

THE APPLICATION OF HYPONYMY IN COLLEGE ENGLISH VOCABULARY  
TEACHING



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THE APPLICATION OF HYPONYMY IN COLLEGE ENGLISH VOCABULARY  
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WangPeng

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Abstract

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WangPeng

Under the Supervision of David V Gillota, PhD

The paper aims to put forward a new way of teaching English, starting from the word itself; to make English learners understand the usage of the English more profoundly and effectively and reduce the amount of memory of vocabulary. This theory is different from the traditional University mechanical way of English teaching in China. It is inclined to practical teaching theory.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

English vocabulary teaching in China tends to put emphasis on quantity rather than on quality. As a Chinese college student, you still need to remember a lot of English words to learn English. However, the fact has proven that the traditional way of English vocabulary teaching in China is ineffective. The difficulty of rote-learning thousands of words can be overwhelming for even college students in China. Hyponymy is the semantic relation of being subordinate or belonging to a lower rank or class (Mititelu, 2006). It contributes to memorizing words efficiently, both in short-term and long-term aspects. Therefore, it is necessary to apply hyponymy to college English vocabulary Teaching.

### **Purpose of the Study**

First of all, this paper aims to explore the ways and significance of applying hyponymy to English vocabulary teaching. Secondly, it will help teachers to change the traditional mechanical way of vocabulary teaching for college English learners. The third point is, this kind of teaching pattern can not only arouse the students' interest and motivation for learning English, but can also reduce the pressure of learning, which is brought by the traditional teaching pattern. It can help students develop their thinking mode of language learning and arouse students' associative memory through using hyponymy method, thus effectively improving the learning efficiency and quality.

### **Significance of the Study**

The application of hyponymy in college English vocabulary teaching is based on the theory of hyponymy. It not only can help the college students remember new words effectively, but also can help them develop good language learning habits and improve the learning methods of vocabulary. In addition, the regulative words formation and features in the application of

hyponymy can enrich the English vocabulary teaching and promote the development of Linguistic skills.

### **Statement of the Problem**

What are the main ideas of hyponymy theory?

Why is it necessary to apply hyponymy to college English vocabulary teaching?

How to apply hyponymy to college English vocabulary teaching?

### **Definition of Terms**

Hyponymy:

Hyponymy is the semantic relation of being subordinate or belonging to a lower rank or class (Mititelu, 2006). The word, which is more general in meaning, is called the superordinate, and the more specific words are called its hyponyms.

Superordinate:

Superordinate is a word that is more generic than a given word (Sherif, M. 1958).

Co-hyponyms:

Co-hyponyms are a word or phrase that shares the same hypernym as another word or phrase.

Meronymy:

Meronymy is the semantic relation that holds between a part and the whole.

Hyponym:

Hyponym is a word that is more specific than a given word (Chaffin, R., & Glass, A. 1990)

### **Delimitation of the Study**

The secondary research will be conducted in and through the Karrmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville using the UW-Search tool. Searches of the literature will be conducted via the Internet through EBSCO host with ERIC, Academic Search Elite and JSTOR as the primary search engines. Key search topics included "hyponymy", "superordinate", "hyponym", and "vocabulary teaching."

Due to the limitation of space, the shortage of the materials collected and the inadequacy of the author's knowledge, there must be many other more persuasive examples of hyponymy that have not been quoted and illustrated in this thesis. In addition, the types of sources are mainly about college students teaching from the books and theses in recent years, lacking some real data from primary research.

