

Research on Ideological Discourse in Foreign Language Education

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Abstract: The discourse system is an important carrier of ideology, and ideology must rely on the discourse system to express and disseminate. The discourse system of ideological and political education carries the content and expression of ideological and political education, and the degree of its improvement and the role it plays directly determine the effectiveness of curriculum ideological and political education. The research on discourse in ideological and political education in foreign language education mainly focuses on what the connotation of discourse in ideological and political education is, which elements it includes, how it operates and plays a role in teaching practice, how educators complete discourse conversion and carry out effective discourse dissemination, and so on. Through these researches, the discourse system of ideological and political education in foreign language education is established. Combined with Marxist theory, discourse criticism theory, and communication theory, the basic concepts and content of the discourse system of ideological and political education are clarified, and the basic elements and operation process of the discourse system of ideological and political education are analyzed.

1. INTRODUCTION

The discourse issue has always been a hot topic in Western social science. With the linguistic shift in Western philosophy, the discourse quandary has gradually broadened from the field of philosophy to many fields such as sociology, political science, and education, receiving wide attention from scholars. Numerous translations and scholarly papers related to Western discourse theory have been incorporated into the academic landscape of domestic social science, and a large number of academic achievements on Western discourse theory have emerged. Concurrently, a growing number of domestic scholars with an intensified sense of theoretical and academic cognizance are incorporating Western discourse theory into their scholarship, centering on issues relevant to China. This endeavor aims to formulate a discourse theory imbued with distinctly Chinese attributes, which may serve as a guiding force for China's actuality. Importantly, during the Symposium on Philosophy and Social Sciences Work, General Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly mentioned "discourse" and "discourse system", emphasizing the coordinated development of the discourse system, discipline system, and academic system as an important task to accelerate the construction of Chinese characteristics in philosophy and social sciences. "Building a discourse system of philosophy and social sciences with Chinese characteristics, Chinese style, and Chinese

temperament"^[1] has become an important goal of academic research, and the issue of discourse and the discourse system has gradually become an academic focal point. In addition, since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the Party and the state have attached great importance to ideological and political education in universities. The National Symposium on Ideological and Political Work in Higher Education and the National Symposium on Ideological and Political Education for Teachers have both made important instructions for ideological and political education, and have issued a series of important documents to provide institutional guarantees for the reform and innovation of curriculum ideological and political education, which has objectively promoted the research on hot issues in ideological and political education by Marxist theoretical workers. In this research trend, there have been continuous achievements in the "discourse system of ideological and political education."^[1]

2. THREE STAGES OF RESEARCH ON THE POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

During the initial phase, spanning from 2007 to 2011, the research was in its nascent, based on the rise of research on ideological and political education discourse. In 2007, discourse research began to enter the research scope of ideological and political

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education disciplines, and gradually developed. In this period, a significant amount of research was devoted to exploring the fundamental theoretical aspects concerning the discourse of ideological and political education. This included inquiries into topics such as composition, reform and innovation, and the construction of an effective system. Notably, Dr. Qiu Renfu from Shanghai University was a prominent figure in this area of scholarship, providing a theoretical basis for subsequent research endeavors. While there exist studies on the discourse of ideological and political education, political discourse has received insufficient attention in academic circles, resulting in scarce findings with just a few articles being published each year. This shows that the academic community has not given enough attention to discourse in ideological and political courses, not to mention a dearth of corresponding theoretical investigation. Research was more focused on the teaching practices of ideological and political courses, with little involvement in fundamental theoretical issues, or direct replication of the theoretical results of ideological and political education discourse. At this time, the term “political and ideological discourse system” had not yet been proposed.

During the second stage, spanning from 2012 to 2015, the emergence of the concept of the “ideological and political discourse system”, related to Party’s theoretical innovation and General Secretary Xi Jinping’s series of important speeches, resulted in a surge of research activity on the topic. Throughout this period, the academic community increasingly turned their attention towards exploring the “ideological and political discourse system” as a prominent research object, ultimately fueling a noteworthy expansion in research outputs. In August 2013, General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed at the National Propaganda and Ideology Work Conference: “Carefully construct a discourse system for external communication, innovate external discourse expression, create new concepts, new fields, and new expressions that integrate Chinese and foreign cultures... Strive for international discourse power and increase the affinity of cultural communication.”^[2] In November 2013, at the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, it was proposed to “expand cultural exchanges with foreign countries, strengthen international communication capabilities and build a discourse system for external communication, and promote Chinese culture to the world.”^[2] For a while, discourse systems have garnered significant attention. While the contemporary notion of ‘discourse systems’ is predominantly discussed in the context of international communication with an emphasis on Chinese characteristics, academic circles have already noted and reflected upon the issue of discourse systems. This has particularly manifested in research on ideological and political education, specifically within the realm of ideological and political courses, giving rise to the concept of an ‘ideological and political discourse system’. There has been a noticeable trend in recent academic research towards exploring the

evolution of the discourse surrounding political and ideological matters. This has led to an increase in scholarly focus on this topic, with researchers devoting substantial efforts towards delving deeper into the intricacies of discourse. It is worth noting, however, that current research has largely concentrated on practical application in teaching political and ideological courses, with only limited exploration of fundamental theory, such as the various connotations, types, and elements of the political and ideological discourse system.

