

Lexical Sense Relations and Their Application in Vocabulary Instruction

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Abstract:

Vocabulary have always been integral to language and crucial for second language learners. However, most second language learners generally share the same feeling that it need a lot of efforts to memorize vocabularies. The meaning of vocabulary was largely determined by the lexical sense relations which makes the understanding and analysis of lexical sense relations helpful in the mastery of meaning of words, and it nurtures the development of imagination to finally arouse learner's interest in lexical study.

Key words: sense relations; semantic field; vocabulary teaching

1. Introduction about Practical and Theoretical Backgrounds

As British linguistic D.A.Wilkins pointed out, "Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed." The study of lexical is the fundamental method of language acquisition. The fact that how many vocabularies a student master has a clear impact on the learner's use of language and communicative competence. D.A.Wilkins also mentioned that "learning of vocabulary involves the association between vocabulary and the outer world, and

the relationships among vocabularies.” The learning of vocabulary, therefore should be considered from every aspects. Teacher should help student to gain more information about vocabulary, including hyponymy, synonymy, antonymy... apart from explaining the meaning and pronunciation of words.

As the study of meaning, semantics assumes an important position in the study of language, it includes sense relation, lexical structure, function, formation and development.

2. Problems in the Development of Students' Vocabulary Ability

From the perspective of semantic relationship acquisition, there are two serious misunderstandings in current English teaching and learning, which leads to the underdevelopment of students' English vocabulary ability.

2.1 Pay Attention to the Correspondence between English Vocabulary and Mother Tongue, and Despise the Semantics of English Vocabulary

In the English vocabulary learning course, students often remember and learn vocabulary through the use of the words list from the textbooks in both Chinese and English or a vocabulary book. (吴雪梅) By this vocabulary learning method, students often match their native vocabulary with English vocabulary. Although they may be able to understand the annotation, pronunciation and spelling of English vocabulary, students often do not understand the differences in the semantic systems of the two languages, causing a lot of misuse in the future. And also resulting in inaccurate or inappropriate use of vocabulary.(高远)

2.2 Pursuing Vocabulary, Ignoring Meaning

Many teachers and students think that if they have a large vocabulary, they can learn the vocabulary well, and the exam will score high. Since only words are counted and words are treated in isolation, there is no understanding of the intrinsic link between words. When students try to use English, they just know how but have no idea why, which leads to the stagnation of students' vocabulary ability, and the vocabulary ability and vocabulary have not been developed accordingly. Wu Xudong and Chen Xiaoqing pointed out that learning words is not only a process of matching meaning with form, it is also a process of establishing a semantic network. @That is to say, learners should constantly understand the semantic relationship between words and other words while deepening the semantic understanding of words. (@)

3. The Lexical Sense Relations

Sense relation refers to the relation of related words in sense; it is a semantic classification of words. This paper will set forth this classification through 3 kinds of sense relations: inclusiveness relation, sameness relation and oppositeness relation.

3.1 hyponymy

Some words represent genus, while others species, the study of their relationship can make a difference between them. Like the word “animal” is a word for genus, and words like “sheep”, “dog”, “fish” are for species. So we name words such as “animal” as superordinate while “sheep” as subordinates. We call the relationship between superordinate and subordinates hyponym, which means the sense relation between two words in which the meaning of one word is included in the meaning of another word. Superordinate and subordinates are relative.

German scholar J.Trier advanced a language lexical structure’s semantic field theory. Brinton 3 defines "semantic field" and relates the linguistic concept to hyponymy:

"Related to the concept of hyponymy, but more loosely defined, is the notion of a semantic field or domain. A semantic field denotes a segment of reality symbolized by a set of related words. The words in a semantic field share a common semantic property."

3.2 Synonymy

A synonym is a word or phrase that means exactly or nearly the same as another lexeme (word or phrase) in the same language. Synonymy denotes the phenomenon of two or more different linguistic forms with the same meaning. Those linguistic forms are called synonyms, e.g. peace and tranquility can be substituted with one another in certain contexts. 4 Synonymy carries the same meaning but differs in other aspects. In the group of synonymy there is a word play the dominate part which represent the same trait carries in all other words, we call this word “synonymic dominant” and the dominated semantic field therefore is “semantically synonymous fields.” For example, if we want to make “leave” as a synonymic dominant to express the meaning of go away, the corresponding synonymy may be “depart, quit” etc.