## **Methodology**

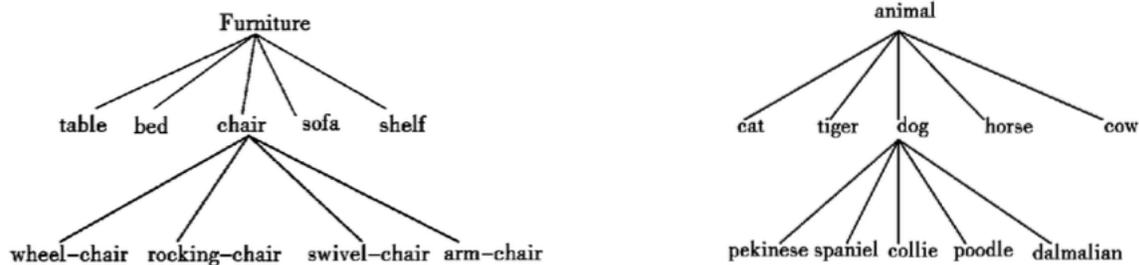
A review of the history of the literature of hyponymy theory will be conducted. A second review of literature relating to research, studies, and evidence of the application of hyponymy in English vocabulary teaching, and its impact on performance—as well as, motivation—will also be conducted.

Resources come from academic journals, articles and papers of recent 10 years, which are about semantic theory, second language acquisition and teaching strategies and application of hyponymy in English vocabulary teaching, some of practical teaching design in these resources will be conducted. Based on the literature review, the thesis proves that the application of hyponymy can be used in college English vocabulary teaching, and it can improve the ability of the students' language application.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Defining Hyponymy

Hyponymy, as a kind of semantic relationship, is a sort of concept about inclusion relation (Palmer, 1981). Here we will see an example of hyponymy. It looks like a tree that shows the top word is superordinate and other words below it are hyponym.



In the example above, *wheel-chair*, *rocking-chair*, *swivel-chair*, *arm-chair* and *Pekinese*, *spaniel*, *collie*, *poodle*, and *dalmalian* are, respectively, the hyponym of *chair* and *dog*; then *chair* and *dog* are also the hyponym of *furniture* and *animal*, so hyponymy is a transitive relation. If X is a hyponym of Y, and Y is a hyponym of Z, then X is a hyponym of Z (Lyons, 1977). Thus, it can be seen, the word that contains other words and can express extensive meaning is called superordinate, and the word which expresses more concrete and narrow meaning is called hyponym.

Strictly speaking, Hyponymy is a kind of semantic relation that has same grammatical function and exists between superordinate and hyponym. For example, *animal*, *tiger*, *dog*, *horse*, and *cow*, have the same grammatical function (noun, countable) and semantic containment relationship (Lyons, 1977). In addition, Lyons called it quasi-hyponymy, a sort of semantic

relation that has a different grammatical structure, but there exists hyponymy in it. For example, shape: *round, square, oblong* and *oval*, “*shape*”, as a superordinate, is a noun, but the hyponym of it could be an adjective like “*round, square, oblong and oval*”.

### **Application of Hyponymy in English Vocabulary Teaching**

Gao and Xu (2013) argue that the English vocabulary that can be used in daily life is about twenty thousand words, which is still a large number for most English learners to remember. In addition to the large number of vocabulary words, there are still rules to follow. The rule is, there are always some words that were invented first, while other words are on the basis of these words, gradually grow new branches. It's like a tree, the initial word is a trunk, then long twigs, small branches and leaves. The following example, based on the word *get*, illustrates this idea.

#### ***get***

I get a lot of E-mails every day. (replace *get* with *receive*)

The policeman finally got him. (replace *get* with *catch*)

I'll get the doctor. (replace *get* with *call*)

Let's get some fresh air. (replace *get* with *breath*)

She gets \$19 an hour. (replace *get* with *earn*)

That stupid dog tried to get me. (replace *get* with *attack*)

I'll get dinner if you get the movie. (replace *get* with *treat*)

In addition, “*get*” also can be the superordinate of the words such as “*persuade, manage, fix, succeed, arrange, contrive, wangle, annoy and so on*” (WangLeping, 2014). This example with the word “*get*” shows that you can use a superordinate word to substitute many meanings of its hyponymy words. If you remember the word *get*, you can use it to mean *receive, catch, call, breath, earn, attack* and *treat* in most cases. Here “*get*” is the top word on the tree, and other words are its hyponymy words below it.

Meanwhile, Cruse thought that hyponymy consists of two relations; the first one is exemplified in 'An X is a Y' (simple hyponymy) while the second relation is 'An X is a kind/type of Y'. (Cruse, D. A. 2002). I would like to mention about *feeling* (noun). Most people only use this word as a kind of emotion. In fact, quite a few words associated with the perception can be expressed with this word. The following example from WangLeping demonstrates this idea.

