Abstract:
This paper proposes an online extensive reading class in order to provide a solution to the dilemma of teaching college English reading. It further presents a framework of execution of this class, which integrates natural language processing technology to assist teachers in presenting up-to-date real English for the students.

Key word: extensive reading, on-line class, natural language processing, web pages

1 Reading in Dilemma

ELT in the university is to further cultivate students’ ability in listening, speaking, reading, writing as well as translation, so that they could effectively perform communication in English. Among the five, reading is now giving his chair to speaking: the circle is giving more and more emphasis on the capability of face-to-face communication. More than that, reading is seldom cared by students except for the sake of intensive reading class and reading comprehension in CET.

The reasons for the less attention to reading can be summarized from the following aspects. On the one hand, the society is disappointed at the “dumb English” out of 10 years of EFL training while more social and economic contact with the world presses much need for spoken English ability. Mastering oral (and correlated listening) skill is a more time-consuming process. On the other hand, English reading course has long been suffering from out-of-date and uninteresting materials. Though more textbooks have appeared recently, it is still hard to include the fast emerging new terms (and usage) which would be necessary in current communication. Finally, college ELT is required for higher quality while the class hour is somewhat reduced along with other courses to provide students with more self-control time. Conflicts also existed between limited English teachers compared with more college students brought by “higher education expansion”.

A typical practice of reducing reading is to change extensive reading class into an after-class activity, often without proper check and instruction. Thus extensive reading becomes the ornament in college ELT. Though this allows teachers to save some class hours, it is not without harm to ELT:

Firstly, extensive reading can provide one of the key elements in language learning, “comprehensible input”. It will lead to language acquisition, provided that the texts include adequate exposure to the language, interesting material, and a
relaxed learning environment. The quality of the language to which the learners are exposed is very important if they are to learn from the input.

Secondly, extensive reading can develop autonomous learning. Motivation and interests are two critical factors which can stimulate students to find out and work out problems in language learning. In further studies and researches, students do need to be liberated from dependence on the teacher, and reading gives them the opportunity to do so. The classroom focuses inevitably on shorter texts, and extensive reading provides learners with the opportunity of reading longer texts, on more varied subjects, on their own, and in their own way. The quality of creation can be cultivated through the course of extensive reading because it can give them the confidence and competence to cope with any problems in studies.

Thirdly, paper reading will hold an important position in further studies since any quite good idea must be sparked by it. Extensive reading can be regarded as footstone as it provides the opportunity for students to touch some contents, which arouse the passion of exploration and thus to motivates learners to read. Motivations can come from many sources: the desire for general knowledge is one of them, but the intrinsic interest of the texts is another. Students in China greatly value authenticity, so if the text is written by a native speaker in good contemporary English, that in itself can be a big draw.

Finally, extensive reading can consolidate vocabulary and language forms already treated in the classroom. In the past, the emphasis has traditionally been placed on graded readers, which have a controlled grammatical and lexical load, and these certainly have the advantage of providing regular repetition and reinforcement of language forms. However, the development of the “real books” movement (particularly in the UK), has led in recent years to an increased emphasis on “real” books written in authentic English, rather than the pre-digested, controlled reading diet offered by traditional graded reading schemes. Others have attempted to arrive at a compromise – real books written in authentic English roughly tuned to the likely language level of the readers. Grading, if it occurs, is as much focused on interest levels and relevance to the students, rather than language forms. An added impetus to this approach is provided by the increasing variations in educational policy across China, both within and beyond provinces and autonomous regions, as local curriculum initiatives make it increasingly difficult to adjust language levels to targeted segments of the student population.

2 The Proposal of Online Extensive Reading

In essence the dilemma of reading is the conflict between limited education resources (teacher, time et al) and enlarged education task (too much person, high quality etc). A reasonable strategy of solving such education problems is seeking help from technologies. Not surprisingly, a good choice is the network technology, by which an online class of extensive reading is within reach.

