Journal of
Creative Practices in Language Learning and Teaching (CPLT)
Volume 2, Number 1, 2014

New Methods in Vocabulary Teaching in the CSL Classroom

Hui Yin
hui.yin@xjtlu.edu.cn
Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

ABSTRACT
Teaching vocabulary in the CSL (Chinese as Second Language) classroom is a challenge that many teachers face and traditional grammar-translation methods seem not to be very effective in CSL vocabulary teaching. This study seeks to explore new methods which are different from grammar-translation methods in vocabulary teaching in the CSL classroom in order to change the situation from passive learning into active learning and from teacher-centered classes into student-centered ones. Various new methods such as synonym/antonym seeking, teaching through other semantic relations, teaching through analogy, teaching through brainstorming and associations, teaching through elicitation, and teaching through analyzing compounds are introduced in this study to provide students opportunities to learn language through using language and to make CSL vocabulary teaching more effective.

Keywords: vocabulary; teaching; Chinese; Second Language

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary teaching has occupied an important position in language teaching. In the past, the traditional method—Grammar-translation method has dominated vocabulary teaching in China for quite a long time. The traditional methodology mainly focuses language teaching on language points teaching. In traditional CSL classes, teachers largely explain language points through providing example sentences with translations to illustrate these points and provide students practice through translations and other exercises. Usually in traditional CSL teaching, teachers rather than students dominate classes. More and more CSL teachers tend to be dissatisfied with such traditional methods and seek new ways to improve vocabulary teaching and the whole CSL teaching as well.

The present study aims at exploring new methods in vocabulary teaching in the CSL classroom in order to change the situation from passive learning into active learning and from teacher-centered classes into student-centered ones. Various new methods in CSL vocabulary teaching are introduced in this paper to provide students opportunities to learn language through using language and to improve CSL vocabulary teaching.

SYNONYM/ANTONYM SEEKING

Words can be used for expressing concepts and denoting concrete or abstract things. There exist various semantic relations between them. Synonymy and antonymy are two basic relations between words. Teaching through searching for synonyms and antonyms can overcome the disadvantage of memorizing new words in a monotonous way to some extent. Classifying words into semantic related groups can help students to memorize vocabulary through establishing semantic associations which can facilitate lexical access from mental dictionaries. Accordingly, the efficiency of memorizing vocabulary can be raised.

Teaching through antonymy is basically asking students to search for pairs of words which have opposite meanings. Antonymy can be grouped into two sub-classes: absolute (non-gradable) antonymy and graded antonymy. Absolute antonymy refers to pairs of words which have bipolar or "mutually exclusive meanings" (William 1992: 28). They are complementary pairs such as alive/dead; married/single; awake/ asleep. Graded antonymy refers to forms which "have relative opposite meanings along some continuum" (Wiebe 1999:5) such as 大小 'big/small'; 高低 'high/low'; 高兴/悲伤 'happy/sad'.

In graded antonymy, the negative of one word is not synonymous with the other. For example, someone who is not happy is not necessarily sad, but more of one is less of another. More bigness is less smallness. Another characteristic of many pairs of graded antonymy is that one is marked and the other is unmarked. The unmarked member is the one used in questions of degree. We ask: 'How high is it?' but not 'How low is it?' unless we have presuppositions. To such questions, our answers could be 'one hundred feet high or five feet tall' but not 'five feet

short' except that it is used humorously.

Sometimes we can ask students to figure out the kind of antonymy of a pair of words in order to have a better understanding of the meanings and the nature of the pair of words. This can help students to grasp the words being learnt and use language properly.

TEACHING THROUGH OTHER SEMANTIC RELATIONS

Besides synonymy and antonymy, there are other semantic relations between words such as hyponymy, partonymy and homonymy. Teaching through these semantic relations can not only consolidate the words which have been learnt but can also introduce relevant new words and make vocabulary teaching more colorful.

Teaching through hyponymy
Teachers could give students superordinate terms and ask them to list co-hyponyms. For example, students are given the superordinate term 'vegetable' and asked to work out hyponyms like those in Figure 1.

