

The Application of Associative Memorizing Method in College English Vocabulary Teaching and Learning

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Abstract: As the basis of language learning, vocabulary has been the focus of college English vocabulary teaching and learning for a long time. Because a host of teachers and students are still prone to utilize traditional vocabulary memorizing methods, English vocabulary teaching and learning is still a field which is worthy of innovation. Associative memorizing method is an innovative method of English vocabulary acquisition. This paper will deeply analyze the application effects of associative memorizing method from the aspects of English vocabulary teaching and learning, hoping to give some helps and inspirations in English vocabulary teaching and learning.

Keywords: Associative Memorizing Method; Vocabulary; English Teaching and Learning.

INTRODUCTION

Research Background

A host of college students have many problems in vocabulary learning. Their problems are mainly reflected in not using scientific and effective methods to learn words, they only memorize words mechanically [1]. According to an authoritative survey, about 80% of college students are still learning words in isolation. Due to the need of passing a variety of college English exams, students always utilize disorganized vocabulary books to learn new words.

This directly leads to the inefficiency of students' English vocabulary learning and the inconspicuous memorizing effect [2]. In order to improve this situation, a research of the application of associative memorizing method in college English vocabulary teaching and learning is conducted.

Introduction to Associative Memorizing Method

Associative memorizing method means that when students learn and master English words, they should not memorize one by one in isolation. They should give full play to the brain's thinking potential and associate many interrelated things together, so that they can memorize words quickly and lastingly [3]. According to a large number of previous studies on relevant literature and interviews with some students and teachers, it can be concluded that "associative memorizing method" has three main characteristics:

- Memorizers can give full play to their imagination, who can grasp the vocabulary more vivid so that unfamiliar words are easier to remember;
- Learners can give the memorized materials some new meanings, thus making new materials easier to learn and remember;
- By means of metaphor, analogy and other ways, learners can associate some new words with familiar knowledge, thus making it more time-saving to memorize new words [4].

The Application of Associative Memorizing Method

Research Design

In order to better study the effects of associative memorizing method in English vocabulary teaching, the authors organized a college English intensive reading class based on vocabulary teaching, and invited some volunteers to join the class. They have observed and recorded this intensive reading class, investigating whether the associative memorizing method is effective for college English vocabulary teaching.

Data Collection

This research's data includes lecture notes, video materials, and recordings of an in-depth interview with three volunteers.

Teaching Records and Analysis

Throughout the intensive reading class, the lecturer selected several paragraphs from some classic English articles for the volunteers to read and helped them to remember some significant words. Next, some practical examples in teaching will be listed, and how the associative memorizing method is applied to teaching can be seen clearly from these examples.

The first example is shown below

"It died suddenly, in a terrible rain of fire and ash. The tragedy struck on the 24th of August, A.D.79. Mount Vesuvius, which had slept quietly for centuries, erupted with savage violence. Tons of hot ash fell on Pompeii, hiding it from sight. For three days the sun did not break through the clouds of volcanic ash that filled the sky. And when the eruption ended, Pompeii was buried deep. A city had perished."

This is a paragraph from the text of Pompeii. The lecturer will use the associative memorizing method (semantic association) to teach the volunteers to remember the following words: "volcanic, volcano, erupt, eruption, and perish."

Take a look at the following teaching episode: (L means lecturer. V means volunteers)

- 01 L: First of all, please pay attention to this word "volcanic", this is the adjective form.
- 02 L: Next, let's learn its noun form: "volcano".
- 03 L: Now, please read the two words aloud three times, and then write them on paper several times in order to deepen the impression.
- 04 L: Please think about what the volcanic action is generally called.
- 05 V: "Eruption!" All the students answered aloud.
- 06 L: Great! Eruption is the noun form, and the verb form of it is "erupt".
- 07 L: Now, please read the two words aloud three times, and then write them on paper several times in order to deepen the impression.
- 08 L: Can anyone tell me what the result of a volcanic eruption is?
- 09 V: "everything is going to die." A student answered aloud.
- 10 L: Good, let's take a look at the more advanced expression of it. We can say it in this way: "everything is going to be perished."
- 11 L: Now, please read "perish" aloud three times, and then write it on paper several times in order to deepen the impression.

Through the above teaching episode, it can be seen that the associative memorizing method links several words through association, thus students can learn these words as a whole, rather than in isolation. The benefits of using associative memorizing method to memorize words can also be seen clearly: In the future, learners can connect these words together at a faster rate to form expressions, instead of thinking about what is the relevant collocation of one of these words. Utilizing such a method for a long time to memorize words can effectively improve the accuracy of using words.

Next, please see the second example:

"At the head of this article we see how three monks were burnt to death a few days ago, and a prior put to death with atrocious cruelty. Do we inquire into the details? No; or we should find out that the prior was subjected to unprintable muti-lations. Man (when he is a North American Indian) gouges out his prisoners eyes; when he is King John, with a nephew to render untroublesome, he uses a red-hot iron; when he is a religious zealot dealing with heretics in the Middle Ages, he skins his captive alive and scatters salt on his back; in the first Richard's time he shuts up a multitude of Jew families in a tower and sets fire to it."

This is a paragraph from the text of *The Damned Human Race*. The lecturer will use the associative memorizing method (spelling association) to teach the volunteers to remember the following words: "atrocious and atrophy; render and rend; religious, religion and region."

Take a look at the following teaching episode: (L means lecturer. V means volunteers)

- 01 L: Please pay attention to this word: "atrocious". It means exceptionally bad or displeasing.
- 02 L: Next, take a look at "atrophy" that is similar in structure to it. A muscle or other part of the body atrophying

means that it decreases in size or strength, often as a result of an illness.

- 03 L: Please carefully distinguish the two words and memorize them correctly.
- 04 L: Can anyone tell me the difference between these two words “render and rend”?
- 05 V: “To rend something means to tear it.” A student answered confidently.
- 06 L: Great! How about “render”?
- 07 V: “If you render someone help or service, you help them.” Another student answered.
- 08 L: Yes, although the two words differ only by two letters, the meaning is completely different. Please carefully distinguish the two words and memorize them correctly.
- 09 L: “Religion and region,” These two words are simple, but many students are very easy to use them in a wrong way.
- 10 L: Now, I will help you distinguish these two words. Religion is belief in a god or gods and the activities that are connected with this belief, while region is a large area of land, usually without exact limits or borders.
- 11 L: Please read these words aloud and memorize what they mean correctly.

The above teaching episode also shows the advantages of the associative memorizing method. When you memorize an English word, you can simultaneously memorize one or more other words that are similar in structure to it. This is going to help strengthen the impression of these words in students’ mind, thus learners can effectively avoid confusing their meanings.

The third example is shown as follows:

“I extremely admire the bromance in *Fast & Furious*.”

“No matter what happens, we should be chillax.”

“If you can't afford a vacation, staycation will be a good choice.”

Each of the above three sentences has a word that can be memorized by associative memorizing method. They are “bromance, chillax and staycation” respectively. The lecturer will teach the volunteers how to memorize their meanings effectively and quickly.

Take a look at the following teaching episode: (L means lecturer. V means volunteers)

- 01 L: Above all, let's take a look at this word “bromance”. Guys, do you think it is familiar to see it?
- 02 V: “It is very similar to romance.” A student answered aloud.
- 03 L: Well-done! Actually, it is a word synthesized by brother and Romance. “Bromance” means a close platonic friendship between two men. Brother and Romance are common words, so it is not difficult for us to memorize bromance.
- 04 L: Please read with me loudly: “brother, romance, bromance!”
- 05 L: Next word is “chillax”, and can anyone tell me the meaning of chill and relax respectively?
- 06 V: “Chill is a kind of feeling of being cold, and if you relax or if something relaxes you, you feel more calm and less worried or tense.” Another student answered.
- 07 L: Great! So the meaning of chillax is not difficult to guess. When we are involved in the emergency, we should be chillax, in other words, we should stay calm.
- 08 L: Please read with me loudly: “chill, relax, chillax!”
- 09 V: “I know the last word is staycation, which must be synthesized by stay and vocation.” A student answered confidently.
- 10 L: You are very smart! We all know the meaning of stay and vocation, so staycation means you have your vocation at home, and common activities of a staycation include making a delicious meal, playing in the backyard pool and watching a fantastic football match.
- 11 L: Please read with me loudly: “stay, vocation, staycation!”

It is absolutely easy and labor-saving to use the associative memorizing method to memorize compound words. Knowing how a word is formed is good for deepening the impression of learners. This is just one of numerous advantages of the associative memorizing method. It can be seen that this method is of great benefit to English vocabulary learning.

Interviews

The authors interviewed three volunteers from the class and asked them to talk about their true thoughts about the associative memorizing method.

Student Liu: "I used to memorize vocabulary in isolation, but after learning a lot of words, the result is not good. When I was writing or speaking, I always used wrong words, actually, I don't know how to use them at all. But I found that the associative memorizing method can help me solve this problem. Using this method, I not only know the meaning of the words, but also how to use them correctly."

Student Yang: "Compound words usually have more letters than other words, so if you don't care how it is synthesized, just trying to memorize them, it will definitely be a difficult thing. Using the associative memorizing method can help us strengthen our impression towards the word. If this method is applied to the classroom of English vocabulary teaching, not only will the teacher teach easily, but the students will learn easily."

Student Wang: "I think the biggest advantage of this innovative approach is that it helps me memorize the words which are similar in structure. Using this method, I will be able to effectively distinguish these words. At the same time, I also hope that this method can be applied more to college English vocabulary teaching."

From the above interviews, it can be seen that the students have a very positive attitude towards the associative memorizing method. The interviews also prove the application of associative memorizing method in English vocabulary teaching has also received support from students.

According to the students' feedback to this intensive reading class, the authors adjusted the methods which they needed after class and summarized it into the following several aspects:

"Semantic field" association method

The meaning of a word does not exist in isolation. It is subordinate to a certain field or scope [5]. Words in the same field have many identical elements in semantics. Learners can regard this field as a "semantic field". They can classify words, and then associate them into memory. In the book *Let Learning Speed Up*, Professor Jiang Sha made a clear statement: the basic method of memory is to associate new information with known things, which can greatly improve the effect of memory.

For example, when it comes to "my room", you can use the opportunity to develop a series of associations to expand your vocabulary, such as: tea table, reading lamp, curtain, wardrobe, home theater, wooden floor, etc. For instance, the word "tree" can make students associate stock, branch, leaf, flower, seed, stem, root and so on. Students can also remember a lot.

Although the words "room" and "tree" are relatively simple, with the help of the "semantic field", students' vocabulary will increase rapidly. This method of teaching words by means of the semantic field enables students to learn the unknown words by analogy. In the process, the learner will feel more relaxed.

"Contrast of homomorphous words" association method

The idea is to put similar words together and compare them, and find out the characteristics and differences of the shape and meaning between the words, and then memorize it. Students need to pay attention to their specific differences in appearance, so that students can effectively avoid confusion in mastering such vocabulary.

Case 1:

Topic and tropic

Topic: n. theme; title; general rule; general theory

Tropic: n. / adj. tropical.

Ingenious notes: Tropic (tropic) takes the "flower" (R) as the theme (topic).

Case 2:

Brush and bush

Brush: n./ vt. brush; painting

Bush: n. shrubs; dwarf bushes adj. low as shrubs (homophonic: "Bu shi")

Ingenious notes: Bush (bush) takes the "flower" (R) as a painting brush (brush).

Practice has proved that this method of using intuitive image thinking to cleverly memorize words can significantly improve the memory effect and prolong the effective memory time. Learners can memorize a group of words with one sentence, which is humorous and interesting and worth advocating.

"Fun homophonic" association method

In the process of learning and memorizing foreign words, Chinese people are greatly influenced by their mother tongue and are accustomed to the memory mode of Chinese. We cannot say that this is an absolute defect, because it depends on how learners use their mother tongue to help themselves learn a foreign language. Scientific research shows that the combination of vision and hearing can also make people produce association which can help to improve learning efficiency. In the process of human memory, if we can play a variety of sensory effects, the effect will be better.

For example:

flee: vi. escapes; vanishes, dissipates vt. Evade

Mnemonic homophonic: Fei Li (flee) - fly away - run away /escape

ambition: n. lofty aspiration vt. Aspire

Mnemonic homophonic: An Bi Sheng (ambition) – careerism – “No ambition, no victory.”

It's very convenient to use homophonic ways. Indeed, some English words may be difficult to remember in a general way. If homophonic associations are used, the meaning of the word can be figured out as soon as the word is pronounced. Even spelling is not a problem. Isn't it a knack for learners to remember words?

"Etyma and affix" association method

There are many affixes (prefixes and suffixes) besides the root, which appear quite frequently in English words. In vocabulary teaching, students can be fully aware of these word-formation methods, common roots and affixes, which are very useful for students to quickly memorize English words and expand their vocabulary, so that they can learn twice with half the effort.

For example:

The mnemonic method of "include" is: in (inward) + clud (close) + e, that is, "locked inside", so "include" means "vt. embody; comprise".

The mnemonic method of "preclude" is: pre (forward/ahead) + clud (close) + e, that is, "close off in advance prevent", so "preclude" means "exclude; eliminate; remove".

The mnemonic method of "conclude" is: con (common/together) + clud (close) + e, that is, "finish/closure", so "conclude" means "infer; deduce; decide".

By analyzing the structure of these typical words, it can be seen clearly that familiarity with the limited etyma and affix in English as soon as possible is beneficial to students' memory of a large number of English words, which is also an effective way for any foreign language learner to constantly expand the vocabulary.

"Homophone" association method

Homonyms refer to two or more than two words with the same pronunciation but different meanings. If they do not pay attention to these words, they will become difficulty in listening exercise or taking exams. Therefore, it is necessary for students integrate and classify homonyms, so that when they learn a word, they can also master the words which have the same pronunciation and other words which are easily confused.

