Title: Vocabulary Acquisition in Classroom: A Frame Based Approach
Key words: vocabulary acquisition, frame, frame semantics

Abstract: One of the most pervasive obstacles in second language acquisition is the vocabulary learning and extending. In this paper, the author suggests to apply a frame semantics (Fillmore 1982a) approach in vocabulary acquisition for ESL learners. Previous researches (e.g. Fillmore and Atkins 1992, 1994) on frame semantics and lexicology or lexicography have already shown that “the frame provides the conceptual underpinnings for related senses of a single word and semantically related words” (Petruck 1996). Thus we are encouraged to apply the theory of frame semantics to vocabulary acquisition, and a hypothesis as following is put forward:

Frame-based approach can facilitate vocabulary acquisition.

A small-scale experiment is carried out to verify the above hypothesis. Subjects are 80 students in a senior middle school in China, who are on the similar level of English proficiency. They are divided into two classes, one as the control group (G1) and the other as the experimental group (G2). The experiment consists of 4 steps:

Step one: 10 English words are carefully chosen and tests are carried out to make sure that the subjects don’t know the meaning of the selected words.

Step two: The teacher uses two different methods to teach these words between G1 and G2. Among G1, the teacher explains the words by giving the students their Chinese equivalents and then asks them to learn the words by heart, while among G2, frame-based method is used to teach the students. First, if there are semantically related words, the teacher organizes them together into a group. Second, the teacher explains the words or groups in frame, exploring the most common words in the frame to activate the retention of new words.

Step three: A test is carried out immediately after the lecture. And then questionnaires (among all the subjects) and interviews (among 10 students randomly selected from each group) are conducted to find out their opinions towards the two methods.

Step four: About one week later, another test is carried out to check the effects of the two approaches in subjects’ long-term memory.

The final results will come out after meticulously analyzing, and if the result is positive, the frame-based approach will be extended to the whole teaching term.

References: