A MODEL SEMANTIC NETWORK TO TEACH MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF ENGLISH POLYSEMOUS WORDS TO ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) LEARNERS IN SRI LANKA

Keerthiwansha N.W.S.B.

Department of English Language Teaching, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

buddhimasandaruwani93@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Éva Kovács (2011) defines polysemy as "the phenomenon whereby a linguistic unit exhibits multiple distinct yet related meanings is a very common feature of any language". Therefore, a Polyseme in English language can be identified as a word, which has several meanings that bear relations with one another. Though there are numerous foreign studies that focus on using cognitive linguistics based method to teach English polysemous words, as far as the Sri Lankan context is concerned, there has been a minimal attention focused to this area of learning English polysemous words. Therefore, this particular study attempts to develop and use semantic networks containing the multiple meanings of English polysemous words to ESL learners in Sri Lanka. A group of 20 pre-intermediate undergraduates of level one following the English for Social Sciences course unit at the Department of English Language Teaching, University of Kelaniya has been selected for the study. Five English polysemous words: SEE, BREAK, GIVE, TAKE, and RUN were selected and their meanings in the Oxford English Online Dictionary were arranged from the core meaning, to other extended meanings on the basis of cognitive linguistic theories. Five reading passages were developed for each polyseme. The experimental group was taught the polysemes through the paragraphs and the control group learned the same polysemes as word lists with example sentences. Both groups faced a post-test of 40 marks. The conclusions derived from the test results were: the core meaning and the extended meanings of a polyseme can be as a network and when the ESL learners are taught the multiple meanings of a polyseme, the teacher should show the relations between different meanings of the same polyseme in various contexts. In addition, the ESL learners show some difficulty when they have to identify a polyseme that has an extended meaning which has less similarity with the core meaning and ESL learners can identify an extended meaning of a polyseme if there is enough contextual information given, but they show difficulty when they are given a polyseme to identify in an unusual context. Thus, the study conducted arrives to the conclusion that using semantic networks is productive in teaching multiple meanings of English polysemes to ESL learners.

Keywords: Cognitive Linguistics, ESL, Experimental study, Polysemy, Vocabulary Teaching