3.3 Antonymy

The relation of oppositeness and antagonism between words is known as antonymy, and an antonym is one of a pair of words with opposite meanings. There are three categories of antonyms identified by the nature of the relationship between the opposed meanings.

(1) Gradable antonymy: They may be seen in terms of degrees of the quality involved. The denial of one is not necessarily the assertion of the other. For example: good - bad, long - short, narrow - wide.

(2) Complementary antonymy: They are characterized by the feature that the denial of one member of the pair implies the assertion of the other and the assertion of one means the denial of the other. For example: alive - dead, male - female, pass - fail.

(3) Converse antonymy: The members of a pair do not constitute a positive-negative opposition. They show the reversal of a relationship between two entities. For example: buy - sell, lend - borrow, before - after.

4. The Application of Sense Relations in Vocabulary Instruction

According to semantics, all vocabulary are connected in some way. That's why we should put vocabulary into some related semantic field in the process of language instruction. We need to link new words to their semantic field and build a Semantic Web.

4.1 Hyponymy and Vocabulary Instruction

In the process of vocabulary instruction, the teacher could name one superordinate and give an example of its subordinates, then ask students to come up with the subordinates they can think of. Take the word "transportation" as a superordinate to make an example, its subordinates include words like "bus" "taxi" "airplane" and so on. By using this connection between words, the semantic web could be effectively established in students. This kind of method can active students mind and put them into a state of self-thinking, meanwhile liven up the classroom atmosphere. Through this method, the relations between superordinate and subordinates could help students have a more effective way of memorizing new words.

4.2 Synonymy and Vocabulary Instruction

English is a language with a multiple of vocabularies, so it's inevitable that this language is rich in synonymy. But we can not overlook the fact that even though synonymy share the sameness in some meanings, they are also differ in other parts, such as the connotation, emotion and style of words. Total synonymy is hardly existed. Like the word "laugh", when it implies the meaning of people who are in a pleasant mood, the corresponding synonymy contains "chuckle", "cackle", "giggle" and "roar", but these words differ in the ways of laughing. Chuckle means to laugh quietly, especially because you are thinking about something funny; cackle means to laugh in a loud, unpleasant way, especially in a high voice; giggle means to laugh in a silly way because you are amused, embarrassed or nervous; and roar means to laugh very loudly. During the process of vocabulary instruction, teacher should be able to consciously provide some other vocabularies that share the same meaning according to the basic meaning of the word. It will prove to be beneficial for students to enlarge and enrich their vocabulary.

But teacher also have to keep in mind to remind students of the minor differences between these words. But since when learning synonymy, student mostly just have a simple understanding of their meaning, and overlook the distinction between expression which causes a lot of errors afterwards.

Words "courageous" "brave" "rash" all have the meaning of people who are not afraid to do things. But they are actually different senses of words. Courageous is a positive sense of word, brave is a neutral word and rash is a negative sense of word.

The phrase "The good thing will inevitable to happen." is a semantically wrong one because the word inevitable carries the negative sense of meaning. Therefore, you should choose a vocabulary with positive meaning. In short, we should pay attention to the analysis of synonyms when learning vocabulary. Teachers should help students learn and analyze the nuances of

synonyms in the classroom through various examples. This will help students to remember words and help students deepen their understanding.

4.3 Antonymy and Vocabulary Instruction

Antonyms are considered to be those that have opposite or contrary semantic relationships between words. Like “love” and “hate”, “happy” and “unhappy”, “lend” and “borrow”. Sometimes a word can have various antonyms due to its different context. Take the word “fresh” as an example, it can mean the food which is recently produced or picked and not frozen, in that case, its antonym will be rotten. And when it means something new or different in a way that adds to or replaces something, the antonym will change into dated. In the course of vocabulary instruction, teachers should pay attention to guiding students to use the anti-sense association between words and words to recognize words and expand vocabulary. The significance of antonyms for vocabulary learning lies in inspiring learners' positive associations, making new words and synonyms of known words and antonyms, so that learners can easily distinguish the differences of synonyms, thoroughly understand the meaning of words, and firmly grasp the words.

