Chapter 2

Literature Review

In a corpora-based approach, this study aims to demonstrate a teaching procedure to assist students in differentiating three verbs: “see”, “watch” and “look at.”

Taiwanese EFL students are always searching for good ways of learning English, and to learn vocabulary efficiently is obviously one of their foci.

In this study, “see”, “watch” and “look at” were chosen to be analyzed because to learn the proper use of them has long been one of the most perplexing problems for students. In this chapter, we are going to review some previous literatures concerned of the classification of the three verbs, the corpora and language teaching, and the collocation. Not only will we discuss some perspectives from which these verbs were classified, but we will also look at the way corpora were adopted to provide students with an interesting learning method. Besides, we will also review some literatures about collocation, which plays an important role in the activity of this study.

2.1 Lexical Meaning

There have been many researchers who devoted themselves to the classification of verbs, and their classification is indeed valuable in helping us investigate the
properties of verbs. What is listed below are some literatures which are concerned of this study.

2.1.1 Situation Types

Saeed (1997) categorizes verbs according to their different situation types. In his work, Saeed defines situation type as “a label for the typology of situations encoded in the semantics of a language.”

In Saeed’s classification, there are sentences which describe static situations, where the speaker views the situation as a steady state. For example, in *I saw Mary yesterday*, the speaker doesn’t mean to focus on the beginning or the end of the situation because he regards it as a steady state, and, therefore, there are no internal phrases or changes in this situation. In English, “see” is called a stative verb, where progressive forms cannot be used due to the fact that “progressive aspect has connotations of “dynamism” and “change’” (Vlach, 1981).

In Saeed’s classification, “watch” and “look” are dynamic verbs in contrast with the stative verbs, such as *see*. In a dynamic situation where these *dynamic verbs* appear, e.g. “Peter is watching a TV program.”, the speaker describes a process. The end point was emphasized and the process has a conclusion.

Saeed’s classification has been a good start for our categorization of the three
verbs; thanks to him, we already have some basic semantic knowledge about the verbs we are going to investigate.

2.1.2 Classification of English Verbs

In her work *English Verb Classes and Alternations: A Preliminary Investigation*, Levin (1993) presents a list of verb classes. According to Levin, “various syntactically relevant, semantically coherent verb classes of English” are contained in this book, where she asserts that “see”, “watch” and “look” are all in the class of “verbs of perception.” In her classification, “see” is in the subclass of “see verbs”, which describe the actual perception of some entity; “watch” is in the subclass of “sight verbs”, which are set apart from the see verbs because they “take a more limited range of complement types”; “look” is in the subclass of “peer verbs”, which, according to Levin, “not necessarily describe the apprehension of something via a sense: one can look at something without seeing it.”

While Levin categorizes these verbs in her own way, these definitions are sometimes too abstract and complicated for junior high school learners. It is also difficult for teachers to explain Levin’s classification of English verbs to the basic learners who have little knowledge about these verbs, let alone the incomprehensible descriptions which are sure to become another burden to them. However, both Saeed
and Levin have indeed provided us with important information about the verbs, and
Levin’s definition of “peer verbs” has to some degree conformed to our later finding
that “line of sight” is what really matters when we “look at” something. What we
really need is a good teaching method which can present the information in a manner
that is comprehensible to the students.

2.2 Corpora and Language Teaching

The term “data-driven learning (DDL)” is defined by Johns and King (1991) as
“the use in the classroom of computer-generated concordances to get students to
explore regularities of patterning in the target language and the development of
activities and exercises.” Tim Johns (1991) begins the use of corpora in language
teaching. He points out that “research is too important to be left to the researchers.” In
DDL, Johns (1997) describes the students as “language detectives,” who discover the
facts by themselves from authentic examples.

Willis and Willis (1996) claim that DDL is a “consciousness-raising approach,”
which is “designed to draw learners’ attention to some of the language features in the
text.” For example, during the observation tasks, some fixed collocations which are in
danger of being missed by a reader can thus be noticed. Willis (1996: 53) defines the
task as “a goal-oriented activity in which learners use language to achieve a real
outcome”, and she proposes a framework which is composed of three stages:

*Pre-task:* Introduction to the topic and task

*Task cycle:* Task → Planning → Report

*Language Focus:* Analysis and practice

Among them, consciousness-raising activities should be used in the Language Focus stage (Willis and Willis, 1996).

