Zhang Yiran
Department of Foreign
Languages, Yangtze
University, Jingzhou, Hubei,
China

A study on the presentation of lexical culture in english textbooks at junior high school

Zhang Yiran

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Abstract

For decades, the consensus based on vocabulary and culture is that vocabulary and culture are entwined with each other, so it's necessary to teach students lexical culture when teaching vocabulary. Against this background, this study, taking Teacher's Resource Book of Go for it and a set of excellent foreign English textbooks English in Mind as reference, aims to investigate the richness of lexical cultural information presented in the set of textbooks Go for it. Based on Leech's seven types of lexical meaning theory, this paper proposes a lexical culture framework for this study. This study uses the self-built textbook corpus and corpus analysis tool AntConc4.2.0 to select one animal word with the highest frequency of occurrence in Go for it. Through observation and analysis, it is found that lexical cultural information presented in Go for it is implicit and inadequate. It presents certain connotative cultural meaning, affective cultural meaning and collocative cultural meaning, but they are not rich enough and requires teachers to consciously summarize. And it presents rare conceptual cultural meaning, and social cultural meaning. On the basis of this research, this paper puts forward some constructive suggestions for vocabulary teaching and vocabulary compilation of textbooks.

Keywords: Lexical culture, textbook analysis, vocabulary in textbook, culture teaching

Introduction

Vocabulary and culture are closely related with each other and the notions of lexical culture have generated a great deal of research in the field of vocabulary teaching. Researchers have looked into the definition and classification of lexical culture (Yang, 1997; Chen, 2013) [1, 2], into the principles of the teaching of lexical culture (Shu, 1995) [3], and into the methods of the teaching of lexical culture (Wang, 2009; Liu, 2011) [4, 5]. There is also a huge literature on current problems of the teaching of lexical culture, which finds that actual classroom vocabulary teaching has a poor effect on the teaching of lexical culture (Lv & Qi, 2018) [6]. However, limited literature to date has focused on the presentation of lexical culture in English textbooks which is a worthy research perspective to solve the problem of poor effect on the teaching of lexical culture because textbooks are the main sources and materials for vocabulary teaching (Suarez, 2001) [7] and English textbooks with rich lexical cultural information could guide and instruct teachers' teaching. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate the richness of lexical cultural information in Go for it in order to give enlightenment to the teaching of lexical culture.

This study uses self-built textbook corpus and corpus analysis tool AntConc4.2.0 to select words in order to make the analysis more objective. At the same time, to better explore the presentation of lexical culture in Go for it, the research also investigates the corresponding Teacher's Resource Book and a set of excellent foreign English textbooks English in Mind as reference and comparison. Through observation and comparison, it is found that lexical cultural information presented in Go for it is implicit and inadequate.

Lexical Culture

The study of lexical culture is usually under the general heading: culture and language. Different scholars give different definitions of lexical culture from different perspectives. Yang Min (1997) [1] defines that lexical culture includes association of words endowed by specific culture and people's feelings and attitudes about signified objects. Wang Rongpei (2011) [8] holds that lexical culture refers to the social and cultural basis which vocabulary

Corresponding Author:
Zhang Yiran
Department of Foreign
Languages, Yangtze
University, Jingzhou, Hubei,
China

lies on and the cultural characteristics and times characteristics reflected by the words. These definitions are reasonable to a certain degree, but are not so completely persuasive about what on earth lexical culture is.

All in all, there is still a long way to go to explore what is lexical culture. However, all is concerned, lexical culture can be understood as the additional and special meaning associated with the historical background, culture, tradition, custom, production mode, lifestyles, thinking mode of the local nations or societies. In the long-term use, lexical cultural meaning has been gradually accumulated, may expands or shrinks, in a dynamic state of development and change.

Analysis Framework

For the sake of this research, lexical cultural information studied in this thesis is based on lexical cultural meaning. There is no completely consistent definition of lexical cultural meaning in academic circles, and the terms used are also different. Different definitions of lexical cultural meaning reflect the different research perspectives of language scholars. However, for the nature of lexical cultural meaning, the definition of lexical cultural meaning is carried out on the basis of lexical semantics, and the differences lie in that some researchers use Leech's "associative meaning"; some borrow what L. Zgusta (1983) [9] calls "added meaning"; other scholars prefer what R. Barthes (1999) [10] calls "implicit meaning". Therefore, this paper intends to combine Leech's seven types of lexical meaning theory to explore lexical cultural meaning.

