

Article

# The Analysis of Vocabulary Teaching in Chinese English Major's Contemporary College English Book

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**Abstract:** Vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental component of English language learning and is widely recognized for its critical role in effective communication and overall language proficiency. Given its importance, the evaluation of teaching materials, particularly textbooks, is essential for enhancing the quality of vocabulary instruction. This study focuses on analyzing the vocabulary teaching approach in the Contemporary College English (First Volume), a textbook designed for first-year English majors in China. The analysis excludes the exam units (Units 7 and 14) and concentrates on Text A of each unit, as it constitutes the primary instructional content. Specifically, the vocabulary section is examined in three key areas: word formation, formulaic language, and synonyms and antonyms. The study evaluates the textbook's adherence to the Principled Communicative Approach and identifies areas for improvement in its vocabulary teaching methods. After the analysis, the study applies the Principled Communicative Approach to evaluate whether the textbook's design aligns with its principles. The findings indicate that while the vocabulary design of the textbook largely adheres to the core tenets of the Principled Communicative Approach, there remains significant room for improvement in several areas.

**Keywords:** the principled communicative approach; textbook; vocabulary teaching

## 1. Introduction

As the most basic and important part of English learning, vocabulary acquisition has been widely concerned by educators. Just as Schmitt (2000) said that "No amount of grammatical or other type of linguistic knowledge can be employed in communication or discourse without the mediation of vocabulary (425)". Therefore, for English learners, the study of vocabulary knowledge is extremely important. And vocabulary knowledge is as important a language ability as reading and writing in English learning, according to Moghadam, Zainal, & Ghaderpour (2012) said "Vocabulary learning is dominant in language acquisition, whether the language is a second or a foreign language, and crucial to learners' overall acquisition (55)".

As stated in the previous paragraph, it is precisely because of the importance of vocabulary in English learning that vocabulary teaching has become more important. And as an important teaching medium, English textbooks play an indispensable role in the teaching of vocabulary. For Shahid, Qasim, & Iqbal (2021), they think that "Textbook is one of the most substantial elements of classroom learning (283)". Thus, choosing a good English textbook is very helpful to students' English study. And a good textbook enables students not only to gain knowledge from it, but also to enrich their spiritual world.

In countries where textbooks are the primary educational resource, the evaluation of textbooks is regarded as an indispensable process (Tabriz, 2018). And the evaluation of teaching materials is the key to improve the quality of classroom teaching and learning environment (Shahid, Qasim, & Iqbal, 2021), thus analyzing the English textbook plays a

Published: 02 January 2025



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crucial role for English teaching. Therefore, this article mainly analyzes and evaluates the vocabulary teaching of the first volume of the *Contemporary College English*.

In this paper we investigate the vocabulary teaching of Contemporary College English for freshman of English major in China. There are sixteen units in this book, but unit 7 and Unit 14 are exam, so this paper will not analyze them. And each of them is divided into Text A and Text B. However, the teaching mainly focuses on the Text A, while Test B is only used as extracurricular reading for students. Therefore, this paper mainly analyzes Test A, which is divided into six parts: reading text, preview, speaking, vocabulary, grammar, and writing.

And for this paper, I mainly analyze the vocabulary part. And from the vocabulary teaching objectives given by the editor, this paper mainly analyzing the word teaching from three aspects: word formation, formulaic language, and synonyms and antonyms. By an analysis of the book, this paper aims to find out whether the book mostly follows the Principled Communicative Approach and put forward some methods to compensate the deficiencies in this textbook.

## 2. Main Body

This chapter makes a detailed analysis of vocabulary teaching in Contemporary College English. And based on the content of this textbook, it is divided into three parts: teaching of word formation, teaching of collocation, and teaching of synonyms and antonyms.

### 2.1. Teaching of Word Formation

English word formation is an effective way for students to learn English words and an important means to expand their vocabulary. Because Contemporary College English is primarily for first-year English majors. Thus, to help students gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of words, the editors have mainly emphasized derivation and compound words a of word formation. And this chapter will also analyze the teaching of word formation from these two aspects.

