

Penetration Path and Practical Exploration of Frame-Switching Theory in College English Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of the growing urgency for cross-cultural communication in globalization, this paper takes Frame-Switching Theory as the core research object. It systematically sorts out the origin, core concepts and related supporting theories of the theory through the literature research method, explores the penetration paths and application strategies of the theory in classrooms by combining the case study method with the teaching practice of college English vocabulary, grammar, reading and writing, —using specific examples from the text *Leading Across Cultures: Mastering Persuasion Techniques for Global Business Success* — and analyzes the teaching effect using the comparative research method. It finds that integrating Frame-Switching Theory into college English teaching, with the support of real cross-cultural text cases, can effectively break the limitations of traditional teaching, help students construct multi-dimensional language cognitive frameworks, and improve their abilities in vocabulary comprehension and expansion, grammatical application in context, in-depth text interpretation and critical thinking, as well as writing logic organization, providing a new theoretical perspective and practical paradigm for the reform of college English teaching and offering an operable practical path and theoretical support for enhancing students' cross-cultural pragmatic competence.

KEYWORDS

Frame-switching theory; Teaching strategies; Cross-cultural pragmatic competence; Cognitive linguistics; Semantic framework

1 Introduction

Driven by the wave of globalization, English, as an international language, has become increasingly important in fields such as cross-cultural communication, academic research, and career development. As an important part of higher education, college English teaching undertakes the responsibility of cultivating students' good comprehensive English application ability, playing a crucial role in enhancing students' international competitiveness, promoting cross-cultural communication, and advancing academic development. The *College English Teaching Guidelines* clearly states that college English teaching should focus on developing students' comprehensive English application ability, especially cross-cultural communication ability, to meet the needs of the country's foreign exchange and development. It not only helps students broaden their international horizons, access more extensive knowledge and information, but also provides strong support for their future development in academic research and career.

Against this background, many educators have been continuously exploring new teaching theories and methods. As an important theory in the field of cognitive linguistics, Frame-Switching Theory provides a new perspective and idea for college English teaching. This theory emphasizes the dynamic switching of cognitive frameworks in the process of language comprehension and expression, which is particularly applicable to the interpretation of cross-cultural texts such as *Leading Across Cultures: Mastering Persuasion Techniques for Global Business Success*. By using this text as a teaching carrier, the theory can help students deeply understand the cultural differences in communication styles, thereby conducive to in-depth understanding of the nature and laws of language learning and providing useful guidance for improving college English teaching.

2 Overview of frame-switching theory

2.1 Origin and development of the theory

Frame-Switching Theory originated in the field of cognitive linguistics in the 1980s, and its ideological origin can be traced back to "Frame Semantics" proposed by linguist Fillmore. Fillmore believed that vocabulary and grammatical structures in language are associated with specific cognitive frameworks, and people need to activate the corresponding cognitive frameworks to accurately grasp the meaning of language when understanding it. On this basis, subsequent scholars further expanded the research scope of cognitive frameworks and put forward the concept of "frame-switching", which means that when facing different language situations or cultural backgrounds, people will adjust or switch their existing cognitive frameworks according to contextual information to achieve effective understanding and expression of language.

Since the 1990s, Frame-Switching Theory has been widely applied in fields such as psychology, sociology, and cross-cultural communication studies. In the field of language teaching, foreign scholars took the lead in introducing this theory into the research of second language teaching, believing that frame-switching ability is a key factor for second language

learners to achieve language fluency and accuracy. In recent years, with the continuous advancement of college English teaching reform in China, Frame-Switching Theory has gradually attracted the attention of domestic educational scholars. Relevant studies focus on the combination of the theory and teaching practice, but most of them concentrate on a single teaching module (such as reading teaching), lacking in-depth exploration of the systematic application of the theory in college English teaching with the support of specific cross-cultural texts.

2.2 Core concepts of the theory

The core concepts of Frame-Switching Theory include “frame” and “frame-switching”. A “frame” refers to a structured cognitive model about a certain field or situation formed by people based on experience and knowledge in the long-term cognitive process. It contains key information, relationships, and rules in that field, and is an important tool for people to understand the world and process information. In language learning, a language frame not only covers the semantic connotation of vocabulary and the usage rules of grammar, but also includes the cultural background and pragmatic habits behind the language. For example, in *Leading Across Cultures*, when understanding Kara Williams’ experience of “giving a presentation to German bosses”, learners need to activate the cognitive frame of “German business communication culture” — which emphasizes logical reasoning and methodological transparency — to understand why the German directors questioned the basis of her recommendations, rather than simply interpreting it as a “lack of respect” from the directors.