The modern English linguists Geoffrey Leech (1981) [11] classified meaning into seven types: conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning, collocative meaning, thematic meaning. Conceptual meaning refers to logical, cognitive, referential or denotative content. Connotative meaning is the communicative value an expression has by virtue of what it refers to, over and above its purely conceptual content. Social meaning is what a piece of language conveys about the social circumstances of its use. Affective meaning is communicated when feeling or attitudes are expressed either directly or indirectly in language. Reflected meaning is communicated when one sense of a word forms part of our response to another sense of word. Collocative meaning is composed of associations a word gets from those words that are often used together with it. Thematic meaning is communicated by the way in which the message is organized in terms of orders and emphasis.

Geoffrey Leech's semantic analysis is mainly based on sociolinguistics and functional linguistics. In other words, Leech examines the meaning of words in the social environment in which language is used. His classification of meaning makes us more aware of the complexity and multiplicity of meaning. Leech's seven types of lexical meaning is the most influential lexical meaning classification. Zhang Zaihong (2009) [12] believes that Leech's seven types of lexical meaning are closely related with lexical cultural meaning.

However, Leech's lexical meaning classification also has some limitations. First, there is a lack of strict and unified standards for classification, and there exist some overlaps. For example, the standard of distinguishing connotative meaning from reflected meaning is not very clear. Secondly, there is confusion at the level of meaning analysis. For example, conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, social meaning, reflected meaning and collocative meaning are analyzed at the level of words, while thematic meaning is partly analyzed at the level of sentences. Therefore, in order to avoid the overlap of lexical cultural meaning and distinguish different kinds of lexical cultural meaning, this paper, on the basis of Leech's seven types of lexical meaning theory, divides lexical cultural meaning into five parts: conceptual cultural meaning, connotative cultural meaning, affective cultural meaning, social cultural meaning and collocative cultural meaning.

1. Conceptual cultural meaning is based on cultural contrast and refers to the differences of lexical meaning caused by culture difference, that is, lexical cultural meaning gap.
2. Connotative cultural meaning refers to the implied or additional meaning of a word in addition to its pure conceptual meaning, that is, the additional meaning formed by a word through symbolism or association.
3. Affective cultural meaning is to express the speaker's feelings and attitudes. It refers to the feelings attached to some words, such as praise, love, affirmation, respect or derogation, disgust, negation and contempt.
4. Social cultural meaning refers to the meaning influenced by social environment or the social relationship between the speaker and listener. Social cultural meaning could further be divided into register cultural meaning, stylistic cultural meaning and regional cultural meaning. Register cultural meaning refers to the language variants used in specific situations or fields, such as mathematics, linguistics, medicine, literature and other fields. Stylistic cultural meaning refers to languages with different degrees of formality due to different communicators and situations, such as formal or informal, written or spoken language. Regional cultural meaning refers to the linguistic variations of different regions, such as British English and American English.
5. Collocative cultural meaning is part of the word meaning suggested by the words with which it co-occurs. The first kind of collocative cultural meaning refers to the collocation habit of words or the meaning of words in a fixed combination, and the meaning produced in a specific context. Due to the role of word collocation habits, the same word will have different collocation meanings when it is paired with different words. For example, the collocation meanings of the word "heavy" are different in different phrases. Another kind of collocative cultural meaning refers to idioms. The meaning of idioms is not the direct combination of various literal meanings. Their cultural connotation is determined by the historical origin, regional environment, living habits, thinking mode and other factors of different nationalities.

Materials and Methods

Corpus plays an important role in the study of vocabulary. The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) is a large corpus of American English, which could provide plentiful and actual examples. And Corpus analysis tool, such as AntConc4.2.0, has the function of word frequency and concordance lines. Based on corpus and corpus analysis tool, a small textbook corpus is built in this thesis. The materials for this study include the five textbooks of Go for

it and corresponding Teacher's Resource Books, and Student's Book 1, 2, 3 of English in Mind. The acquisition and processing of material includes the following steps:

1. Constructing textbook corpus. Use the scanner to scan the paper version of the textbooks and save it as an image format. ABBYY Fine Reader 15 is used for optical recognition of the image, and the identified document is saved in TXT format. And then process and remove irrelevant information, and check and deal with gibberish in the text.

2. Import the processed materials of the five textbooks of Go for it into AntConc4.2.0 to generate a word list. According to the frequency of occurrence, respectively select one word relevant to animal, namely the word "dog". Then extract the concordance lines of the two words. On the basis of analysis framework of lexical cultural information, analyze the lexical cultural information of these two words in Go for it. At the same time, corresponding Teacher's Resource Book, and Student's Book 1, 2, 3 of English in Mind are processed in the same way and these materials are acted as reference and comparison corpus.