#### 2.1.1. Teaching of Derivation

Derivation is an indispensable method for learning English vocabulary. Bauer (2021) said derivation is that "a recurrent word-part which always has the same meaning, and which can be added transparently to other words or word-parts to make new words (44)". And in derivation, the root is the basis of the word and represents the core meaning of the word, while the affix is the combination of letters added before or after the root, which can change the meaning or part of speech of the word. As for affix it is divided into prefixes and suffixes, and they all have different functions as a part of the words. Prefixes have obvious semantic functions. They modify or limit the roots of words and indicate concepts such as quantity, attitude, degree, place, and negation. Most prefixes do not affect the part of speech of a word. Suffixes have obvious grammatical meaning and can determine the grammatical properties of words. They are used to form parts of words, such as nouns, adjectives, and adverbs. However, their semantic function is not as obvious as prefixes (Bauer, 2021).

In Contemporary College English, the editors mainly focus on the teaching of derivation. In the unit 1, the author explains the suffixes of nouns and adverbs so that students can understand the meaning of suffixes. For example, in the noun suffixes, the author gives several examples of -action/ -tion/ -sion, and then he gives some examples of root words with these suffixes, such as action and discussion. In the adverb suffixes, author give -ly as an example and then illustrates some instances to help students better understanding the meaning of word formation.

Then editors give some exercises to help students further learn derivations and learn some affixes during doing exercises. The first exercise is Identify the parts of speech of the

following words and list the suffixes used, in this exercise, editor ask students divided the given words into three parts, which is Noun suffixes, Adjective suffixes and Adverb suffixes. The editor added a new suffix type-adjective suffixes, and this enables students to independently discover the characteristics of adjective suffixes and deepen their memory in the process of recognizing the given words (Yang, 2010). The second exercise is that write down the corresponding adverbs, adjectives, nouns, or verbs of the following words, such as write down the corresponding adverbs simple of hurried, terrible, possible, miserable, polite, fortunate, practical, physical, favorable, rough, serious (Yang, 2010). By doing this exercise, students can combine the previous knowledge and use different types of suffixes to change the parts of speech of given words. The third part is to translate the following expressions, paying attention to the different use of the suffixes "-ful" and "-less". In this exercise, editors give some phrase such as a useful word, a helpful suggestion, a harmless animal, and a shameless liar and so on.

In unit 3, editor also give some exercise for students to become familiar with the rules of word formation. For instance, there is an exercise that is giving the parts of speech of the following words and studying how they are formed, such as form analyzing the words "unhappy, ungrateful, unwell, unimportant, unnecessary, unable, uncommon, unmarried, unknown, unsatisfied, unwilling, unfortunate" students need to conclude what's the meaning of prefix "un-". In addition, editors also give some instances of other affixes such as suffix "-able", prefix "fore-", suffix "-en", prefix "re-"(Yang, 2010). In unit 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 10, editors use exercises like the ones above to reinforce the students' learning of affixes and introduce some new affixes. When introducing new affixes, editors always let students to translate the expressions, and ask students paying attention to the different use of the affixes.

After unit 10, editors mainly pay attention to teaching some word formation tips. For instance, in unit11, there is a tip like "the prefix 'un-' meaning the opposite, can not only be added to adjectives or adverbs, but it can also be added to verbs. For example: happy-unhappy (adjective)", "The suffix 'en-' can be added to some nouns to make adjectives. It can also be added to many adjectives and some nouns to make verbs. For example, wood--wooden (adjective); wool -woolen (adjective)" (Yang, 2010). In the next several units, the editor helps students to use word formation more accurately and better understand the structure of words by teaching the right usage of affixes. After teaching word formation tips, the editors wrote relevant exercises to help students consolidate their knowledge. For instance, after students learned suffix 'en-', editors will ask students to decide whether the adjectives in the brackets can be used as verbs or should be turned into verbs by adding the verb suffix "-en"(Yang, 2010).

### 2.1.2. Teaching of Compound Words

In the part of vocabulary explanation in Contemporary College English, the editor mainly introduces two kinds of word formation. After focusing on derivation, the editor explains the compound words. Compound words are formed through the combination of two or more words. "When two or more independent words are combined according to certain rules, they may form a compound word or a freely combined phrase or phrase." (Bauer 2021: 34) And Learning compound words is also very important in learning English words, as the meaning of many compound words can be considered by combining the semantics of each constituent word base. While retaining the meaning of each word base, the denotation always becomes smaller, allowing students to infer the meaning of compound words (Bauer, 2021).