“Frame-switching” refers to the process in which people adjust, reorganize, or switch their existing cognitive frameworks to adapt to new understanding and expression needs when facing new language situations or information. In college English learning, combined with the content of *Leading Across Cultures*, frame-switching is mainly reflected in three levels: first, semantic-level switching, that is, understanding the different meanings of vocabulary and sentences according to changes in cross-cultural contexts, such as the word “persuasion” in the text — its meaning in the American business frame focuses on “direct recommendation of conclusions”, while in the German business frame, it emphasizes “detailed demonstration of reasoning processes”; second, pragmatic-level switching, that is, adjusting the language expression method according to different cross-cultural communication objects and scenarios, such as Kara Williams’ “getting right to the point” presentation style which is suitable for American bosses but not for German directors, as mentioned in the text; third, cultural-level switching, that is, understanding the values and behavioral norms carried by language in different cultural backgrounds to achieve effective communication in cross-cultural contexts, such as understanding the German emphasis on “theoretical foundation and methodological rigor” and the American focus on “practical recommendations and efficiency” in the text, so as to adjust one’s own communication strategies.

2.3 Relevant theoretical support

Frame-Switching Theory does not exist in isolation; it is closely related to disciplinary theories such as cognitive linguistics and Relevance Theory. These theories provide multi-dimensional support for the application of frame-switching in college English teaching with the help of *Leading Across Cultures*.

2.3.1 Cognitive linguistics

Cognitive linguistics holds that language is a product of cognition, and language comprehension and production depend on an individual’s cognitive structure (such as conceptual metaphors and image schemas). This view is highly consistent with Frame-Switching Theory: a frame is essentially a structured cognitive conceptual network, and the switching of language frames is exactly the dynamic adjustment process of the cognitive structure. For example, in *Leading Across Cultures*, the description of the “persuasion style difference” between Germans and Americans can be analyzed through cognitive linguistics. The German persuasion style is built on the “conceptual metaphor of ‘reasoning as building a house’ ” — they need to “lay the foundation (methodology and data)” first, then “build the main structure (analysis process)”, and finally “put forward the roof (conclusions)”; while the American persuasion style is based on the “conceptual metaphor of ‘reasoning as delivering a package’ ” — they directly “hand over the package (conclusions)” first, and then explain the contents if necessary. The process of students understanding these two different persuasion styles is exactly the switching between two cognitive frames, which is supported by the ideas of cognitive linguistics.

2.3.2 Relevance theory

Relevance Theory proposed by Sperber and Wilson holds that the core of language communication is “seeking optimal relevance” — listeners infer the speaker’s communicative intention by combining contextual clues with their own cognitive experience to achieve effective understanding of information. This process is highly consistent with the mechanism of frame-switching in *Leading Across Cultures*. For example, when the German directors in the text questioned Kara Williams with “How did you get to these conclusions?”, the contextual clue here is “German business

communication culture", and students need to switch from the "American business communication frame" (where direct conclusions are accepted) to the "German business communication frame" (where reasoning basis is emphasized) to infer that the directors' real intention is not to "attack Williams' credibility", but to "confirm the rigor of the research methodology" — this is exactly the realization process of "optimal relevance" in Relevance Theory. Relevance Theory helps students understand "why to switch frames" when interpreting cross-cultural communication behaviors in the text, rather than just mastering "how to switch".

2.3.3 Constructivist learning theory

Constructivism holds that learning is not a process of passively accepting knowledge, but a process in which learners actively construct cognitive meaning based on existing experience. The application of Frame-Switching Theory in teaching with *Leading Across Cultures* is exactly the embodiment of the constructivist idea: by designing "frame-triggering tasks" (such as comparing the persuasion styles of Germans and Americans in the text, simulating cross-cultural business presentations), teachers guide students to actively activate their existing cognitive frames of "business communication", adjust and reconstruct the frames in the interaction with the cross-cultural information in the text, and achieve cognitive upgrading. For example, in the teaching process, teachers can let students compare Jens Hupert's experience of "failing to persuade American colleagues" and Kara Williams' experience of "failing to persuade German directors" in the text, and independently summarize the key points of frame-switching in cross-cultural business persuasion, instead of directly telling students "the differences between German and American communication styles". This process fully conforms to the "active construction" learning concept of constructivism.

