

How to Use Positive Transfer in English Vocabulary Teaching

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Abstract

Vocabulary learning is the foundation of foreign language learning. Effective vocabulary teaching lays a good foundation for mastering language. Students want to learn English well, the first step is to learn vocabulary, which depends on the method that teachers choose to teach them. If teachers can use some effective skills and measures, they can teach students vocabulary better. Positive transfer means that one kind of learning plays a positive role in promoting another kind of learning. This article illustrates the importance of positive transfer in vocabulary teaching and its practices. In English vocabulary teaching, teachers can not only carry on positive transfer to teach students according to the phonetic, glyph and semantics of vocabulary, but also promote students' learning and mastery of new vocabulary according to the similarities and differences between old and new words and similar grammatical genres, and consolidate students' existing grammatical knowledge structure of old words.

Key Words: Positive transfer, Vocabulary teaching, Vocabulary learning

1. Introduction

Transfer is a general term that describes the carryover of previous performance or knowledge for subsequent learning. Positive transfer occurs when the prior knowledge benefits the learning task, that is, when a previous item is correctly applied to present subject matter. Positive transfer is not only suitable for foreign language teaching, but also for vocabulary teaching. If teachers can choose appropriate strategies of positive transfer to teach students vocabulary, students will learn vocabulary better.

Harmer (1991:153) reported that "If the structure is the skeleton of the language, the vocabulary is the most important organ and flesh." In English learning, vocabulary is the most basic aspect that students need to master. If students do not reserve a certain amount of vocabulary, they can not use language in actual communication. Vocabulary is the most basic material of the language, and expanding vocabulary is a prerequisite to improve students' abilities of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Therefore, vocabulary teaching is a focus of English teaching. Person's life is accompanied by vocabulary learning, while vocabulary is used to express contents and concepts, and reflects human's understanding of the world. Lewis (1993) argues that vocabulary is the finest grammar. Grammar is not just a set of rules that make sentences, but also include vocabulary. Therefore, for teachers, take effective vocabulary teaching methods can make students effectively master and use vocabulary in the course of the limited class time.

2. Relationship Between Positive Transfer and English Vocabulary Teaching

2.1 The Importance of Positive Transfer on English Learning

Whether children learn mother tongue or adults learn a foreign language, linguists and psychologists demonstrate that "all new learning involves the relocation based on previous learning." (Bransford, J D, Annl, L B ,Rodney, &R C, 2000) In English teaching, if teachers can find and correctly use the law of positive transfer, it will be conducive to teaching quality. In English learning process, students will use the existing English knowledge unconsciously in the brain to further acquire new knowledge. Positive transfer can make students to effectively use the learned knowledge, so that students can learn more easily.

2.2 The Importance of Positive Transfer on English Vocabulary Teaching

In English vocabulary teaching, many teachers do not take any strategy and just rigidly teach the word to the students. Many teachers do not give students effective vocabulary learning methods, so it leads students can not correctly use the words and even can not remember the vocabulary. If teachers can correctly apply positive transfer in vocabulary teaching, not only can students acquire a firm master of vocabulary and make it easy for students to learn, but also reduce the burden on teachers and let teachers skillfully teach students. If teachers can make students learn to utilize positive transfer and apply positive transfer in other aspects of English learning, it will not only improve students' English vocabulary learning but also improve the overall efficiency of English learning.

3. Using Positive Transfer in English Vocabulary Teaching

Language transfer refers to the influence of one language on another new language or the language experience that already acquired on the completion of other foreign language training activities. That is, the impact that the students have acquired between language experience, cognitive structure, learning strategies and approaches, and new skills of foreign language. Then when teachers learn or teach new words, they must find out the relationship between the target vocabulary and the students' existing knowledge and experience.

3.1 Promoting the Absorption of New Words

Vocabulary is not independent. There are intricate relationships between them. For example, the homophones "no" and "know", the pronunciation of the two words is the same, however, the glyph is not the same. Students can not understand the words in terms of their literal meaning. Therefore, the study of the relationship between words becomes particularly important. When teachers teach new words to student, if the target vocabulary can be presented in front of students with other relevant vocabulary, then student can learn the vocabulary more effective. Students will absorb new vocabulary more quickly by associating them with existing vocabulary.

