WORDS WITH MULTIPLE MEANINGS IN REPETITIONS

İngilizce Doğal Metinlerde Çok Anlamlı Kelime Tekrarlarının Analizi

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Abstract

Additional meanings for words with multiple meanings in a foreign language often need to be acquired from exposure, e.g. from reading, as there are too many meanings to be directly taught in the limited classroom time. Acquisition of multiple meanings from exposure in reading will depend to a large extent on the availability of the various meanings in L2 texts. The present study investigates the uses of seven high frequency adjectives in English with multiple dictionary meanings over their entire occurrences in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. The adjectives have been chosen for analysis for their frequency in the language as well as their frequency in the book. All seven words were among most frequent 1,000 words of English as well as being the top most frequent adjectives used in the book. The meaning in each repetition of a given adjective was coded by matching it to one of the meanings listed for the word in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary using Maxqda Analysis Software. The results suggested that 61% of the dictionary meanings for the seven adjectives occurred at least once in the book with 48% of the covered senses appearing 7 or more times. The book provides full coverage of the dictionary senses for two words and high coverage for another three. It has been concluded that authentic novels like *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* could be a rich source of input for semantic elaboration of adjectives with multiple meanings.

Keywords: *Adjectives with multiple meanings, repetitions, reading, EFL.*

Özet

Yabancı bir dilde çok anlamlı sözcüklerin ek anlamlarının sınıf ortamında öğretilmesi, anlam sayısının çokluğu ve ders süresinin yetersizliği nedeniyle mümkün olmamakta, bu nedenle öğrencilerin bu sözcüklerle ders dışında karşılaşmaları gerekmektedir. Bu çalışmada, İngilizce'de sık kullanılan ve çok anlamlılık içeren 7 sıfatın *Harry Potter ve Felsefe Taşı* adlı romandaki kullanımları incelenmektedir. Söz konusu sözcüklerin tümü İngilizce'de en sık kullanılan 1000 sözcük arasında olup kitapta da en sık kullanılan sıfatlar arasında yer almaktadır. Sözcüklerin her biri için, sözcüğün romanda geçtiği tüm satırlar belirlenmiş ve bu satırlarda kullanıldıkları anlamla sözlükteki anlam eşleştirilerek kodlanmıştır. Bu kodlamada Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary ve Maxqda Nitel Veri Analizi Yazılımı kullanılmıştır. Çözümleme sonuçları, 7 sıfat için sözlükte belirtilen toplam 72 anlamdan 44'ünün (% 61) en az bir kez kitapta geçtiğini, bunlardan % 48'inin ise en az 7 kez tekrarlandığını göstermiştir. Kitap, sözcüklerden 2 tanesinin tüm anlamlarını 3 tanesinin de anlamlarının büyük bir çoğunluğunu kapsamıştır. Bu açıdan bakıldığında, bu tür doğal metinlerin çok anlamlı sıfatların öğrenilmesi bakımından zengin bir kaynak oluşturduğu sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Bununla birlikte, kitabın söz konusu sözcük anlamlarının % 40 gibi önemli bir bölümünü içermiyor olması, tek bir kitabın sözcüklerin tüm anlamlarını tanımak için yetersiz kaldığını göstermektedir. Bunun telafisi için öğrencilere daha çok miktarda İngilizce metinler okumaları önerilmiştir.

Anahtar sözcükler: *Çok anlamlı sıfatlar, tekrarlar, okuma, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce.*

