A Special Strategy for Practical English Teaching: to Find Interesting Linguistic Phenomena of English

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Abstract—English class is about a language learning, which means that students have to face hundreds of words every day, and therefore sometimes they will inevitably get tired, and even give up learning. In order to avoid the classroom atmosphere being depressing, students' enthusiasm getting lower, and in order to improve the teaching effect, to improve the quality of teaching, as English teachers, we should continue to search for interesting phenomenon in the English language, and tries to sum up them, and then put them into practice in the daily teaching, to increase students' interest in learning English, so as to build an interactive, practical and effective classroom-ecology. In college English teaching, practical course is important to stimulate students' interest in learning language and to improve their competence. However, for many teachers there are some misunderstanding in practical teaching, namely cognitive errors, such as "English practical teaching is just the student's presentation", "practice course must be outside of the classroom", "practical English teaching is to evade the teaching of grammar and vocabulary" etc. Actually, these opinions are not right, because teacher's guidance in students' presentation is considerably crucial, classroom is good enough for most practice course, and the teaching of grammar and words is essential and crucial for students' language competence. So the author's idea is that establishing correct cognition of English practice teaching is important for teachers, and then carrying out effective practical teaching courses and cultivating students' practical skills are the top priorities for the "transformation and development" of English teaching in China. The author in this paper is going to demonstrate how the "boring" traditional vocabulary lesson is changed into an interesting practice course, with the learning of auto-antonyms words as a case.

Key Words— *college English, practical teaching, auto-antonyms*

I. INTRODUCTION

In regular English teaching, students' main task is to acquire declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge. The content of the course mainly lies in teachers' "speaking" and students' "listening". Although there are occasionally some interactive parts, the proportion is relatively small. Comparatively speaking, English practical course is designed for students to show themselves, where teacher creates a "realistic scene" for students to use language by themselves. It is a practical test of students' declarative and procedural knowledge, aiming to enable the majority of students in the class to participate in the dynamic experience of language learning.

However, many teachers have some cognitive errors in practical teaching, such as "English practical teaching is just the student's presentation", "practice course must be outside of the classroom", "practical English teaching is to evade the teaching of grammar and words" etc.

For instance, many people think that English vocabulary teaching is too boring, students have little enthusiasm and weak interest to learn, and the classroom atmosphere is dull. Therefore they think that the reform of "College English Practice Teaching" means that English vocabulary course is unnecessary, which should only be learned by students themselves after class and is none of the teachers' business.

But actually, it is not. These opinions are wrong, because teacher's guidance in students' presentation is crucial, and the teaching of vocabulary is important for students' language competence.

English vocabulary learning belongs to the

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category of basic knowledge, and the basic knowledge of students is a necessary condition and foundation for effective English practice course. Practical teaching is an important way for students to transfer and strengthen their basic knowledge. The two are not the relation of which is superior and which is inferior, but a complementary, dialectical and unified whole.

II. AN SPECIAL STRATEGY FOR PRACTICAL ENGLISH TEACHING

In fact, English practical teaching could be even like this: In regular teaching, teachers find a special or interesting language phenomenon and make students understand this language phenomenon. And then let the students make use of it as a guidance to find out more the similar kind of language phenomena, and then classify those linguistic phenomena to sum up a rule, so as to be familiar and learn to use this linguistic rule flexibly. This could be the final purpose of language teaching.

That is to say, a "boring" traditional vocabulary lesson could be changed into an interesting practice course. Now the author intends to make "vocabulary teaching" as an example to show how the "boring" vocabulary course is changed into an interesting vocabulary practice course.

For example, in English reading course, the boring vocabulary learning can be changed into an interesting vocabulary practice course.

III. CASE STUDY

In the unit seven of the book "Reading Course" (second edition), edited by Weidong Dai, there is a special word "sanctioned" in the fourteenth paragraph of the article "The Changing Sino-American Relationship"：

Conscious of the need to strengthen its military muscle, China has focused on inducting modern technology and upgrading existing weapon systems. Collaborating with and using Pakistan knowledge of Western military aviation technology, China developed an effective multi-role combat aircraft. And it is exposing its forces to multi-national military exercises outside its own borders, while undertaking internationally <u>sanctioned</u> operations.

