

An empirical study on the effect of Chinese lexicalization pattern on English verb learning: a case of state-change verbs

This paper aims to explore the possible effect of Chinese lexicalization pattern on Chinese-speaking learner's interpretation of English state-change verbs. There is a general consensus that learning verbs is more difficult than nouns (Pulverman and Hirsh-Pasek, in press). Therefore, it is beneficial to know about the conceptual foundations for verb learning, which is better known as "lexicalization". To learn verbs, learners have to discover the lexicalization patterns of which meanings are typically conflated in a verb, and which are expressed by other means, such as particles or prepositional phrases.

Talmy (2000) has identified five event types, namely, motion event, temporal contouring event, state change event, action correlating event and realization event. So far, there have been many cross-lingual researches on motion event verb lexicalization. However, scant researches on state change event verb lexicalization are conducted. Following Talmy (2000), Mandarin and English are typologically complementary in their lexicalization of state-change event. English verbs (e.g., *pick*, *break*) generally conflate both the cause and the fulfillment of state-change, while Chinese verbs (e.g., *zhāi*, *dǎ*) specify only the cause meaning, which are usually followed by a second verb indicating the change of state. However, whether indeed it is correct to label English verbs as "fulfilled verb" and Chinese verbs as "conative verb" remains a question. Meanwhile, existing researches show that lexicalization pattern could be transferred from mother language to target language, and when the target language is mastered, the lexicalization pattern of target language will in turn affect the use of mother language (Berman & Slobin 1994). Therefore, by finding out the features of Chinese-speaking learners in learning English state-change verbs, this research will provide helpful strategies for English verb teaching and learning, and hopefully, shed some light on English-Chinese verb translation.

This paper tries to answer three questions: (1) Is the Chinese lexicalization pattern of state change event different from that of English? (2) How do Chinese-speaking learners interpret the meanings of English state-change verbs? (3) Is there positive or negative transfer in English verb learning? As to the methodology, researcher will first collect and analyze verbal and non-verbal data to find out the language-specific lexicalization patterns. An experiment involving Chinese-speaking learners will be further conducted to figure out the effect of Chinese lexicalization pattern on English state-change verb learning. In the experiment, eight video clips which depict state-change events (e.g. fill cup, pick apple) and eight clips of the corresponding no-state-change events will be presented and yes/no questions will be asked.

Reference

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