Concordance lines bring together many instances and provide users with opportunities to observe regularities which are often unobserved when they were met in normal contexts (Hunston, 2002). Based on its advantages, Hunston (2002) also proposes that “DDL is hypothesized to improve general skills of using context to deduce meaning.” It is different from other teaching methods in a way that, instead of “teaching” language features, it “presents learners with evidence, giving them opportunities to make hypothesis and make conclusions.” Through the consciousness-raising tasks, students will then be able to see language in a different perspective.

Meunier (2002) also points out that the use of “class concordancing” is “the greatest methodological influence that corpus linguistics has had on teaching.” It encourages a more inductive approach to learning. As she claims, DDL activities have two characteristics. First, they mainly address the fields of lexis and lexico-grammar;
the second characteristic of DDL activities is the almost exclusive use of native speaker data. She also points out the drawbacks of DDL activities: they are time-consuming and require lots of preparation on the part of the teacher, who has to predefined the forms to meet the need of his teaching and provide students with interesting materials. Lastly, she gives advice on the teaching methodology, stating that corpus activities should be used to complement other teaching methods, not to replace them completely.

After experiencing classroom activities based on inductive learning, in 2000, Bernardini asserts that though students are attracted by the discovery and problem-solving activities, they are likely to lack confidence or feel frustrated. According to her experience, these activities are usually more successful with more advanced students who already possess some linguistic knowledge. Besides, technical problems are also handicaps to the activity, causing unexpected trouble to the class.

As far as teaching materials are concerned, Hunston (2002) states that while advanced learners can be encouraged to use a raw (unedited) corpus and make observations on their own, the materials given to students who are not advanced enough should be designed in advance. The teacher should select concordance lines based on the purpose of the course, and make some questions which will assist students in noticing the relevant information in the lines. Besides, lines with
exceptionally difficult vocabulary can be left out, and lines with unnecessary usages can be edited. According to Johns (1997), such tasks are “closed” in the sense that “the result is known to the teacher in advance.” Besides, he also states that selection and editing of concordance data is time-consuming; it requires fine linguistic and pedagogic judgment, without which, the patterning of an item in the corpus can not be truthfully reflected.

For Taiwanese EFL students, the access to the real use of English is often insufficient, which in turn becomes another obstacle to their progress in English learning. Unfortunately, most teachers in Taiwan have not been aware of the possibility of adopting DDL in their classroom.

2.3 Collocation

In this study, collocation plays an important role because in many of the concordance lines, students need to connect the verb with the objects behind it and discuss the reason why they can be put together. Through the discussion, students gradually figure out usages of the verb.

According to Benson et al (1986), collocation is the habitual co-occurrence of two or more words. It is categorized into lexical collocation and grammatical collocation. The former consists of combinations of nouns, verbs, adjectives and
adverbs, such as make sense and fall asleep. The latter consists of nouns, verbs or adjectives plus a preposition or a grammatical structure; examples are full of and free from. In the concordance lines of this study, lexical collocations are the ones which are going to be discussed.

In Shih’s study (2000), she points out that many language learners only take semantic compatibility into consideration when they combine words. She claims that learners often have difficulty telling the different collocation behavior of synonymous words because they lack the collocation awareness.

Besides, Farghal and Obiedat (1995) also points out that the learning of collocations has long been neglected. Pedagogically, grammar has been the main focus, which to some degree explains the reason why collocation teaching is not emphasized.

In this study, through the observation tasks, it is hoped that students will not only acquaint themselves with the verb use, but build up more awareness about word connections.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, the three verbs are categorized from different perspectives. Firstly, Saeed classifies the verbs based on their situation types. In his classification, “see” is
a stative verb; “watch” and “look” are dynamic verbs. What follows is the classification of Levin, who categorizes “see”, “watch” and “look at” as belonging to the subclass of see verb, sight verb and peer verb respectively; all of the subclasses are under the class of “verbs of perception.” Both Saeed and Levin have provided us with important information about the verbs, which indeed helps us differentiate the verbs efficiently.

Then corpora and their assistance in the field of language teaching are reviewed. Tim Johns begins the use of corpora in language teaching. Nowadays, more and more researchers, such as Willis and Willis, Bernardini, and Hunston, have devoted themselves to the research of corpora-based teaching method. However, it still takes some time for most Taiwanese EFL teachers to believe in the effectiveness of DDL and adopt it in class.

Finally, literatures about collocation are also reviewed. EFL students tend to lack the collocation awareness; however, it is needed in the observation tasks of DDL. It is hoped that, after the consciousness-raising tasks, students may also know more about the way words connect.