



## Research Article

**THE ACTIVITY OF *CONSTRUCTIVISM* AND *COMMUNICATION*  
IN READING AND LEARNING LITERATURE***Nguyen Thanh Thi**Ho Chi Minh City University of Education**Corresponding author: Nguyen Thanh Thi – Email: thint@hcmue.edu.vn**Received: May 05, 2019; Revised: June 06, 2019; Accepted: July 10, 2019***ABSTRACT**

*Based on the suggestions from some interdisciplinary research projects, the article suggests that the connection between the opinion of reading literary texts such as constructivism and communication (in literary theory) with the viewpoint of teaching - learning literature as knowledge creation and social constructivism (in theory and method of teaching literature) can bring many methodological suggestions in developing literacy competence for readers and learners.*

**Keywords:** Literary text, Response-Inviting structure, Communication strategy, Constructivism, Social constructivism.

**1. Two questions for the researcher**

Interdisciplinary research with the dominant connection of the system of concepts, achievements or scientific methods of many industries in this era is no stranger, but in fact, for many reasons, not has been properly respected as well as able to bring about many achievements as expected. That fact needs to be taken care of. Similarly, in the field of literary research and teaching, the ability to connect and “cooperate” between literature research (basic research) with the study of theory and method of teaching literature in schools (applied research) has many limitations. This article aims at finding a “hyphen”, a possible bridge between the two areas mentioned above from the perspective regarding reading-learning literature as a *constructivism* and *communication activity*.

Our research questions raised here are:

1) What role do the background knowledge of the genre and the skill of reading the text according to the genre of individual readers play in their reading and receiving literary texts?

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2) Are the external support methods (teacher's, learning environment, etc.) for reading and writing are especially necessary, feasible and effective in helping students / learners improve their ability to read literary texts?

The above questions may be answered more satisfactorily when connecting the results of the theory of reception, communication theory, discourse analysis in the study of literature with the achievements of knowledge constructivism, social constructivism in psychological research - education. For example, from the connection of interdisciplinary research results (particularly literature - theory and method of teaching literature), teaching reading comprehension of literary texts in schools will and should be considered as: **a)** the combined performance, at the same time, two types of readers' activities - students: *reading activities* (“constructivism” as a reader), and *cognitive activity* (“knowledge creation”) as a learner); and **b)** the combined implementation, at the same time, two types of communication - communication between the reader and the author and the communication between the learner and the teacher and the learner with the learner. The first type of communication, in fact, is to communicate with the “me”, ie the author image in reader’s imagination through the literary text - the type of communication M. Bakhtin calls “indirect communication” when the reader comes into contact with the text. The second type of communication is the communication between the learner and the teacher, and / or with the learner, through the lesson, in the classroom. This is of course direct communication - the type of activity associated with the process that Vygotsky calls “social constructivism” in learning. Accordingly, the process of reading literary texts is the process of *constructing* and *communicating* at the same time, and the process of teaching reading literary texts is also the process of teaching *constructivism* and teaching *communication*

## **2. Reading as *construction* and *communication*, teaching reading literary texts as teaching-learning *constructivism* and *communication***

### **2.1. Reading as *construction* and teaching reading literary texts as teaching-learning *constructivism***

The spirit of promoting the role of the reader in the theory of literature reception is typical of W. Iser's viewpoint, as well as the spirit of promoting the role of learners in modern education that represent Piaget's theory of constructivism is an encounter in terms of theoretical research that has important implications and suggestions for teaching reading literary texts

2.1.1. The theory of modern literary reception perceives “literary work as a process”<sup>1</sup>, but an “open” process. Accordingly, the role of the reader is particularly high in this process. However, the “creation” of art texts, from the recipient side is not arbitrary, subjective and emotional work. In contrast, as the theory of “*reader-response criticism*” by Wolfgang Iser<sup>2</sup> has stated, reading, or wider, receiving literary texts, is “co-creation” on the basis of a potential structure of the text - the basis of reading that Iser calls “response-inviting structures”<sup>3</sup>.

According to W. Iser, if the writer's creative process focuses on “fictional activity,” the readers' reception process focuses on “reading activity.” From the writing side, “response-inviting structure” is the creative result, based on the natural combination of “reality”, “imagination” and “fiction” of the writer. From the receptive side, carrying out “reading activity”, means carrying out a “word processing” process, penetrating the “response-inviting structure” that the writer creates, performs and demonstrates their “*reader-responses*”. Thus, it is the “response-inviting structure” of the text that will open the highly subjective “response” opportunities from the reader. This is an open “co-creation” space.