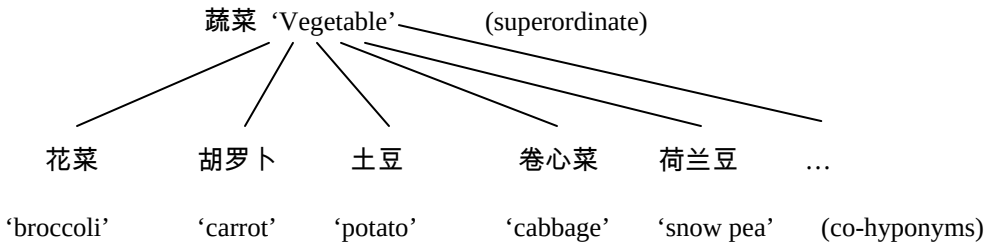

Figure 1 Illustration of the superordinate and co-hyponyms

Teaching through partonymy
Partonymy refers to the relationship between some entity and one of its subparts such as 门 'door'/房子 'room'. Give students the entity to denote the whole and ask them to find some of its subparts or vice versa.

Teaching through homonymy
Homonymy refers to single forms with two or more unrelated meanings. It can be classified into two groups:

a. homophones are homonyms with the same pronunciation but two or more distinct (unrelated) meanings such as cite/site/sight; flea/flee

b. homographs are homonyms with the same spelling but distinct meanings such as plant (vegetation)/plant (factory); lead (N)/lead(V)

Some psycholinguistic evidence (e. g. Kess 1992; Reed 1988) suggests that the phonological or orthographic module can act independently in lexical access to some extent. For example, if given the phonological representation 'tree' and asked to find words which rhymes with it, you can easily retrieve the words such as 'free', 'three'. Phonological information or orthographic information can help students to access its homonyms. Teaching through homonymy can make vocabulary teaching more interesting and can also provide students opportunities for class discussions.

TEACHING THROUGH ANALOGY

Teaching through analogy is meant to help students to understand the relations between words and distinguish their meanings by means of comparison. The analogy could be expressed through the formula: A : B = C : D (Dai 1993). Students can compare the relation between the pairs to arrive at the meanings of the new words. The following two examples (with the new words italicized) are illustrations.

(1) 笔 'pen': 作家 'writer'/ (*手术刀* '*scalpel*'): 外科医生 'surgeon' (person and instrument)

(2) 医生 'doctor': 诊所 'clinic'/ (*厨师* '*chef*'): 饭店 'restaurant' (person and working place)

The teacher can also ask students to figure out the relation of one pair and use the known relation to fill in the blank using logical reasoning as (3) and (4) show.

(3) 旅馆 'hotel': 房客 'guest'/ ___ (*寝室* '*dormitory*'): 学生 'student'

(4) 叶子 'leaf': 树 'tree'/ ___ (*羽毛* '*feather*'): 鸟 'bird'

Teaching through analogy can help to train students' thinking, develop their potentials and cultivate their logical reasoning. Students of science and technology are particularly interested in this kind of activity.

BRAINSTORMING AND ASSOCIATIONS

Things in the world are not isolated, many of which are associated with each other in one way or another. Naturally there are different relations between words. In vocabulary teaching we can select a word as the center word (or starting word) and expand it outward by searching for words related to this word. A group or a string of words can be formed around the center word to establish a semantic network as (5) indicates.

(5) **医生**'Doctor'-----**医院**'hospital', 诊**所**clinic', **病房**'ward', **体温**'body temperature', **体温表**'thermometer', 发烧'fever', **救**护车'ambulance', 处**方** 'prescription', 药 'medicine', 药**片** 'tablet', **胶囊**'capsule', 发**炎**'infection', **等** 'etc.'

The teacher can write the center word on the blackboard and ask students to find related words through brainstorming and associations. After the teacher writes down the words, students can discuss to cross out unrelated words to build a lexical group around the centered word (or the starting word).

The teacher can also give students a generic term or categorical name and ask them to find specific items. Students are encouraged to discuss the prototype (exemplar) and its features. According to prototype theory (e. g. Kess 1992), some concepts are fuzzy and the boundaries are not clear-cut. A prototype is a typical item which share more features (properties) of that category. Therefore, the prototype or exemplar is often the first item to occur in people's mind when they are given a categorical name to find specific items. When we are asked to find an example of fruit, it is likely that the first item to occur in our mind is 'apple'. According to activation theory (e. g. Reed, 1988) in psycholinguistics, the generic term or the exemplar can activate its neighbors in mental lexicon and its related words which share some features with the exemplar.

