On the identification of near-synonyms in teaching Chinese as a foreign language

Zhu Zhou Zhuo Ma

School of Arts and Law, Henan Polytechnic University, Jiaozuo, Henan, China

Abstract: *The vocabulary in Chinese language teaching materials is the basis for students' mastery of the Chinese language, and the teaching of near-sense words, as one of the major difficulties in teaching, has always been a hot topic in the field of research on teaching Chinese as a foreign language. The purpose of this paper is to summarize the experience of previous authors and to suggest pedagogical inspirations for second language teaching, so that the method of near-sense word analysis can be made more relevant to learners and more simplified and effective, in order to promote the implementation of second language teaching in a better way.*

Keywords: *Teaching Chinese as a foreign language, teaching methods of near-synonyms*

1. Introduction

Language is a complex symbolic system made up of five hierarchical units: phonemes, morphemes, words, phrases and sentences. [1]Vocabulary, as the smallest unit that can be freely used in language use, is the cornerstone and key to language learning. In the teaching of vocabulary, the identification and learning of near-synonyms is always the focus, and at the same time a major difficulty. In terms of the concept of near-synonyms, many literature on the ontology of the Chinese language classifies synonyms as "words with similar meanings" and "words with equal meanings", and also as "absolute synonyms ", "relative synonyms" or "perfect synonyms" and "imperfect synonyms", which are more traditional and recognized by many linguistic scholars. This view is more traditional and has been endorsed by many language scholars, including Huang Bo Rong, Liao Xudong and their book Modern Chinese, as well as Hu Yushu, Liu Jin, Gao Qingci and Xie Wenqing. In his article "Several Problems of Modern Chinese Synonyms", Mr. Zhang Gong says: "The statement that synonyms are divided into two categories of equivalents and near-synonyms is questionable. In our view, such a distinction is unnecessary, and such a fundamental understanding is not accurate enough. 'near-sense', which is apt to be ambiguous." 1It can be seen that in linguistic circles, some scholars, represented by Mr. Zhang Gong, do not think there is such a concept as "near-sense", preferring to adopt the term "synonym" directly. According to Zhou Jian (1988), "near-synonyms are literally words that are close in meaning, but essentially, they are a group of words that refer to different things but are similar in meaning". [2]Hu Yushu (1995) argues that two words that are close to each other, although they have the same meaning, are not exactly equal in their corresponding meanings, and despite their similarity, there are still various subtle differences, and they cannot be replaced arbitrarily in linguistic communication applications. [3]Scholars (Li Lidong 2007) argue that for learners of Chinese as a second language, the term 'near-synonym' is easier to understand, meaning 'words with similar meanings'.[4]

Although researchers have different opinions on the definition of near-synonyms and synonyms, the scope of the discussion can be divided into several aspects, including the criteria for judging the two, the scope of the two and the relationship between the two, which have been discussed by scholars in different ways. The current consensus is that synonyms or near-synonyms refer to words that are identical or close in meaning. In the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language, the concept of synonym and near-synonym is defined in a broader sense, and generally no strict distinction is made between the two, and the two names can be mixed to indicate all "words with similar meanings" in the teaching process. Any word that has a similar meaning and is easily confused by international students is the subject of a critical analysis by second language teachers.

---

[1]Zhang Gong, 'Several Problems with Modern Chinese Synonyms', Hebei University Journal, 1964, no. 1.

