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邓子钦

玛丽·哈威 (主审)

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WORKING WITH WORDS

A Practical Guide to Teaching
and Learning the Vocabulary
of English

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Guangdong Higher Education Press

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Deng Zi Qin
Shantou University

PREFACE

My own recent eight-week term of teaching linguistics in a Chinese university convinced me that the most direct and useful approach is through the study of words. Given the extent of the teaching of English as a foreign language, the study can be generally confined to English words. The method I used was simply to take the information about individual words given in an ordinary monolingual dictionary, and to relate it to its linguistic bases. Thus my class explored with me the relations between a word—any word—and its variant forms, its variant pronunciations, its grammatical context, its senses, its collocations, its etymologies. By this method the teacher creates a program of applied morphology, applied phonology, applied syntax, applied semantics, with a dash of pragmatics, etymology and language history. In my own brief experience, it seemed to work well, and I thought I should perhaps make a book out of it.

But now, happily, I find the task already done, in *WORKING WITH WORDS* by Deng

Zi Qin and Mary Harvie. This book has the added advantages of its being rooted in the functional theory of language made explicit in the works of M.A.K. Halliday, and enriched with a plentiful supply of information about the structure and formation of English words and idioms.

Since it takes a functional approach the book always relates words and idioms to various types of discourse and to the culture of the participants and the communities they belong to. It has useful discussions of the nature and function of word books, especially dictionaries, and provides generous references to other studies of language and language learning. In this way it provides a direct approach to the leading concepts, of modern linguistics, always inviting the participation of the reader by sets of interesting and challenging exercises and problems at the end of each chapter.

The book is timely, and directly addresses the needs of its intended users in English language programs. It is written clearly, and is more concerned with providing useful information about words and guidance on usage than with advancing one theoretical position or

attacking another (though it does both of these things, discreetly and without undue tub-thumping).

Although it has an obvious relevance to Chinese language programs in colleges and universities, and although it is clear that both of its writers were in Australia at the time of writing and both influenced by linguistic studies in Australia, these geographical conditions should put no constraints on its usefulness in any countries where English is taught, either as a native language or as a foreign language. Like any other good books on linguistics, **WORKING WITH WORDS** throws light on language and language behaviour in a way that honors its subject and fully justifies its publication.

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PART I INTRODUCTION

1 . Our Lexical World

We are the meaning makers. Our focus in this text is upon language as behaviour. Meaning does not rest in inkmarks on paper or in sound-waves or in light-waves from a television screen. We are the meaning makers. We discern meaning in phenomena, events, things, relationships, qualities and we choose words or create words to share that meaning with others. We attribute or discern meaning only by consensus. Lexicology or the "science of words" must encompass that vital behavioural link. Second/Foreign language learners add a new word-stock to their existing word-stock for expressing meaning. The process of word formation, the development and recognition of rules for word order, the style and social context of speech events must be understood as strands in the cultural cloth of a society. Lexicologists have always been aware of the

influence of cultural and environmental factors on language. Lexicographers have included definitions to explain these influences in dictionaries but there has been a tendency in textbooks on lexicology to minimize discussion of these vital issues.

Underlying all the chapters of this book is the idea that users of a common language, English in this instance, may have differing rule systems for attributing meaning using the SAME WORD-STOCK.

These rule systems are culturally biased. Even within the speech community of London, England, differing social classes use differing rule systems for choice of words and ordering words. One of the consequences of this recognition is the focus of attention on the language users as meaning makers.

Sociolinguistic descriptions of differing language use in a cultural setting provide information of a complexity not possible in a purely linguistic description. Strictly linguistic description is usually restricted to an analysis of transcribed phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon. This approach is atomistic because sounds are reduced to their smallest known unit (phonemes), words are reduced to their

smallest unit of sense (morphemes) and rules are reported in mathematical formulae. The lexicon is treated statistically with high frequency words and low frequency words. None of those practices tells us anything about how we select words or how we order them to GAIN THE ATTENTION of our audience. Sociolinguistic factors such as role play, topic choice, diglossia or switching dialect influence speech patterns, word choice, and word ordering. Therefore if we regard language as behaviour we are treating it as a kind of "behaviour potential". M.A.K Halliday in *Explorations in the Functions of Language* (P. 51) has this to say about the "potential in language behaviour".

The potential of language is a meaning potential.

This meaning potential is the linguistic realization of the behaviour potential;

"can mean" is "can do" when translated into language. The meaning potential is in turn realized in the language system as lexico-grammatical potential, which is what the speaker "can say".

We place ourselves at the centre of our lexical world. We assign labels to objects, qualities, relations, and events AFTER we

have discerned meaning, we agree together to assign such and such a meaning to such and such a sound in such and such a situation in such and such a way in our dictionaries. The "meaning potential" of students of English as a foreign language can be increased only by increasing knowledge about English words. This knowledge must include awareness of cultural influences on word formation and syntax as well as on information concerning the differing approaches to grammar systems.

2. The Plan of This Book

We have grouped the chapters in this text on WORKING WITH WORDS under six broad areas to facilitate teaching and learning:

(1) The origin, formation, development, and attributed meanings of words.

(2) Semantic features of words; polysemy; homonym; synonyms and antonyms; inflexion; stylistics; figures of speech; discourse analysis.

(3) The relationship between language, culture, grammar and Englishes of the world.

(4) The principles, practices and uses of dictionaries.

(5) Teaching, learning and testing vocabu-

lary.

(6) Glossary of terms and select bibliography.

It is regrettable that too few recent texts are available for teaching English vocabulary. It is even more regrettable that practical approaches to the subject like *Teaching Vocabulary* (by Wallace, M. 1982) take no heed of recent research on the subject in his article "Vocabulary and Second Foreign Language Teaching".

Roland Carter (1987) pursues this line of thought starting from the simplest unit for the study of words—the phoneme and we have built up our unit for study through the morpheme, the word, idiom, phrase, collocation, sentence and paragraph to discourse analysis. Throughout we have tried to keep in focus the learner as the active meaning-maker.

We have attempted throughout the text to sketch in a background or relevant contemporary research in the field of language learning and to provide a framework of cultural information in order to bring traditional concerns of vocabulary teaching and learning into the picture we now have of our lexical world. Language is like music. What is left with us after listening is the mood, the ideas, the harmony and the