In the third stage, spanning from 2016 to the present, investigations pertaining to the ‘ideology and political theory discourse system’ have undergone a decrease in activity, subsequently followed by an upward progression. In May 2016, Xi Jinping mentioned “discourse system” multiple times at the symposium on philosophy and social sciences. A scholarly surge towards the analysis of discourse systems has been ignited within the philosophical and social sciences academic community. Not only is this a pragmatic necessity for the advancement of the Party and state, but it also entails a crucial duty and accountability for philosophers and social scientists to cultivate the Party’s theoretical innovation. In light of the significance of ideological and political education, the Ministry of Education has declared 2017 as the “Year of Teaching Quality of Ideological and Political Courses in Higher Education.”^[2] Furthermore, in April 2018, the Ministry of Education has released the “Basic Requirements for Teaching Work of Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Higher Education in the New Era”^[3] in order to facilitate the advancement of instructional quality in ideological and political courses. In March of the year 2019, General Secretary Xi organized a national seminar targeted towards teachers of ideological and political education with a primary focus on highlighting the integral nature of the course in fulfilling the fundamental objective of instilling proper morals in students. The organizer put forward a set of ‘eight cooperative requisites’ necessary for restructuring and innovating ideological and political education while concurrently outlining ‘six requirements’ aimed at the individuals charged with facilitating such teachings, which were formulated with the intent of optimizing the effectiveness of ideological and political education schemes. In August 2019, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council jointly issued “Several Opinions on Deepening the Reform and Innovation of Ideological and Political Theory Courses in the New Era”,^[3] fully implementing the spirit of the speech of Xi Jinping at the symposium of ideological and political theory teachers in schools. Therefore, there has been a resurgence in the investigation of the discourse system pertaining to courses on ideological and political theory within the academic realm. This phenomenon not only signifies the implementation of the spirit of reform and innovation in colleges and universities promoted by the Party and the state, but also serves as an imperative for elevating the caliber and standard of ideological and political theory courses in higher

education institutions. In this particular stage, scholars have adopted a greater spectrum of viewpoints and attained an amplified degree of profundity and scope in their investigations, thereby culminating in a multitude of theoretical progressions.

3. RESEARCH ON IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

3.1 Research on the Subject of Ideological and Political Discourse

This article posits that discourse is derived from the spoken word, which serves as a means of expression, dissemination, and communication. The individuals responsible for these actions become the subjects of discourse. Consequently, the subject of a discourse system must encompass those who produce, disseminate, and receive speech, thereby forming a cohesive “subject group.” Utilizing the “theory of subject-interaction” as a specific analytical framework, it can be postulated that discourse producers within the foreign language education domain’s ideological and political language system encompass not only educators and learners, but also the textbook authors and subject researchers who are responsible for the development of educational materials. The rationale underpinning such a view is predicated upon the notion that both educators and learners are regarded as disseminators of discourse; a reality that effectively epitomizes the subject-interaction mode of “subject-subject” relationship wherein educators are deemed to occupy a stronger role in the guidance, propagation, and refinement of discourse. Educational practitioners and learners are identified as among the recipients of discourse, with the latter assuming a more prominent role in the processes.

The discourse objectives and functions vary across different disciplines. From the perspective of language producers, textbooks are the basic basis and guidelines for teaching, fundamentally carrying the integration of the ideological and political curriculum. However, most foreign language education majors use English original textbooks, which naturally contain content about Western culture. American linguist Kramsch believes that “learning and understanding the target language culture should be combined with contrasting it with the background knowledge of the native language culture. Cultural teaching in language education includes both target language and native language cultural teaching.”^[4] Hence, it becomes imperative to extensively absorb political and popular discussions by analyzing the content of textbooks. This is crucial for developing textbooks that are not only based on scientific principles and standardized guidelines but also easily comprehensible. Therefore, textbook discourse is formulated.

During the actual teaching process, the textbook content is adapted to suit the students’ specific

circumstances. The discourse is then refined and reproduced before being conveyed to the students, thereby ensuring effective dissemination. When students are presented with language, they have an exchange with their teachers, generate novel discourse, and provide feedback. Such interactions carry the linguistic production and dissemination, with students serving as ambassadors of language and teachers fulfilling the role of recipient. This interactive dynamic highlights the subjective nature of the relationship between teachers and students, both of whom are the subject of the discourse surrounding ideological and political education.

3.2 Research on the Discourse Context of Ideological and Political Education

The term ‘context’ denotes the surroundings or circumstances in which language is employed. The renowned philosopher, Frege, introduced the celebrated ‘principle of context’, positing that “words should be analyzed in relation to sentences, not in isolation.” While expounding on the topic, Robbins delineated the context as a ‘primary structure that enables the elucidation of information regarding the function and connotation of a discourse’.^[5] The theory of pragmatics dictates that the utilization of any language must be contingent upon discrete contextual parameters, with the connotation of speech being inherently tied to its contextual surroundings. As such, context is a crucial component in the articulation, transmission, comprehension, and recognition of speech. In the suitable context of oral communication, individuals exhibit greater comprehension and concurrence with the ongoing conversation. With varying contexts, the semantics of words undergo substantial alterations.

