

The Application of Contextual Expressions to Improve Effectiveness of Learning in ESP Classroom

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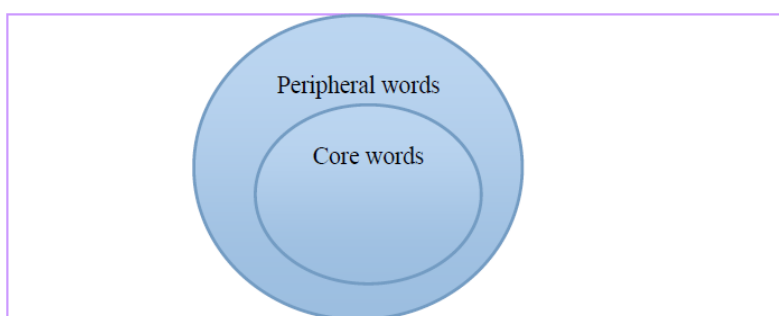
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Abstract—This thesis discusses vocabulary as a key factor to increase effectiveness of ESP pedagogy. Contextual expressions are the main line of context, and form the principal clues for the textual anticipation and key word-meaning inferring. The thesis compares the different effects of the conventional word-list and contextual expressions as used in textual anticipation, and finds that contextual words have positive effect on pre-text leaning, oral and writing interaction and word-meaning inferring. The thesis also discusses the recognition of contextual words and makes in-depth analysis of the logical deducing process, aiming to raise students' contextual awareness over ESP learning and develop their independent and autonomous capacity. The discussion recommends the inference strategy based on contextual expressions and core and peripheral words, in order to achieve some degree of independence from dictionaries.

Index Terms—ESP, contextual words, text anticipation, word-meaning guessing

I. INTRODUCTION

Contextual expressions refer to the main coherence words in a text, forming the contextual network. The Dictionary of Chinese defines context as narrowly ongoing words spoken or written down, and broadly as the social environment, such as history, location, social trends, customs and local terms, in which thoughts or ideas are expressed. In terms of language learning, although society, culture, and history are important supportive factors, it is the verbal context that plays a greater role. And the verbal environment constitutes the main contextual clues. Contextual expressions can be pairs or groups of single words or phrases, in various parts of speech. They correlate and respond to each other, either in meaning or function, and two or more related contextual expressions often become one of the small topics, which relate to the general topic. They give new information while linking to the given information. There are near meaning contextual expressions, i.e. synonyms, and far meaning ones, whose meaning is related in one way or another. The two kinds show the characteristics of contextual words in terms of core words and peripheral words, the former usually being able to match the target word directly, while the latter indirectly.



Contextual clues are often used for inferring meaning in EFL, and viewed as an auxiliary word acquiring strategy. When there is an adequate language environment, quite a lot of new words may be judged and their meaning guessed. Wang (2009) believes that while the factors of discourse and learners have positive impact on meaning inferring, context adds to higher rate of correct inference. As a vocabulary building strategy, contextual clues are obviously advantageous over word-building method (Yu, 2007). Derin Atay & Cengiz Ozbulgan (2006) hold that specialized vocabulary teaching helps form ESP study strategy, and that any retention strategy facilitates ESP students to learn more words. As well the strategy promotes language learning in ESP classroom, where students do not so much face a new product as a new way, since the genre is composed of no special language or teaching material (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND RELEVANT TO ESP AND CONTEXTUAL WORDS LEARNING

Theories which are influential to present-day ESL and ESP learning include cognitive theory and the factor of affect and emotion. According to cognitive theory learners are active processor rather than passive receiver, in that they respond to the learning goals visually, aurally and emotionally (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Recent cognitive views have to do with ESP reading pedagogy strategies, one of which is concerned with the reflection of need to read with or without using a dictionary (Alderson, 1980 and Scoot, 1981). In the affect view language learning is emotional experiences; and the feelings that the learning process evokes will have a crucial bearing on the success or failure of the learning (Stevick, 1976). In the field of ESP, motivation has been interpreted as relevance to target needs, which means medical texts for medical students, engineering English for engineers and so on (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). In addition, to provide ESP learners with convenient means to access a specific branch is seen as capable of motivating many a positive feelings of learning.