The word "sanction" is special, because it has two meanings and most importantly the two meanings are totally opposite. Looking up this word in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it is shown as follows:

"sanction"

> ➢ *1. official orders or laws stopping trade, communication etc. with another country, as a way of forcing its leaders*

to make political changes；measures taken by countries to restrict trade and official contact with a country that has broken international law；a form of punishment that can be used if someone disobeys a rule or law

Examples:

· a resolution to impose sanctions on Democratic People's Republic of Korea
· the threat of trade sanctions
· The UN security council may impose economic sanctions.
· US sanctions against Cuba
· The continued abuse of human rights has now led the United States to impose sanctions against the regime.
· the harshest possible sanction which could be imposed
> ➢ *2. formal official permission, approval, or acceptance: if someone in authority sanctions an action or practice, they officially approve of it and allow it to be done*

Examples:

· Apparently, the aide had acted without White House sanction. .
· He may now be ready to sanction the use of force.
· a newspaper run by citizens without the sanction of the government

Therefore, if the students just know that the meaning of the special word "sanctioned" is the first one (a form of punishment), the information they can get in the paragraph could be that China has focused on modern technology and weapon systems to take part in some unreasonable multi-national military exercises which are disagreed by the world; on the contrary, if students just know the meaning of the special word "sanctioned" is the second one (formal official permission, approval), the information they can get could be that China has tried so hard to upgrade modern technology and weapon systems in order to make contribution to the righteous multi-national military exercises which are supported by the world.

From the analysis above we can see that the totally opposite meaning of the word "sanction" may cause serious misunderstanding for students and even make some students make big mistake in getting key information from the article. It is crucial that only when students know clearly the word "sanction" has two opposite meaning and try to make sure which meaning of the word is more suitable according to the context, can they get the correct information and avoid making serious mistakes in understanding the whole article.

So it is excellent for teachers to guide the students to realize that there exists a special linguistic phenomenon in English, namely "auto-antonyms". And then an interesting vocabulary practice course begins.

Firstly, teachers should make their students know what "auto-antonyms" is.

IV. THE ORIGIN OF AUTO-ANTONYMS

Two words with opposite meanings are called antonyms, and auto-antonyms are words that are the opposite of themselves. In accordance with the Wikipedia, an auto-antonym or autantonym, also called a contronym or contranym, is a word with multiple meanings (senses) of which one is the reverse of another. For example, the word "cleave" can mean "to cut apart" or "to bind together".

The terms "autantonym" and "contronym"

were coined by Joseph T. Shipley in 1960 and Jack Herring in 1962, respectively. An auto-antonym is alternatively called an antagonym, Janus word (after the Roman god with two faces), enantiodrome, self-antonys, antilogy, or addad (Arabic, singular didd).[1]

V. THE CREATION OF A LIST OF AUTO-ANTONYMS

Then after the students' learning of the definition and origin of auto-antonyms, teachers could give the students an assignment that a month will be given to them to find out more the similar linguistic phenomenon (auto-antonym words), and a month later their homework will be gathered to check whether they have find out most of the auto-antonyms in English. Below is a list of some of the English auto-antonyms words.

Figure 1：List of Auto-antonyms [2]

aught	anything
	nothing
brother	a younger boy or man who has the same parents as you
	an older boy or man who has the same parents as you
comprise	contain; include
	be composed of; consist of
dust	remove fine particles from
	cover with dust or fine powder
egregious	outstandingly bad
	remarkably good
fast	fixed firmly in place
	moving quickly; speedy
give out	to produce; distribute
	to stop producing; cease functioning
inflammable	capable of burning
	unburnable
leave	go away
	remain
moot	debatable
	academic
nonplussed	baffled
	unperturbed
original	existing or happening first
	brand new
puzzle	to make sb feel confused because they do not understand sth
	to find the answer to a difficult or confusing problem by thinking carefully
quantum	very small

	a very great and sudden increase
rent	to regularly pay money to sb so that you can use sth that they own, such as a house, some land, a machine, etc.
	to allow sb to use sth that you own such as a house or some land in exchange for regular payments
sanction	official orders or laws stopping trade, communication etc. a form of punishment that can be used if someone disobeys a rule or law
	formal official permission, approval, or acceptance: if someone in authority sanctions an action or practice, they officially approve of it and allow it to be done
sister	a younger girl or woman who has the same parents as you
	an older girl or woman who has the same parents as you
table	to propose; suggest
	to postpone; shelve
temper	to soften; mollify
	to strengthen (e.g. a metal)
transparent	easy to perceive or detect
	(in computing) functioning without the user being aware of its presence
trim	to cut pieces off (e.g. fingernails)
	to add to; ornament
terrific	very good，excellent
	very frightening
weather	to withstand; stand up to
	to wear away

VI. THE CLASSIFICATION OF AUTO-ANTONYMS

The third teaching step could be like this:

After the students become familiar with most of these auto-antonyms words, in order to help the students to learn and remember these

words better, the teachers could ask them to make a further exploration about auto-antonyms, which is to classify these words. The guidance is as follows.

