

The Course of English Lexicology Learning based on Constructivism Perspective

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Abstract. In this paper, the author changes the traditional pure theoretical teaching method of “spoon-feeding” in the course of English lexicology, applies constructivism specifically to vocabulary teaching, and regards lexicology as a dynamic process rather than a static knowledge. The author applied the constructivism teaching concepts of cooperative learning, context learning so as to cultivate students to actively construct the meaning of knowledge, which provides a new perspective and solution for the teaching in the course of English lexicology.

Keywords: English Lexicology; constructivism; cooperative learning; context learning.

1. Introduction

Vocabulary is the foundation of language, phonetics, grammar and vocabulary are the three main elements of language. Vocabulary is the building material of language, so no vocabulary means no language. Some researchers have shown that if a person masters about 3000 English words, he can communicate about 85% contents which he wants to express. If a person masters about 5000 English words, he can complete more than 90% contents of communicative task. If a person masters about 6000 English words, he can complete about 95% contents of communicative task. The increase of vocabulary correspondingly promotes the competences of reading, listening and language communication. The improvement of these abilities in turn can promote the increase of learners' vocabulary. So, vocabulary will influence the competences of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating greatly.

2. The Problems Existing in College English Lexicology

2.1 The Ignorance of the Methods of Vocabulary Teaching

For many years, due to the influence of structuralism linguistics, English teaching pay more attention to the structure and form of language. In recent years, the functional approach and communicative approach have not been paid enough attention to vocabulary teaching.

In current situation, in the process of college English teaching, many teachers leave vocabulary for students to learn on their own, or simply lead in reading aloud. Teachers don't instruct students the approach to remember vocabulary through the principle of word formation. Students often learn by rote memorization, even recite CET level 4 and CET level 6 vocabulary books separately. In this way, students don't produce any relationship between words and words. So, it is easy to forget and difficult to use vocabulary freely.

2.2 The Method of Vocabulary Teaching is Single and Insufficient

In professional English courses, English lexicology is a compulsory course that every student must learn. For other major students, English lexicology is a course that students can take as an elective course. However, most teachers teach this course as a pure theory course. Teachers often use the method of “spoon-feeding” to explain the lexicology theory in class. Students as the object of knowledge infusion, the classroom is completely dominated by teachers. The main task of students is to understand the lexicology knowledge which teachers told them. In this way, there are many disadvantages. Firstly, the course of English lexicology is only a kind of knowledge rather than a kind of ability to remember and use vocabulary effectively. Theory and practice are out of touch each other. So, it is not conducive to the cultivation of students to solve practical problems. It is difficult for

students to improve the comprehensive use of language effectively. Secondly, in this way, the course of English lexicology exists nominally only, students can't understand the principle of word formation and use the principle freely, they still have to spend a lot of time in memorizing vocabulary. Due to the inability to understand the appropriate semantics of words, the reading comprehension is still very poor.

3. The Abilities of the Course of English Lexicology should be Cultivated

How can we use the course of English lexicology to guide students to learn vocabulary effectively? The author believes that three kinds of ability should be cultivated in the course of English lexicology:

(a) Have the ability to guess the meaning of English words according to morphological structure of English words.

(b) Have the ability to use English words according to the principle of word formation.

(c) Have the ability to guess the appropriate meaning of English words according to the specific context and structure of reading materials.

How to cultivate these three abilities in the course of English lexicology? This paper will account for the implementation of "learning by doing", that is to say, how to use the methodology of constructivism to teach English lexicology.

The author of the paper takes constructivism as a new perspective in teaching the course of English lexicology. Constructivism is a hot research topic, which has been used in education wildly since the beginning of the twenty-first century. After searching in CNKI, the author found there are 1502 articles about constructivism in national Chinese periodicals from 2000 to 2018. There are 166 articles about college English vocabulary teaching, but no articles about the application of constructivism theory in the course of English lexicology. This is the main innovation of the paper.

This study attempts to combine constructivism with the teaching and research of college English lexicology. According to our specific teaching environment, it mainly applies the teaching concepts of constructivism, such as cooperative learning, situational learning and cultivating students to construct the meaning of knowledge actively. This study not only expands the application scope of constructivism but also takes lexicology as a dynamic process in different contexts rather than a kind of stative knowledge and theory. This paper provides a new perspective and approach to the study of lexicology teaching.

4. The Definition of Constructivism

Constructivism can be dated back to Piaget (1966), then absorbed the essence of Vygotsky (1978)'s theory of historical and cultural psychology, Ausubel (1968)'s theory of meaning learning and Bruner (1960)'s theory of discovery learning. Constructivism accounts for the whole cognitive process of human beings' learning clearly. Jean Piaget articulated mechanism by which knowledge is internalized by learners. He suggested that through process of assimilation and accommodation, individuals construct new knowledge from their experiences. Assimilation means individuals incorporate the new experience into an already existing framework without changing that framework. In contrast, when individual's experiences contradict their internal representations, they may change their perceptions of the experiences to fit their internal representation. When we act on the expectation that the world operates in one way and it violates our expectation, we often fail, but by accommodating this new experience and reframing our model of the way the world works from the experience of our own failure or others' failure [1]. That is to say, learners' cognitive structure is constantly improved and developed in the circle of "balance-unbalance-new balance". In the process of teaching design, teachers should emphasize on students' direct participation to gain experience and cultivate their ability of independent exploration and self-regulation.