Many people have viewed contextual words as an active way to learn vocabulary. Elgort et al (2014) argue that for most of ESL learners the result of context-words study depends on their verbal knowledge learned. They attach importance to the existing semantic knowledge for recognizing contextual words. Chao & Hu (2013) suggests that ESL learners acquire their vocabulary in two ways: the unconscious and conscious ways. The unconscious way involves repeated exposure to the target language, the vocabulary achievement being the natural result. In the conscious way learners are aware of the environment in which the target lexicons are placed, and they learn to use the words in this or that environment. Chang & Levesque (2011: 23), in an experiment conducted on vocabulary study, said that learners had reported the similar recall result on word learning done with context and without context when conventional word-list is offered. The same thing has happened to the learning of Japanese. In inferring the meaning of words made up of two Chinese characters, both context and morphemes have become the factors of correct guessing for the foreign students (Yoshiko Mori, 2003). To sum up the views expressed by the above-mentioned specialists, contextual words have facilitated ESL and EFL in two ways. First, reading comprehension in the context of coherent words is efficient since logical relations can be followed. Second, they make for understanding and memory of difficult expressions, when known knowledge is referred to guess the meaning of new items. Since the derivation of meaning is possible from contextual clues, contextual expressions constitute an important aspect of reading and interpretation strategies.

III. RECOGNIZING CONTEXTUAL WORDS IN ESP TEXTS

A. *Relationship Words*

The recognition of contextual expressions is assisted by relationship words, so called because they tell the relationship of contextual expressions. Generally articles, pronouns, conjunctions adverbs and prepositional phrases, these coherence words also serve as coordinators, to maintain brevity and clarity, in that they avoid redundancy, i.e. the use of articles and pronouns to restate information already given, the use of conjunctions adverbs and prepositional phrases for confirmation, continuation, addition, comparison, contrast, concession, etc.

The main difference between contextual words and relationship words is that the former are content words while the later are mostly empty words; with the former constructing part of the text and the latter indicating this construction. Contextual words are not as easy to judge as the relationship words are, since they do not have the same fixed positions as the indicators do. Contextual expressions appear in any place and keep the theme going, in smaller units and topics. There are simple contextual words, pairs/groups of synonymous/antonymous words; and complex ones, phrases similar in meaning or function. In Chinese there are coherence indicators, too, similar to the structural coordinators, such as 这个、那个、因此、所以、可以看出、不难发现 (this; that; therefore; it can be seen that; obviously).

B. *Techniques for Recognizing Contextual Expressions*

To decide if one expression is contextually related to the others, there can be at least three techniques. The first one is to see if the pair/group correlate in meaning or function, and are able to explain one another. The second one is to find structural coherence indicators, which usually signal the presence contextual pair/group. The third one of recognition is to analyze relation, when there are no obvious exterior signals. The analysis aims to find the relations of the expressions, e.g. *general and specific, summary and specific case, cause and effect, contrast, supplementation, etc.*

Techniques	Types/function
A judgment of meaning or function	synonyms/similar-meaning expression
B finding coherence indicators	words signaling relations
C judging relations	cause and effect/addition/contrast

III Methodology

This chapter discusses the application of contextual concept in designing ESP class activities, in three aspects: pre-text anticipation, speaking and writing interaction and unknown word meaning inference.

3.1 Methods and processes

In teaching practice, I was able to compare the effects of two different methods of teaching, one based on conventional word list, and the other on contextual expressions. Two types of activities were adopted in two sequential class hours, each spent on similar-topic short reading passages e.g. *common law Vs civil law; solar energy Vs wind energy, analysis of the source rock Vs the formation of oil and gas*. At the end of the lecture the activities were recalled and the feeling about them was discussed.

