Metaphor Analysis of Polysemy and Middle School English Vocabulary Acquisition

Muyu Lin

Jinan Foreign Language School, Jinan, Shandong, 250000, China

Abstract: *Language is an important way for people to communicate. Whether we can master and properly use the polysemy of language will directly affect the accuracy of communication. Polysemy means that the same word form bears multiple meanings. Its function is to reduce the number of words and the burden of memorizing words, which is the embodiment of the principle of human language economy. In the process of word meaning expansion, metaphor mechanism plays an extremely important role. Metaphor is an expression tool to understand and explain another corresponding thing by means of one thing. It is a mapping from one cognitive domain to another. The cognitive theory of metaphor has guiding function and application value to foreign language teaching, especially English vocabulary teaching to a great extent. Vocabulary teaching based on cognitive metaphor theory is helpful to systematically sort out and learn polysemy. The systematic and generative features of cognitive metaphor theory are helpful for English learners to build their logical expansion ability of word meaning. Studying polysemy from the perspective of cognitive metaphor will certainly promote the development and innovation of English vocabulary teaching.*

Keywords: Polysemy; metaphor analysis; middle school; English vocabulary

1. Introduction

The teaching of polysemous words has always been a big problem in vocabulary teaching. The teacher did not explain to the students the connection between the meaning of the word and the meaning of the word when explaining the polysemous words. The students only memorized one of the meanings mechanically. It is difficult to connect the cluttered multiple meanings in their minds, resulting in time-consuming and inefficient phenomena[1]. Based on this, people reduce the number of words used by giving more extended meanings to the same word form, thereby reducing the burden of memorizing a large number of words. The polysemous word just meets people's need for further understanding of the world [2]. In real life, polysemy is a common phenomenon in language, and it is an objective requirement for language to be able to develop and change continuously. The extension of the meaning of a word is not arbitrary or unreasonable [3]. Metaphor and metonymy are the two basic ways of thinking for people to understand the objective world, and they are also the internal cause of the linguistic phenomenon of polysemy. In the process of vocabulary evolution, not only new words appear and old words disappear, but also the original vocabulary expands or extends a variety of new meanings, that is, a word is polysemy [4]. Therefore, in our country's English teaching, if teachers can help students to accurately and efficiently master the polysemy of a word in English vocabulary, they can better improve students' English expression ability and communicative accuracy, thereby improving students' comprehensive English ability. At the same time, it also has important practical significance and theoretical value for English teaching research [5].

Language is an important tool and means for people to communicate. The accuracy of language expression will directly affect the quality of interpersonal communication. Human beings face the phenomenon that a language has a huge vocabulary, and each vocabulary has multiple meanings [6]. The ability to master and appropriately use the polysemy of the language directly affects the accuracy of communication. Polysemy is a common phenomenon in various human languages, so it is no exception in English vocabulary. The vocabulary cannot be increased, which will inevitably affect the improvement of English performance [7]. The emergence of the term polysemy conforms to the principle of saving time and effort. Assigning multiple meanings to a word can greatly reduce the number of vocabulary used in a language, thereby reducing the learner's memory burden on a large scale. However, polysemy not only greatly enriches the meaning of language vocabulary, but also creates certain obstacles to interpersonal communication [8]. Vocabulary is the foundation of language

and one of the basic elements of language. Therefore, mastering the vocabulary and its evolution process is particularly important for researchers engaged in language research, especially language learners. From the perspective of metaphor and metonymy, this paper studies the polysemy of the word in high school English, and provides reference for Chinese high school students to accumulate and master English vocabulary.

2. A study on the cognitive metaphor of polysemy

2.1. Polysemy

There is a common phenomenon in any language. A word carries two or more meanings. Linguists regard this phenomenon as an important research topic, which is called polysemy [9]. Polysemy in English is manifested in the aggregation of multiple closely related meanings in a single language form. Polysemy is a very common but vital phenomenon in human language vocabulary. It is the inevitable result of the development of human language. New words are usually monosemy at the beginning, but they have gained new meaning in the process of language change and development, so there is polysemy. When there is a lack of corresponding words to express a concept in daily language, people often take the method of borrowing some words from well-known words to express this new concept, and these old words and new words are similar in formation or function, so they can be replaced temporarily.