In the “response-inviting structure” that the writer creates, it is pre-installed with “blanks”, “indeterminacy” (indeterminacy) and even, negation, They are both “inviting” and challenging readers. Read / receive, first of all “handles” the “blanks”, “uncertainties” or “negative”... that this text “invites”. It is also the mission that helps readers penetrate the work. Saying the text “invites” the reader to “handle” also means recognizing the power of “reforming”, “processing” the text, the right to actively and proactively supplement the text with new meanings (not just finding the meanings inherent in the text). Thus, in essence, when carrying out “reading activity” and “text processing” for a literary text, it is the reader who is exercising the power to re-create that text in their own way.

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<sup>1</sup> Truong Dang Dung, *Literary works as processes*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi 2004. In this work, the author introduces many basic concepts serving as a tool for identifying real research subjects of modern literary theory. It is noticeable that the author emphasizes on the characteristic of “process”, “openness”, the functions of “constructions” in receiving literature, and the important conclusion: the real existence of the text is not the structural space but the process, the text's time of use.

<sup>2</sup> Wolfgang Iser (1926-2007), literary researcher, professor at Konstanz (old West Germany), Republic of Germany, co-founder (along with R. Jauss) of reception theory Konstanz (“Aesthetics Reception” – “Rezeptionsästhetik”, in German, or “*Reader-Response Criticism*”, in American English). Wolfgang Iser's argument is based on results of serious research about the role of not only reader but also the texts in reception activity.

<sup>3</sup> Wolfgang Iser. *The Response-Inviting Structure of the text*, Huynh Van Van trans. (from German version), *Literary Research* Vol 9/2017. The phrase Response-inviting structures are translated into Vietnamese as “kết cấu vẫy gọi”, which has since become common.

However, stating that readers have the right to “create” text in their own way does not mean that arbitrary “handling” behaviors are acceptable. The “word processing” must adhere to some principles. First, “handling”, “constructivism” must be based on “blanks”, “uncertainties” or “negatives”... from the text itself; secondly, “handling” and “constructivism” must be based on “genre diagram” (each literary genre, according to the law of type, principles, ways of establishing “blanks”, “uncertainties”, “negative” separately). In the role of a receiver, one cannot “handle” a lyric poetry document in the same way as “handling” literary script writing, or narrative texts; “Handling” a formal document cannot be the same as “handling” a funny text... Here, background knowledge of genre and experience in reading literary texts according to clear category is obviously very important.

2.1.2. The theory of *Constructivism* by J. Piaget<sup>4</sup> has shown that the cognitive process of people in general, of students / learners in particular, is a process of “creating” knowledge ; every cognitive process, including learning, reading must start from the known knowledge, from the background knowledge to the unknown. And each person's knowledge is the result of an endless series of “constructions”, a dynamic and continuous accumulation process. It is possible to imagine the process of knowledge creation as follows:

“**Schema**” (available) => “new situation” => “imbalance” => **assimilation/adaptation** => “equilibrium” = “**schema**” (already available) => “new situation” => “imbalance” => **assimilation/adaptation** => “equilibrium” = “**schema**” (already available) => new situation => ...

In the diagram, the “**schemme/ schema**” is understood as knowledge, experience through the learning process, “constructed” and accumulated into “the known”, “already” in the form of a cognitive structure (mapped). *Assimilation* is the act of integrating the new into the cognitive “schema”. *Adaptation* is the act of making *accommodation* so that the “cognitive” schema is consistent with the new cognitive object. The rhythm between these two types of behavior creates a balance that must be included in the cognitive development mechanism

For example, through reading many simple text stories, learners can create knowledge about their stories in a “schematic” way of the structure of short stories, as well as the way to read short stories, so that readers can apply with similar documents. However,

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<sup>4</sup> Jean Piaget (1896-1980). In his *Constructivism*, he argued that the learner’s activity of knowledge construction always performs two functions that complement each other and transfer continuously, namely *assimilation* and *accommodation*. His perception of constructivism is totally different from that of traditional instructivism. Later, it was suggested that Piaget’s theory be called theory of *Radical Constructivism*, in order to distinguish it with Vygotski’s *Social-Constructivisme*.