3.2 Implementation

To describe the implementation of the teaching plans, two short passages entitled *common law* and *civil law* are used, together with list of words and contextual expressions attached to each passage (see Appendixes). To contrast the two plans similar processes are described to similar ends, though different effects did result. The first three levels (Activity A) mainly describe what have happened in the first hour, and the next three levels (Activity B) focus on what have been going on with contextual expressions.

3.2.1 Activities for text anticipation

Activity A: Decide which of the following pairs of words are arranged by definition and which by word-building scheme. The answers to the first two pairs are given as examples.

Pairs	Definition(D) Similar word building (SWB)
common law/decisions by judges juridical/jurisdiction law/legislature law/statute statute/statutory judge/judicial law/legal stare decisis/case law adopt/inherit judicial/judiciary	D SWB

Activity B: With a partner discuss and work out a topic name for each group pf expressions. Write down the name next to the group of expressions. The first two are given as clues.

Pairs/groups of contextual expressions	Topic name
1. civil law /continental European law/ the concept of codification/ the Code of Hammurabi/ the Corpus Juris Civilis/ codified documents 2. code/ codifications/constitution/law/legislative enactments/statute 3. common law/legal precedents/developed by judges/case law 4. interpreted/legislative enactments/ passed by legislature 5. interpreted/ developed or made by judges; civil law/common law 6. religious law/canon law/Islamic law 7. Scandinavian cultural sphere/ Denmark, Norway and Sweden/ Finland and Iceland	Civil law and its origin Code and codification

Comments

Both activities mentioned above serve to lead in the follow-up activities. Activity A lists the word pairs which are closely related, synonyms in terms of meaning and form. This type of listing will contribute a lot to the comparison of similar-meaning/building word, and the memorization of new items. Activity B does the similar thing, but sheds particular light on reading comprehension, and through the topic students are able to relate those words with the textual theme. The activity helps save effort skimming through the text. Furthermore as the plan indicates the relations in a wider context, and is therefore able to elicit more interaction of speaking and writing.

1. Interaction of speaking and writing

Activity A: Speak and write a paragraph about Common Law, using the pairs of words listed in Activity A of 3.2.1. You may just continue to speak or write from the following models if necessary.

Modeled speaking

A: Common law has its sources from decisions made by judges, right?

B: Yes, judicial decisions are important, but there are differences from one jurisdiction to another.

A: In this principle are laws made and passed by a legislature?

B: No, they are decided by court judges, so this doctrine is different from the one governed by statute.

A: Here is a sentence, *such statutes may overrule judicial decisions*. What does it mean?

B: ...

Modeled writing

Common law has its sources from the decisions made by judges. In some jurisdictions, judicial decisions may be rejected by statutes. Legislature may make or pass laws ...

Activity B: In pairs continue to speak and write from models, using the contextual expressions taken from Passage 2. For writing practice each of the two partners is required to use mainly one part of the contextual expressions.

Contextual expressions

Part one	Part two
civil law	continental European law
a code	codifications/constitution
the concept of codification	the Code of Hammurabi
civil law systems	the Corpus Juris Civilis
interpreted	developed or made by judges
the Corpus Juris Civilis/	codified documents
legislative enactments	legal precedents
civil law	French civil law/Chinese law

Modeled speaking

Student A: Civil law is also called continental European law?

Student B: I guess it had its origin in Europe, and spread to the other parts of the world.

Student A: What's the difference between code and codification?

Student B: A code is set of legal rules while codification means rules making systematically.

Student A: What about the concept of codification?

Student B: ...