According to the part of speech, auto-antonyms words could be divided into four categories: noun, adjective, verb and adverb.

1) noun:

aught——anything or zero (nothing);

brother——younger or older;

model——archetype or an exact copy, reproduction, replica

2) adjective:

fine——used to tell sb that an action, a suggestion or a decision is acceptable or of high quality, excellent;

3) verb:

leave——go away or remain (If you leave something or someone in a particular place, you let them remain there);

puzzle——to make sb feel confused because they do not understand sth or to find the answer to a difficult or confusing problem by thinking carefully;

4) adverb:

fast——to become firmly fixed and unable to move or moving quickly;

literally——according to the most basic and original meaning of a word or used to emphasize that something, especially a large number, is actually true

It is worth noting that verb auto-antonyms words can be furtherly classified into three groups:

1) The opposite meanings are the actor and receiver of the same action.[3] For instance, looking up this word "rent" in the Collins English Dictionary, you will find its meanings are as follow:

①to regularly pay money to sb so that you can use sth that they own, such as a house, some land, a machine, etc.

②to allow sb to use sth that you own such as a house or some land in exchange for regular payments

Examples:

Who do you rent the land from?   (receiver)

He rents rooms in his house to students. (actor)

2) The opposite meanings are two completely opposite behaviors.[4] For instance, looking up this word "Screen" in the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, you will find its meanings are as follow:

1) if something screens something else, it is in front of it and hides it.

Example:

A line of trees screened the house from the road.

2) to screen for a disease means to do tests on a lot of people to find out whether they have a particular illness; test for illness.

Examples:

All women over 50 will be regularly screened.

It is now possible to screen babies for diabetes.

3. The opposite meanings result from nouns being verbed in the patterns of "add <noun> to" and "remove <noun> from". [4] For example, looking up this word "dust" in the Collins English Dictionary, you will find its meanings are as follow:

"When you dust something such as furniture, you remove dust from it, usually using a cloth" or "If you dust something with a fine substance such as powder or if you dust a fine substance onto something, you cover it lightly with that substance", two totally opposite behaviors. Dust is part of a series of noun-verb conversions related to coverings of things. If the noun gives a covering that is natural to the thing, then the verb means remove the covering. If the covering is imposed, the verb means put the covering on.

Examples:

I vacuumed and dusted and polished the living room.

Lightly dust the fish with flour.

In addition to the word "dust", "seed" and "stone" are with the same situation.

Then after the students' learning of the definition, origin and classification of auto-antonyms, the last step of the course is that teachers ask students to classify the list of English-language auto-antonyms mentioned above according to the part of speech and the origin of those words. The students will finally get the "completed product" of a classified list of English auto-antonyms words, which may essentially be the impetus of the students to explore new knowledge in learning English.

CONCLUSION:

To sum up, auto-antonym is a special form of polysemy, which reflects the flexibility and expressiveness of English. Through the learning, understanding and exploration of them, it is conducive for non-native students to enhance their language ability, and stimulate their great interest in English learning.

What is worthy of mention here is that, like auto-antonyms, there are many other special and interesting linguistic phenomena, such as homonyms, heteronym, malapropisms and rhyming slang etc., all of which are very meaningful, interesting and worth the students' exploration. All in all, establishing a correct

cognition of English practice teaching is considerably important for teachers, and then carrying out effective practical teaching courses and cultivating students' practical skills are teachers' primary task in modern education, and therefore teachers should try hard to find some special or interesting language phenomenon in regular teaching, and then arouse students' enthusiasm and interest to explore more new knowledge, so as to improve students' language competence. After all, English class is about a language learning, and students have to face hundreds of words every day, and therefore they will inevitably get tired sometimes, and even give up learning. In order to avoid the classroom atmosphere being depressing, students' enthusiasm getting lower, and in order to improve the teaching effect, to improve the quality of teaching, as English teachers, we should continue to search for interesting phenomenon in the English language, and try to sum up them, and then put them into practice in the daily teaching, to increase students' interest in learning English, so as to build an interactive, practical and effective classroom ecology.

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