This book introduces the concept of compound words from the unit 2, and gradually permeates the teaching of compound words during intensive reading. In unit 2, the editor introduces the concept of compound words, and then gives some exercises, such as guessing the meaning of the following words and see how they are formed (headache, heart-broken, banknote etc.) (Yang, 2010). Students can judge the meaning according to their

existing knowledge of vocabulary, and then compare their answers according to the method of looking up the dictionary. In the vocabulary exercise in Unit 5, the editors gave some compound words and asked students to translate these words into Chinese, such as a well-planned move, broken home, dried fruit, and a preserved egg.

After unit 10, the editors gave some word formation tips in unit. And for compound word, the editors give some tips like “many compound adjectives are formed by adding past participles to nouns. For example: snow-covered; state-owned; hand-written” and “in English, there are some compound adjectives which are made up of a noun plus an adjective, such as waist-high, oil-rich etc.”. After giving the tips, editors set some exercise to help students better understand the tips such as asking students to explain and translate the following compound adjectives (skin-deep, pitch-dark, labor-intensive etc.) (Yang, 2010).

In the section on word formation, the editors mainly introduce the definitions of derivation and compound words in word formation, and then give examples to help students better understand their meaning. After explaining the definition, editors link the knowledge to various exercises, and ask students to practice consolidating what they have learned. But word formation is not fully explained in this book. The editors only give some sloppy definition of word formation in the exercises. And there was no systematic framework to introduce word formation, the explanation of word formation between each unit is chaotic and illogical. In addition, in the exercise part, the questions are not new, and there is a lack of correlation between the exercises.

## 2.2. Teaching of Formulaic Language

“The formulaic language is intrinsically connected with functional, fluent, communicative language use.” (Schmitt 2010: 8). According to the situation of most English learners, although some people have enough vocabularies, they do not know how to use them reasonably, which leads to the failure of students to express their ideas clearly and accurately, thus learning formulaic language is crucial for students to learn and use correct words to express themselves and be more like a native speaker.

In Contemporary College English, the authors mainly focus on the teaching of collocation and phrasal verbs. For instance, In the unit 1, the editors first introduced verb+ noun collocations, but instead of using descriptive language, the editors used some practices to help students understand their meanings, such as completing the following verb + noun collocations or expressions. (Yang 2010: 12)

1. \_\_\_\_ steps
2. \_\_\_\_ one’s way
3. \_\_\_\_ one’s tears
4. \_\_\_\_ games

In this way, students need to decide which words to fill in the blanks based on the collocations given in the questions. And in the process of thinking, students can summarize the characteristics of verb+ noun collocations by themselves. After this exercise, editors give some collocations for students to fill in the corresponding sentences. For example, editors give the collocation like “on one’s own”, “show off”, and students need to use these two words to fill the following sentences. (Yang 2010: 12)

1. Unlike high school students who have many classes to go to, university students should spend most of their time studying \_\_\_\_.

2. Peter loves to \_\_\_\_ his new fancy car, for it is just about the only property he has.

In this way, students need to first understand the meaning of each collocation, and then fill in the blanks according to the meaning of the sentence, that is, the context. Learning words in context can be very effective, as students can not only master the meaning of the words, but also enhance their language sense. In the third exercise, editors wanted the students to master some verb collocations, so the editor asked the students to fill in the blanks with the correct preposition or adjectives. such as follows. (Yang 2010: 13)

1. Houses in that part of the country were mostly made \_\_\_\_ cheap material. They all collapsed in the earthquake.

2. The Great Wall wine is made \_\_\_\_\_ the best grapes in our country.

From the questions, we can see that the editors want the reader to know about the collocation of "make". But the editor did not list the relevant collocations of "make" in the question, so students need to look through the dictionary or use other methods to search the collocation of "make". This is a tough work for freshmen because students not only need to look up different collocations, but also need to understand it and fill in the blanks with the correct collocations according to the sentence meaning.

