



Improving Students Proficiency Through Thorough Vocabulary Instruction

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I. Some typical (types of) errors among CFL students

- 1) *Ta de jiehun bu tai hao. 她的結婚不太好。
(VO taken as nouns)
- 2) *fache 52 ci tekuai 發車52次特快 (VO taken as transitive verbs)
- 3) *zhaoxiang le liangge xiaoshi / zhaoxiang de hen bucuo 照相了兩個小時 / 照相得很不錯 (VO incorrectly followed by other elements)
- 4) *huilai meiguo yihou 回來美國以後 (VC taken as transitive verbs)



Some typical (types of) errors among CFL students (Cont.)

- 5) *canguan jiaren he pengyou 參觀家人和朋友 (Incorrect verb-object combination)
- 6) *yijia chixiang de zhongguo fanguan 一家吃香的中國飯館 (Incorrect adjective-noun combination)
- 7) *Wo bu zhidao ruguo ta ye xiang qu. 我不知道如果他也想去。 (Incorrect use of connectives)
- 8) *Qichuang yi hou, xian wo xizao, shuaya. 起床以後，先我洗澡、刷牙。 (incorrect word order)



II. Possible main causes of these errors

- **Negative transfer from learners' first (native) language**

- It is maintained that L1 interference is one of the several sources of errors that learners make (Krashen and Stephen 1988)
- Lott (1983) defines interference as errors in learners' use of a foreign language that can be traced back to their mother tongues.
- Ellis (1997) notes that in learning a target language, learners construct their own interim rules according to their L1 knowledge.
- Typically, a person learns a language partly in terms of those kinds of meanings already learned in L1 (Larson-Freeman and Long, 1991).



Possible main causes of these errors (Cont.)

- **Inadequate vocabulary instruction**

- Perception that vocab is the easiest part of language students can learn by themselves
- Time constraint, particularly in intensive language programs
- Faulty/too simplistic glossary in textbooks
- Insufficient teaching of grammar & semantics of vocabulary
(Wang 2003)



III. Suggestions on how to teach vocab thoroughly—WHAT to teach

- **Focus on teaching grammar of verbs (verb as the center) (Teng, 1976):**
 - Noun or verb., e.g., 开会、结婚、离婚
 - VO structure preceding another object or not, e.g., 教书、见面、签字、结婚、听话
VS 出台、移民、备战、造福、立足
 - VO structure followed by another element, e.g.,
跑步、睡觉、照相、洗澡
 - VC(direction) not taking object, e.g.,
回来、出去、上来、下去



Suggestions on how to teach vocab thoroughly—WHAT to teach (Cont.)

- **Disambiguate meaning of English words in glossary** (1 English word = different Chinese expressions), e.g.,

--Visit

visit a friend: 访问朋友 / visit the Great Wall: 游览长城 /

visit a museum: 参观博物馆

--If

If you go, it'll be ok. (如果/要是, Condition)

If I were you, I wouldn't go. (如果/要是, Hypothesis)

I wonder if it is the right choice. (是否, Choice)

If it were not this cold today! (要是...多好, Wish)



Suggestions on how to teach vocab thoroughly—WHAT to teach (Cont.)

- **Teach part of speech** (Teng 2005), e.g.,
- 给
钱我给他了。(v.)
给他打工，饿死也不干！(prep)
护士给他量了量血压。(prep.)
狗给人偷了。(prep.)
你的良心给狗吃了。(prep.)
裤腿叫露水给打湿了。(aux.)
- 和
她和朋友讲她在泰国的经历。(prep.)
她和男朋友都不喜欢上网。(conj.)



Suggestions on how to teach vocab thoroughly—WHAT to teach (Cont.)

- Teach part of speech (cont.), e.g.,
 - 他很聪明。(v.)
 - 她不高兴。(v.)
 - 我喜欢中国饭，我也喜欢日本饭。(adv.)
 - 一个代表美国在华商业利益的组织新近发布的年度报告显示，人力资源成本和原材料价格的增长被许多在中国南部经济发达省份经营的美国公司视为一个新的挑战。(V.)



Suggestions on how to teach vocab thoroughly—WHAT to teach (Cont.)

- Teach common phrases, collocations and fixed expressions, e.g., 目不转睛, 总面积, 滴酒不沾, 亲朋好友, 工作人员

Examples of mistakes of this type:

- 我有两个且。
- 中国的全面积很大。
- 我爸爸不喝滴酒。
- 独立日我们邀请了亲朋来我们家烤肉。
- 飞机场工作人帮我们找到了我们的行李。



Suggestions on how to teach vocab thoroughly—WHAT to teach (Cont.)

- **Teach proper nouns (PN) as well**

- Students, particularly beginners, often have difficulty recognizing PN's which usually feature a low rate of repetition.

- Listing PN's separately, and usually at the end of glossary, can leave students with the wrong impression that they are unimportant.

- Teaching PN's explicitly not only enlarges students' vocabulary but also teach them an important part of the Chinese culture, e.g., 陈百万, 李有木, 马文革, 韩招弟, 张万年, 马超.



Suggestions on how to teach vocab thoroughly—HOW to teach

- **Teach new words in context** (Hadley, 2001)
 - Help students understand precise usage/meaning of words
 - Help students soak words into their long term memory (they've got something to associate words with)
- **Lots and lots of example usages**
- **Some mistakes due to lack of example usages**
 - * 我们去了一家很吃香的饭店吃饭。
 - * 我弟弟有樱桃小嘴。
 - * 我朋友上周末参观了我。
 - * 我每天晚上学习三个半点钟。



Suggestions on how to teach vocab thoroughly—HOW to teach (Cont.)

- Use Chinese learning websites, e.g., ChinesePod, WordChamp
- Use electronic devices, e.g., iPod, iPad
- Use Chinese learning software, e.g., Wenlin, NJ Star, Rapid Rote
- Use popular songs, movies, e.g., 后来 VS 以后
- Encourage students to do extensive reading (topics as varied as possible)
- Integrate vocab instruction with listening and speaking practices



IV. Concluding remarks

Vocabulary plays an important role in determining students' target language proficiency level. Instructors need to be sensitive to the **grammar, semantics, and culture embedded in words** and take measures to teach vocabulary in a way that helps students learn them more thoroughly and hence minimize their errors/improve their language proficiency.



Comments? Suggestions?

Thank you!