For example:

Sew [səʊ] (stitch/tailor/needle) ----- sow [səʊ] (seed)

Dear [diə] (darling/honey/expensive/beloved) ----- deer [diə] (stag/doe/fawn)

See [si:] (catch sight of/clap eyes on) ----- sea [si:] (sea)

There are also three or more than three homonyms.

For example:

- Meet [mi:t] (come across/encounter) ----- meat [mi:t] (flesh) ----- mete [mi:t] (border/boundary)
- Right [raɪt] (accurate/correct) ----- write [raɪt] (compose/depict) ----- wright [raɪt] (worker) ----- rite [raɪt] (ceremony)

If homonyms are putted together like this, is it not like picking grapes? Not only can it stimulate students' imagination and interest in memorizing words, but also enables students to use the same rules of pronunciation to remember some certain words more firmly, clearly and for a long time.

"Storyline" association method

When people listen to very interesting crosstalk or review books, they can imagine the scenes described in the story, and even tell the story vividly after a long time, because the story is substantial and has a plot, it has a strong appeal to the listeners and it's unforgettable. So, for English vocabulary learning, students can also use "storyline" association method so that they can remember a group of English words with special meanings by means of interesting story plots?

Former Soviet educator Korolyov said: "Interesting and attractive things can double the likelihood of memory." This is a potential teaching, because its ultimate goal is to give full play to the enthusiasm, initiative and potential of students, so as to improve learning efficiency.

For example:

When learners learn the word "-ash", first of all, there are some words: smash (shatter/shred), crash (drop/fall down), clash (bounce), and cash (ready money). Then, when they learn vocabulary, they can compile these words into "stories" and give them a "plot" to help us better grasp the vocabulary.

For instance:

"Bush was ashamed that some terrorists clashed into the World Trade Center, that the plane crashed, that the building was completely smashed and turned into ashes. He said it would take a lot of cash to restore American confidence."

In the form of story-telling to teach vocabulary, students must be impressed by a series of new words derived from "-ash"? In fact, there are some stories behind many English words, just as the famous sentence say "Every word has a story behind it." What learners need to do is to learn as much as possible about the "cultural allusions" behind the words so as to help us master the words.

"Interesting pictographic character" association method

Modern scientific research shows that the division of human left and right hemispheres is different. The left hemisphere is the abstract thinking center, while the right hemisphere is the image thinking center. Language learning is mainly an intellectual activity dominated by the left hemisphere, while the right hemisphere is far from being fully developed. Professor Ornstein of the University of California believes that the total capacity and efficiency of the brain can be doubled if the left and right hemispheres work more actively with each other by giving proper stimulation to the untapped part of the brain. According to these studies, we naturally think that if learners can more consciously use the right hemisphere of vivid thinking for pictographic associative memory of English vocabulary, it will greatly improve the efficiency of memory and the effect of word memory.

For example:

- Ostrich (a very large African bird with a long neck and long legs, that cannot fly but can run very fast)
- Mnemonic method: "o" (its shape: a circle) + "s" + "t" (association: a street) + "rich" (rich people) → → In the streets (t), the rich (rich) are raising ostriches in the enclosure (o).
- Business (the activity of making, buying, selling or supplying goods or services for money)
- Mnemonic method: "bus" (public transport) + "in" (inside) + "e" (its shape: goose) + "ss" (association: two snakes) → → Two snakes (ss) and a goose (e) talk business in (in) a bus (bus).

These are typical examples of using "interesting pictographic character" association method to memorize words. These examples show that in vocabulary learning, some students can actually associate some words according to their images by dividing the letters into groups of meanings, then giving each part a reasonable meaning, and then combining them, so that students can remember the words quickly and accurately.

"Antonym" association method

Antonym association method, as the name suggests, refers to the antonymic relation of word meaning. It means that when you remember a word, you can also remember its antonyms. The meaning of English words has great context dependence. Therefore, students should pay attention to the collocation of words when they associate antonyms, so as to avoid memorizing them by rote.

For example:

Rapid—slow;
Worth—worthless;

Dry lips—moist lips;
Dry cloth—wet cloth;
Dry air—damp air (not“wet air”here) .

Through this comparative analysis, students will be able to distinguish the concepts of different words more clearly and grasp the correct use of words quickly.

Vocabulary is not only a difficult problem in teaching, but also one of the problems that students have to face after class. Therefore, the correct and effective utilization of associative memorizing methods can help learners memorize English vocabulary more efficiently and firmly.

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CONCLUSION

To make a long story short, the associative memorizing method can effectively improve the level of English vocabulary teaching. Thus, the application of associative memorizing method in college English vocabulary teaching is supposed to be encouraged, but diversification is a symbol of English vocabulary teaching. Therefore, associative memorizing method will not be the only method used in English vocabulary teaching. Teachers should utilize more new and innovative approaches to help students memorize words from different memory perspectives.

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