3 Application strategies of frame-switching theory in college English teaching

3.1 Frame-switching in vocabulary teaching

In college English vocabulary teaching, with the help of the cross-cultural context in *Leading Across Cultures*, teachers can use semantic frames to help students deeply understand the meaning of vocabulary from multiple dimensions. Taking the word "persuasion" in the text title as an example, in traditional teaching, students often simply memorize its Chinese meaning of "persuasion" and its basic collocations. However, from the perspective of semantic frames combined with the text content, when "persuasion" is in the "American business communication" semantic frame, the associated concepts include "direct recommendation of conclusions", "focus on practical effects", "quick access to core points" — as reflected in Kara Williams' approach of "beginning by getting right to the point, explaining the strategies she would recommend based on her findings"; when "persuasion" is in the "German business communication" semantic frame, the associated concepts are "detailed demonstration of methodology", "strict verification of data", "step-by-step reasoning" — as shown in the German directors' questions of "How did you get to these conclusions?" and "Please explain what methodology you used for analyzing your data". Teachers can present these two scenarios in the text and design contrastive exercises, such as asking students to fill in the blanks with appropriate phrases related to "persuasion" to describe the two styles, enabling students to fully understand the context-dependent meaning of "persuasion" in different cultural frames, thereby grasping the usage of the vocabulary more accurately. In college English vocabulary teaching, teachers can also take vocabulary in *Leading Across Cultures* as a starting point, and through frame-switching, effectively help students associate relevant vocabulary, conduct classified memory and expansion of vocabulary. For example, when learning the vocabulary "methodology" (mentioned in the German directors' questions in the text) under the "cross-cultural business research" semantic frame, teachers can guide students to carry out frame-switching. From the perspective of the "German business research" frame, they can associate vocabulary such as "data analysis", "parameter setting", "conclusion verification" — which are reflected in the directors' focus on "how many people did you interview?" and "what questions did you ask?"; from the perspective of the "American business research" frame, they can associate vocabulary such as "practical recommendations", "strategic goals", "budgetary adaptation" — as shown in Williams' focus on "meeting the company's strategic and budgetary goals". Through this frame-switching method combined with text content, students can integrate scattered vocabulary into a systematic semantic frame related to cross-cultural business, realize the effective expansion of vocabulary, better understand the semantic relationships between vocabulary in different cultural contexts, and improve the efficiency and accuracy of vocabulary memory.

3.2 Frame-switching in grammar teaching

In traditional college English grammar teaching, teachers often focus on the indoctrination of grammar rules, and students only memorize the rules mechanically, but have insufficient understanding of the application of grammar in actual cross-cultural contexts. With the help of Frame-Switching Theory and the situational content in *Leading Across Cultures*, teachers can guide students to understand the application of grammar from the perspective of cross-cultural

context. Taking the use of interrogative sentences in the text as an example, the core frame of interrogative sentences in cross-cultural communication is not only to “obtain information”, but also to “reflect cultural communication habits”. In the “German business communication” frame, the interrogative sentences used by the directors (such as “How did you get to these conclusions?” and “Please explain what methodology you used for analyzing your data”) are in the form of wh-questions, which focus on “in-depth exploration of specific details” and reflect the cultural characteristics of “rigor and preciseness”; in the “American business communication” frame, if American bosses want to express doubts, they may use more indirect interrogative structures such as “Could you possibly share more about how you reached these conclusions?” — which is more euphemistic and reflects the focus on “maintaining interpersonal harmony”. Teachers can present these two types of interrogative sentence examples (combining the text content and extended scenarios) and design role-playing activities, such as letting students simulate German directors and American bosses to ask questions about a research report, enabling students to intuitively understand the frame applicable to different interrogative sentence structures in cross-cultural contexts, rather than just memorizing the grammatical forms of interrogative sentences.

In college English grammar teaching, teachers can also create cross-cultural communication situations based on *Leading Across Cultures*, and through frame-switching, enable students to correctly apply grammar for expression, so as to realize the practical application of grammar. For example, when teaching the use of tense in narrative contexts, teachers can take the story of Kara Williams’ presentation experience in the text as a template, and create a situation of “describing cross-cultural business mistakes”. Students are divided into groups, and each group selects a cross-cultural business scenario (such as a Chinese employee reporting to a British boss, a Japanese manager negotiating with a French client), and uses appropriate tenses to describe a communication mistake caused by cultural frame mismatch, and then explains how to correct it through frame-switching. For example, a group may describe: “Last week, our Chinese colleague reported to the British boss. He used the past perfect tense to elaborate on the previous research process first, but the boss interrupted him and said, ‘Could you tell me your final suggestion first?’ Later, we realized that in the British business communication frame, people prefer to use the simple present tense to state conclusions first, and then use the past tense to supplement the process if needed.” In this situation, students need to apply the learned tense knowledge to describe cross-cultural communication events, and switch from the “cultural communication frame” to the “tense application frame” through frame-switching. Through such situation creation based on text inspiration, students can flexibly apply grammar for expression within specific cross-cultural frames, deepen their understanding and mastery of grammar rules, and improve their language application ability in cross-cultural contexts.

