

# EFL Peer Chinese-English Formulaic Sequence Translation Based on Prosody

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**Abstract**—Semantic prosody is the research focus in the field of second language acquisition. Corpus-based language learning is considered as an access to the improvement of second language acquisition and the reflection of lexical items along with particular connotations habitually. This paper is based on semantic prosody to investigate the problems of EFL peer Chinese-English translation in formulaic sequence. Studies have shown that EFL learners pay more attention on the formation of semantic meaning and less attention on the completeness of semantic integrity. Inappropriate word choice in the formulaic sequence translation of EFL learners results from ignorance of semantic prosody. Finally, the integration of semantic prosody into EFL is discussed.

**Keywords**—prosody; formulaic sequence; peer translation; semantic extraction

## I. INTRODUCTION

Second language acquisition is a complex and systematic process. How to improve EFL learners' ability in native-like expression has been the hot focus of second language acquisition research. With the help of corpora-based linguistics, much research has examined the considerable amount of lexical items in language expression, which appeared in semantic fields with its special connotations. This leads to the recognition of the importance of semantic prosody for second language acquisition. This paper involves two purposes: (a). to introduce the notion of semantic prosody and investigate the problems of EFL translations problems in lexical level; (b). to develop the vocabulary teaching methods and prevent the use of interlanguage.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### A. Semantic Prosody

Semantic prosody, meaning semantic harmony, is first proposed by Louw in 1993. With the development of corpus linguistics, the research on prosody becomes more and more scientific and systematic in the examination and judgment of cross-language expression and translation.

In Louw's view, a consistent meaning of a word is determined by the words which collocate[1]. The function is to express the attitude and evaluation of the language user. For Sinclair's view, semantic prosody is "words or phrases show a

tendency to occur in a certain semantic environment"[2]. He raised important points that there are a lot of words and phrases with a tendency appeared in some special text. Stubbs pointed that every lexical item matches with a corresponding semantic set[3]. Whitsitt made a further point on the importance of prosody in corpus linguistics.

### B. Formulaic sequence

An increasing number of scholars have paid more attention on the construction and formation of semantic meaning in the level of word items. There are a succession of definitions defined this phenomenon by linguists according to constructional form, semantic features, textual functions and so on: chunking, lexical chunking, formulaic sequence, prefabricated words, prefabricated chunks, the extended unit of meaning, lexical bundle, lexical sequences, multiword expressions, collocations, multi-word strings, lexical phrase..... These definitions reflect the descriptions of this linguistic phenomenon and show the complexity and research significance of word items in second language acquisition. So, EFL learners' acquisition of word items is helpful to promote peer translation from Chinese to English.

Sinclair proposed the notion of the use of word items as the extended unit of meaning and stressed on the application of the extended unit of meaning in maximal approach to express semantic meaning in language system. The maximal approach is the extended unit of meaning, which is based on the mechanism of co-selection theory. According to the theory from Sinclair, the extended unit of meaning is achieved by the following five factors, including node word, the collocation of node, colligation, semantic preference and semantic prosody. The functions of these five factors in semantic expression are realized in the Fig.1.

Based on the Fig.1, formulaic sequence is the combination of semantics and syntax, formed by a set of words and centered by the node. This attracts much attention and linguistic research on EFL vocabulary learning and teaching. Lewis pointed that language is the grammarized words and formulaic sequence is the combination of words and grammar, and the combination of form and meaning. Wray said formulaic sequence is a coherent or incoherent prefabricated set of words or a bunch of prefabricated components as a whole semantic unit, which can be stored as a whole unit of

meaning and also can be used and extracted directly without grammar generation analysis[4].

The research on formulaic sequence is mainly from the viewpoints of phraseology, psycholinguistics, corpus linguistics and language teaching didactics. Formulaic sequence, as a unit of semantic meaning in linguistic phenomenon, is more and more stressed and concerned in the field of lexicography. Studies show the possibility of formulaic sequence as a combination of form and meaning in psychological reality, automatic extraction, lexical effect and universality of the application, etc.

### III. RESEARCH EXPERIMENT

There is a tendency of multiple perspectives on the research of prosody and formulaic sequence. Semantic prosody keeps a strong association with connotations and grammatical principles. Contextual and suprasegmental unit of meaning is available to learners in the process of comprehension.

