

BOOK REVIEWS

Michael Hoey, *Lexical Priming: a new theory of words and language*. Stroud, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2005. Pp. Xiii + 202. ISBN 0-415-32863-2.

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Hoey's book '*Lexical Priming: a new theory of words and language*' discusses a new view of language, explaining the existence of combinations of words. Through the lenses of native speakers, this view of language assumes that language users store the words they know in the context in which they have heard or read before, be it spoken or written. Then, they will build up a collection of these words and/or phrases in contexts. Subconsciously, the process of noticing that these contexts have some grammatical pattern to them becomes to occur.

The book is divided into ten chapters of varying length. In the first chapter, Hoey (2005) starts describing a brief notion of lexical priming by arguing traditional methods of vocabulary acquisition and giving a definition of lexical priming. In Chapter 1, drawing data and evidences from language corpora, Hoey suggests that we acquire vocabulary not only from explicit learning, but mostly from contexts including linguistic and contextual information, social interaction, etc. in which we repeatedly encounter. Lexical priming is what we are primed (readied by our prior experience of words) to expect words to be in the units of other words (their collocations) and also expect words to appear in certain grammatical situation (grammatical colligations) and in certain position in text and discourse (their textual colligations). From this definition, it is implied that lexical priming is words that are primed to appear at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of an utterance. In other words, every time we encounter a word or phrase, we store it along with all the words that accompanied it and with a note of the kind of context it was found in. To prove his claim, concordancing can be successfully used to prove the position of lexis because collocation is seen to be closely related to the psychological phenomenon of priming that arises from a language user's repeated encounters. A concept of productive priming (related to how we create our language use) and receptive priming (words that we expect from speakers) are also introduced.

Subsequently, in Chapter Two, Hoey suggests that, because of some aspects of linguistic creativity in a language, semantic association as a word or word sequence associated in the mind of a language user with a semantic set or class is claimed to contribute to word priming. In order to support this claim on the effects of priming on semantic association, Hoey uses statistical evidence of

priming of some words taken from a corpus of 'The Guardian'. In this regard, this chapter is presented as a showcase, taking the word *consequence* (result) to illustrate the semantic set of collocates that are associated with the word. From a comprehensive corpus analysis, as considered from pragmatic perspective, four major types of association regarding the word *consequence* are offered, which include: 1) logical association (e.g., *logical, ineluctable, direct*), 2) negative evaluation (e.g., *awful, fire, appalling*), 3) seriousness of the consequence (e.g., *important, serious, significant*), and 4) unexpectedness of the consequence (e.g., *unforeseen, curious, surprising*).

Chapter Three is mostly devoted to priming and colligation (grammar and its position). Hoey uses the word *in winter* and *in the winter* as an example so as to the relationship of lexical priming and grammar. As supported by the corpus, *in winter* tends to go with the use of present tense, while past tense with *in the winter*. Then, Hoey takes that word *consequence* as an example to reveal that the word *consequence* has a tendency to occur as head of a nominal group but rarely found as pre- or post-modification. In order to prove his hypothesis about priming of synonyms, similarities, and differences of priming positions, Hoey further takes the word *reason*, as a synonym of *consequence*, into his investigation. A phenomenon of colligation nesting of the word *reason* is very intriguing in two ways. That is, it was found that the nesting of *reason* + clause without connector is primed for the pragmatic association of affirmative purposes, whilst the nesting of *reason* + why clause primes for denial. A definition of colligation (the grammatical company a word or word sequence keeps (or avoid keeping) within its own group or at higher rank) is also offered.

Concerning the priming and lexical relation including co-hyponymy, synonymy, and synonymous, Chapter Four, as demonstrated by a corpus, presents the relationship of words and their collocations, colligations, and semantic associations regarding shared priming, especially in a single letter morpheme (e.g., *round the world, around the world, all around the world, halfway a/round the world, etc.*). This finding suggests that priming tends to vary from word to word because priming is the word form and patterns of an individual word, rather than the meaning. In this regard, Hoey emphasizes that 'synonyms differ in respect of the way they are primed for collocations, colligations, semantic associations and pragmatic associations, and the differences in these primings represent differences in the uses to which we put our synonyms' (2005: 79).

As far as polysemy and the priming are concerned, Chapter Five presents three hypotheses on polysemy and patterns of lexical priming. The first hypothesis addressed by Hoey is that a polysemous word has a *common sense* and a *rare sense*. At this juncture, the rare sense tends to be primed to avoid the collocation, colligations, and semantic associations, compared to the common sense which is primed to favour certain collocations, semantic associations, and colligations. This leads to the second hypothesis that Hoey mentions is that the patterns of a polysemous word relatively overlap. The third hypothesis is that the effect of humour or ambiguity is intentionally created when the first two hypotheses are

violated. As claimed by the findings of a corpus presented in the book, the results from the word *consequence* (result vs. importance), *reason* (cause vs. rationality) seem to support Hoey's hypotheses. However, ambiguity sometimes emerges due to the relationship between a local priming and a textual pattern in an interpretation of lexical priming.

