

A Pragmatic Study on Mental Lexicon

心理词汇 语用研究

韩仲谦 著



国防工业出版社

National Defense Industry Press

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·北京·

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

心理词汇语用研究 / 韩仲谦著. —北京: 国防工业出版社, 2008. 11

ISBN 978 - 7 - 118 - 05998 - 4

I. 心... II. 韩... III. 心理活动 - 词汇 - 词用学 - 研究
IV. H0

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2008)第 158572 号

※

国防工业出版社出版发行

(北京市海淀区紫竹院南路 23 号 邮政编码 100048)

天利华印刷装订有限公司印刷

新华书店经售

*

开本 850 × 1168 1/32 印张 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ 字数 224 千字

2008 年 11 月第 1 版第 1 次印刷 印数 1—3000 册 定价 32.00 元

(本书如有印装错误, 我社负责调换)

国防书店: (010) 68428422

发行邮购: (010) 68414474

发行传真: (010) 68411535

发行业务: (010) 68472764

序

在语言研究中,对词汇的研究无疑具有悠久的历史。这部专著从广义上来说属于词汇研究的范围,但它远远超出了传统意义上的词汇研究,这从它的标题便可看出。这部专著所做的词汇研究涉及三个方面:第一,它所研究的不是宽泛意义上的词汇,而是聚焦于心理词汇;第二,它所采纳的不是传统的研究视角,而是语用的视角;第三,它不是一个单纯的理论研究,而是试图揭示心理词汇研究对二语教学所具有的意义。这三个方面足以表明这部专著的创新性和实践价值。

对词汇从心理和认知的角度进行研究是词汇研究中近年出现的一个趋势,这也许是整个语言学研究近年出现的认知趋势在词汇研究中的表现。因而,心理词汇研究无疑属于语言研究中一个比较前沿的领域。

语用学自20世纪70年代诞生以来,语用一直是语言研究中的一个热门话题,八九十年代几乎所有的语言研究者言必称语用,这股语用热可以说一直持续

至今,涉及的面广,渗透得深。但从语用的角度来透析心理词汇倒也是一个鲜为人所采纳的研究途径。

传统的词汇研究对二语习得的意义毋庸置疑,但心理词汇的研究对二语习得具有什么实际意义仍是一个值得研究的新问题,此书所做的研究是在传统研究基础上的深入,并在理论阐述的基础上对这个问题给出了答案。这是这部专著的价值所在。

此书作者韩仲谦博士多年来对心理词汇的研究具有浓厚的兴趣,并一直关注国内外学者在这方面的研究成果,积累了丰厚的资料,这从书后的参考文献便可看出。近年来,韩仲谦又对语用学这个领域做了深入的研读,对语用学的主要理论和方法都有较全面的把握。因此,在书中他能自如地运用有关的语用学理论和方法,从语用这个视角来剖析心理词汇的方方面面,并提出了自己的看法。

对心理词汇的研究目前还处于一个开发期,这方面的专著并不多见,韩仲谦的这部专著至少在国内可算是一个突破,它对今后心理词汇的研究必然具有参考价值和指导意义。

何兆熊

2008年6月

Acknowledgements

I offer thanks to the people who have helped me in so many ways.

Primarily, I wish to thank Dr. Su Xiaojun, professor from Soochow University. It was Dr. Su who first activated my interest in mental lexicon when I studied at Soochow University as a MA student. All that I have been doing on mental lexicon these years originates from his encouraging suggestions.

I also wish to thank Professor Bao Jiping, my former MA supervisor at Soochow University. His thoughtful guidance for and careful examinations on my MA thesis which dealt with the mental lexicon in general terms laid a solid basis for the accomplishment of present book.

My deepest gratitude goes to Prof. He Zhaoxiong, former supervisor of my PhD career, who led me all the way through my three-year academic stay at Shanghai International Studies University. His thought-provoking instructions, careful examination, valuable ideas, kind suggestions and constructive criticisms all contributed greatly to the completion of my doctoral dissertation on which the present book is

built. What is more, Prof. He, though very busy himself, still spared me much time writing an encouraging foreword for my book. The favor that he has done me will for sure encourage me to do more and better in my academic career.

Special thanks go to Prof. Yang Daliang from Shanghai University of Electric Power. It is his brotherly love and generous help that made possible the publication of the present book.

I appreciate the grants offered by Shanghai International Studies University. The fund from the grants ensured the successful completion of the book. My appreciation also goes to the editors and the publisher whose work made the final product available.

Finally, I am grateful to my wife, Ma Hongxia, and my daughter, Han Chuqi, for their unflagging support and inspiration.

