cultural awareness is not an overnight endeavor; it demands sustained effort and creative design. Taking Li Lan's Travel Journal as a case, this paper has conducted a systematic discourse analysis along four dimensions: theme, structure, content, and meaning. It reveals that a seemingly simple travel journal can serve as a rich vehicle for multicultural knowledge and affective attitudes. Only by continuously improving their curriculum literacy, professional expertise, and intellectual competence can teachers identify meaningful entry points for cultural education in text analysis, integrate language learning with cultural development, and guide students from simply knowing what cultures exist toward how to engage with cultural diversity. In this way, discourse teaching can truly fulfill its educational value, and the instrumental and humanistic values of the English curriculum can

be integrated in classroom practice. Ultimately, this helps students improve their language proficiency while growing into a new generation with a strong sense of national identity, a global perspective, and cross-cultural communication competence.

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