Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Motivation

In Taiwan, many EFL students are taught to learn English vocabulary by means of memorizing its Mandarin equivalent. Though this seems to be the fastest way to cope with quizzes in school, these students tend to find themselves confused and have difficulty using the proper vocabulary at the right time when coming across new contexts.

However, due to the fact that most school teachers are under pressure of sustaining students’ academic performances in tests, when students encounter a new usage of vocabulary, teachers, before thinking of better ways to explain, are inclined to ask them to tentatively keep that in mind. Few teachers strive to find a new way in helping students understand that usage. Both teachers and students are caught in a plight where rote memorization never seems to end.

In fact, the improper use of vocabulary often brings about confusion or even misunderstanding, and this can be attributed largely to the fact that Mandarin and English vocabulary are not in a one-to-one semantically-corresponding relationship. That is, there is often more than one English equivalent for one single Mandarin word,
and vice versa. Under such condition, it is not difficult to understand the reason why EFL students, more often than not, have difficulties choosing proper English equivalents in different contexts, let alone the defective teaching approaches their teacher has been adopting to teach them.

Besides, the arrangement of junior high school English curriculum has also been an issue to be discussed. It is the improper arrangement of courses that makes it even more difficult for students to learn vocabulary accurately. In fact, just like the way we acquire our mother tongue, prototypical word meanings of a foreign language should always be learned first; only when learners have been acquainted with the core meaning of a word can they prepare themselves for the extended ones. However, the English education in Taiwan does not seem to follow this principle.

Take the word “see” for example. According to Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner’s English Dictionary, its first definition, which was generally regarded as the core meaning of a word, says “When you see something, you notice it using your eyes.” Based on the definition, three of the most adopted versions of textbooks in junior high schools of Taiwan were collected and analyzed. On the table below, what is listed on the second column shows the volumes and the lessons in these textbooks where a prototypical use of “see” appears for the first time. On the third column of the table, it shows other usages of “see” that have already been taught to the students
before the prototypical one was instructed.

Table 1.1: The course design of “see” in Taiwanese English textbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The first time when prototypical use of <em>see</em> appears, and where it is</th>
<th>Extended usages of <em>see</em> which have been taught before the prototypical use of it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Joy &amp; HAN LIN</td>
<td><strong>Book 3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Book 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Version (佳音翰林版)</td>
<td>Unit 1 (Dialogue)</td>
<td>Unit 1 (Reading: A letter.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tina: Well, did you see any beautiful seashells on the beach?</td>
<td>See you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jack: Yes, I saw some, but I don’t like seashells.</td>
<td>Unit 5 (Theme Words)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>see a movie (with a picture printed above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unit 6 (Dialogue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oh, I see.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Book 2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unit 4 (Dialogue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>OK. See you this Saturday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unit 6 (Dialogue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Amy: Sam! What do we need for the picnic?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sam: Let’s see. We need paper plates and paper cups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Kang Hsuan Version (康軒版)</td>
<td><strong>Book 3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Book 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Lesson 1** (Dialogue) | We **saw** many things in the National Palace Museum. | **Lesson 9**  
(Dialogue 1) |
| **Lesson 2** (Dialogue) | Susan: Hi, Peter! I’m Susan, Sam’s sister. Do you remember me?  
Peter: Of course, I do. Nice to **see** you again, Susan.  
Susan: Nice to **see** you, too. | Peter: What’s his telephone number?  
Linda: **Let’s see**. It’s 2918-9393.  
(Dialogue 2)  
Linda: Let me **see**. Let’s try his cell phone. 0-9-1-0-3-4-8-5-6-7.  
**Lesson 8** (Dialogue)  
Mrs. Brown: What? 50 dollars a bottle?  
Clerk: Yes, it is.  
Mrs. Brown: **Oh, I see**. You mean 50 New Taiwan dollars (NT$50), not 50 American dollars (US$50). |
As we can see on the table above, in all the three versions of textbooks, the extended meanings of the verb *see* are instructed much earlier than the core meaning of it. After having been instructed in the extended uses, such as *see a movie*, students tend to feel confused in later stages when they are taught the core meaning of the word. In fact, the core meaning of a word should be taught in the first place considering its significance in meaning. However, the course design nowadays does not seem to follow this principle, and its improper arrangement has become another obstacle to students’ English learning.
All the above facts show us a need to find a way in changing the intractable situation. In this study, the researcher will investigate these issues and present practical methods in coping with the concerned problems. The researcher will also give illustrations and suggestions to the teachers whose students have difficulties using vocabulary.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