2. Distinguishing between inevitability

2.1 Factors of the Chinese vocabulary itself

The fundamental aim of education in Chinese as a foreign language is to achieve the communicative competence of second language learners. For second language learners, whether they can correctly grasp the differences between the words they use and use them correctly in communication can be used as a criterion to judge the level of mastery of the target language. The subtlety of the differences between words undoubtedly makes it more difficult for Chinese learners to grasp the differences, such as the weight of the meaning of the word, the emphasis of the meaning of the word and the extent of the meaning of the word. The subtle distinctions between words undoubtedly make it more difficult for learners of Chinese to grasp them, such as the weight of the meaning, the emphasis of the meaning and the size of the range of the meaning. [5]

Firstly, there is a lightness of meaning in the word. Many close words represent things that are similar in concept, but have a level of importance. Example: "trust" and "believe". "Believe", to be right, to be sure. The word "trust" means to believe and deliver, the latter at a deeper level than the former. The words "worry" and "worried" both mean uneasy. The word "worry" is more semantic, meaning "to be worried" in addition to "to be at ease", such as worrying about the future, fate and other important matters. "Worry" means to be at ease, to be worried about something that is immediate or tangible.

The second is the focus of the word, for example, both sophistry and sophistry refer to unreasonable arguments, but sophistry focuses on "sophistry", i.e. weirdness, which is the use of fraudulent means, strange words, and specious language to justify one's fallacies. The word "cunning" focuses on cunning. It means to be dishonest, to play tricks, to distort the truth, to cunningly justify one's falsehoods.

In addition, there is also a range of meanings. Both 'reclaim' and 'open up' mean to develop, but reclaiming means to develop abandoned land into arable land, while open up means to expand developed land, which has a smaller range of meanings. "The word 'pioneer' refers specifically to development, new development, and has a wider range of meanings. Once again, there are words that mean roughly the same thing but actually apply to different objects and situations. Both 'taste' and 'comprehend' mean to understand, to appreciate, to comprehend, but the former refers to the emotional experience. The latter refers to rational understanding and appreciation. These are the subtle differences in the near synonyms. Without the teaching of the identification of near-synonyms, second language learners are likely to make linguistic mistakes in actual everyday use, which can seriously lead to unnecessary communicative conflicts and contradictions.

As mentioned above, a large part of the reasons for second language learners' near-sense word bias comes from the Chinese vocabulary itself, such as the similarity of Chinese word forms, multiple meanings of words, the inter-lexical nature of vocabulary, and the difference in usage between ancient and modern Chinese, all of which make the differentiation and learning of near-sense words more difficult.

2.2 Misuse of vocabulary

It is easy to see from the process of second language teaching that the misuse of near-synonyms is inevitable at all stages of language learning for international students, with errors such as confusion of word nature, lack of differentiation of word classes, wrong matching objects and unclear colour meanings of words. The verb "to marry" is a verb and is not used in conjunction with "to attend", etc. Similar near-synonyms include office and business, meeting and conference, near and near, love and love, think and think, etc.;[6] The object of the collocation is wrong, for example: we exchanged learning experiences and teachers with our Chinese friends I was very happy when we exchanged gifts. The components that follow both "exchange" and "exchange" are conventional in nature, with the former going with "opinion", "gift" and so on. The former is used with words such as "opinion" and "gift" and the latter with words such as "idea", "experience" and "culture". In addition, the word 'exchange' is often followed by an abstract noun such as 'opinion', while 'exchange' is often followed by an abstract noun. Similar nouns include visit and visit, disseminate and publicise, handle and deal with, express and show, adopt and employ, discover and find, etc.

There are also biases such as stylistic errors and pragmatic errors. As the level of education

gradually moves from primary to intermediate and advanced, learners' Chinese vocabulary levels increase and each new term that is incorporated may be confused with old vocabulary previously learnt. It is therefore imperative to teach the identification of near-synonyms. In response to stylistic and pragmatic errors, Liu Lu (2017) has suggested that the usual sporadic discursive teaching should be continued and that a dedicated optional lesson on near-sense words should be added on a regular basis (e.g. weekly). [7]In the optional lesson on near-sense words, teachers can put together the near-sense words previously learnt in the integrated class and systematically explain them in a compartmentalised manner according to the discursive framework. And then continue to teach decentralised discourse, e.g. by adding an optional near-synonym lesson each week. The main focus would be on the near synonyms learned in the past, systematically explained according to a discursive framework.