Sinclair affirmed semantic prosody is existing in many words and phrases in certain English contexts[5]. Based on the foreign research on prosody and formulaic sequence, main focus of domestic scholars is presented in the contrastive analysis between Chinese and English. Wei Naixing studied the extended unit of meaning based on corpus data[6]; Huang Sihong pointed cognitive possibility for the use formulaic sequence[7]; Lu Jun analyzed the translation of formulaic sequence between Chinese and English[8]. These studies examined from different angles, which reflected the depth of understanding of formulaic language in the process of comprehension.

#### A. Experiment Design

Based on the above research and practical backgrounds on formulaic sequence, this paper aims to study and analyze semantic prosody problems of EFL learners in translation of formulaic sequence and intends to study the following questions:

The first is to find the difference and the relationship between the students with the knowledge on formulaic sequence and prosody, and the students with less knowledge on them.

Levels	Factors	Function	Process
Concrete semantic meaning	node	key factor	node recognition
	collocation	cooccurred words with node	coselection in words
	colligation	cooccurred words with the syntax of node	coselection in grammar
Abstract semantic meaning	semantic preference	cooccurred lexical items in special semantic field	coselection in semantic field
	semantic prosody	cooccurred sequence of syntax, semantics and pragmatics	realization of semantic function

Fig.1.

The second is to find the implications based on the data analysis and establish a teaching instructional plan for teaching on formulaic sequence and prosody.

#### B. Participants

Participants in this study were 35 students majoring Mechanical Engineering from one of universities in northeast of China. The age of EFL learners ranged from 20 to 22 with a period of 8 years in English study. For the time in studying formulaic sequence, all the participants involve 2 terms engagement in College English class.

#### C. Procedure

At the first stage of this experiment, all the participants attended the reading comprehension test prior to the beginning of this experiment and got 2.624 as the standard deviation. At the second stage, the design of formulaic sequence test was arranged with the aim reflecting prosodic cues. Five blanks were extracted from Band Four Examinations in recent five years according to the translation task in Band Four examinations. At the last stage, data analysis was based on corpus and questionnaires were conducted about the mismatch or miss after the test within permitted time.

#### D. Data Analysis

The data was collected in this study for analysis based on the comparison between CLEC and BNC corpus. The data analysis examined whether formulaic language can be identified with right prosody by EFL. According to the answers, the poor EFL learners and proficient learners are respectively reflected the characteristics in translation task. Based on these results and questionnaires, a trend was observed whether formulaic language can be identified by prosodic cues by some ways for different learners with different abilities. The study aimed to find empirically what led to the difference in formulaic language translation and demonstrated unique semantic preference for the EFL learners with different levels in foreign language.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Data Analysis on EFL Answers

The standard for judgment depended on BNC written corpus. Based on the collocations appeared in the writing of EFL learners, Wei Naixing divided the lexical choice of match into three types, typical match, interlanguage match and abnormal match[9]. Wei Naixing also defined: typical match represents the concordance between EFL's translation and native expression; interlanguage match represents the misuse of some words in formulaic sequence, and that means the English translation is equal to Chinese meaning but with the unmatched semantic preference and prosody; then abnormal match represents the translation is built on the combination of the lexical items from Chinese, which matches with the semantic meaning but do not match with the expression in second language in any way. The division depends whether the translation of EFL learners goes with the semantic prosody of formulaic sequence. According to the principle on division, the results show in Table I.

TABLE I. RESULTS OF TANSLATION

Types	Divisions of Answers		
	<i>Typical Match</i>	<i>Interlanguage Match</i>	<i>Abnormal Math</i>
Proportion	18%	58%	22%

Through data analysis, the extraction of formulaic sequence for EFL learners is based on the node word, especially a node word in verb with simple meaning. Firstly, typical match is limited to the words with equal Chinese meaning in both semantic preference and semantic prosody during the process of EFL vocabulary learning. Therefore, the learners tend to remember the word with limited or less meanings. For the variety of word meaning, to some extent, the learners cannot grasp the related semantic preference and semantic prosody in some special linguistic text. Secondly, for some verbs as a node or phrases in this study, the meaning is richer relatively and easily applied in more semantic field, and this kind of verb collocates with other words in more ways to form some extended unit of meaning in some semantic field. In this case, EFL learners are highly dependent on the meaning of the first native word meaning instead of second language and know little about some special words with the high-frequency characteristics appeared in semantic preference and semantic field. The dependence on the first language results in the use of interlanguage and wrong collocation. Thirdly, a small occupation of EFL learners cannot express the English semantic meaning and find the word choices or node word based on the pieces of Chinese meaning provided in the examination.

Compare between Chinese EFL learners' interlanguage and native English in experiment, the findings revealed that there are significant differences in semantic prosody between English native speakers and Chinese EFL learners. Chinese EFL learners underused the semantic prosody and overused its semantic meanings.

