

ETYMOLOGICAL APPLICATION ON ENGLISH WORD MEMORY

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Abstract

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Word memory is a big problem for many second language learners. Especially in China, the Exam-oriented education system forces students to pay a lot of attention to word memory in English education. But this kind of traditional and mechanical memory method usually has little effect and is easy to forget. Many Chinese students and their teachers struggle with this problem for a long time.

In order to make word memory easier, it is necessary to bring the application of etymological into English words memory. By looking for the common origin of many words and finding the laws of words combined, teachers can not only teach their students words but also tell interesting stories and history of those words. In this way, the students get not only language, but also English culture. And to the students' advantage, they can remember words by combined them all in an interesting way, making them hard to forget.

This paper reviewed many domestic and foreign methods to improve memory of English words. There are certain advantages and feasibility, but most of those methods have focused on the word memory itself, while neglecting the history and succulency and cultural background.

Key words: *etymology; word memory; English education*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Linguist D.A. Wilkins (1987) said “Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed”. However, word memory is always a big problem for second language learners, especially in China. The exam-oriented education system forces students to pay a lot of attention to word memory in English learning. But the traditional and mechanical memory methods usually have little effect and are easy to forget. Many Chinese students and even teachers have suffered with this problem for a long time.

In order to break through this difficulty, many English teachers explore various word memory methods. These methods of word memory have a common characteristic; they all asked students to spend a lot of time and energy in writing, reading, and practicing repeatedly. Because these methods require students to have plenty of time, energy, and careful planning in advance, students may feel frustrated and lose enthusiasm to learn English.

This paper will offer discussion of the feasibility of a combination teaching method, known as etymological application on method with etymology. The combination of creative advances for both for the teachers and students are explored.

Statement of the Problem

The problem expressed as a question is, “How to use etymology to remember more

words both in English teaching and studying?”

Definition of Terms

Sun Wei (2003) defines the etymology as: “Etymology is a branch of linguistic, which is used to explore the source, development and evolution of words.” In comparison to Chinese etymologists, western etymological researchers focuses more on practical history comparisons and word structure than on the evolution of individual words from ancient to present times. Its outstanding characteristic is to compare and structure. Because Chinese characters are more rigid than western words, Chinese etymologists are very interested in the original words, compared to western researchers who must analyze a wide variety of word structures, each of which have their own history.

Robert K. Barnhart (1988) defining the etymology is like exploring the historical, political, and rhetorical wonderland of our linguistic heritage.

Delimitations of the Research

The research was conducted at the Karmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, over ninety (90) days. Primary searches were conducted via the Internet through EBSCO host with ERIC, Academic Search Elite, and Google/Google Scholar and the CNKI (China Knowledge Resource Integrated Database) as the primary sources, and the Key search topics included “etymology”, “word memory”, and “English education”.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

Linguist D.A. Wilkins (1987) said “Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed”. However, word memory is always a big problem for many second language learners, especially in China. As ZhangChangyou in the linguistic analysis on English vocabulary acquisition says: “A Chinese vocabulary, no matter whether it is one sentence of composition, voice and meaning may change, but word shape and word state may not change. This is why a lot of students are not sensitive to English word. English and Chinese are quite different language systems, and have little similarity with each other, especially in vocabulary acquisition. How to solve this problem is more seriously discussed in China than in English speaking countries.

The present methods of the word memory in China

In order to break through this difficulty, many Chinese English teachers explore various words memory methods, roughly divided into the following categories:

- The traditional English word memory, like the Li Hongliang (2008) writes in middle school English words on the art of memory:
- In memorizing words in a sentence
- Word formation memorizing words
- Contact method memorizing words
- Recycle method memorizing words

Su Zhe (2010) discusses other methods that include:

- Voice stimulation method
- Reading memory method
- Classification mnemonic
- Mechanical memory method

Another researcher Wang bin (2011) points out that to remember English words in daily life is an effective way to build vocabulary.

Those methods of word memory have a common characteristic. They all ask students to spend a lot of time and energy in writing, reading and practicing again and again. But these methods require students to have plenty of time, energy and careful planning. Otherwise, students become easily frustrated which affects their enthusiasm to learn English.