I didn't mean to hurt your feeling. (replace emotion)

I still have feelings for her. (replace *feelings* with *love*)

You have no feeling for others. (replace *feelings* with *sympathy*)

I got the feeling that he didn't like me much. (replace *feelings* with *impression*)

I don't have any strong feeling about it. (replace *feelings* with *opinion*)

She has a wonderful feeling for colors. (replace *feelings* with *understanding*)

I've lost all feeling in my leg. (replace *feelings* with *sense*). ( WangLeping, 2014).

Regardless of physical feelings or emotional feelings, everything can be expressed in feeling. Its secret lies in feeling the word itself. It comes from the transformation of feel, and feel refers to the human sense of the things in the outside world, whether mental or physical, whether positive or negative. Only with the development of language can it be further divided

into different feeling (WangLeping, 2014).

We can also meet a lot of hyponymy in English vocabulary learning. Miller thought that hyponymy reflects different aspects of the organization of human lexical memory, these superordinates like “get” and “feeling” are the “basics” in the hyponymic hierarchy for entering part-whole relations (Rosch, E., Mervis, C. B., Gray, W. D., Johnson, D. M., & Boyes-Braem, P., 1976). In English vocabulary teaching processing, learners, at first, need to learn how to classify a word. Classifying a word means connecting it to its correct hypernym (Rydin, 2002), so that they can deepen the understanding and memory of these words, meanwhile, deepen on the use of these hypernym. Herdikusuma (2015) even applied hyponymy to English vocabulary teaching, which aimed to increase the students’ vocabulary ability. He tried to teach English vocabulary by using a hyponymy game, and the result proved that the students who received a higher score, the same score, and the lower score were not affected by physical and mental factors. Herdikusuma brings up two main points: “For the teacher, a teacher has an important role to help the students to increase their vocabularies. Therefore, it is expected that the teachers can use hyponymy game as a media to teach vocabulary. For learners, from the justification of game as media in teaching vocabulary, it is expected that the learners apply hyponymy game in learning vocabulary.” (Herdikusuma, L, 2015).

For example: “A: What’s your father’s job? B: He’s a teacher/ policeman/ engineer/ worker/ cleaner/ actor/ driver/ civil servant/ businessman/ doctor/ lawyer/ pilot/ dentist/ cook/ journalist/ barber/ fire fighter, etc...” (WangHongyuan, & ChenYanxi, 2010). This game shows that we can use the same sentence pattern to drill the hyponymy words in order to help students remember so many words at a short time, which can make students learn fast on the superordinate

(job) and hyponym ( *teacher, policeman, engineer, worker, cleaner, actor, driver, civil servant, businessman, doctor, lawyer, pilot, dentist, cook, journalist, barber, fire fighter*), thus achieving the purpose of vocabulary acquisition and language communication. Besides this, language teachers can stimulate learners' interest by using a presentation of the new sentences as well as interviewing.

We can also use a chart to promote the vocabulary acquisition. For example:

“Pessimistic forecasts say that there is only enough coal for 450 years, enough natural gas for 50 years and that oil might run out in 30 years. Fossil fuels are rapidly running out. The tragedy is that fossil fuels are far too valuable to waste on the production of electricity. If we don't start conserving the things now, it will be too late. Obviously we have to do something quickly about the energy crisis” (WuLiqun, 2009).

| <b>fossil fuels / energy (crisis)</b> | <b>years to run out</b> |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>coal</b>                           | <b>450</b>              |
| <b>natural gas</b>                    | <b>50</b>               |
| <b>oil</b>                            | <b>30</b>               |

By using chart, we can understand the discourse more easily, meanwhile, it has led to a better understanding of hyponymy between these words (WuLiqun, 2009).