5. The Application of Constructivism in the Teaching of English Lexicology

5.1 Induction and Deduction

English lexicology is a highly theoretical course, the purpose is to learn vocabulary effectively through the essential features and internal structure of vocabulary. But there are 48 prefixes, 36 suffixes, 111 roots (statistics based on A course in Modern English Lexicology compiled by Zhang Weiyu) [2]. If we use traditional teaching methodology, it will disconnect the relation between the old and the new “schema” in the knowledge construction. So, this study tries to make good use of assimilation and accommodation, find the relation between old and new experience. That is to say, college students who have learned English for at least six years and have learned about 2500 to 3000 English words in middle school. We should pay more attention to considering how to improve their precious experience, how to make good use of previous schema to select, integrate, transform and assimilate new stimuli. New knowledge will be reconstructed only if establishing the necessary collection between existing knowledge, experience and new input.

In practice, we can emphasize both induction and deduction through “observation-discovery-induction-application”. For example, when teaching the prefix “re-”, giving a lot of words they have learned such as: “return”, “reflect”, “recall”, “retreat”, “reprint”, “rewrite”, “rebuild”, “reproduction”, make students to summarize the meaning of “re-”, then teachers also ask students to build new words which they don’t know, ask them how to write out “reconsider”, “remarry”, “renew”, “reform” and so on. Through a lot of vocabulary which students have known, induct and deduct new words which they haven’t known, in which not only cultivates students’ ability of observation, but also cultivates their guessing and word-formation ability.

5.2 Situation Creation

The author believes that the purpose of mastering word-formation is to use the principle freely. To guess the right meaning in context is the necessary ability of reading comprehension. The reasons are as follows: Firstly, as you know, dictionary is not panacea. Polysemy is a pervasive semantic phenomenon across languages. The same word has different meanings in different context. Secondly, when reading up-to-date newspaper and magazines, you will find that you can’t find the new words in dictionary because a large number of new words haven’t been taken down in dictionary timely. Dictionaries can’t contain all words of the world. Especially with the development of science and technology, a lot of fresh things will emerge. English-spoken countries create a large number of new words in life on the basis of the principle of word-formation. Thirdly, following a functional approach, Leech (1981) categorizes seven kinds of meaning: conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, stylistic meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning, collocative meaning, thematic meaning [3]. So, it is very important for teachers to cultivate the ability of guessing the appropriate meaning in different context.

5.3 Vocabulary Acquisition in Reading

The use of a large number of natural language materials can help to cultivate students’ ability to acquire vocabulary in the process of reading. Having a certain vocabulary can help learners better understand the content of articles, at the same time they can also effectively acquire vocabulary through reading. There are many advantages to enlarge vocabulary through reading. Firstly, it is a good way to combine reading activities and vocabulary learning. The memorizing words based on understanding is more conducive to the transition from short-term memory to long-term memory. If a word you often meet in different occasions many times, the word will transit from short-term memory to long-term memory. Secondly, through reading English materials, learners will guess the appropriate meaning according to the context, which is also a good way to understand and master lexical chunks. A lexical chunk is a combination of “form” and “function”. It reflects the relationship among semantics, syntax and pragmatics. The acquisition of lexical chunks can promote the idiomatic and accurate expression of English.

5.4 Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is an important method of constructivism. Most of words that we have learned are passive vocabulary, how to transfer the passive vocabulary into active vocabulary is a serious problem teacher should think about. Cooperative learning can provide a lot of opportunities for students to use foreign language. For example: Teachers can give students some topics, students will form a cooperative learning group to discuss and argue freely, fully express their different understandings, then write a paper. Through cooperative learning, every student will have a platform to learn from each other and communicate with others. Each of them has a lot of chances to practice in their cooperative group, which can transfer passive vocabulary into active vocabulary effectively.

5.5 Implementation of Formative Assessment

Constructivism pays special attention to the diversity of assessment. Such as standardized tests, students log, learning portfolio, observation and discussion records can be used as teaching assessment methods. In the course of English lexicology, both teachers and students can be evaluators. So as to overcome the problem of single subject and object in traditional evaluation. teachers should pay more attention to students' self-evaluation of learning content, process and result. Teachers should encourage and support students to self-rethink and self-regulate, make evaluation become their motivation of learning. Through dynamic evaluation, students can rethink their shortcoming and monitor their learning so as to cultivate them to learn the rules of vocabulary. Little by little, through the implementation of formative assessment, not only students' competence of comprehensive language will be improved, but also their metacognition ability will be improved.

6. Conclusion

In private colleges, students' Gaokao scores are much lower than public college. Their learning initiative is low, their study basis is poor, and lack of good learning and living habits. Students are used to learning English words by rote. They are used to learning English lexicology as a kind of theory and knowledge rather than integrated language skills. Through induction and deduction, situation creation, implementation of formative assessment, motivating students' interests in learning foreign language, this paper explores a combination of theory and practice in teaching the course of English lexicology. Through "learning by doing", students' capability of analyzing and solving problems has been improved. Learning by doing is a good way to make learning as a kind of sustainable development so as to adopt future's work and life.

References

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