In communication studies, context is called communication context. In a narrow sense, it refers to the scene where specific communication activities (such as a dialogue between two people) take place, including time, place, and the people present. In a broad sense, communication context also includes the larger environment of the community, organization, system, language, culture, and other subjects engaged in communication behaviors. The transmission of context frequently gives rise to fresh interpretations that extend beyond the symbolic text itself and affect the significance of the symbolic text, thus creating situational meaning. “The meaning conveyed by the situation will have a repercussion on the symbolic text system’s meaning and exert limitations on the dissemination outcome.”^[6] Consequently, it is evident that context also encompasses the notion of a ‘field’.

The pragmatics and communication studies offer valuable insights for contextual analysis of ideological discourse systems. In particular, a contextual examination of the elements that comprise ideological discourse systems in foreign language education holds significant importance for promoting effective communication in this field. Drawing upon principles

from both pragmatics and communication theory, as well as insights derived from systemic functional linguistics, with particular attention paid to the division method employed by linguist Hu Zhuanglin, the study of ideological discourse in foreign language education is segmented into three distinct contextual components. These components are comprised of textual context, situational context, and cultural context.

3.3 Research on ideological and political discourse content

The essential factor determining the ideological and political education discourse system and setting it apart from other discourse systems lies in its core content. This content is vast and varied, and can be classified according to different criteria. By examining its distinctive features, the content of ideological and political education discourse can be divided into three categories: political discourse, theoretical discourse, and popular discourse. This study aims to analyze the content of ideological and political education discourse in foreign language education through the lens of these three aspects.

3.4 Research on the Discourse Forms of Ideological and Political Education

Form refers to the structural and expressive methods by which the different components constituting an entity are consolidated. Concerning the composition and presentation of discourse, ideological and political education discourse has two forms: textual form and spoken form.

Textual form is commonly defined as written discourse. In the context of foreign language education, ideological and political discourse is primarily presented in the form of textbooks and teachers' instructional materials. Textbooks serve as the central reference for teaching discourse, providing standards and guidelines for teaching activities. On the other hand, teachers' instructional materials encompass various forms such as handwritten notes on blackboards, multimedia presentations, videos, audios, and pictures. These materials are the outcome of teachers' creative adaptation of textbook texts, incorporating their interpretation of the textbook and curriculum, and considering the practicality of teaching and the needs of students.

Spoken form: As implied by its name, it refers to a mode of expressing information or ideas through spoken words. It involves both the form of verbal expression and the manner in which thoughts are conveyed. This constitutes the fundamental and primary mode of instructional delivery within the classroom setting.

3.5 Research on the generation of ideological discourse

The production of conversation in foreign language education and ideological education is not singular, static, or isolated. The discourse of ideological education in foreign language education should draw from the assets of traditional Chinese culture and moral education, demonstrate the significant historical accomplishments of revolution, construction, and reform under the guidance of the Party, exhibit deep historical reasoning, and also encompass profound theoretical reasoning. It should act as the primary arena for moral education and embody lively practical reasoning.

3.6 Research on the Conversion of Ideological Discourse

The production of discourse provides resources for foreign language education and the ideological discourse system. However, in order to effectively educate and guide students' thoughts and behaviors, it is necessary to convert the generated discourse into spoken form. The ideological discourse system, which contains ideas and values, uses the production of discourse as a starting point and aims for the effective dissemination of discourse. The conversion of discourse serves as a vital intermediate link between production and dissemination. Teaching is a dynamic interaction between teachers and students, and the challenge now lies in activating static text-based discourse in order to meet the needs of teaching and students - a complex yet crucial problem.

3.7 Research on the Dissemination of Ideological Discourse

Communication scholars argue that information dissemination within human society is characterized by evident processivity and systematicity. Taking a macro perspective, the discourse system of ideological and political education within foreign language education is seen as a communication system itself. The generation and transformation of discourse are viewed as integral components of the communication process. However, in the present study, the focus is on the micro perspective, specifically on the specialized field of ideological and political education within the foreign language education curriculum. The aim is to investigate discourse dissemination as a fundamental element within this context.

4 CONCLUSION

The research is to be conducted from various disciplinary perspectives, including linguistics, Marxist theory, and education. This thorough and systematic approach intended to enable a comprehensive analysis and understanding of the subject, content, context, form,

generation, transformation, and dissemination of ideological language in foreign language education. The study aims to clarify the fundamental concepts and associations of the ideological language system, while also analyzing the basic components and operational processes of such a system. By examining the practical issues concerning ideological language systems in foreign language education, with reference to related theory in linguistics and education, an innovative system for teaching ideological language in foreign language education can be constructed. Research into ideological discourse in foreign language education has the potential to benefit educators in their efforts to guide students in the development of proper perspectives on life, values, and the world. Additionally, this research can facilitate the conscious adoption of correct socialist core values among students while strengthening their sense of collectivism and patriotism.

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