in reality, stories are diverse: short stories, medium stories, long stories; Short stories can be written in the direction of dramatization, lyricism, fiction, epic, etc., long stories can be written in the form of “legend”, “parable”, “anecdotes”, or combination of these forms, or can be written in a “single” or “multi-voice” way, etc. In front of a document that is different from what is known, a “new situation” of reception appears to make the reader / learner fall into a “*disequilibrium*” state. At this time he is forced, on the one hand, to apply all that is known to “*assimilate*”, on the other hand, to seek and supplement new knowledge to “*accommodate*” the reception schema adapted to new cognitive objects (for example, a new storybook, a new reading) and return to *equilibration* with a new or preliminary “schema” added with new lines. Then when a new situation (with another storybook) appears, the reader/ learner must continue a process of both assimilation and accommodation to escape the “imbalance” state, return to the new equilibration in the cognitive mechanism.

A connection of the theoretical achievements of the theory of receiving literature with the theory of knowledge constructivism brings about a methodological cognitive consequence: educators will have more chances of success if they can find solutions to activating the creation of meaning in receiving literary texts in *the subject of the reader - students* simultaneously activating in them the *construction* of knowledge in the subject of learners in the learning environment.

## **2.2. Reading literary texts as communication and teaching reading literary texts as teaching-learning communication**

2.2.1. Theory of speech genre of M.M. Bakhtin<sup>5</sup> considers literary genres as secondary forms of speech that exist in communication. He said that in all cases: “*When we organize our words, we will always imagine the whole body of our speech: both in a form of certain genre diagrams, and a form of personal meaning of speech*”<sup>6</sup>. He also distinguished clearly two groups of speech categories: primitive and secondary. The types of secondary speech (including literary genres) are of course built on the basis of the original forms of speech. When reading, receiving a literary text, the reader participates in a communication (proposed by the writer). However, it is not conventional communication, but “indirect communication” (in “indirect language”). Applying the theory of speech genre of M. M.

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<sup>5</sup> Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975), Russian researcher of social sciences and humanities. His research *The issue of speech type*, was published in 1953. Printed in La Nguyen (collection of translations) *Literary Theory, Modern issues*, University of Education Publishing House 2017.

<sup>6</sup> M. M. Bakhtin. *Literary reviews*, 1986. Cited in Tyupa, *Communicative strategies* (part II) La Nguyen trans.

Bakhtin in the study of “communication strategy”, V.I. Tyupa<sup>7</sup> said that in order for the communication to be operational, in these indirect communication situations, the author and the reader must have “agreements” on “communication strategy” and this “strategy” is synonymous with the choice of genre, so that each side of the communication party must respect the law of the genre as a “communication strategy”, the same choice and the same realization: “*genre is some bilateral convention in communication, it functions to link subjects and recipients of speech. The phenomenon of genre is the super linguistic language (dialect) of culture*”<sup>8</sup>. Thus, the Communication strategy is built on the basis of category and in turn, the Reading strategy must also be compatible with communication strategies and categories.

On relating these writers' views and communication strategies to Iser's theory of acceptance<sup>9</sup>, is it clear that: in nature, reading and receiving literary texts is not only *constructivism* but also *communication, constructivism in communication, to communicate. Constructivism and communication* are two types of activities that take place simultaneously, not separated.

2.2.2. Different from the constructive viewpoint of J. Piaget (created in the independent cognitive mechanism of individual students/ learners), constructivist viewpoint of Vygotsky's *social-constructivism*<sup>10</sup> especially promote social interaction in teaching. By demonstrating that there is a qualitative difference between the cognitive development of individual students/ learners (as “lonely scientists”) does not receive assistance with development of students/ learners who have the support, guidance of teachers, or those

<sup>7</sup> Valery Igolevich Tyupa, Russian literature researcher, Professor head of prosodic theory and history, faculty of Literature-History, Russian State University for the Humanities.

<sup>8</sup> V. I. Tyupa, *Communicative Strategies* (part II) La Nguyen trans. Source: languyensp.wordpress.com.

<sup>9</sup> W. Iser always asserts that the position of reader is the active position seeking meaning (new and different meaning), not just the given meaning in the text; if the creator of text has his/her intention, the reader also has his/her own direction (reader's direction), the recreation of text must be the combination of the intention and direction from both sides.