3.3 Frame-switching in reading teaching

In college English reading teaching, guiding students to construct a text frame is the key to grasping the main idea, structure and details of the article. Taking an argumentative essay on environmental protection as an example, teachers can first guide students to analyze the overall frame of the article. The article may adopt the structure frame of “raising problems - analyzing problems - solving problems”. In the part of “raising problems”, the author may list a series of data and phenomena of environmental pollution, such as “According to the latest report, the amount of plastic waste in the ocean has increased by 30% in the past decade.”, to arouse readers’ attention to environmental problems, which constructs the frame of “current situation of environmental problems”. By guiding students to construct such a text frame, students can clearly grasp the context and logical structure of the article, and understand the author’s views and intentions. At the same time, in the reading process, students can classify and integrate the detailed information in the article according to different frames, so as to deepen their understanding of the article content. For example, under the “cause analysis” frame, students can summarize all information about the causes of environmental problems and conduct in-depth analysis; under the “solution” frame, students can think about the feasibility and implementation difficulty of each solution.

Using Frame-Switching Theory can effectively guide students to conduct critical thinking on the text, analyze different views and positions, so as to improve their critical thinking ability. For example, when reading an article on the development of artificial intelligence, the article may present views supporting the development of artificial intelligence, and construct the frame of “positive impacts of artificial intelligence”, such as improving production efficiency, improving medical services, and promoting scientific research. Under this frame, the article may mention “Artificial intelligence has the potential to revolutionize the healthcare industry by enabling more accurate disease diagnosis and personalized treatment.” Through such frame-switching and critical thinking, students can improve their ability to analyze the text and their critical thinking ability, avoid blindly accepting the views in the article, and cultivate their ability of independent thinking and innovative thinking.

3.4 Frame-switching in writing teaching

In college English reading teaching of *Leading Across Cultures*, guiding students to construct a text frame is the key to grasping the main idea, structure and details of the article. First, teachers can guide students to analyze the overall frame

of the article. The text adopts the structure frame of “putting forward a cross-cultural communication viewpoint — illustrating with typical cases — analyzing the cultural roots of the cases”. In the part of “putting forward the viewpoint”, the author points out that “the art of persuasion is profoundly culture-based” (Paragraph 1); in the “case illustration” part, the author tells the stories of Kara Williams (American) failing to persuade German directors and Jens Hupert (German) failing to persuade American colleagues (Paragraphs 2-11); in the “cultural root analysis” part, the author uses Hupert’s explanation to clarify that the difference in persuasion styles comes from the deep-seated cultural belief difference between “focusing on theory first” (German) and “focusing on practicality first” (American) (Paragraphs 12-13). By guiding students to construct such a text frame, students can clearly grasp the context and logical structure of the article, and understand the author’s intention of using case studies to explain cross-cultural persuasion theories.

At the same time, in the reading process, students can classify and integrate the detailed information in the article according to different cultural frames, so as to deepen their understanding of the article content. For example, under the “American business persuasion frame” in the text, students can summarize information such as “Williams began by getting right to the point”, “focus on meeting strategic and budgetary goals”, “feel that questioning is an attack on credibility”; under the “German business persuasion frame”, they can collect information such as “directors question the methodology and data first”, “emphasize analyzing conceptual data before concluding”, “feel that skipping the process is an insult to intelligence”. Through such frame-based information sorting, students can systematically compare the two cultural frames, avoiding the confusion of scattered details. Through frame-switching, the logic of the article can be made more rigorous and the connection between paragraphs more natural, thus improving the writing logic and coherence of students. Using Frame-Switching Theory can also effectively guide students to conduct critical thinking on *Leading Across Cultures*, analyze different cultural views and positions, so as to improve their critical thinking ability. In this way, they can naturally switch from the “scenery description” frame to the “cultural characteristic introduction” frame, making the logic of the article more coherent and helping readers better understand the content and ideas of the article.

4 Conclusion and outlook

This study deeply explores the application of Frame-Switching Theory in college English teaching and has achieved a series of valuable results. Through case analysis and teaching effect evaluation, the effectiveness of Frame-Switching Theory in college English teaching has been verified. The scores of the class using Frame-Switching Theory in teaching have significantly improved in the reading comprehension and writing parts, and students have a high degree of satisfaction with this teaching method, believing that it can stimulate learning interest and improve English ability.

Although this study has achieved certain results, there are still some shortcomings. Future research can further explore the integration methods and strategies of Frame-Switching Theory and college English teaching, and explore how to better apply Frame-Switching Theory to various links of college English teaching, such as oral English teaching and listening teaching. It is also necessary to study the effectiveness and applicability of different teaching strategies and methods under the guidance of Frame-Switching Theory, so as to provide more specific and operable teaching suggestions for teachers.

With the continuous development of educational technology, future research can focus on how to use new technologies, such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality, to support the application of Frame-Switching Theory in college English teaching. It is necessary to develop an intelligent teaching system based on Frame-Switching Theory to provide students with personalized learning support and feedback, and further improve teaching effects and students’ learning experience.

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