Model Two: Writing

Student A Civil law is the most wide-spread legal system, because it is used by the most countries in the world. In this system a legislature is involved to amend a code. The concept of codification has had a long history...	Student B Called continental European law, the system has originated in Europe Continent. Codification in a constitution is one the characteristics and the central source of law. For instance, the Code of Hammurabi ...
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Comments

Both activities seem to have done a good job guiding speaking and writing, though they follow different lines of thinking. By and large, speakers and writers for Activity A depend much on improvisation and spontaneity, and for this reason, is perhaps more challenging than Activity B. With shy and quiet student it can be pretty hard to do. In contrast, Activity B seems more convenient for speaking and writing, with the words for use clearly cut and directed. It can also be challenging and inviting, for the speaker or writer has had to make good use of his portion for speech and writing. One of the problems ESP teachers are faced with is effective interaction between the students with the text material they have read. As ESP learning is not only meant to learn specialized knowledge and information, but for language use and interaction, the students get psychological and emotional satisfaction from using the language to achieve some goals (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987: 47). Therefore it is worthwhile to devise and practice procedures which encourage interaction between students.

2. Word meaning guessing activities

Activity A: For each italicized word/expression in the sentence, choose the word/expression closer in meaning to match it

1) Alongside, every system will have a legislature that passes new laws and *statutes*. (judicial decisions/enactments by a legislature)

2) In some jurisdictions, such statutes may overrule *judicial* decisions or codify the topic covered by several contradictory or ambiguous decisions. (judges'/legislative)

3) In some jurisdictions, judicial decisions may decide whether the jurisdiction's constitution allowed a particular statute or *statutory provision* to be made or what meaning is contained within the statutory provisions. (jurisdiction's constitution/legislative enactments)

4) The doctrine of *stare decisis*, also known as case law or precedent by courts, is the major difference to codified civil law systems. (case law/codified topics)

Activity B: From passage 2 find out words and expressions hard for you to understand. With the help contextual expressions guess the meaning of each unknown word/expression, referring to the suggestions given. Then with a partner discuss your answers.

paragraphs	Words whose meaning is to be found out	Matching contextual expressions	Techniques used
1	a) b) c)		
2	a) b) c)		
3	a) b) c)		

Suggestions

a) Notice the words which are close in meaning or function to the target one. For instance, all the three words *codification/constitution/statute* have to do with the meaning of law, judging from the expression *the central source of law ... is codification in a constitution ...* which shows where law comes from.

b) Find out relationship words in a context, as in *while the concept of codification dates back to the Code of Hammurabi in Babylon ca. 1790 BC; religious laws such as Canon law and Islamic law, ...* The darkened words show relationship the contextual expressions (i.e. the relationship of product and origin, of general case and specific case), which indicate, for example, the meaning of *the concept of codification* judged in relation to *the Code of Hammurabi*.

c) Pay attention to the implied relationship. For example, the group of contextual expressions *Scandinavian cultural sphere/ Denmark, Norway and Sweden/ Finland and Iceland* shows the cultural sphere and its components, and from this relationship we conclude that the unfamiliar words *integrated; inherited* mean to *be part of* or to *come from*. Contextual relationship is therefore analyzable.

d) Confirm the meaning of a new item by judging its usage in like collocation. Does the phrase *to amend a code* mean to amend a piece of law or a collection of law? The expression *the Code of Hammurabi* gives us the answer: a systematic collection of law.

Comments

Both activities A and B aim to assist word-meaning inference, but in different ways. Activity A aims at definite meaning of words, resulting of some better understanding of the passage. Activity B encourages students to clear the meaning of the unknown words by themselves, by offering a wider context, and clues to make their own inference. While the former activity tries to clear doubts about word meaning, the latter leaves room to clear them by the students themselves.

Guessing word meaning from the context is the core function of contextual expressions. When there is an adequate context available, the meaning of many hard words can be guessed; in theory; and the rich the context, the higher rate of correct guessing (Çetinavcı, 2014: 89). It must be admitted that the high guessing rate correspond to students' existing knowledge of grammar and context, therefore building students' contextual experience is essential to the vocabulary building (Lin, 2008: 121). The word guessing activities designed around contextual expressions focus on awareness building and basic guessing techniques. Sometimes, context does not provide close reference for precise guessing, but they assist understanding in more ways.