The online extensive reading class focuses on cultivating students’ reading competence and training the ability of fast reading and good command of mastering information. As to teachers, they will change the traditional methods of compiling
books which can be accomplished with the help of computer nowadays. They can obtain substantial language materials from Internet and finish the compiling work quickly and efficiently by adopting advanced technology. As to students, an extensive reading class is the ideal way of student-centered learning process which possesses the characteristics of exploration and discussion in learning language. They read, learn and communicate with teachers and classmates by surfing web pages. The online extensive reading class not only cultivates reading ability but also helps students adapt to learning and working abilities in net age.

The advantages of an online extensive reading class are obvious. Firstly, students can choose the proper time to read the material. Instead of reading many materials in the class, they can divide and read part of the assignment day by day. Students can use programs to reason, to read, to discuss with each other and ask for teachers looking at the screen stroking the keyboard one person one computer. Then students' gumption is strengthened. Online extensive reading will promote communications and studies largely and bring creative inspirations among students. Secondly, teachers can check the progress of the students and give some suggestions when necessary, with the help of some computer program, such as the teacher can send the students a number of crucial messages, including

- Reading can be fun.
- It is entirely acceptable to skim – you don’t have to understand every single word to get the gist.
- It is good to develop opinions and personal responses while you are reading, both social, ethical and aesthetic.

The main task of teachers is to guide students. Students should use the knowledge of English to design the study method and process. By the means of online extensive reading, they quest, study and solve the questions of subjects. It is very useful for students to be trained and cultivated in this way. Finally, in teaching practice, nearly all kinds of English network-assisted teaching programs intend to be integral. Confucius had said: Provide education for all the people without discriminations, teach students according to their aptitudes. But it is only a perfect ideal until now. That the students’ levels are different is very difficult to deal with for teachers. If teachers care for the average ones, they will delay the better ones; otherwise, they can only sacrifice the majority but to cultivate the top students. Teaching students according to their aptitudes needs individual instruction. English instruction needs the convergence except the divergence as well as the environment aiming at individuality and a team. The application of online extensive reading just meets the needs. Hypertext and hypermedia teaching programs can content different demands of various students in theory. Students can learn by themselves or review reading materials with online extensive reading programs. The past version aiming at all students now can be supplied by communication. In addition, students can discuss with their partners selected by themselves and communicate with teachers on line in time. During this course, students have more opportunities to exchange information, which have more intentions.
3 Using Natural Language Processing for Online Extensive Reading

Basically speaking, an online extensive reading class depends on 3 elements: network access, English teacher and reading material. Since campus network is established in most colleges, it is not hard to find a computer to host the class webpage. And since checking can be performed automatically by the program and instruction can be delivered through e-mail, it is not impossible to find some English teachers to support the class. The only problem, which is yet often overlooked, lies in the material selection.

Generally students like the texts that are interesting, authentic and most up-to-date which enable them to learn about the world. In practice neither the students nor the teachers would expect an electronic version of existed reading textbook displayed on screen. The charm of online reading class is that it could provide the most up-to-date materials directly from the Internet.

3.1 Framework of NLP assisted reading material preparation

The webpages, however, are not always suitable for junior student’s learning purpose. A constant adaptation of web materials is definitely too much for the teachers. In addition, browsing through the Internet for desired material would be disastrous.

In this paper, we present a NLP (natural language processing) technology based on solution to the selection of reading materials. The basic idea is to employ computer program to undertake some routine (even part of human-intelligence-like) work, including searching, classification, and hopefully adaptation and evaluation. What’s left for the teacher is to confirm and, if necessary, make some modifications. Figure 1 give the framework of such NLP based reading material development.
3.2 Online extensive reading in practice