Among the most problematic issues about learning English, the different usages of “see”, “watch” and “look at” have long been perplexing for Taiwanese EFL students, especially for junior high school students, who have just finished learning all the three verbs. Due to the fact that these verbs carry similar meanings and can all be literally translated into “kan (看)” in Mandarin, students are apt to feel unsure of their decisions when asked to tell them apart.

Nowadays, Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) has been a trend, and teaching English in a corpora-based approach is particularly prevalent in a way that corpora can provide users with authentic and plentiful examples, which is helpful for both teachers and learners. Due to the fact that most EFL learners in Taiwan have little access to the real use of English and that dictionaries can only provide a few examples, data-driven learning (DDL) which is based on carefully selected corpora examples
will be of great help to their English learning.

Since it has long been a problem for students to differentiate “see”, “watch” and “look at,” the researcher will then take them as examples to show a DDL based instruction in this study. For the benefit of instruction, “look at” instead of “look” will be investigated because there are too many phrases beginning with “look,” and we will only focus on “look at”, the meaning of which is similar to the ones of “see” and “watch.”

Furthermore, to make suggestions as to how we can improve the arrangement of courses, illustrations will be shown to assist the textbook editors in deciding which part to be taught in the first place. As we have mentioned earlier, the core meaning of each verb should be taught first. It would be inefficient if the teacher began with the extended usages and put off teaching the idiomatic ones; in that case, students might easily get confused. Thus, in this study, we will focus mainly on the prototypical use of each verb because only when learners understand the most fixed usage of each verb will they be competent enough to learn other extended usages of it.

Corpora will be the major tools used to help figure out the distribution of “see”, “watch” and “look at.” COBUILD ON CD-ROM and COBUILD ENGLISH COLLOCATIONS will be the corpora to be adopted, through which examples and word usages can be acquired. Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner’s English
Dictionary and many other dictionaries will also be of assistance in the course.

Common features in the use of each verb will be carefully analyzed and presented. Comparison among the three verbs will finally be clearly made. It is hoped that with the assistance of these materials, EFL teachers will then be able to provide their students with not only more reliable information, but more constructive and systematic instruction.

1.3 Organization

The thesis is organized as follows: Chapter 1 is the introduction of the study. The motivation, purpose and organization of the study will be depicted. Chapter 2 is the literature review of previous studies.

Methodology will be presented in Chapter 3, where the subjects, tools of the study, and the detailed procedures will be listed as explicitly as possible. The way to decide the priority of teaching materials, the suggestions as to how the activity can be conducted appropriately, and the means through which students will be encouraged to participate in the class discussion, will all be described here. This chapter can be viewed either as an illustration of using corpora to distinguish words which are similar in meaning, or as a detailed demonstration of DDL based instruction. For those who have interests in the practice of data-driven learning, this chapter should be
one of your foci.

Chapter 4 is the “analyses and discussion.” More detailed analyses of the features which distributed systematically in the concordance lines will be done, and the purposes of asking students to observe certain parts of the concordance lines will also be depicted. The three verbs will not only be analyzed respectively but also be discussed as a whole; after all, to differentiate these verbs is one of our ultimate goals in this study.

In Chapter 5, conclusions of this study will be given. Besides, pedagogical implications of this study, namely, the tips and suggestions for Taiwanese EFL teaching, will be depicted here. In addition, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research will also be listed.