## **The Significance of Hyponymy in Vocabulary Expression Teaching**

Herdikusuma's opinions pointed out that whenever we think about language, we usually think of mastering vocabulary, meanwhile, the development of vocabulary is extremely interrelated with the development of skill in expression. For second language learners, learning language means to memorize thousands of words, it is a very cruel and low efficiency method because when they use them in practical expression, most of the words have been forgotten. "Semantic links play an important role in production. This suggests the use of semantic field based on presentation method" (Hedge, T., 2001). In order to improve learners' vocabulary expression skills, teaching vocabulary by using hyponymy is necessary, as Herdikusuma states, "it is similar to synonymy (a word similar in meaning) and antonym (a word opposite in meaning) using words relation to explain the meaning of the target word" (Herdikusuma, 2015).

As an example, if learners forget "Gambling house" or "delivery room", how can they convey the same meaning? As we know, Gambling house is a place where people win money by playing cards or something and delivery room is the room where women give birth to their baby. In a similar way, "veterinarian" is a doctor whose job is to make ill animals well again, "dentist" is a doctor whose job is to treat people's teeth. When learners forget these specific vocabulary words, they can absolutely use those simpler words to explain what they want to express, because of the existence of semantic relation between the specific word and explanation, learners can easily associate the hyponymy. (Nattinger, J. R., & DeCarrico, J. S, 1992). But how could this method be used in English expression? Based on the arguments above, let's see an example: "Her youngest son inherited all her property".

Let's assume the learners just don't know the word "inherit." How could they express this word or this sentence, as we mentioned above, according to hyponymy method? The superordinate of "inherit" could be "get", so this sentence could be expressed as " Her youngest son got all her property", meanwhile, we can also use semantic relation to transform it:

"She gave all the property to her youngest son."

"All her property goes to her youngest son."

And you don't even have to use "property": She gave her youngest son all she had (Wangleping, 2014).

Nation (1990) listed a series of points that learners should master in order to know how to use a word: "The meaning(s) of the word, the written form of the word, the spoken form of the word, the grammatical behavior of the word, the collocations of the word, the register of the word, the associations of the word, the frequency of the word." (Goulden, R., Nation, P., & Read, J., 1990) That is the precondition of mastering hyponymy, which is in order to cultivate the students' ability of using vocabulary in expression. About the significance of application of hyponymy theory in English vocabulary teaching, Wu discussed that hyponymy theory could be used for summarizing and collecting vocabularies in English teaching processing. (Wu,1988), meanwhile, Joanna said that semantic links played an important role in the process of accumulation in vocabulary memory, it is a reminder for language teacher to apply semantic relation method like hyponymy in vocabulary teaching. (Channel, J, 1981). "No matter how well the student learns grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of second language learner are mastered without words to express a wide range of meanings, communication in an second language learner just cannot happen in any meaningful way" (McCarthy, M. 1990). Learners'

vocabulary size directly affects the quality of the learners' language input and output, and also affect the learners' language competence (Liguangqin, 2006). Therefore, in order to keep pace with the times, we need to get rid of the traditional teaching pattern, and constantly develop new education methods, which can accelerate the efficiency of learning. Hyponymy also can cultivate learners' learning strategies and autonomous learning ability. In vocabulary teaching, teachers should bring their leading role into full play to guide the learners to think correctly (Borg, S. 2003). Teachers can put forward a superordinate and give one or two examples about its hyponym and then ask students to speak out some more hyponyms one by one. This kind of teaching method can not only mobilize the enthusiasm of the students' initiative thinking and vivify the teaching atmosphere, but it can also create a relaxing atmosphere for the tedious vocabulary learning (Zhouqian, 2006).