3. Rationale for the distinction

In recent years, research on proxemics has gradually shifted from the study of Chinese ontology to the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language. Due to the rise of the "Chinese language fever" in the world, the target group of Chinese language teaching is no longer just for native Chinese learners, but has been transformed from a single language teaching to a world-oriented language teaching. However, due to the specificity of the teaching targets, teaching Chinese as a foreign language differs from traditional language teaching in that learners have different Chinese language bases and the influence of their own culture on Chinese language learning is also different. Therefore, the problems related to near-synonyms in teaching Chinese as a foreign language require us to take a special view of special problems and to conduct more in-depth research in teaching from the perspective of cultural differences. It is only by looking at the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language and language teaching differently that we can make the teaching of near-sense words more systematic and effective.

Up to this point the linguistic community has also been very rich in research results on near-synonyms in Chinese ontology, with many monograph papers such as Ge Benyi's Modern Chinese Lexicography, Zhang Zhiyi's Concise Dictionary of Synonyms and Zhang Gong's Several Problems of Modern Chinese Synonyms providing an in-depth discussion of issues related to the scope, nature and classification of near-synonyms. Mr. Mei Lichong points out that distinguishing synonyms should involve two practical tasks: 'seeking their similarities' and 'identifying their differences'. [8]"Seeking their similarities" is the basis for distinguishing near-synonyms, and on this basis we can then "distinguish their differences". The analysis of near-synonyms in foreign Chinese has been studied by scholars (Meng Xiangying 1997; Zhou Li 2004; Li Lidong 2007; Hong Wei 2012, 2014; Yang Lili 2017;), while for near-synonyms, Hu Yushu believes that they "cannot all be equated despite their similar meanings, and even if there are various subtle differences in their use, they cannot be replaced at will. " 2So the approach to the identification of near-synonyms is mostly based on three aspects: rational meaning, colouring and lexicality. The rational meaning aspect is analysed in terms of the weight of meaning, the size of the category and the relationship between the group and the individual; the affective colour aspect focuses on emotional and stylistic colour; and the lexical nature distinguishes between the different functions of words in actual use. [9]In addition to the rich meanings of Chinese, the misuse of near-synonyms by second language learners is also influenced by the learners' own cultural background, the content of the teaching materials and the teachers. However, Japanese and Korean learners performed significantly better than their European and American counterparts in the learning of homonymic near-synonyms, while European and American learners performed better than their Japanese and Korean counterparts in the learning of heteronyms." [9]Channell (1988) argues that in second language learning, there are two criteria for determining whether a word has been acquired by the learner, one of which is one is that the meaning of the word can be identified and understood with or without context, rather than by the learner's guesswork; the other is that the learner can use the word naturally and correctly in context.[10]

Likewise, the identification of close synonyms should meet the condition that a group of close synonyms can be truly mastered when learners can accurately distinguish the nuances between them, regardless of the context, and can use them naturally and correctly in that context.

4. Teaching inspiration

In the process of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, students should learn to master how to

---

2 Hu Yushu． Modern Chinese [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Education Press 1995.

discriminate between near-synonyms, firstly, they should clarify the steps of discriminating between near-synonyms, and gradually analyse and compare near-synonyms in a hierarchical way. When analysing a set of near-synonyms, it is important to first clarify the lexical nature of the near-synonyms, which is the most basic requirement for understanding a vocabulary. [11]This is the most basic requirement for understanding a vocabulary. Through lexicality, we can understand the meaning, usage and syntactic components of a vocabulary in a sentence. The identification of the lexical meanings of near-synonyms should focus on the differences in the meanings of the words. From the perspective of rational meaning, we should pay attention to the different meanings between the near-synonyms, the different meanings expressed, and focus on the focus of differentiating the meanings of the words. From the point of view of colourful meaning, attention should be paid to the emotional and stylistic colours attached to the words and to the linguistic context in which the words apply. Finally, the grammatical function of the words is analysed This step is somewhat more difficult than the previous two steps and is also used to distinguish between close synonyms that are difficult to discriminate. And in order to do a better service to these three steps and to achieve better near-synonym identification, the following teaching insights are proposed.