Results and Discussion

It's difficult to study lexical cultural information of all the vocabulary in Go for it, so this thesis intends to take one representative word as case study to observe lexical cultural information in Go for it. Animal words are entwined with plentiful cultural information. Based on this, this thesis selects the animal word "dog" with the highest frequency of occurrence among animal words in Go for it with the aid of corpus analysis tool AntConc4.2.0. The specific case study for lexical cultural information in Go for it is as follows.

Changes in the meaning of animal words are influenced by culture and rich cultural content is in turn reflected by the meaning of animal words. Due to different cultural content, tradition and psychology, many Chinese and English culturally-loaded animal words differ greatly in meaning, which is likely to invoke mistakes in understanding and expression. According to statistics, there are 853 groups of cultural meanings among 258 culturally-loaded animal words in English (廖光蓉, 2000), which shows that animal words are loaded with abundant cultural meaning. Therefore, this thesis selects the word "dog" that appears most frequently among animal words in Go for it.

Through retrieval, it is found that the word "dog" appears in Go for it for 40 times in total. After extracting the concordance lines of the word "dog" and ignoring a few useless examples, there are 19 cases of the specific context of the word "dog". On the basis of classification of lexical cultural meaning, this thesis analyzes the lexical cultural information reflected by the word "dog" in Go for it.

By observing the presentation of the word "dog" in the specific context of Go for it, it is found that the word "dog" mainly presents connotative cultural meaning and affective cultural meaning. First, in foreign countries, dogs usually appear in positive images, such as cute, friendly and lucky, so they are regarded as pets and family members. Their owners will name them and take them for a walk. (This point is a bit different from China, where dogs are often seen as fierce and often used as watchdogs, especially in rural China.) Second, because dogs are smart, they can usually be used as human assistants, such as guide dogs.

At the same time, the word "dog" in corresponding Teacher's Resource Book, and Student's Book 1, 2, 3 of English in Mind are acted as comparison. By comparison, the presentation of lexical cultural information of the word "dog" in Go for it is insufficient in the following two aspects.

First, the cultural information is only presented implicitly. It is hard for students to realize the culture information unless teachers have the consciousness to excavate, summarize and explain. Fortunately, most of the cultural information can be found in Teacher's Resource Books. For example, Teacher's Resource Books supplement the status of dogs in western minds and how dogs serve as human helpers. This shows that Go for it reflects certain cultural information, but it is not obvious enough. On the one hand, it requires teachers to be qualified with adequate cultural awareness and be able to summarize potential cultural information of words. On the other hand, teachers should also make full use of Teacher's Resource Books, which can be used as teaching guidance and a supplement of teaching materials.

Second, it does not present the common collocative cultural meanings of the word "dog". The word "dog" is a basic word and have plenty of collocations, which are commonly used by English speakers. And these collocations usually can't be understood if we only know the literal meaning of the word. For example, "hot dog" is a kind of food, not a kind of dog. Therefore, it's necessary to present these collocations to students. Unfortunately, common collocations of the word "dog" doesn't appear in Go for it. But corresponding Teacher's Resource Books supplement a few common collocations of the word "dog", which is an indicator for teachers and learners to pay attention to common collocations of the word "dog".

Through above analysis, there are two points which need to be noted for teachers and compilers. First, Teacher's Resource Books often supplement and expand cultural information missing in Student's Books, but it is still important for compilers to provide certain cultural information explanation when necessary in Student's Books and it is indispensable for teachers to add and summarize necessary lexical cultural information. For example, when learning the reading text "Animal Helpers" in Unit 2, Book 2, Grade 8, teachers could use self-built textbook corpus to present the specific context of the word "dog" in textbooks and then ask students to observe and find words in textbooks to describe dogs, such as "lucky", "friendly", "cute", "smart", "helpful", etc., teachers could also use COCA (the widely-used corpus of English) to present more specific and actual context of the word "dog" to ask students to observe, such as "faithful", "lovely" etc. Then teachers instruct students to summarize the affective cultural meaning of the word "dog" according to the above words and help students realize that dogs are generally considered as human friends and contain positive images. In the following, teachers could ask students to discuss what dogs can do for humans and what cultural phenomenon reflect the close relationship between dogs and humans, which could deepen students' understanding of dogs and cultivate students' awareness of loving and protecting dogs and other animals.

In addition, teachers should guide students to realize that lexical cultural meaning is dynamic. For example, now more and more people in China begin to raise dogs as pets, and the image of dogs among Chinese people is also gradually

becoming positive. Moreover, teachers should also instruct students to pay attention to the similarities and differences between different cultures. Some cultures are universal. For example, dogs bite people and often greet their owners at the door when their owners get home. However, some cultures even vary from person to person. For example, in dog-loving countries, there also exists people who is afraid of dogs.