Han Zhongqian

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Preface

Vocabulary is one of the indispensable components of the language system. It plays a crucial role in the teaching and learning of an FL/L2. Linguists and researchers have approached the field of vocabulary from different perspectives. In the past few decades, there emerged a psychological and cognitive tendency towards vocabulary research. This approach focuses on language learners' mental lexicon, trying to make clear how a language learner's brain recognizes, stores, organizes and retrieves words. It has been approached phonetically, syntactically, semantically and phonemically. Some positive conclusions have so far been drawn and are shedding new lights on FL/L2 vocabulary teaching and learning.

However, studies on mental lexicon are far from adequate. A learner's vocabulary proficiency is ultimately reflected in his/her pragmatic proficiency. If we make mistakes in grammar when we speak, we are said to speak badly only; however, if we cannot speak tactfully or appropriately, we are said to behave badly (Thomas, 1995). To speak tactfully or appropriately inevitably involves the retrieval of proper words from the mental lexicon. There should be room for prag-

matic considerations in the study of language learners' mental lexicon. Pragmatic studies could most probably shed fresh lights on the interpretation of mental lexicon.

Based on this assumption and initiated by a growing literature on the acquisition and learning of FL/L2 pragmatic competence, this book probes into the crucial roles that pragmatic factors might play in the formation and the functioning of a language learner's L1 and L2 mental lexicons. It begins by an illustration of the importance of vocabulary in language learners' linguistic competence (Chapter 1) and a survey of the research literature on vocabulary and mental lexicon (Chapter 2), attempting to offer a rationale for the ongoing study. After a general consideration of lexicon and lexicon development (Chapter 3), the book sets about a discussion of what pragmatic competence is and what a learner's mental lexicon appears to be, trying to find out the relationships between pragmatics and language learners' mental lexicon, particularly the contributions pragmatics would make to the building, development and functioning of one's mental lexicon (Chapter 4). Although the researching emphasis falls on the exploration of language learners' L2 mental lexicon, such a research will prove illogical without leaving room for discussion of one's L1 mental lexicon since the L1 mental lexicon is closely interrelated with the L2 mental lexicon. Chapter 5 is thus dedicated to a tentative probe into the roles that pragmatics is playing in the L1 mental lexicon. Beginning from Chapter 6, the author deals with the L2 mental lexicon all the way to Chapter 9, specifically researching its general property, formation, representation and processing, accessing with a focus on the roles that pragmatics is playing at each stage. Before winding up (Chapter 11),

other pragmatic factors that contribute to one's L2 mental lexicon are included (Chapter 10) to make the story more complete. Meanwhile, special attention is paid to the pedagogical implications in the processes of the discussion for each topic. A subsection of pedagogical implications is reserved in each chapter except the opening one and the concluding one to make the research more pedagogy-oriented.

Limitations exist, anyway. On the one hand, the research is mostly speculative. There is an urgent need for more empirical evidences to support the conclusions ever made. On the other, though termed "a pragmatic study", this study does not approach its thesis from a strictly traditional understanding of the term "pragmatics", for not all the standard theories embraced by the term "pragmatics" are referred to throughout the overall study. We hope that, rather than being taken as flaws, these limitations (along with others) can be seen as suggestions for further researches into language learners' mental lexicon.

Han Zhongqian

May 2008

Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1	Lexicon and Linguistic Competence and Communicative Competence	2
1.2	Deficiency and Inadequacy of Current Researches on the Lexicon	8
1.3	A Multi-dimensional Pragmatic Approach to the Mental Lexicon	10

Chapter 2 Terminological Issues and Literature Review

2.1	A Preliminary Research Step: Terminology	13
2.2	A Historical Literature Review	20
2.3	Pedagogical Implications	29

Chapter 3 General Considerations of the Lexicon and Its Development

3.1	Words: Starting Point for a Language	31
3.2	What Is a Word?	33
3.3	What Is in a Word?	35
3.4	What Is Involved in Knowing a Word?	36
3.5	Lexical Development	38
3.6	Pedagogical Implications	44

Chapter 4 Pragmatic Competence and the Mental Lexicon

4.1	A Brief Interpretation of Pragmatics and Pragmatic Competence	46
4.2	Pragmatic Competence and L2/FL Acquisition and Learning	52
4.3	The Mental Lexicon	55
4.4	Pragmatics and the Mental Lexicon	71
4.5	Pedagogical Implications	73