Another new word memory method has also been explored Cheng Congbing (2010) introduced the scientific experiments memory method. The method relies on the following:

- Feedback memory method: Students and teachers need to strengthen interactions
- Extrapolate method: Puts the Chinese meaning contact words together to memory
- Key words isolation method: Use different color and symbolic mark key words.
- The five method: Using seeing, listening, reading, writing, smelling together

- The complete memory process method: Recognize, maintain, reproduce and memory are a whole process which closely linked to each other

These methods seem easy to use, and strengthen the students' interest and confidence in studying.

Research on methods of the word memory abroad

A number of research studies have been done outside China on word memory.

Consider the following researchers and their findings.

1. Mainela-Arnold; Evans; Coady, (2010) investigated the impact of lexical processes on target word recall in sentence span tasks in children with and without specific language impairment. They concluded that future studies need to examine the extent to which verbal working memory capacity is a cognitive construct independent of extant language knowledge representations.
2. Ferré, García, Fraga, Sánchez-Casas, Molero, (2012) examine emotionally charged words are usually better remembered than neutral words. They focused on memory for emotional words in bilinguals and examined the influence of some variables that might modulate the effect of emotionality of second-language words on recall.
3. Cortese, Khanna, Hacker, (2010) in two studies, participants studied 30 lists of 50 words and were tested on 30 lists of 100 words. Item-level multiple regression analyses were conducted on hits, false alarms, hits

minus false alarms, d' , and C . The predictor variables were objective frequency, subjective frequency, image ability, orthographic similarity, phonological similarity, phonological-to-orthographic N (PON), age of acquisition (AoA), and word length. The regression equations accounted for 45.9% of the variance in hit rates, 14.9% of the variance in false alarm rates, and 29.2% of the variance in hits minus false alarms. Results were largely compatible with predictions made by single- and dual-process theories of recognition memory.

4. Dobel, Junghöfer, Breitenstein, Klauke, Pantev and Zwitserlood, (2010) discuss remembering words in the context of novels. They concluded that learned novel words rapidly gained access to existing conceptual representations, as effectively as related native-language words.

Perhaps these findings may have implications for Chinese learners. However there are distinct Chinese cultural differences that the Chinese researchers focused on more external factors and influence. They often study the problem of memory from the macro and humanistic perspective, unlike western scholars that pay attention to accurate data textual research.

Definition of etymology

Sun Wei (2003) defining the etymology said: “Etymology is a branch of linguistic, which is used to explore the source, development and evolution of words.” From Sun Wei’s theory, it is believed that to explore the source of the word will inevitably

involve two words and the relationship between the pronunciation and meanings. It should also be noted that the western etymological research method is practical history comparison linguistics party method. Its outstanding characteristic is to compare and structure. The basic concept is to compare different languages, in the same or similar dialect significance, which have different phonetic word form.

One western researcher (Barnhart 1988) suggested that defining the etymology is like exploring the historical, political, and rhetorical wonderland of the English linguistic heritage. There is opportunity to examine how the sometimes backwards, sometimes hilarious, and sometimes illuminating ideologies built into our language affect modern thinking.

Ayto, (1990) lists alphabetically the histories of more than 8,000 words in the English language in his book *Dictionary of Word Origins*. One learns about the hidden and often surprising histories of and connections between English words and their non-English ancestors.

An older source *A dictionary of grammatical terms in linguistics by Carl Darling Buck* (Buck, 1949) remains an indispensable tool for diachronic analysis of the Indo-European languages. Arranged according to the meaning of words, the work contains more than 1,000 groupings of synonyms from the principal Indo-European languages. Buck first traced changes in meaning of the root words as well as presenting cases indicating which of the older forms have been replaced by expressions of colloquial or foreign origin.

Reference books, such as the examples given, can open the door to the western

etymology, allowing one to find many interesting postscripts to history and to modern thinking of words. However, the books can very rarely be relevant to China, although the books let many English learners to understand the evolution of words in history.

Research on etymological application abroad

Researches on etymological application abroad generally concentrated in the investigation of a certain word or certain variety.

1. Sayers, William (2011). *The Etymologies of Some Terms of Disparagement: Culprit, Get (and Brat), Gull, Job, Niggle, Prig, Vagrant*. The author suggests the possibility that the word job is a originated in the 16th century due to its lack of antecedents in Old English or Middle English.
2. Sayers, William (2010). *Three Anglo-Norman Etymologies: Booze, Gear, and Gin*. The author addresses the history and social conditions associated with the etymologies and definitions of the words and their modern English uses.
3. Coates, Richard (2011). *A Possible Etymology for Aberdevine 'Siskin'*. This article explores the etymology of the words "aberdevine," referring to a siskin, or songbird. The author examines entries on the words in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. This kind of researches focuses on one point of etymology, but rarely mentions the application of the whole etymology system.