From Unit 1 to Unit 8, the editor taught verb+ noun collocations and used similar exercises. In unit 9, the editor introduces adjectives+ noun by way of exercise. such as follow (Yang 2010: 199):

Translate the following adjective+ noun expressions into Chinese.

1. watchful eye, unlighted cigar, odd number, opposite side, simultaneous, interpretation, peaceful co-existence, peaceful surroundings

Through the translation, students can deepen their impression of the adjective + noun collocations and summarize its features in translating many of these types of collocations, which fosters the student's awareness of independent learning.

In general, the editor's explanation in the vocabulary collocation section mainly focuses on verb+ noun collocations, adjective + noun collocations and verb collocations. However, it lacks descriptive explanation, such as the definition of collocation and some collocation rules. The editors only gave practices and expected students to summarize the collocation rule by themselves, but they did not consider that the book is applicable to freshmen, whose English level is not enough to support them to complete this task independently. Moreover, the explanation of collocation lacks a systematic structure, and the editors' explanation of collocation is not evenly distributed in each unit, which leads to confusion among students and confuses collocation with word formation.

### 2.3. Teaching of Synonyms and Antonyms

Bauer (2021) wrote in his book that "Two words are synonyms (or are synonymous) if, in context, they mean precisely the same thing, if they denote the same entity (110) " and he also proposed that learning synonyms under a certain context is important. As for antonyms, Bauer (2021) propose that "antonyms are opposites, but this requires a great deal of deconstruction (112) ". So, we can see that synonyms and antonyms are a set of opposites that complement each other, and it is reasonable to study them together. In Contemporary College English, the teaching of synonyms and antonyms is relegated by the editors to the end of the vocabulary section, but the study of synonyms and antonyms is also of great importance to the student. As to the introduction of synonyms and antonyms, the editor has used the same method as in the introduction of collocations, namely, to ask the students to summarize their knowledge for themselves in the course of the exercise.

In the teaching of synonyms and antonyms, editors divided them into three types of exercises. The first is filling in each blank with the correct form of the appropriate word in the brackets, such as follows (Yang 2010: 39).

2. I would like to \_\_\_\_\_ (speak, say, talk) something about a book I read on Tibet three weeks \_\_\_\_\_ (ago, before).

3. Have we ever met \_\_\_\_\_ (ago, before)? Ah, now I \_\_\_\_\_ (remember, recall, memorize).

The editor gives synonyms like "speak", "say" and "talk" and antonyms like "ago" and "before" where the blanks need to be filled, and students need to choose appropriate words based on the context of the sentence, which can exercise their ability of independent thinking and encourage them to use dictionaries and other tools to inquire about the specific meaning of these words. And distinguish words based on context.

As for the second exercise, students are asked to give corresponding synonyms and antonyms for the given words, such as giving the corresponding synonyms like “encounter, mark, and ancient etc.” and giving the corresponding antonyms like “complete, steep, and doubt etc.”. The use of such questions can encourage students to look up the dictionary or use the existing knowledge in their minds to fill in the blanks. However, because the editors list too many words, students will feel boring in the process of doing the exercise, thus reducing students' learning enthusiasm. Besides, the setting of the questions is too simple and lacks context. So even if the students know the corresponding synonyms or antonyms, they don't know how to use them.

In the third type of exercise, editors ask students to fill in the blanks with the correct form of the words given such as follows (Yang 2010: 275).

Worth, worthy, worthwhile

1. This used car is not\_\_\_\_\_ buying.
2. It was\_\_\_\_\_ getting the house repaired.
3. All his life he was trying to be a \_\_\_\_\_ son of his father.

This exercise can be thought of as a variant of the first exercise type, in which students are also given a set of synonyms and asked to fill in the corresponding spaces depending on the context. The first thing they need to do is to understand the meaning of the words, and then to understand the meaning of the sentences given, and finally fill in the blanks according to the context. As mentioned above that “learning synonyms in a certain context is important”, it can be concluded that it is very meaningful to use context to help students understand vocabulary.