Chapter 5 Pragmatic Aspects of the L1 Mental Lexicon

5.1	A General Description of a Language Speaker's F1/ NL	
-----	--	--

	Mental Lexicon	80
5.2	Children's Acquisition of the Essential Properties of Words	84
5.3	Learning of the L1 Pragmatics	86
5.4	Pragmatic Environments and Cognitive Capacities in the Early Formation and Development of the L1 Mental Lexicon	88
5.5	Empirical Evidence for Pragmatic Development in Children's Early Lexical Acquisition	90
5.6	Context and Early Word Learning	101
5.7	Pedagogical Implications	104

Chapter 6 L2 Acquisition/Learning and the L2 Mental Lexicon

6.1	An Overall Review of the L2 Acquisition/Learning	107
6.2	Learning of the L2 Pragmatics	118
6.3	A General Investigation into the L2 Mental Lexicon	119
6.4	Pedagogical Implications	128

Chapter 7 Pragmatics and the Formation of the L2 Mental Lexicon

7.1	Pragmatic Nature of the Phonology of the Mental
-----	---

Lexicon	134
7.2 The L1 Orthographic Impact on the L2 Word Processing	144
7.3 Pragmatic Factors in the L2 Mental Lexicon Meaning Construction	151
7.4 Pedagogical Implications	159

Chapter 8 Pragmatic Nature of the L2 Mental Lexicon Representation and Processing

8.1 Pragmatic Nature of the L2 Mental Lexicon Representation	163
8.2 Adaptive Properties of the Lexical Processing in the Mental Lexicon	166
8.3 Pedagogical Implications	175

Chapter 9 Pragmatic Mechanism of the Lexical Access in the Mental Lexicon

9.1 Existing Lexical Accessing Models	182
9.2 Variables Influencing Lexical Accessing	192
9.3 Social Influences on Lexical Accessing	194
9.4 Appraising the Pragmatic Nature of the Lexical Accessing Mechanism	198

Chapter 10 Other Pragmatic Factors Contributing to the L2 Mental Lexicon

10.1	Incidental Acquisition of Lexis	207
10.2	Impact from Socia-cultural Familiarity on the L2 Vocabulary Development	209
10.3	Pragmatics and Learner Styles and Learning Strategies	211
10.4	Pedagogical Implications	213

Chapter 11 Conclusions

11.1	Concluding Remarks on the Pedagogical Implications of the Study	221
11.2	General Conclusions of the Book	228
11.3	Existing Limitations	233

Bibliography	235
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1 Introduction

It is a widely accepted view among language teachers and researchers of this field that the knowledge of vocabulary is essential for being able to communicate in a second language (Kormos, 2006). One might be able to speak using just a few rules of grammar and might still be understood, but without using appropriate vocabulary, communication can hardly be successful. There has been quite a long history for studies of vocabulary acquisition and related areas of lexical research in second language acquisition to be relatively neglected. Compared to work in grammar, phonology, and discourse studies, much less is known about the nature of the second language learners' lexicon (Long & Richards, 1997). However, recent years have witnessed second language vocabulary acquisition becoming an increasingly interesting topic of discussion for researchers, teachers, curriculum designers, theorists, and others involved in second language learning. Since the mid-1980s there has been a renewed interest in the role of vocabulary in second language learning, and this has seen

a growing body of empirically based studies of such issues as the nature of the bilingual lexicon, vocabulary acquisition, lexical storage, lexical retrieval, and the use of vocabulary by second language learners. Regarding the various attempts to the study of second language or foreign language vocabulary acquisition and learning, the present study is going to make a fresh research into this hot field by adopting a pragmatic approach to L2/FL learners' mental lexicon.

Pragmatics, although a recent development in linguistics, has so far already shown itself to be a promising discipline with its strong explanatory power for many linguistic issues. The field of pragmatics has spawned a number of research areas. Apart from contrastive pragmatics and cross-cultural pragmatics, inter-language pragmatics is of special interest for the purpose of the current study since it mainly concerns itself with the development of both L1/NF and L2/FL learners' mental lexicon and the teaching and learning of an L2/FL lexicon.

1.1 Lexicon and Linguistic Competence and Communicative Competence

Vocabulary is central to language and of critical importance to the typical language learner (Zimmerman, 1997). It is one of the indispensable components of a language system and plays a crucial role in the learning and teaching of a foreign language. No matter how well the student learns grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to express a wide range of meanings, communication in an L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way (McCarthy, 1990). Theoretically, it now seems likely that language acquisition begins with word learning rather than syntax triggering, with words gradually "grammaticalized" through experience on a largely associative basis. Practically, studies throughout the 1980s