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Introduction

Second language learners are all too familiar with the fact that very few words are learnt once and for all in the first encounter. Nagy and Herman (1987:32) suggested that information to be gained from a single encounter with a word is 'relatively small' and this has been supported by research evidence from studies on incidental vocabulary acquisition in a second language (Zhu, 2015; Joe, 2010; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006; Hulstijn, 1992; Saragi et.al., 1978). Most words require repeated encounters in meaningful contexts in order to get consolidated in memory and research indicated that more repetitions generally lead to greater gains (Shahreza & Tavakoli, 2012; Chen & Truscott, 2010; Webb, 2008, 2007). Repeated textual encounters also contribute to the elaboration of word knowledge by adding pieces of extra information about the word in addition to its form and main meaning sense such as parts of speech, additional meanings, morphological relatives, the kind of arguments required in a sentence, collocations, register or frequency to name but a few. Schmitt (2010:16) argues that some of these aspects are difficult to teach explicitly and they are best acquired incidentally through exposure to the L2, e.g. from reading. Also, classroom time will not be long enough to teach every single aspect for every single word. Direct teaching is particularly unfeasible for words with multiple meanings. Many high frequency words in English have several meanings (5 on average for the most frequent 1,000 words: Ozturk, 2016) resulting in a tremendously increased number of meanings to be learnt for the EFL learner. For the first 3,000 words, the learners need to learn over 10,000 meanings. Therefore, learners have to rely on incidental learning from exposure to external sources for the elaboration of word meaning, i.e. 'semantic elaboration'. Then, we may ask if the input the learner receives provides sufficient exposure to words with multiple meanings for this kind of elaboration to occur. Pedagogical texts like reading passages in coursebooks or even graded readers do not seem to be long enough to provide exposure to the full range of meanings of L2 words with multiple meanings. In the present study, we investigate the potential of an extended natural text, i.e. a novel, for providing exposure to high frequency words with multiple meanings in English.

For full semantic elaboration of an L2 word with multiple meanings from reading, the learner has to meet each and every sense of the word. In practical terms, this will mean that the learner will meet the same word repeatedly but not necessarily with the same meaning. But is one encounter with a given meaning enough to learn it? This crucially depends on the level of learning required. For merely recognizing a meaning among alternatives in a multiple choice test for a given word form, even a single encounter will be enough for about half the time (Webb, 2007). On the other hand, recall of meaning of a given word out of context as in a translation task requires repeated encounters. Chen & Truscott (2010) reported that less than one word out of ten has been learnt in one encounter and that most gains in semantic knowledge occurred between 3 to 7 exposures. In Shahreza & Tavakoli (2012), only 16% of words on average have been learnt at one encounter and learning has significantly increased at three encounters (i.e. 39%) whereas over half of the words (64%) was learnt only after 7 exposures. In Webb (2007), less than one third of the words (29%) had been learnt after 10 encounters. While it is difficult to arrive at an optimum number of repetitions needed for learning word meaning from reading, it would be relatively safe to say that one encounter is not enough and that more repetitions generally lead to better learning. The present study will also look into the potential of authentic English texts for providing repeated encounters to individual senses.

The foregoing discussion has presupposed that learning from exposure is uniform across the senses of a word with multiple meanings and that all senses will require exactly the same number of repetitions. However, it could be argued that learning the first meaning for a new word will pose different challenges than learning additional meanings of the same word. In the former case, the learner has to learn both a word form and a corresponding meaning whereas for additional senses no learning of a new word form will be necessary. This might reduce the number of repetitions necessary for learning the additional senses if learning meaning without having to learn the form is an advantage. Additionally, the semantic relations that hold among meanings of many words with multiple meanings, i.e. polysemy, might make understanding of additional meanings in context easier once the main meaning sense is known. For instance, a learner who is familiar with the meaning 'with no or very little light' of the word *dark* is likely to understand the meaning 'having a colour close to black' as in *a dark suit* without much difficulty. The studies reported above dealt with learning a single meaning sense and therefore generalizable only to the learning of the first meaning of a word with multiple meanings. Two studies have provided clues as to how L2 learners handle additional meanings of multi-meaning words in reading (Kang, 1993; Bensoussan & Laufer, 1984), both of which, contrary to the expectations, reported problems with additional senses. In Kang (1993), advanced L2 learners ignored contextual clues that disambiguated additional meanings in a written text and preferred to stick to the meaning they had previously acquired for the word leading to substantial distortions of the interpretation of the text. In Bensoussan & Laufer (1984), university students in an EFL course translated words in a written text to their mother tongue, and incorrect translations suggested that for polysemous words they used their 'preconcieved notions' (i.e. previously acquired meanings) of these words to translate rather than the contextual meaning. These studies suggest that L2 learners have a resistance to additional meanings and therefore knowing one meaning for a word makes learning of additional senses harder. Judging from this, it might be argued that a greater number of repetitions will be necessary for learning additional senses of words with multiple meanings than it will be necessary for the very first meaning.