3.1.1 Sound

Phonetic learning is the foundation and foremost step of mastering a language. If a person's pronunciation is not accurate, it will affect speaker's expression and listener's understanding. In addition, the quality of English pronunciation is related to learners' evaluation of their English learning ability and affects learners' interest in English learning and confidence. In the process of language learning, there is not only the influence of Chinese on English pronunciation, but also the internal influence of English pronunciation. It is very helpful for students to understand the internal rules of English pronunciation in vocabulary learning, such as, the pronunciation rules of vowels, consonants, syllables and close syllable. For example, put the same words as vowel letters together, name-mate-fate, they all include "a" and pronounce [e]. Another example, nice-fine-rice, they all includes "i" and pronounces [ai]. This is not only allows students to review the phonetic symbols, but also review the old words and strengthen the memory of new words. Teachers use this way to let students remember vocabulary- put vowel combinations of the same pronunciation but different words together or vowel combination of difference but the same pronunciation words together, such as: break-great; meet-meat; see-sea. We can avoid the confusion of these words. Teachers can purposefully illustrate homonyms at the same time when they are on the vocabulary voice teaching class, only in this way can students learn by comparison. For example: list/least, straight/street, lock/luck, feel/fill, wander/wonder; etc..

3.1.2 Font

Teachers can use the font between old and new words to promote the learning of the target vocabulary. Teachers can make use of the similarities between old and new words and the rules of part-of-speech changes. The similarity of parts of speech can promote students' in-depth memory of words and make a more vivid and specific memory of words for students. For instance: affect, effect; crash, crush; ensure, insure; crow, crown; etc.. The law's change of the part of speech: do-did-done; ring-rang-rung; fall-fell-fallen; drive-drove-driven; get-got-got; come-came-come; etc.. The changes of part of speech are mainly caused by the past tense and the past participle of verbs. The task for students to remember words can be simplified if students can systematically remember the temporal changes of these verbs.

3.1.3 Words Meaning

Both Chinese and English have synonyms and antonyms. Therefore, teachers can use the synonymous or antonymous connection between new and old words to promote students' memory of words. In a large number of synonyms in English, some of them have similar semantics and different usage; and some of them have similar semantics and usage. When writing or translating, students often encounter a puzzle: I want to express a thing, which word should be used?

Therefore, the analysis of synonyms is not only part of English teaching, but also an effective vocabulary strategy. When teachers teach new words to students, they should illustrate similar words to students, so that students can analysis the words with the existing knowledge of vocabulary and master the new knowledge based on the old knowledge.

For instance: desk,table; family,house,home; in front of,in the front of; many,much,a lot of; high,tall; always,usually,often,sometimes; big,large,great;borrow,lend; learn,study;etc..

There are also a large number of antonyms in English, both in nouns and adjectives. Teachers can present two antonyms to students at the same time. The two words have a strong contrast so students have a deeper impression that students will remember these antonyms more firmly. For instance: above,below; bad,good; better,worse; best,worst; black,white; nothing,everything; etc..

3.2 The Influence of Grammatical Knowledge Structure on New Words

When teaching students' English vocabularies, teachers not only teach part of speech and pronunciation of the vocabularies, but also teach the use of the word in sentences. That is, teacher help students to establish a grammatical knowledge structure. Therefore, when teachers teach new vocabulary to students, they can contact students' grammatical structure of knowledge so that students can combine new vocabulary with existing grammatical knowledge structure to promote new vocabulary absorption.

3.2.1 Similar Sentence Structure

Many words have a similar structure. For example, "accomplish "and "fulfill" have the similar meaning."Accomplish" can be followed directly with the noun, and "fulfill" can also be followed directly with the noun. Another example is "promise" and "allow", they also have similar meaning, but the usage is different:

"I promised her to buy a toy."

"I allow her to buy a toy."

The meaning of these two sentences is not the same, the former is "to tell someone that you will definitely do or provide something or that something will happen," the latter is "to let someone do or have something, or let something happen."

3.2.2 Similar Syntax

There are many verbs in English, but the usage of each verb is different. For instance: avoid,practice,dislike,admit,acknowledge,finish,mind,consider;etc.. These verbs can only be

followed the "-ing" structure. Another example: long, want, expect, hope, wish, desire, refuse, agree, pretend, promise, aim, choose, decide;etc..These verbs can only be followed the "to do" structure. When teachers teach new words, they can associate new words with these old words and present them in front of the students, so that students can produce associative memories and transfer one word's method of memory to another.

4. Conclusion

The transfer involves the interaction of cognitive, social, environmental and other factors, which provide useful ideas and methods for teachers to teach. These concepts and methods will influence teachers to choose different methods to teach vocabulary in practical teaching. In English vocabulary teaching, the positive transfer plays an important role. When teachers teach new words, they should make full use of positive transfer. Different strategies are adopted for different vocabularies to achieve the best results for both the teacher's teaching and the student's learning.

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