But other research studied the whole etymology system.

4. Philology, Etymology, and Phonetics (2009). In this article the author focuses on the teaching about philology and etymology in undergraduate education. The author suggests teachers must create a background of support for philological knowledge in their classrooms. This article tries to put the etymology and teaching together.
5. Kjellmer, Göran (2006). Popular Etymology and Language Use. The article discusses the popular or folk etymology of certain British words. The effect of popular etymology in certain British words is that its modern meaning may have little bearing with the word itself. This article mentions some phenomena of Modern etymology.

These articles are separate from the macroscopic and microscopic way to open the door of etymology to us; we can know about the etymological research methods and feel the glamour of the etymology and historical changes.

Research on etymological application in china

Whereas the etymology application of Chinese language has been heavily studied, the knowledge of etymology application in English is very limited. The research on etymological application in China starts very early, but they usually focus on the investigation of Chinese part. Sun Wei (2003) when comparing the Chinese etymology and western etymology researches pointed that, “Chinese etymological research actually begins in traditional exegesis of etymology. By using modern linguistics method, voice changes as the main line. According to the meaning of each other word

find the differentiation of the words' evolution history" (P18). The research of Chinese etymology already has accumulated the rich results. But even with limited research, there are still a few studies in the English etymological applications.

1. ShenJiaXuan (1997) provides a brief overview of etymology in regards to its various components and types, "from wide to pragmatic study".
2. Hu Zhengmao (2009) studied the etymology and translation problem in English. This article described the phenomenon of problems that stemmed from various Chinese translations of single English word/phrase in practice. Using the word "stakeholder" as an example, this paper discusses the diplomatic and linguistics problems that were results of an inaccurate translation. The article also mentions some important methods of etymology research, such as sememe analysis, the significance of etymology learning, and the significance of etymology in English education.
3. JiangYunLei and ZhangGuoXia (2009) *Etymology in College English Teaching*. This article put forward many significant theories:
 - etymology learning can help students to developing a rich vocabulary
 - etymology study help students to deepen the understanding of language
 - etymology study of can greatly stimulate the students' learning about cross-cultural communication

The article also encourages educators to do several learning activities in order to improve application of English etymology.

- Pay attention to the new meanings of old words.

- Continues to grow foreign words. The development of English will always go along with international events, pay attention to the words which connect to the new international events is also very important.
- Use old words as a means of familiarity when defining and encouraging use of new words.

Those few articles that combine the Chinese and western etymology and apply it to English teaching and translation, those papers are very valuable because they lay the foundation that will give educators more tools to effectively help students to remember and use new vocabulary.

Research combined etymological application and word memory

Those papers which combined etymological application and word memory are very few, but there are many original ideas and methods in them.

1. Boers, Frank, Eyckmans, Hélène (2007) write an article: Presenting figurative idioms with a touch of etymology: more than mere mnemonics? This paper discusses some phenomenon of new idioms: In many conditions, the meaning of many idioms is 'motivated' by their original, literal usage. This offers the possibility of presenting idioms in ways that promote insightful learning rather than 'blind' memorization. Associating an idiom with its etymology has been shown to enhance our memory.
2. JiangMeiqin, YangMei, XiaoYao, ChenQian, WangShiao (2010) Explore the Greek myth of the etymology into English word memory. This paper writes

about the affection of Greek myth in the etymology, and then divides those affections into three categories: The influence of the basic vocabulary, the influence to stem, affix, and the influence of idioms. After analyzing the feasibility of this method, the authors put forward several specific teaching methods:

- Morphological analysis: the word then deduced the meaning of word.
- In context as the medium, meaning is deduced.
- In communication for the purpose, improve the learning interest.
- Combined with Lenovo method and induction memorizing words.

Advantages of etymological word memory

Although the method of combing etymology and word memory is not seen more in domestic and foreign research, but through these works above, one can understand the profound theoretical accumulation and academic charm of etymology and the thirst of second language learners, the combination of etymology and word memory is only a question of time.