Summary

Chapter 3 discusses the application of contextual expressions in ESP classroom by comparing word-list based and contextual-expression based activities. On the whole the word-list activities have aims for reading comprehension and its facilitation. And the activities around contextual words are aimed for interaction and language use as well as reading comprehension.

Evaluation of effect on learning promoted by the use of contextual expressions

(1 = excellent 2 = good 3 = acceptable 4 = not very good)

	1	2	3	4
Pre-text discussion		√		
Reading comprehension	√			
Interaction of speaking and writing	√			
Word-meaning guessing		√		

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Semantic context has proved to be a useful tool to infer word meaning, and a conscious use helps build a word-learning strategy, which is particularly useful to SL learners. In this discussion we have discovered that semantic context can be pinned down and somewhat clearly defined, as we have done with contextual expressions and core words and peripheral words. By subdividing contextual expressions into topical groups, we have been able to put them to conventional language use, for encouraging interaction and participation in ESP classroom, where any pedagogical

efforts will bear fruit. Furthermore, we have found that though core words can directly explain the target words, the added information from peripheral words offers multiple points to judge the target word. This kind of training develops students' contextual awareness and eventual capacity to guess the meaning of new items.

The correct guessing of the unknown words depends on the richness of the context, that is, the enough number of contextual expressions (B. M. Çetinavcı, 2014). And the nearer is the contextual word meaning, the closer is the guessing. Sometimes, however, when there are not enough near-meaning contextual words, the correct guessing can be a problem. In such a case, one has to rely on the peripheral words and other guessing techniques, including even the formal aspects of things, such as similar structure or word-building. Guessing, then, involves more logical analysis. For instance, there are not direct contextual clues for guessing the word *equity* in the sentence *common law and equity are systems of law whose sources are the decisions in cases by judges*, except the information contained in the sentence itself and the sentence that comes at the end of the passage, *One of the most fundamental documents to shape common law is the Magna Carta, which placed limits on the power of the English Kings*. From the two sentences one can infer that this word, together with the term common law, has to do with power limiting, and court decisions by judges may ensure the practice. Also the word has to do with its building, it appearance similar to another word, *equality*. These clues work together for the correct inference. This example shows that the inferring process can be a complicated matter, and one has to allow for more room for the recognition of contextual words, and for unconventional techniques. And the recognition of contextual expressions is the first step toward successful guessing.

APPENDIXES

Passage 1

[1] Common law and equity are systems of law whose sources are the decisions in cases by judges. Alongside, every system will have a legislature that passes new laws and statutes. The relationships between statutes and judicial decisions can be complex. In some jurisdictions, such statutes may overrule judicial decisions or codify the topic covered by several contradictory or ambiguous decisions. In some jurisdictions, judicial decisions may decide whether the jurisdiction's constitution allowed a particular statute or statutory provision to be made or what meaning is contained within the statutory provisions. Statutes were allowed to be made by the government. Common law was developed in England, influenced by Anglo-Saxon law and to a much lesser extent by the Norman conquest of England, which introduced legal concepts from Norman law, which, in turn, had its origins in Salic law. Common law was later inherited by the Commonwealth of Nations, and almost every former colony of the British Empire has adopted it (Malta being an exception). The doctrine of *stare decisis*, also known as case law or precedent by courts, is the major difference to codified civil law systems.

[2] Common law is currently in practice in Ireland, most of the United Kingdom (England and Wales and Northern Ireland), Australia, New Zealand, Bangladesh, India (excluding Goa), Pakistan, South Africa, Canada (excluding Quebec), Hong Kong, the United States, on a state level, (excluding Louisiana) and many other places. In addition to these countries, several others have adapted the common law system into a mixed system. For example, Nigeria operates largely on a common law system, but incorporates religious law.