Authentic English texts can be expected to provide ample exposure to multiple word meanings as previous research has shown multiple meanings to be widespread in English texts. Ozturk (2017) has revealed that around one third of words (32%) in a sample from an authentic English text were used in a meaning other than its primary meaning. Adjectives seem to be a potentially troublesome category with respect to multiple meanings. Ozturk (2016) has shown that although adjectives were less in number among the most frequent 9,000 words of English, a greater proportion had multiple meanings in the dictionary (85%) and they had a greater average number of listed meanings per word (2.93). Ozturk (2017) indicated that they were used in a secondary sense over half of the time at the beginning of an authentic English novel (56%) and around one third (32%) over the whole book.

The present study will be concerned with the textual potential for elaboration of word meaning across repetitions of high frequency adjectives with multiple meanings over an extended English text. More specifically, we ask if an authentic English text offers sufficient exposure to various meanings of seven high frequency polysemous adjectives. More specifically, the following research questions will be investigated:

1. *Does an authentic extended text in English provide full coverage to the range of meanings of high frequency adjectives with multiple meanings?*
2. *Does the text provide repeated encounters with individual meanings?*

The Study

The text used for analysis was J.K.Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone.* The text was chosen for its popularity around the world and because it constituted a potential reading material for many advanced EFL learners.

Analysis

10 high frequency adjectives in English with 50 or more occurrences in the book were identified using the Vocabulary Profiler based on the BNC and COCA word frequency lists on Compleat Lextutor (http://www.lextutor.ca/vp). The 50 cut-point was decided somewhat arbitrarily, but it generated a reasonable number of adjectives (10) with a sufficient number of occurrences to allow for at least 3 repetitions of each sense (see Table 1). Seven of the adjectives also occurred enough number of times for each of their individual senses to be repeated 7 times across the book. All adjectives were among the most frequent 1,000 words in English. This ensured that they had a large number of meanings that would be available for learning as previous research has shown that high frequency words have a greater number of meanings (Ozturk, 2016). Only one of the selected words did not have multiple meanings (*sudden*) and was eliminated from the analysis. The comparative and superlative forms, e.g. *better* and *best* or *later* and *latest* were also excluded from the analysis as these forms had multiple meanings of their own which were not shared by the base form. The frequency count was based on word families, therefore also included adverbs and compounds based on the adjective in the count. 37 occurrences of *near* were adverbs, i.e. nearly. Likewise, 6 instances of *goodbye* were included in the 91 occurrences of *good* and 43 occurrences of *late* was in the comparative form. When these occurrences were omitted, the number of occurrences of the simple adjectives failed to meet the 50 plus criterion. Therefore, these adjectives have been dropped from the analysis: *near* (16 occurrences), and *late* (15 occurrences) leaving 7 adjectives for analysis.

Table 1. Most frequent 1K adjectives in Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone

Adjective	Frequency In the book	Dictionary senses	Repetitions necessary for 3	Repetitions necessary for 7
good	91	24	72	168
sudden*	83	1	3	7
great	78	14	42	98
dark	76	9	27	63
long	75	7	21	49
near*	75	6	18	42
little	71	5	15	35
late*	63	4	12	28
black	59	9	27	63
large	53	3	9	21

*Adjectives omitted from the analysis

Using the text-based concordancing programme for English on Compleat Lexical Tutor at http://www.lextutor.ca/conc/text/ concordance lines were generated for each adjective from the whole book. Then, the meaning of the word in each line for a given word was checked against the meanings listed for the word in the online version of the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com) and using Maxqda Analysis software (MAXQDA 11, Release: 11.0.10), each line was coded with one of the meanings.

Results

The results of the analysis (see Table 2 below) have shown that out of the 72 meanings listed in the dictionary for the seven adjectives, 44 occurred at least once in the book, which corresponds to 61% of the meanings. For only two of the adjectives (*long* and *little*) all of the cited meanings occurred in the book. For another three (*good*, *great*, *dark*), almost two thirds of senses were covered. These results suggest that the *Philosopher's Stone* provides good coverage for five of the seven adjectives investigated. It must be noted, however, that these results are difficult to interpret given the lack of comparable research in the second language vocabulary acquisition literature. Still, the total absence of 39% of the senses indicate the limitations of a lengthy text in providing full elaboration of the meaning senses for some highly frequent adjectives in English.