The study based on questionnaires shows that the variation on answers resulted from the variation of individual's reading experience and the psychological notice of mental mechanism. For EFL learners, during the mantic decoding process of cross-language, the extended or additional meanings of a words are more difficult to grasp, especially the realization of meaning expressed by the way of context or communication in some special semantic fields.

In addition, the mental lexicon for EFL leaners has a common character, the tendency to grasp the word with concrete meaning easily and the word with abstract meaning difficultly. In particular, the semantic preference and semantic prosody is formed on abstract meanings.

#### B. *The Imlications for Teaching Instructional Design*

The division of formulaic sequence types was proposed in several standards, such as the functions of formulaic sequence, the high frequency of formulaic sequence and form of formulaic sequence. Nattinger & DeCarrico divided formulaic sequence according to appearance of formulaic sequence, separating the types of formulaic sequence in poly words,

institutionalized expression, phrasal constraints and sentence builders[10].

Formulaic sequence is considered as the combined realization of grammar, semantics and pragmatics. Language expression develops from word on microscopic level to the extended unit of meaning on macroscopic level. Formulaic sequence is composed of different kinds of patterned language. Some formulaic sequences are relatively obvious and recognizable easily according to fixed form and opacity of meaning. For the convenience of data analysis on the unit of meaning and the structure on formulaic sequence, this study amalgamated and divided the formulaic sequence into three forms, fixed form, semi-fixed form and open form in Table II.

TABLE II. DATA COLLECTION ON FORMULAIC SEQUENCE

Types	Divisions of Formulaic Sequence in Examination		
	<i>Fixed Form</i>	<i>Semi-fixed Form</i>	<i>Open Form</i>
Proportion	52%	31%	17%

Based on the above data in Table II, the EFL learners tend to use formulaic sequence with fixed form more frequently and skilled than semi-fixed form and open form. Among the fixed forms, there is a tendency that EFL learners is more likely to choose a formulaic sequence with high frequency rate during the process of language acquisition, such as out of sight, live up to and apply for in the examination. In contrast, without regard to and out of ..... are presented with satisfactory expressions.

Peter claimed that language users can take formulaic sequence as a whole rather than taking them together from lexical memory or by employing some other components and use them until they reach a proficient lever in language acquisition[11]. The formulaic sequence learning is dependent on the rate of frequency of node word and the rate of context frequency. Formulaic sequence in fixed form is more easily retrieved from the mental lexicon than the other types. Gruber proposed the importance of textual background for formulaic sequence learning that the intertextuality makes formulaic language become a rich for research[12].

The inherent variability on formulaic sequence in language and teaching is the relevant patterns of co-selection. For the prosody in formulaic sequence learning, the teaching instructional plan should be based on texts, which shows the concordance between the usage and semantic prosody. Therefore, formulaic language can be identified based on prosodic cues in contexts and its co-selected patterns by the node in its context shifts the focus from a model which is paradigmatic and emphasizes the freedom of word choice to form the extended unit of meaning in semi-fixed or open form of formulaic sequence.

In teaching instructional design, the teachers should also provide special training in formulaic sequence with high frequency and reinforce the awareness of formulaic sequence for EFL learners. Based on the analysis from experiment data, there is a main reason affecting formulaic sequence and the related prosody learning: the uniqueness of individual

grammar and word priming on grammatical or lexical level. The EFL learners often have subjective reactions to a given semantic field, which is based on first native language for the EFL learners with poor language acquisition or the EFL learners with second language proficiency. The variation of implied attitudinal meaning of a word is achieved by different collocational or prosodic environments.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study was investigated and conducted for the two main purposes. This first was to find factors affecting language semantic prosody in formulaic sequence translation for EFL learners; the second was to find implications for instructional design.

The findings in this experiment bring some implications for teaching instruction design. So the teaching instruction design should be based on the types of the preferred use of formulaic sequence among the students. The teachers should stress on various types of formulaic sequences which the students are familiar or unfamiliar, especially the design of translation for unfamiliar types of formulaic sequence. For the improvement on semantic prosody, the teachers should provide the formulaic sequence learning for students in an enlarged semantic field, necessarily in context to grasp the prosodic cues. Based on the students' translation with high marks, the most important implication of the finding in the experiment is that the mental mechanism which forms by the use of formulaic sequences are related to language learning skills and personal mental lexicon. The difference which was observed in the experiment among the students shows that overall cognitive ability for learning is dominant factor in learning.

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