Overall, the editor's teaching of synonyms and antonyms is not comprehensive enough. First, the book lacks an explanation of the definitions of synonyms and antonyms and overestimates a student's ability to learn autonomously. As freshmen, they do not have enough ability to summarize what they have learned. Secondly, the teaching of synonyms and antonyms only stays in the practice process, and the setting of some topics is too sloppy and lacks certain context, which can lead students to have negative feelings about vocabulary learning.

### 3. Discussion

In this part, the Principled Communicative Approach (PCA) will be regarded as the main supporting theory for the analysis of the second part. Arnold, Dörnyei, & Pugliese (2015) put up with seven maxims of Principled Communicative Approach, which are in accordance with the state of the art of current psycholinguistic research (10) :

The personal significance principle.

The declarative input principle.

The controlled practice principle.

The focus on form principle.

The formulaic language principle.

The language exposure principle.

The focused interaction principle.

According to the analysis in the second part, we can see that the teaching of words in Contemporary College English follows the personal significance principle. The process of the word teaching is student oriented, as the editors give a lot of questions and expect students to explore on their own using dictionaries or other learning tools. Teachers have less interference in the process; However, under the student-led teaching, the teacher's explanation is also very important for the students at this stage.

For the declarative input principle, in the absence of an explanation of the knowledge points of word formation or formulaic language, the editor gives some exercises to the students in the hope that the students will be able to summarize the features of word formation or formulaic language during the course of the exercises. However, the editor overestimated the independent learning ability of the freshmen. At this stage, students

are not capable enough to summarize knowledge by themselves, which is very difficult for them. Thus, editors should add more descriptive explanations of the fundamental knowledge, not just set questions for students to do.

And through analyzing the vocabulary teaching of Contemporary College English in the paper's second part, we can see that it is consistent the controlled practice principle, the focus on form principle, the formulaic language principle. Firstly, as the main teaching method in the vocabulary section of this book is to deepen students' understanding and mastery of the knowledge by using practice activities. Secondly, it can be seen that the editors attach great importance to sentence structure and form in the practice exercises. For example, in these exercises, the author will ask students to complete a sentence by judging the parts of speech, and students will gradually get familiar with the structure of a complete sentence through such exercises. Thirdly, the formulaic language teaching can be seen from paper's second part, it mainly concluded collocation and phrase verb. However, the book lacks a full recognize of the importance and universality of practical communication in the teaching of formulaic language. For example, the editors lack the supplement of real situations in the setting of some exercises. As Arnold, Dörnyei, & Pugliese (2015) believe "there should be sufficient awareness raising of the significance and the pervasiveness of formulaic language in real-life communication, and selected phrases should be practiced and recycled intensely(10)".

The design of Contemporary College English also conforms to the language exposure principle. Before learning the vocabulary part, students should first read the previous articles and understand the background knowledge of the articles, which creates a good language environment for students. Nevertheless, editors can set more activities before class, such as giving students some videos to watch or some discussion activities, so that students can be more fully exposed to the language. But the focused interaction principle is not reflected in the vocabulary section of this book. The teaching of vocabulary in this textbook mainly focuses on practice questions, and there are few interactive links. Therefore, according to this principle, editors should set up some interactive sessions, such as group discussions or some vocabulary related games.

In general, the editors' vocabulary design of this book mostly follows the Principled Communicative Approach, but there is still a lot of room for improvement.

#### 4. Conclusion

The analysis in this paper mainly focuses on vocabulary teaching (word formation, formulaic language, synonyms and antonyms) in the first volume of Contemporary College English. After the analysis, the study applies the Principled Communicative Approach to evaluate whether the textbook's design aligns with its principles. The findings indicate that while the vocabulary design of the textbook largely adheres to the core tenets of the Principled Communicative Approach, there remains significant room for improvement in several areas.

In summary, the vocabulary teaching in this textbook is systematic and covers a broad range of topics, including word formation, collocations, and synonyms and antonyms. These aspects enable students to explore diverse word categories and gain a deeper understanding of vocabulary. However, to further enhance students' English learning experience, revisions and improvements to the textbook by the editors are necessary.

Finally, due to the limitations of my current abilities, this paper lacks deeper investigation and comprehensive analysis. I hope that future research, supported by my continually improving knowledge, will allow for a more thorough examination of the textbook.

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