Table 2. Summary of the results for all adjectives

Adjective	Number of Senses	Senses covered	Meanings with 1-2 occurrences	Meanings with 3-6 occurrences	Meanings with 7+ occurrences
good	24	15 (63%)	6	3	6
great	15	10 (67%)	2	3	5
dark	9	6 (67%)	3	1	2
long	7	7 (100%)	2	2	3
little	5	5 (100%)	1	1	3
black	9	3 (33%)	1	1	1
large	3	1 (33%)	0	0	1
Total	**72**	**44 (61%)**	**13 (30%)**	**11 (25%)**	**21 (48%)**

The dictionary meanings of the words were represented to varying degrees in the book. Only a small proportion of senses (11 out of 72 senses or 15%) occurred 10 or more times, which was suggested as the minimal number of repetitions necessary for the development of full knowledge of a word in Webb (2007). About half of the meanings that did occur in the book (48%) did so 7 or more times. The learning potential of these meanings is very high as the study by Zahar et.al. (2001) has shown that most learnt words from reading was repeated an average of seven times in the text. Another 25% (11) of the senses were repeated between 3 to 6 times, which are also likely to induce learning.

For only 30% (13) of the senses there were very few occurrences (1 or 2), which might not be sufficient for learning ~~for learning~~ word meaning as several studies indicated that acquisition of word meaning from reading was minimal with a few encounters (Webb, 2008; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006) .

In all adjectives, one of the meanings has been used with greater frequency in the book than other meanings. Table 3 gives the number of occurrences of the most frequent meanings and of the next most frequent meanings in the book. In most cases, there is a big gap between the two: the frequent sense occurs more than twice the number of times the next most frequent sense. The occurrences of the most frequent senses in the seven adjectives account for about half of all occurrences (49.5%) while the next most frequent senses account for only 14%. In 6 of the words (except *good*), this most frequent meaning corresponded to the first meaning cited in the dictionary.

Table 3. Occurrences of the most frequent and the next most frequent senses

Adjective	Most frequent sense	Next most frequent sense
good	20	9
great	30	12
dark	34	19
long	34	14
little	30	12
black	48	6
large	53	0
Total	**249** (49.5%)	**72** (14%)

For the adjective *good*, the most frequent meaning in the book was the 'pleasant' sense (20 occurrences) and the next most frequent meaning was the 'high quality' sense with 9 occurrences. This most frequent meaning in the book is not the first listed in the OALD and hence, not the primary meaning of the word. It is not the first meaning, either, in the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (cf. http://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/good), which explicitly claims to adopt the policy of 'organising meanings by frequency' and listing 'common meanings first' in a word's entry (http://www.ldoceonline.com). The first meaning cited in both dictionaries is the 'high quality' sense. This mismatch might be an idiosyncrasy of the book investigated here in that the most frequently used meaning in the book may not be the most frequent meaning in the language. On the other hand, there is the possibility that the above-named dictionaries adopt a policy of citing the core meaning first for clarity when it is different from the most frequent sense. Core meanings in words with multiple related meanings are the main meaning senses of which the other senses are extensions. Several studies have shown that understanding of the core senses aids the understanding of the non-core senses while the reverse is not true (Verspoor & Lowie, 2003). The 'high quality' sense seems to be the core sense for the word *good* as one can see how the other senses are related to this sense, but no explicable connection exist among the non-core senses. In the following examples taken from the OALD, the 'high quality' sense is implicated in *good time*, *good reason* and *good ear* each of which is of high quality as far as times, reasons and ears go, but *good reasons* are not necessarily pleasant or *good times* are not necessarily sensible.

*Your **work** is just not **good** enough (high quality)*
*Did you have a **good time** in London?(pleasant)*
*I have **good reason** to be suspicious. (sensible)*

*Can you speak into my **good ear**? (healthy)*

This policy is therefore justified, but needs to be further investigated if dictionaries are consistent in providing the core sense first and if it is the best way of organising dictionary entries. Coreness and sense frequency needs to be a matter of serious concern for dictionary makers and vocabulary researchers.

Conclusion

This study has shown that authentic English novels might be a rich source of input for semantic elaboration of high frequency adjectives with multiple meanings. More than half of the dictionary meanings have been covered in the novel and about half of the covered senses were repeated for a large number of times (7 or more), which render them highly conducive to learning. On the other hand, the absence of some 40% of the senses in the book suggests that one book may not be enough to gain access to the full meaning potential of adjectives with multiple meanings. In order to get enough exposure to the full range of meanings of a word, learners are advised to increase their total exposure to English.

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