With the progress of society, new things and new ideas emerge one after another. In order to match them and reflect them more vividly, human languages are constantly creating new words or giving new meanings to existing words to add the richness of language. Polysemy expands and extends the meaning of vocabulary, which not only conforms to the economic principle of language communication, but also enriches the vocabulary in the language. The emergence of polysemy not only does not increase the number of words, but also obtains the new meaning items of language words. The expressible meaning is expanded, but it will not lose the original meaning items, which reflects the principle of language economy and the creativity and flexibility of language, which is more in line with the needs of human memory and communication [10]. Therefore, polysemy is an advantage rather than a disadvantage of language. Vocabulary teaching is an important part of foreign language teaching, and polysemy is the difficulty of vocabulary teaching. For a long time, the majority of teachers and students have been troubled by this difficulty. If this problem can not be solved well, the quality of foreign language teaching is bound to be affected. Related studies in cognitive linguistics show that polysemy refers to the phenomenon that language forms carry two or more senses, and its emergence is directly related to people's cognitive ability. Human cognition determines the formation of concepts, which are formed through human thinking processing. According to the historical evolution of vocabulary, word meaning can be divided into original meaning, extended meaning or extended meaning. The original meaning refers to the original meaning of words, usually refers to the specific meaning of things that human beings first knew. Extended meaning or extended meaning generally refers to the word meaning derived from the original meaning.

2.2. Metaphor, metonymy and polysemy

Traditional metaphor studies regard metaphor as a rhetorical device. Later, the study of metaphor has gone through the process from rhetoric to cognitive. It is not only a linguistic phenomenon, but also a way of human thinking. With the rise of cognitive linguistics, metaphor has become the research focus of cognitive science, which is no longer limited to the linguistic level. Cognitive linguists believe that metaphor is the main motivation for semantic generation, and most polysemy in English is caused by people's metaphorical thinking. Metaphor is at the cognitive level, and thinking is metaphorical. It is an important part of human's unique cognitive ability and participates in the generation, transmission and processing of meaning. Metaphor involves the comparison of two concepts. Understanding another concept by one concept is metaphorically called target domain and source domain. The target domain is the concept or experience that metaphor is trying to understand, and the source domain is the method that people use to describe experience. Metonymy is usually a deeper thinking that is more abstract than metaphor and divorced from language reality. Like metaphor, metonymy was regarded as a figure of speech at the linguistic level in the past.

The extension of word meaning is not arbitrary or unprovoked. Metaphor and metonymy are two basic ways of thinking for people to understand the objective world, and also the internal motivation

for the linguistic phenomenon of polysemy. Original meaning is the meaning of words given by people when they first know things. It is always more specific and primitive. With the historical evolution and language development, the original meaning will extend to more meanings. Cognitive linguistics holds that polysemy is also based on the projection principle of the above concept domain. In the process of cognition, people project from a specific and familiar conceptual domain to the conceptual domain of abstract new knowledge, and establish the connection between things through similarities to form new meanings of words. At the same time, lexical meaning is also derived from basic meaning, sometimes called metaphorical meaning. This is the interpretation of polysemy in cognitive metaphor research. We usually classify metaphor as a rhetorical device, using one word, phrase or phrase to replace another corresponding one, so as to infer the similarity between them.

Metaphor, as a cognitive way, is also a thinking tool. It is ubiquitous in our daily life. The general conceptual system on which we think and act is fundamentally metaphorical. The essence of metaphor is the result of mapping from one conceptual domain to another. Usually, people jump from a specific physical domain to an abstract domain. They are in two different domains, so people have the ability to recognize complex abstract concepts. Metonymy and metaphor are both cognitive phenomena. The difference between them is that metaphor expresses a parallel relationship, that is, it expresses something by pointing out some similarity between something and another thing. Metonymy mainly refers to understanding the whole or another part of the whole with a more perceptual part in the same cognitive domain.

3. The enlightenment of the cognitive mechanism of polysemy to English vocabulary teaching

The core of linguistics is semantics, the core of semantics is the cognitive process of concepts, the core of cognitive process of concepts is metaphor, and metaphor is the main constructive force of polysemy. The meaning of any word can only be learned through context. To remember the meaning, you must touch it in various occasions. Metaphorical thinking is an important tool for semantic change and development of vocabulary. We all know that English vocabulary is rich and varied in English, and many words have many meanings. The application of cognitive metaphor theory in vocabulary teaching, highlighting the role of metaphor in word meaning extension, is helpful to systematically understand and understand the linguistic phenomenon of polysemy. Teachers should first let students understand the original meaning of words, then make associations and make inferences, organize students to discover and study metaphors and metonymies in textbooks and life, analyze polysemous words through these two cognitive ways, and show students the formation process and deep structure of polysemous words, so as to improve the efficiency of vocabulary learning.