Conclusion

Main materials of vocabulary learning for junior high school students are English textbooks, which are also loaded with abundant lexical cultural information waiting for being excavated. On the basis of the theory of classification of lexical cultural meaning, this thesis analyzes the presentation of some vocabulary in Go for it with the aid of corpus. It is found that lexical cultural information presented in Go for it is implicit and inadequate. The findings of this study also give inspiration to vocabulary compilation of textbooks and vocabulary teaching.

For vocabulary compilation of textbooks, we could use corpus to provide actual and culture-ridden sentence examples of vocabulary. Sentence examples used in textbooks should contain certain cultural information, which can not only help students understand the specific meaning of words, but also improve their cultural literacy. Moreover, the selected examples should be authentic and provide guidance to the teacher. Examples can be divided into actual examples and examples made up by editors. In general, actual examples are more likely to show cultural information contained in vocabulary. And corpus is a helpful and effective tool to select authentic and suitable examples when compiling textbooks. For example, the textbook could provide the following actual example of the word "propaganda" from COCA: "The major way political warfare is waged is through propaganda." Such an example will undoubtedly help readers understand and use the word "propaganda".

For vocabulary teaching, teachers should first improve their own cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity. In order to ensure effective teaching of vocabulary culture, teachers should first improve their own cultural sensitivity so as to consciously guide students to pay attention to the lexical cultural information. Teachers themselves should give play to their subjective initiative, consciously improve cultural literacy and form the concept of teaching students cultural knowledge. For example, teachers can improve their cultural awareness in a variety of ways, such as reading literature, writing teaching reflection, participating in teacher seminars, academic workshops, teacher training community, and carrying out action research or case study to better improve teaching quality and enhance cultural awareness. In addition, when teachers prepare for teaching, it's very important to carefully read Teacher's Resource Book, which is a guideline for what and how to teach.

Secondly, teachers should teach in context with the help of corpus to help students summarize lexical cultural information of vocabulary and develop dynamic view of lexical cultural meaning. In current English vocabulary learning, most students pay mere attention to the literal meaning of vocabulary and only focus on the breadth of their vocabulary, and ignore the depth of their vocabulary, which lead to their wrong concept towards vocabulary that one word corresponds to only one meaning so that they usually feel frustrated when using vocabulary even they

have memorized the meanings of a lot of words. Therefore, teachers should revise students' wrong concept towards vocabulary, guide them to pay more attention to lexical cultural meanings and encourage students to conclude and construct the framework of lexical cultural meanings in context. For example, students could distinguish synonym with the aid of lexical cultural meaning. Although many words have similar meanings, the cultural information they convey are likely to differ to varying degree. For example, "autumn" and "fall", which both mean "the season of the year between summer and winter", have different regional cultural meanings. The former is British English and the latter is American English. For another example, "encounter" and "come across" all mean "meet", but their stylistic cultural meanings are different. They are formal and informal styles respectively. Therefore, teachers should guide students to distinguish synonym with the aid of lexical cultural meanings in order to help them clearly understand the cultural differences among words.

Thirdly, teachers should present lexical cultural information of vocabulary in multiple ways. Different lexical cultural information requires different ways of presentation. Teachers should choose the most suitable ways to present lexical cultural information according to the specific needs. For example, conceptual cultural meaning can be conveyed best through illustrations. Suitable and multiple ways of presentation could arouse students' interest and deepen their understanding of words.

Fourthly, teachers should help students develop dynamic view of lexical cultural meaning. First of all, only with the help of specific context can words vividly convey cultural information, so words cannot be learned and memorized in isolation. Besides, the cultural information of vocabulary is always in dynamic development, because the social environment is constantly developing and changing and people's ways of thinking are also changing. Therefore, teachers must help students develop the context view and dynamic view of vocabulary learning, and learn vocabulary with an inclusive and open mind. In addition to using textbooks to teaching vocabulary, teachers can also use corpus to present the actual and dynamic context to help students to understand the cultural information of vocabulary.

It is a new attempt to study the vocabulary in English textbooks at junior high school from the perspective of culture, which is more innovative than the previous textbook vocabulary analysis both in terms of research perspective and application. However, the author's theoretical literacy and ability to analyze problems exist certain limitations, so the lexical cultural information in the textbooks can only be analyzed on the shallow level. It is difficult to systematically analyze lexical cultural information in textbooks, so this research just selects one typical words with rich cultural information as representative to analyze. It's a regret that this research can't analyze ample samples. To some extent, it inevitably has certain limitations and subjectivity. Lexical cultural information in textbooks is a charming area to explore. There still exists a lot of work to do to explore the secret deeply rooted in vocabulary and culture. Hope this thesis can provide inspiration for relevant research.

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