From this point of view, the establishment of the word meaning network helps learners to make a connection between old and new knowledge, effectively memorize words and expand vocabulary. At the same time, it is also beneficial for learners to make a comparison between words with similar meanings and opposite meanings to achieve accurate use.

5. A Synthetically Pedagogical Procedure

Brown and Payne (1994) made a very clear model of vocabulary teaching where the teaching of vocabulary falls into five essential steps: (1) having sources for encountering new words, (2) getting a clear image, either visual or auditory or both, for the forms of the new words, (3) learning the meaning of the words, (4) making a strong memory connection between the forms and meanings of the words, and (5) using the words. Here we are going to discuss the synthetically pedagogical procedure following Brown and Payne's five steps:

5.1 Encountering New Word

The first essential step for the sense relation strategy is encountering new words, that could happen in a lot of situation. Like reading a new passage or having a new lesson. In the regular teaching process, we would ask students to try to guess the meaning of words from the context. Recognizing words in context can help students effectively grasp the meaning of words, but the limitation is that they can only grasp the words in this specific context. Teachers should provide students with different methods and channels for students to be exposed to new words.

5.2 Getting the Word Form

In this step, students need to copy the words that are new or difficult for them from what they have marked in the text or from the word list. By doing so, students can get the spelling and

pronunciation of these new words. Familiarize students with word forms because many errors are caused by confusing the spelling or pronunciation of similar words. Therefore, in the second step of the semantic relationship strategy, students are required to master the correct spelling and pronunciation of the words before proceeding with the words.

5.3 Constructing Sense Relations

The essential step of the sense relation strategy is constructing sense relations of words. In this step, the teacher should find appropriate words to setup sense relations of the new items, and at the same time make the presenting procedure an interesting learning process for the learners. According to the above research, we want to display new words through synonymy words, antonymy words and hyponymy words associated with the target word meaning. After students are familiar with these semantic relationships, they can ask students to use these words in a way that is syntactically used. When establishing semantic relationships, teachers can follow the following two sub-steps:

(1) When teachers show new words to students, they should encourage students to explain the meaning of the new words through synonymy, antonymy and hyponymy that the teacher has given, and guide the students' interest to the semantic relationship words of the new words. In this step, the teacher allows the students to divide into groups to share information and discuss difficulties. Teachers should give students time to train self-learning skills so that students can master the strategy of learning words.

(2) Because students have little foreign language experience, they should use the help of teachers to use flexible semantic analysis or basic category vocabulary theory to find appropriate synonymy, antonymy and hyponymy semantics to construct a target word semantic network.

5.4 Consolidation

In this step, the teacher provides appropriate exercises to train and consolidate the newly learnt words and helps the learners get a better retention on them. The exercises prepared by the teacher are designed exercises for the meaning of the newly learned words. It should be about enhancing the semantic relationships between words. Teachers can adopt a simple and straightforward approach when consolidating semantic relationships for students. The teacher can give two words directly, and then let the students judge the semantic relationship between the two words.

5.5 Use the Word

The final step is using the words. Some may consider this step unnecessary. However, our aim is to help students integrate vocabulary knowledge. This requires the use of new words. If the semantic relationship is established for the new words, it is to understand the words and use them reasonably which makes the steps to use new words essential. Teachers can organize students to write short paragraphs, even essays to use newly learned words and related semantic words. The cloze practice that containing target words is also a good way to use new words. By using new

words, students are able to gain knowledge of word collocation, syntactic provisions, and use words in a proper way.

6. Conclusion

In summary, the establishment of the Semantic Web helps learners to link old and new knowledge, effectively memorize words, and expand vocabulary. It also helps learners to compare words with similar meanings and opposite meanings to finally be able to use words accurately. Vocabulary plays an essential part in English learning. Without some mastery of certain vocabulary, skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating in language accumulation can only be castles in the air. It affects the learner's pragmatic and verbal communication skills, and the semantic relationship between words and words. From the perspectives of semantic relations, based on the linguistic principles of hyponymy relations, synonymous relations, antonymy relations, etc., Teaching vocabulary in the semantic field can help to enhance students' ability to analyze and understand vocabulary, understand and master the semantics' combination of rules. And ultimately promotes the growth of students' vocabulary.

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