### **Chapter Three: Conclusions and Recommendations**

The big problem that many Chinese students meet with during their English learning is vocabulary, which has become one of the major concerns on the part of their teachers and researchers. Rong (2011) stated that in the traditional mode of English teaching, because of the monotony of the teaching method, Chinese students are always expected to enlarge their vocabularies quickly. Students pay too much attention to the size of English vocabulary rather than the quality, meanwhile, they focus too much on those difficult complex vocabulary words and ignore the understanding and mastering of basic vocabulary, but basic vocabulary is the first step that the second language learners need to master. Then it gets easier to learn gradually those complex vocabularies. That is how the hyponymy method applies in English vocabulary teaching. If a word corresponds to more than one lexical item, then the lexical item will stand in different relations to other lexical items, which make a huge web of English vocabulary (Rong, L. A. L, 2011). In summary, the applications of hyponymy in English vocabulary teaching can not only make students understand the superficial meaning of words, but also help them know better how to apply them into practical expression and enhance students' lexical competence. Most importantly, it is a good way to expand the size of vocabulary and get a deeper understanding of English language. If we apply the theory into the vocabulary teaching thoroughly, it must get a positive influence on our current teaching situation.

Based on these conclusions, it is recommended that educators should change the traditional mechanical teaching methods and open vistas on the teaching of design and on more mindful professional design practices. "Cultivating learners' ability to use vocabulary in their early stage can inspire and cultivate the students' interests in studying English, help them build up self-confidence and let them possess the ability and skills to exercise the language" (Nunan, 1999 :



|              |           |
|--------------|-----------|
| bedroom      | library   |
| mushroom     | factory   |
| study-room   | vegetable |
| workroom     | apartment |
| reading-room | school    |

In example (1), option D is the superordinate of other three options, and the other three options are the common hyponym of option D. Meanwhile, the semantics of “*fruit*” contain other three words. As a result, option D is different from the other three. Learners may use hyponymy to solve this problem, develop vocabulary learning, and acquire vocabulary through this design. Word association research has shown that co-hyponyms in particular have very strong connective bonds (Aitchison, 1987). These and other sense relationships (hyponymy and metonymy) can be illustrated with semantic maps, which are often used to help consolidate vocabulary. In example (2), learners perhaps do not know the meaning of “*crimson*,” but learners could use hyponymy to exclude A, B and C. On the one hand, red with other three options are the common hyponym. On the other hand, we can find that red should include several more specific colors from this sentence. As a result, *red* should be a superordinate in here, so we can exclude D related to the color of *red*. In the example (3), every word in column A is with room, learners may feel interested, thus it will arouse their curiosity, meanwhile, learners may also use hyponymy to find the matching words, which can promote the acquisition of vocabulary. Vocabulary can be combined together to form a semantic field under the domination of the common concept. This common concept can be said by superordinate, and the semantic field consists of a hyponym. For example, organ can be expressed to a kind of common concept, under its domination. Words like mouth, eye or nose can form a semantic field. The relationship between the words in the semantic field is interdependent. According to the hyponymy between

the words, we can associate the hyponym through its superordinate in the semantic field and draw inferences about other cases from one instance. Thus, it's getting easier for learners to enlarge their vocabulary (Zhou, 2006). At the same time, learners may apply hyponymy to the corresponding vocabulary learning process.

In addition, teachers can also make learners acquire vocabulary actively through competition. For example, a teacher can list some superordinate words like month, week, subject, clothing, furniture, kinship, instrument, and let students write down the corresponding hyponym, and winner is the person who gives the most sufficient answers, This way of competition can greatly mobilize and inspire the enthusiasm of learners to participate in vocabulary learning, which can make learners acquire words such as January, February, March... / Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday... / Japanese, French, Chesapeake, German... / t-shirts, suit, uniform, scarf, overcoat... / bed, wardrobe, chair, sofa,... / parents, uncle, aunt, nephew, niece... / piano, violin, trumpet, guitar, erhu, drum..., This way has a great role in promoting vocabulary learning.

English teachers often find it difficult for Chinese college students to grasp the vocabulary although they have learned English as a second language for almost 6 years. Chinese college students always feel that there are so many English words that have no rules to follow. They need to spend a lot of time to remember the words but it's easy to forget soon, resulting in losing their self-confidence and enthusiasm in learning English. I think English teachers have the responsibility to help the students solve the problem. In fact, English vocabulary has rules to follow and they are connected with each other closely, for example, the hyponymy and semantic field rules. If the teacher put these rules and the inner relationships of the English vocabulary in teaching and inspire students to comprehend words by analogy, students will understand and remember the meaning of English vocabulary by heart.

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