In vocabulary teaching, for example, we can give students the generic term: **鸟** 'bird' and ask them to describe its features or properties such as having feathers, ability of flying, having a beak, seed-eating, incapability of swimming. Then students can discuss its prototype which could be more than one and other members in the category:

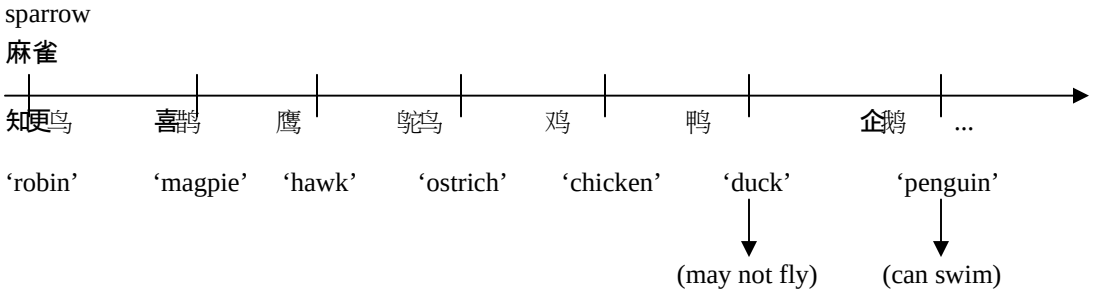

Figure 2 The prototype(s) and other members in the bird category

麻雀 ‘sparrows’ and 知更鸟‘robins’ share more features of a bird and therefore are more bird-like, while a penguin is not a good exemplar because it possesses less features (e. g. it can swim). Through discussions of features or properties of the prototype and searching for members for a category, students can learn vocabulary through using language. Furthermore, the teacher can ask students to discuss the connotations or associations of a particular item if it is obvious. Connotations are culture-specific. In China, 喜鹊‘magpie’ is associated with bringing good lucks while in North America its connotation is being noisy.

Through associations we can find some shared commonalities which often cannot be easily detected. For example, we normally do not notice some commonalities between 裤子 ‘pants’ and 蛇 ‘snake’. However, these two items share the same classifier 条 in Chinese. In fact, there is something in common between the two items, that is, both are elongated objects. It is a good practice to put semantics in the classifier system for students to learn words in this category. For example, the following classifiers are actually associated with certain meanings. Analyzing meanings and implications of classifiers can help to learn classifiers and their associated words. The entities which are associated with these classifiers are far from random as the following shows:

a. 条 (long and flexible): 一条蛇 ‘a snake’; 一条河 ‘a river’

b. 支 (long and slender): 一支笔 ‘a pen’; 一支烟 ‘a cigarette’

c. 根 (slender) : 一根香蕉 ‘a banana’

d. 张 (flat): 一张纸 ‘a piece of paper’; 一张票 ‘a ticket’

e. 颗 (small and round) 一颗珍珠 ‘a pearl’; 一颗星 ‘a star’

f. 粒 (round and smaller than 颗): 一粒米 ‘a grain of rice’; 一粒砂 ‘a grain of sand’

Teaching through brainstorming and associations can help students to establish semantic networks and make the classroom teaching more vivid. It is a good practice to encourage students to use their brains actively for classroom discussion and participation in vocabulary learning.

TEACHING THROUGH ELICITATION

Teachers can elicit the words under practice through providing students proper contexts and/or

situations. For example, the sentence in (6) can be provided to students in order to elicit the word**顺序** 'sequence'.

(6) 你能按时间 _____ (**顺序**) 列出导致第二次世界大战的事件? Can you list the events leading to World War II in the correct time _____ ? (sequence)

Teachers can also give students a few sentences and provide them a proper situation in order to elicit the word(s) or phrase(s) being sought.