Language is not in a vacuum, it carries a certain culture and thinking mode. If English teaching excessively pursues the accuracy of language and adopts a single teaching method, students will form a learning method of memorizing words by rote. At the same time, it forms a wrong idea that English learning is only passive acceptance, without independent thinking and thinking space, which can not stimulate students' initiative and autonomous learning. And it will be a laborious task for students to memorize the meaning of words mechanically. However, if we think about and explore the cognitive metaphorical relationship between different meanings of words, it will help to improve language learners' ability of memorizing and understanding words. If metaphor is applied to polysemy teaching, it can arouse students' interest in vocabulary learning to a certain extent. From this point of view, if we can apply metaphor theory to English vocabulary teaching and learning, introduce cognitive metaphorical thinking mode into English vocabulary teaching class, and try to guide students to make metaphorical cognitive association of vocabulary and cultivate students' cognitive metaphorical thinking ability. Then the polysemy problem that perplexes teachers and students will be solved to some extent.

The generative features of cognitive metaphor theory are also conducive to students' word meaning expansion. Therefore, under the condition of a certain vocabulary, we can explore as many meanings of known vocabulary as possible, improve students' vocabulary application ability and expression ability, and make up for the shortcomings of previous vocabulary teaching methods. And it can provide a new model for more efficient vocabulary learning.

4. Conclusions

The teaching of polysemy should be based on prototype. Many words still retain their original basic

meanings more or less while gaining new meanings. In this way, with the same vocabulary, the range of meanings that can be expressed is wider. The metaphorical analysis of the prototype of the word meaning will help students to know more clearly the relationship between the meanings of the word and deepen their memory of the word meaning, which will also be beneficial to the flexible application of the word. The improvement of English vocabulary teaching will not happen overnight. It needs to sum up students' experience and lessons in the learning process and change teaching methods and strategies in a timely manner under the guidance of cutting-edge theory. At the same time, students are also required to figure out the learning methods suitable for them according to their own needs. The cognitive theory of metaphor has guiding function and application value to foreign language teaching, especially English vocabulary teaching to a great extent. Vocabulary teaching based on cognitive metaphor theory is helpful to systematically sort out and learn polysemy. The systematic and generative features of cognitive metaphor theory are helpful for English learners to build their logical expansion ability of word meaning. This not only makes up for the deficiency of traditional vocabulary teaching mode, but also opens up a new way for more scientific and effective vocabulary learning.

References

[1] Wang Xia, Meng Yansong, Li Yunhong. The understanding and application of "a word with multiple meanings" in high school English teaching[J]. China Foreign Exchange, 2018, 000(005):146-147.

[2] Luo Qiao. Research on Vocabulary Teaching from the Perspective of Prototype Theory——Taking "One Word with Multiple Meanings" as an Example[J]. Journal of Guilin Teachers College, 2018, 32(4): 3.

[3] Li Nannan. Analysis of the polysemy of the word "hand" in Chinese and English from the perspective of metaphor and metonymy [J]. Northern Literature: Second, 2017(5): 2.

[4] Dong Yingying. Understanding the polysemy of a word from a cognitive perspective[J]. Journal of Weifang Engineering Vocational College, 2016, 29(6): 5.

[5] Wang Erqian. Understanding of "a word with multiple meanings" in high school English learning[J]. New Generation (second half of the month), 2017, 000(016): 84.

[6] Wei Jing. The enlightenment of the study of polysemy under conceptual metaphor vision on English vocabulary teaching[J]. Campus English, 2018(22):1.

[7] Shen He. The understanding and application of "a word with multiple meanings" in high school English teaching[J]. English Pictorial (Advanced Edition), 2018, 000(001):71.

[8] Zhang Xiuqiong. The understanding and application of "a word with multiple meanings" in high school English teaching[J]. Huaxia Teachers, 2017(11): 2.

[9] Cao Hongjuan. A corpus-based study on the polysemy of the word in the college entrance examination [J]. Basic Foreign Language Education, 2020, 22(2):9.

[10] Wang Menghan. An analysis of polysemous vocabulary teaching in high school English based on the theory of cognitive metaphor [J]. Novel Monthly: Comprehensive, 2020(2): 3.