4.1 Teaching in stages

Before teaching near-synonyms, second language learners should first get to know their learners and 'segment' the target group. Because learners at all levels have different levels of mastery and absorption of the content due to differences in age and ability, teaching near-synonyms to beginners can be illustrated with pictures, interesting questions and example sentences, such as the following two sentence patterns: "A new law has been issued in China." and "The school announced the winners of the English competition." The word "promulgated" is usually followed by the law of each country. The word "announced" is often followed by methods, results, statistics, etc. The two words can be clearly distinguished according to the difference in the objects paired with them in the example sentences. The[12] use of objects, photographs, chalkboard drawings, slides and other visual means allows for a more intuitive approach to teaching and learning, and facilitates contextualisation for learners. "The word 'young' and 'young', 'collect' and 'collect'. The grammatical meanings can be analysed in terms of grammatical meaning, with emphasis on the lexical structure and collocation of words, such as represent and show, avoid and evade, develop and play, lose and lose, etc.

4.2 Teaching by induction with examples

It refers to the analysis and summary of the near-synonyms that appear in the teaching process. In practice, we first make a big distinction from the lexical nature into the same lexical nature and different lexical nature, pejorative colouring and positive colouring, etc., then select a group from them, find their typical examples under that meaning category, compare their meaning, usage, structure, etc., and finally summarise the similarities and differences, and summarise the practical communicative use in the The final point is to summarise the similarities and differences, and to summarise the practical communicative use. In addition to comparing words of the same genus, there is also the collection of typical examples of usage, i.e. not in terms of quantity, but in terms of representativeness. This enables a comparative vocabulary to be built up and the learners to build their own 'example bank' so that the understanding and use of the words can be impressed upon the students. This method aims to develop students' ability to summarise examples of near-synonyms, which will help them to learn more efficiently on the one hand, and to develop their teaching activities more thoroughly on the other.

If words with the same morphemes are classified into one category, such as "go back" and "return", they tend to naturally associate the same morphemes together, mistakenly believing that words containing the same morphemes have the same meanings and usage, thus ignoring the differences between the morphemes in specific words. To help international students make the distinction, they should be wary of seeing only the same morpheme, which means "back", without considering that the morpheme "go" emphasises the process and "to" emphasises the process. The word "go" emphasises the process, while "to" focuses on the result. Typical examples are "neng" and "hui", "chuan" and "song", two sets of near-synonyms whose misunderstandings are largely due to the international students' poor understanding of Chinese. These two groups of near-synonyms are largely due to the over-generalization and analogy of international students' knowledge of Chinese.[13] The teacher can analyse these words from the perspective of their own "root meaning" and "judgmental meaning", and in terms of the method, on the basis of inductive learning, should also pay attention to the recurrence rate of the teaching examples in the teaching. The methodological approach, based on inductive learning, should also focus on the recurrence of the examples in the teaching and learning process,

through the use of a 'database' of extracts and repeated lectures to deepen learners' memory.

4.3 Teaching antonyms in contrast

Near-synonyms themselves have similar meanings, and it is challenging for teachers to interpret them accurately and to make them understandable to learners. The denotative nature of Chinese characters determines the meaning of words and the teaching of diction. To understand a text, one must first understand the meaning of the words, which is important for developing students' reading skills. If you rely solely on elucidating their grammar and explaining the gaps in rational meaning, teaching is boring and at the same time complicates the issue. It is therefore important to focus on finding the biggest difference between each pair of close synonyms and to facilitate the distinction in the quickest and most efficient way. Teaching antonyms means helping learners to understand by explaining the antonyms that correspond to each of a set of near-synonyms. Antonyms refer to two words with opposite meanings and are divided into absolute and relative antonyms. Words that have opposite or opposing meanings. For example: true-false, big-small, for-against, etc. Antonyms express mutually exclusive meanings. For example:winter-summer, black-white. Although these antonyms are not contradictory or oppositional, they form a stark contrast and are often in a juxtaposed, relative position. Teaching with antonym contrast can reveal the contradiction of things, make the contrast and reflection of meaning sharp and profound. Emphasising the role of the central meaning, antonyms become antonyms, making the language more profound and powerful.