TEACHING THROUGH ANALYZING COMPOUNDS

Compounds are very common in Chinese which is claimed to be a compounding language by some linguists. Teaching students compounds by introducing some knowledge of compound-formation can help students to enlarge their vocabulary in a relatively easy way. The meanings of most compounds in Chinese can be arrived at by analyzing their parts such as **帆船** 'sail-boat', **鸭蛋** 'duck-egg' and **书包** 'school-bag'. These compounds denote a subtype of concepts denoted by their heads. They are said to be endocentric and the meanings of such compounds are quite transparent. In some cases, however, the meanings of compounds are not "easily discernable from their constituent parts" (Reeves et al. 1998: 165) such as redneck, butterfly, redhead, birdbrain, walkman in English and **伤风** 'hurt-wind–have a cold', **反正** 'reverse-right–anyway' and **风行** 'wind-go–be in fashion' in Chinese. Thus, a redneck in English is not a type of neck; rather it often refers to a person from the American southern rural laboring class. The meaning of **伤风** 'hurt-wind' in Chinese is not quite related to its constituents **伤** 'hurt' or **风** 'wind'. These compounds are called exocentric and their meanings are opaque in one way or another. Such compounds only make up a small number of Chinese compounds; however, attention should also be paid to the teaching of these compounds.

Analyzing the meaning and formation of compounds is very useful in teaching CSL. For example, resultative compounds are very common in Chinese and are worth discussing. In Chinese, resultative compounds refer to structures in which one or more morphemes serve as the complement(s) of a head morpheme (Li & Thompson 1981; Packard 2000; Xiao & McEnery 2004). In resultative compounds, the second morpheme indicates a result of the action of the first morpheme. Morphemes used as complements of result are limited. The commonly used ones are the following: 破 'break', 倒 'fall', 掉 'drop', 开 'open, separate', 完 'finish', 到 'attain, achieve'. In English, the resulting state is usually indicated by an adjective or prepositional particle–in short, by an atemporal relational predication (Langacker 1987, 1991, 2008) while in Chinese, the resulting state is often indicated by a complement verb or adjective which usually follows the head verb as in (7).

(7) 推倒 'push-fall–push down'

打破　　'hit-break–break'
吃完　　'eat-finish–finish eating'

In this type of structure, the order of the two verbs cannot be reversed; otherwise non-sense words would be formed. Therefore, **推到** 'push-fall–push down' cannot be **倒推**

Since there are some lexicalization differences between English and Chinese (Yin 2005, 2010a), English speakers have difficulty in acquiring Chinese resultative compounds. In Chinese, the concept covered by a typical English verb such as *kill*, *kick*, *open* is divided into two parts: the final outcome and an action performed with the intent to lead to that outcome, which is signaled by the main verb (Talmy 1985, 2000; Yin 2010a, 2010b, 2011). As a result, the unitary concept of an English verb often has a counterpart in Chinese two-part conceptualization expressed by a resultative compound consisting of a verb plus its complement as (8) illustrates.

(8)

他	**踢**	**了**	张**三**	**可是**	**没**	**踢到**
he	kick	perfective	Zhangsan	but	negative	kick-achieve

'He kicked Zhangsan but missed.'

In (8), the first clause means that the speaker performed the action with the intention of kicking *Zhangsan* and the second clause which contains a resultative compound ***踢到*** 'kick-achieve' indicates that the action did not achieve the goal, that is, his action of kicking was not successful in making physical contact with *Zhangsan* by his foot. The English verb *kick* used to gloss the Chinese verb ***踢*** does not correspond fully in meaning. The original meaning of the sentence is that 'He performed the action with the intent to kick Zhangsan, but he missed.'

Another good example of resultative compounds in Chinese would be ***看见*** 'look-perceive—see'. A verb like ***看*** 'direct one's gaze, look' in Chinese usually only encodes the meaning of looking, without indicating whether the looking has led to perception or not. When Chinese speakers want to convey the meaning that not only the action has taken place but also results have been achieved, they usually need to add resultative complements. Thus, when Chinese speakers want to express the meaning equivalent to English 'see' they need to use two verbal morphemes: one is ***看*** 'look' and the other is ***见*** 'perceive'. In the case of English, a different strategy for conveying the resultative meaning of verbs is used. It does not add resultative complements to action-only verbs but uses entirely new verbs, which include both the action-phase and the result-phase as in *look* vs. *see*.