[3] In the European Union, the Court of Justice takes an approach mixing civil law (based on the treaties) with an attachment to the importance of case law. One of the most fundamental documents to shape common law is the Magna Carta, which placed limits on the power of the English Kings. It served as a kind of medieval bill of rights for the aristocracy and the judiciary who developed the law.

Technical words and expressions

1. equity /'ekwɪti/ the quality of being fair and impartial
2. judicial /dʒu:'dɪʃ(ə)l/ pertaining to courts of law and to judges
3. jurisdiction /,dʒʊərə's'dɪkʃ(ə)n/ the right, power, or authority to administer justice; the territory over which authority is exercised
4. overrule: to rule or decide against
5. contradictory /kɒntrə'dɪkt(ə)rɪ/ contradicting; inconsistent
6. ambiguous /æm'bigjʊəs/ having several possible meanings or interpretations
7. provision /'stætʃt(ə)rɪ/ a law providing for a particular matter
8. *stare decisis* /'steərɪdɪ'saɪs/ [L] the doctrine that rules or principles of law on which a court rested a previous decision are authoritative in all future cases
9. treaty: formal agreement between two or more states
10. aristocracy /,æ'rɪstəkrəsi/ a class of persons holding exceptional rank and privileges, especially the hereditary nobility.

Proper names

1. Magna Carta /ˌmægnə `kɑ:tə/; medieval bill of rights: Magna Carta was originally written because of disagreements amongst Pope Innocent III, King John and the English barons about the rights of the King. Magna Carta required the King to renounce certain rights, respect certain legal procedures and accept that his will could be bound by the law.

2. Salic law: provided written codification of both civil law, such as the statutes governing inheritance, and criminal law, such as the punishment for murder. It has had a formative influence on the tradition of statute law that has extended to modern times in Central Europe, especially in the German states, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, parts of Italy, Austria and Hungary, Romania, and the Balkans.

3. the Court of Justice: is the highest court in the European Union in matters of European Union law.

Passage 2

[1] Civil law is the most widespread system of law around the world. It is also sometimes known as Continental European law. The central source of law that is recognized as authoritative is codifications in a constitution or statute passed by legislature, to amend a code.

[2] While the concept of codification dates back to the Code of Hammurabi in Babylon ca. 1790 BC, civil law systems derive from the Roman Empire and, more particularly, the Corpus Juris Civilis issued by the Emperor Justinian ca. AD 529. This was an extensive reform of the law in the Byzantine Empire, bringing it together into codified documents. Civil law was also partly influenced by religious laws such as Canon law and Islamic law. Civil law today, in theory, is interpreted rather than developed or made by judges. Only legislative enactments (rather than legal precedents, as in common law) are considered legally binding.

[3] Scholars of comparative law and economists promoting the legal origins theory usually subdivide civil law into four distinct groups. French civil law: in France, the Benelux countries, Italy, Romania, Spain and former colonies of those countries. German civil law: in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Estonia, Latvia, former Yugoslav republics, Greece, Portugal and its former colonies, Turkey, Japan, and the Republic of China. Scandinavian civil law: in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. As historically integrated in the Scandinavian cultural sphere, Finland and Iceland also inherited the system. Chinese law: a mixture of civil law and socialist law in use in the People's Republic of China.

Contextual expressions

1. civil law /continental European law/ the concept of codification/ the Code of Hammurabi/ the Corpus Juris Civilis/ codified documents
2. code/ codifications/constitution/law/legislative enactments/statute
3. common law/legal precedents/developed by judges/case law
4. interpreted/legislative enactments/ passed by legislature
5. interpreted/ developed or made by judges; civil law/common law
6. religious law/canon law/Islamic law
7. Scandinavian cultural sphere/ Denmark, Norway and Sweden/ Finland and Iceland

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