<sup>10</sup> Lev Seyomovich ygotsky (1896-1934) Russian psychologist, founder of *Social Constructivism*). “*Pedagogical Psychology*” – his work since 1934 – although still incomplete and was published quite late, it has become the foundation for many studies and theories about the development of cognition in many decades. His theory focuses on the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition. The theory is different from J. Piaget's theory in several points: 1) more attention on the influence of culture on the development of cognition; 2) more emphasis on the influence of social factors on the development of cognition) more emphasis on the role of language in the development of cognition; 4) denial of the argument that thinking exists before language (Piaget) and support of the idea that thinking and language are separate systems since birth. At the age of three, these two systems are assimilated to create linguistic thinking (internal talk).

Achievements of research in the framework of Vygotsky's social culture theory points out 4 basic principles in developing learner's knowledge: a) Language plays a central role in the development of knowledge; b) the development of knowledge cannot be separated with social conditions; c) learning brings about development; d) children construct themselves their knowledge.

with higher knowledge and skills, Vygotsky gives the concept of *zone of proximal development*. From this conclusion, he strongly emphasized the role of the instructor (teachers, parents, siblings...) to learners, and also recommended that the teacher's task is to find ways to support learners in acquiring new knowledge and experience from the knowledge they have had. Learning, thus, is synonymous with social interaction, a direct communication in the classroom, through lessons. It is a kind of *communication - awareness*, on the basis of “social constructivism” (communication between students and teachers, between students of different levels and also on the cultural background, cultural “dialogue”...). This type of *communication - awareness* in teaching reading texts must rely on strategic *communication - awareness* according to the law of type and existence as “bilateral conventions” between authors and readers. Accordingly, when learning to read literary texts, students must simultaneously participate in two forms, two levels of communication.

Thus, a logical connection of the theoretical achievements of the theory of literary communication with constructivism theory and social interaction can bring about a methodological cognitive consequence: educators there will be more chances of success if they find a good solution to organizing and activating teaching activities in the way of “communication in communication” (two in one): Communicating “constructing literary texts” in *reading* and communicating “social constructivism” in *learning* activities.

### **3. Conclusions**

**3.1.** The paper has shown the identification of the relationship between the role of readers in receiving literature (according to “acceptance theory”) and the role of learners in knowledge construction (according to “constructivism”) will be a reliable basis for answering the first question. Likewise, finding a solution to activating *indirect communication* (through literary texts, according to the theory of “communication strategy”, “reading strategy”) must be carried out simultaneously with finding solutions to enable *direct communication* and “social interaction” (according to “social constructivism”), will be a reliable basis for answering the second question.

**3.2.** The article also shows that: It is necessary to have a strong connection between basic science and educational science in the study and practice of the teaching method of the subject, here the Literature subject, which is the teaching of literary texts.

In our time, reading and teaching reading literary texts have been enlightened by many literary theories as well as modern education theory. However, in Vietnam, it seems that modern literary theory (in the basic research area) and the theory of literary education (belonging to research and application in the subject of education) are still conducted separately. The “association”, by many reasons, is quite limited. It is time to have a stronger, more efficient connection. If there is a good connection, for example, as

mentioned above, between the theory of “type of speech” (M. M. Bakhtin), “narrative communication” and “communication strategy” (VI Tyupa), theory of literature reception from the perspective of “reader-response criticism” (W. Iser), receptionist studies (HR Jauss)... with *knowledge construction* theory (Jean Piaget) and/ or *social constructivism* (Lev Vygotsky) and modern perspectives on the reading and teaching of literary text (VB) of many educational educators in the world, there is clearly a basis to believe that the effect of teaching literature in the direction of competence development in Vietnamese schools will be much better.

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**VỀ HOẠT ĐỘNG KIẾN TẠO VÀ GIAO TIẾP TRONG ĐỌC VĂN – HỌC VĂN**

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**TÓM TẮT**

*Từ gợi mở của những thành tựu nghiên cứu liên ngành, bài viết cho rằng: sự kết nối giữa quan điểm đọc văn bản văn học như là kiến tạo và giao tiếp (trong lí luận văn học) với quan điểm dạy - học văn học như là kiến tạo tri thức và kiến tạo xã hội (trong lí luận và phương pháp dạy học văn học) có thể mang lại nhiều gợi ý có tính phương pháp luận trong việc phát triển năng lực đọc văn cho người đọc - học sinh.*

**Từ khóa:** văn bản văn học, cấu trúc mời gọi, chiến lược giao tiếp, thuyết kiến tạo, thuyết kiến tạo xã hội.