Due to the fact that many English verbs not only express action but also result, English speakers often miss necessary resultative complements in learning Chinese. Therefore, teachers need to analyze these lexicalization differences between English and Chinese to help students understand the formation and meanings of Chinese compounds in order to avoid making such mistakes as omissions of complements which are indeed necessary to signal result.

CONCLUSIONS

The methods proposed in this paper for vocabulary teaching in the CSL classroom are only a few which are different from traditional methods such as the grammar-translation method. Teaching vocabulary through the recommended methods such as forming semantic networks, building associations, using analogy and elicitation, analyzing word-formation and meaning of compounds can not only arouse students' interests in vocabulary learning, but also raise efficiency for CSL vocabulary teaching.

Nowadays, more and more CSL teachers have come to realize the importance of providing students quality language teaching through innovation and reflection. It is encouraging that in China reforms in language teaching are in full swing in various aspects such as syllabus and material design, teaching methodology and course assessment. Language teachers pay more and more attention to students' participation and class discussion. If we can use various methods to encourage students to participate in Chinese classes and fulfill different tasks, such classes will be more interesting and more productive. In this way students can learn Chinese through using Chinese and teacher-centered classes will turn into student-centered ones.

REFERENCES

Dai, C. T. (1993). Exploration on enlarging English vocabulary. Paper presented at *the College English Teaching and Research Conference of Fujian, Zhejiang & Jiangxi Provinces*. Xiamen, China.

Nicoladis, E. & Yin, H. (2010). Evidence for the role of frequency in the acquisition of lexicalization patterns of Chinese-English bilingual children. *Journal of Chinese Linguistics*, *38*(2): 288-322.

Kess, J. F. (1992). *Psycholinguistics*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Langacker, R. W. (1987). *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar. Vol. 1, Theoretical prerequisites*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Langacker, R. W. (1991). *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar. Vol. 2, Descriptive application.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Langacker, R. W. (2008). *Cognitive grammar: A basic introduction*. Oxford, U.K. & New York: Oxford University Press.

Li, C. N. & S. A. (1981). Thompson. *Mandarin Chinese: A functional reference grammar*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Packard, J. 2000. *The morphology of Chinese: A linguistic and cognitive approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Reed, S. K. (1988). *Cognition: theory and applications*. Pacific Grove, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.

Reeves et al. (1998). Words and meaning. In J. B. Gleason & N. B. Ratner (Eds.),*Psycholinguistics* (pp. 157-226). New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.

Talmy, L. (1985). Lexicalization patterns: Semantic structure in lexical forms. In T. Shopen (Ed.), *Language typology and syntactic description: Vol. 3. Grammatical categories and lexicon*, (pp. 36-149). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Talmy, L. (1985). *Toward a cognitive semantics*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
Xiao, R. & McEnery, T. (2004). *Aspect in Mandarin Chinese: A corpus-based study*. (Studies in Language Companion Series 73.) Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
William, F. (1992). *Linguistic semantics*. Hillsadale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
Yin, H. (2005). A comparison of two satellite-framed languages: English and Chinese. In S. K. Chin et al. (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 2005 Northwest Linguistics Conference* (pp. 153-165). University of British Columbia, Canada.
Yin, H. (2010a). A corpus-based comparison of satellites in Chinese and English. In R. Xiao, (Ed.), *Using Corpora in Contrastive and Translation Studies* (pp. 416:434). Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle, UK.
Yin, H. (2010b). *A Cognitive Approach to Multi-Verb Constructions in Mandarin Chinese*. Unpublished Ph.D dissertation. Canada: University of Alberta.
Yin, H. (2011). The cognitive semantics of Chinese motion/directional verbs. *Working Papers of the Linguistics Circle of the University of Victoria*, *21*: 118-125.

About the Author

Dr. Hui Yin currently holds an academic position at the Department of English, Culture and Communication, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University. Before joining Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, Dr. Yin was Professor at Xiamen University of Technology, China; Linguist at Zi Corporation, Canada; Associate Professor and Director at the Institute of College English, Zhejiang University, China; Visiting Scholar, Central College, USA. His main research areas are Cognitive Linguistics, Corpus Linguistics, Language Teaching and Learning.