For example, the antonyms of rich and affluent, with rich corresponding to poor and affluent corresponding to poor, can be better used by international students who know the main difference between them and can use the near synonyms well.

4.4 Integrating the background culture of the target language

Language contains cultural factors, and culture also reflects the characteristics of a language. The teaching of near-synonyms in Chinese as a foreign language cannot be taught without the assistance of Chinese culture. The reasons for international students' near-synonym errors are mainly cultural differences, negative transfer of the mother tongue and the learning strategies of international students, but ultimately it is the cultural differences that bring about a mismatch in language knowledge. The learners of bilingual Chinese have different linguistic backgrounds, and studies have confirmed that the learners' mother tongue has an impact on their acquisition of near-sense words, but learners from Chinese and non-Chinese cultural circles have different acquisition performance. Hong Wei (2011) concluded from his experiments that "European, American, Japanese and Korean learners at the elementary and intermediate levels are more likely to learn synonyms than heteronyms. However, Japanese and Korean learners performed significantly better than their European and American counterparts in the learning of synonymous proxemics, while European and American learners performed better than their Japanese and Korean counterparts in the learning of heteronymous proxemics." [14]This suggests that teachers who teach near-synonyms with a little knowledge of the learners' native language backgrounds and who take into account the learners' cultural backgrounds while contextualising them in the target language. This will lead to more targeted and appropriate teaching strategies.

In the analysis of proxemics, it is crucial to identify the colour meanings of words, which are generally divided into three directions: emotional, stylistic and figurative. The analysis can be specific from these three perspectives. However, because of the specificity of the educational environment and the target audience, educators need to take into account the differences in the semantic culture of the language in different cultural contexts, as well as the cultural meanings, content values and cultural psychology embedded in the semantic system of the language. For example, when teaching the political meaning of the words 'wife' and 'bitch', which are identical in meaning, educators need to add relevant Chinese cultural content and introduce them to overseas students in accordance with the cultural traditions of our history. For example, the words "wife" and "madam" are both "wife" in English and are used in both written and spoken English without making too much of a distinction. The two words "wife" and "madam" have the same meaning, but they are used in different contexts, so international students have some difficulties in distinguishing the colorful meanings of the Chinese words. This is partly due to the negative transfer of the mother tongue. In conclusion, language teaching cannot be separated from cultural presentation, and cultural teaching must also be adapted to the learners' actual language ability, requiring the teacher to explain the language points while also combining relevant cultural knowledge points to achieve a complementary teaching effect, and to help learners better grasp

the differences between the two words while tapping into the cultural connotations.

4.5 Heuristic teaching

The teacher acts as a guide in the learning process and the teaching strategies adopted by the teacher also have a certain degree of influence on the learners' learning outcomes. The teacher is only responsible for asking questions and guiding the learners to analyse and summarise. The learners are the real protagonists, not only by observing the typical corpus given to them, but also by actively thinking about the similarities and differences of the group of synonyms, and by testing their acquisition through post-lesson exercises after the teacher has explained the differences in meaning and specific usage. Compared to passive receptive teaching, in order to master a set of near-synonyms, learners need to put in more effort to discover and summarise the language rules themselves, thus deepening the impression in their minds and maintaining a longer-term memory.