The content of the course will be divided into 4 grades and it will all come from Internet. It deals with society, politics, economics, culture, history, religion, physical training, medicine, literature, local condition and customs, and popular science knowledge. This program will exploit the advanced technology of NLP to assist teachers to edit all the language source materials. After the course offered, the materials will be renewed in part continuously (which depends on factual need), by this means, the reading materials will own distinct sense of times and attraction, and the language materials have actual application value to students. In addition, in the enforcement of the program, it will use different kinds of network technology flexibly, as well as computer and artificial intelligence technology to study and realize the corresponding teaching expert system, which includes diverse coaching forms. It can record and analyze automatically students’ study process as possible as provide teachers with more information through computer. The concrete technical route is as below:

- Study and establish the extensive reading materials’ standard for forward selection, and use information searching technology to search suitable language materials automatically on Internet.
- Study and exploit natural language analysis technology to set up formalized readable standard of extensive reading materials initially; develop the assistant environment for teaching materials’ evaluation, which helps teachers revise and select texts in the end.
• Study and exploit the latest NLP technology to process the long articles automatically, in this way, which can meet the initial need for college extensive reading as well as assist teachers to finalize the articles.

• The content of the course, besides the main text materials, will own necessary background video and image materials for every article, which will help students form more concrete and accurate concept. As for key articles and special language points, it will provide necessary record of teachers’ explanation. In addition, it can provide feedback for students’ practice in time, which enable students to further improve their understanding on their own initiative.

• On the presentation of reading materials, it will mainly adopt mature text demonstration technique with necessary pictures; audio and video materials that will be processed by selective download method. In doing so, there is not too much request for network.

• In the mode of course guidance, it will generally adopt asynchronous guidance method (except for network condition permission). In addition to recording the previous discussion and answers, it will adopt “mail list” in order to let every student see their fellows’ questions and the teachers’ answers during study. Moreover, when several students are on line at the same time, it will provide BBS to form a certain kind of “cooperative study”.

At present, through our efforts, a set of college extensive reading course materials has been initially realized from Internet, which could be applied to non-major English students in teaching. Actually, this program is only restricted by the adopted network service scope; theoretically it can meet all the needs of English learners in our province.

4 Conclusions and Discussions

College English extensive reading on line focuses on cultivating students’ reading ability, improving students’ reading speed and the ability of grasping information accurately. It will select the most suitable reading materials, as well as adopt new content, new information and knowledge to enlarge students’ vocabulary effectively. This program can also improve reading speed and cultivate the skills such as grasping main idea and logical deduction. The main innovation lies below:

• Use new technology and new tools to change teachers’ traditional teaching mode. With the help of hi-tech innovation, it presents the process of editing teaching materials for teachers a new look. Teachers can gain a lot of language materials in need from Internet, and finish editing for teaching materials as soon as possible with computer’s help, which can ensure the reading materials’ quality and efficiency; the course’s realization is based on the current network condition, the reduction of the video and audio’s quantity in order to lessen the burden of students when they study on line by download selectively and E-mail.

• Realize the ideal mode of language learning for students as the center, at the same time, it owns some characteristics of explorative study and discussible study. Students use WWW form to study College English extensive reading, and can communicate with teachers and fellow students in different ways, during this course,
they can get some automatic tips from computer. The principal form of course guidance will adopt BBS, mail list etc. as off-line course guidance mode; in possible case, teachers can be arranged to take part in online study and provide guidance; the form of BBS can also be used to improve the cooperative study among students.

● Through teaching online, it can not only cultivate students’ English reading level, but also cultivate the study ability and work ability that can meet the need for Internet times.

Extensive reading programs can play an important role in promoting language improvement and development. They require a certain amount of investment in both time and resources, but the benefits far outweigh the costs. Our program will not only consider adequately the wide space which computer and network provide the teaching of English extensive reading with, but also adopt some hi-tech such as artificial intelligence and NLP to improve teachers’ labor process. Through this project, we can not only provide with a new notion College English extensive reading course on Internet, but also probe the overall process from innovating the organization of teaching materials to teaching strategy for teachers. With the new introduction of processing web pages for college English reading that gives due weight to the importance of extensive reading, we can look forward to a wide change in attitudes to designing extensive reading, as well as to teaching strategy in ELT.

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