From the articles we know the advantages of etymological word memory:

- Increase in vocabulary
- Understand the language and culture
- Strengthen the learning interest of the students
- Reduce the frustrations by forgotten words.

But there also exists some obstacles when promoting this method.

Some examples in etymological application

Etymological application is not only a theory; we must know where those words originated before using it in teaching. As we all know, there are a few important source in English words: the Greek myths and the ancient Latin. AD 43, Roman emperor Claudius spent three years conquering the central Britain, and began 400 years of rule. In these 400 years, the Roman languages, cultures, religions deeply influenced the people who used English in the British Isles, so, the English words system contains many words from Greek mythology and Roman mythology, and finally becoming what we knew today. There are some very interesting materials that teachers can use in their teaching. Next we will give some etymology application examples.

1. Mother Earth, Gaia. In the beginning, there was only chaos, the primordial abyss. Then came Gaia, the Earth Goddess, she produced a son, Uranus, who was the sky. She is the authority in biological, plant growth, development, and she is the source of life. Many of the words with “ge-” usually have relations with "earth" “birth” and “produce”, such as: “gene” “generate” “genius” “geology” “geography” and “pregnant”. In this way many words have different meanings and spellings can link together with a single story: the mother of earth, Gaia.
2. Cronus. Cronus is the youngest son of Gaia and Uranus the Sky, He used the sickle to castrated his father and take the throne from him, becoming the second generation of god. He is the god of all time and the

transformation of the four seasons. A lot of words dealing with time also have a relationship with Cronus, Cronus evolved into the root “chronu-”, like “chronic” “chronicle” “chronograph” and “synchronize”.

There are a lot of stories and characters such like that in Greek myths; they are all very interesting stories, and also indispensable parts of western culture. It will be easier for students to remember vocabulary and also very helpful to understand the history behind words.

However the myths are just a part of the English word system, the other parts will involve western thinking mode, and if we know nothing about that it will be hard to understand many English words. Next we will give some etymology application examples about western thinking mode.

- About soul. We take the word “animation” as an example. The original meaning of animation is to give the picture a life; it comes from the Latin word: animate (give an inanimate object to have the soul of life). Animate also means heart and soul, the word “unanimous” share the same base of that, “uni-”+“animate”, everyone has only one mind. And some other words also have the same thinking model, such as: “equanimity” “magnanimity” “animadverts”.

Chapter III: Conclusions and Implications

Research Problems in etymological application

Etymology is a subject which has a long history and profound cultural heritage. It began a time ago both in Chinese and English, however research of this kind of application starts too late. Especially English learning in China has become popular in more recent years. There is not a large number of foreign etymology works that were translated into Chinese. The research and application of English etymology in China still needs time.

It is also a huge challenge for Chinese English teachers. Etymology involves many aspects of history and linguistic knowledge, which is good news to students. They can hear a new story behind their vocabulary. It also greatly improves the knowledge requirements of our teachers.

Etymology not only means interesting and fun vocabulary memorization for students, but also combines with some advanced linguistic theory. How to understand and digest the knowledge of linguistics is a new question.

Prospects for the future research

Through this literature review, we see the present situation of English education clearly, and see that the biggest concern in second language learning is knowing what contributes to word memory in English language learning,

Finally, we found the etymology theoretical basis, which discusses the feasibility of the method that combines the etymology and word memory in English education. We do see some problems to promote this method, but we know what those obstructive

factors are. As long as we can take some time and energy, etymological application on English word memory will greatly enhance the ability of learners to remember English words, and promote the communication between Chinese and western culture.

Conclusions and Implications

This paper reviewed many domestic and foreign methods to improve memory of English words. There are certain advantages and feasibility, but most of those methods have focused on the word memory itself, while neglecting the history and succulency and cultural background behind that. Introducing the etymological application into word memory will provide new ideas for word memory in English teaching. This method can not only strengthen and expand students' vocabulary, but will also bring the western culture into the English learning and teaching, increasing the interest for the students in the learning process.

Unfortunately, communication between these two countries has begun too late. There is not a large number of foreign etymology works that were translated into Chinese, and if there were, it would greatly improve the knowledge proficiency of English teachers. How to understand and digest this method is also a problem. Widely using etymology into daily word memory and teaching practice still needs a lot of time to study and promote.

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