Shao Jing (2011) has proposed the 'cognitive-functional teaching method'[12] , which is similar to heuristic teaching, that is, teachers should first analyse and summarise the similarities and differences of a group of near-synonyms in semantic, grammatical and pragmatic aspects, and then design 'effective corpus' that can be easily discovered by students. ' and to devise thought-provoking questions to guide students to come together to summarise the similarities and differences of the near-synonyms.[15] However, heuristics need to take up more teaching time, which inevitably interferes with the organisation of other teaching activities, and learners also need to invest more time and effort, which can easily lead to boredom. Another disadvantage is that it is very demanding for teachers to design typical discourses, to guide learners to analyse and summarise them, and to control the pace of the lesson. If the teacher can adopt inspirational teaching most of the time, and occasionally regulate it with passive teaching, one moving and one still, in a measured manner and at a suitable pace, the teaching effect of near-sense word analysis will be more satisfactory.

5. Conclusion

In the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language, there are still many difficult points that have not yet been overcome, such as the teaching of phonetics, grammar explanation, the phenomenon of petrifaction and the lack of motivation of second language learners. However, in the final analysis, vocabulary is the basis for students to master the Chinese language, and as the support and root of the whole teaching system, vocabulary teaching is the root of all the important and difficult problems. Teaching staff are required to explore more comparative methods concerning the teaching of near-synonyms within the framework of a system that adheres to a learner-centred perspective. It also needs to be noted that for teaching Chinese as a foreign language, we need to have some tolerance in the identification of near-synonyms and acknowledge some ambiguous areas of near-synonymy. Although the definition of near-synonyms is that the word pairs are two concepts in terms of connotation, we have found in our teaching that many near-synonyms can be made more difficult and less effective if they have to be explained too clearly and treated as two concepts. Therefore, as a difficult area in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, it is important to prepare lessons carefully and study teaching methods in order to make second language teaching more concise and effective, and to help second language learners to improve their learning in practice.

References

[1] Huang Bo Rong Liao Xu Dong. Modern Chinese [M]. Lanzhou: Gansu People's Publishing House 1997.
[2] Zhou Jian. The nature and categories of equivocal words[J]. Journal of Tianjin Normal University (Social Science Edition), 1988(05):85-89.
[3] Hu Yushu. Modern Chinese [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Education Press 1995.
[4] Li Lidong. Identification of near-synonyms in teaching Chinese as a foreign language [D]. Hebei University, 2007.
[5] Wan Yiling. Chinese Vocabulary Tutorial [M]. Beijing: Beijing Language and Culture University Press, 2011.
[6] Yang Lili. Identification of near-synonyms in teaching Chinese as a foreign language[J]. Education Teaching Forum, 2017(22): 202-205.
[7] Liu Lu. Research on the Teaching and Learning of Near-sense Word Recognition in Foreign

Chinese [A]. School of Chinese as a Foreign Language Education, Peking University, 2017 Foreign Chinese Doctoral Student Forum and Master's Degree Proceedings of the 10th Beijing Regional Postgraduate Academic Forum on Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language [C]. School of Chinese as a Foreign Language Education, Peking University: School of Chinese as a Foreign Language Education, Peking University, 2017:8.

[8] Mei Lichong. A Dissertation on the Codification of Cognate Dictionaries [A]. Exploration of Chinese language and Chinese language teaching [M]. Beijing: Chinese Language Teaching Press 1995.

[9] Hong Wei: "An empirical study on the influence of morphemic factors on the learning of near-synonyms by international students", Language Teaching and Research, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2011.

[10] Meng Xiangying. Talking about the Identification of Near-sense Words in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language [J]. Journal of Tianjin Normal University, 1997, (3).

[11] Wei Haoran. A study of near-sense word acquisition bias among foreign students [D]. Heilongjiang University, 2015.

[12] Zhou Li. Identification of near-synonyms in teaching Chinese as a foreign language [J]. Theoretical Observation 2004 (1).

[13] Hong Wei. An experimental study on the teaching of near-synonyms in Chinese as a second language [J]. World Chinese Language Teaching, 2013(3).

[14] Zhao X. and Hong W. Teaching Chinese near-sense words to second language learners," Chinese Language Teaching and Research, Vol. 4, No. 4, 2013.

[15] Shao Jing. The application of "cognitive function teaching method" in the teaching of word analysis [J]. Chinese Learning, 2011 (05):93-98.