Since textual patterns and local priming play a key role in successfully determining lexical priming in general, and for polysemous words in particular, in Chapter Six, Hoey takes a close look at lexical priming by going beyond looking at lexical levels. Taken cohesive chains and combination of lexical items into account, Hoey then makes a conclusion that some words tend to collocate in a larger textual environment including textual collocation, textual semantic association, and textual colligation, compared to its nesting and cohesive chains shown by concordancing analysis. Thus, this phenomenon describes that textual cohesion is crucial in determining lexical priming, collocation, colligations, and their positions that might appear in texts.

With regard to the importance of discourse, Hoey's third claim about lexical priming and text is presented in Chapter Seven. Hoey says that "every lexical item is capable of being primed positively or negatively to occur at the beginning or end of an indecently recognized 'chunk' of text" (2005: 129). Using paragraphs into his investigation, Hoey demonstrates that the preference of a particular lexical item to either positive or negative priming is related to the item's semantic relation at discourse level (the organization of the passage). As suggested by his corpus, Hoey remarks that writing effectively involves using appropriate text and paragraph beginnings, and one can learn from priming of cohesion of paragraphs.

Lexical priming and grammatical creativity are the topic of Chapter Eight. With relevance to language acquisition, Hoey echoes that in order to acquire, memorize, and use a word of language users, sounds of a word will be primed at the beginning stage, and then produce morphological and syllabic combinations and systematically move from priming the syllable to the word, to the lexical item, to grammatical priming, and ultimately to the larger unit or discourse, respectively. As clearly seen in Chapter Seven, Hoey suggests that lexis and text are organized rather than structured, and that phonology, syntax and interaction are structural systems needed to act as interfaces between phonic substance and lexis, between lexis and text, and between text and the extra-textual context. In this respect, a language model of the interlocking of linguistic levels consisting of three linguistic levels: phonic substance, lexical priming, and discourse needs in the extra-textual features is offered. Hoey's model suggests that morphology serves as an interface between phonic substance and lexical priming, while text serves to connect lexical priming and discourse need in extra-textual context. The combination of phonological structure, grammatical structure, and discourse structure contributes to means, which Hoey claims that it is a natural process when language users produce utterances.

Hoey further explains lexical priming and other kinds of linguistic

creativity in Chapter Nine. He explains priming usually found in humour, magazines, literary creativity, and ambiguity. These activities, thus, are claimed to be an account of deliberate deviations from dominant priming of a lexical item. The last chapter of this book ends with some implications of Hoey's lexical priming theory, mainly focusing on teaching and learning a second language. To offer pedagogical implications which lexical priming is exercised, Hoey suggests that teachers should use authentic data where possible; for example, what is shown and realized in a corpus can be used to state the existence of lexical priming, and thus lead to new ones to learners. The learners, in turn, should realize that priming come into existence in learning a language, and it is from a single focused and generalizing encounter. Therefore, learners should be exposed to priming as often as possible in order to promote learners' mental concordance. At this juncture, Hoey makes an exclusive conclusion that deciding what a good corpus is never an easy task. Also, the study of lexical priming remains inconclusive, awaiting further areas to explore such as early stages of a child's acquisition of language, intonation, colligations, and understanding of language change.

As suggested by the book title: *Lexical Priming: a new theory of words and language*, what is new in this book is the comprehensive description of new theory of word acquisition and language use. The book offers a window onto an area of language acquisition often unfamiliar to applied linguists, especially those whose English is not their mother tongue. Based on the data taken from a corpus, Hoey tries to present and convince us that learning a word is from encountering words and phrases, and thus these words are primed in main and brain of language users. In the perspectives of second language acquisition, this claim can be applied to the explanation of how language users acquire new words and use them effectively in the right context, time and in real situations. Psychologically, however, it seems that priming is not determined by specific rules. Since intuition is substantially needed in determining priming, we might have different interpretation from the data because lexical priming is closely associated with semantic association at the lexical level and pragmatic association at the discourse level. Intuition may sometimes be distorted by the needs of the researcher or by the education of the informant (Labov 1975). Moreover, the notion of priming primarily depends on language users' experience and how much linguistic and situation contexts they encounter. Therefore, identifying priming can be different from one and another. In short, it can be said that the relationship between intuition and priming is a complex one. Taken this into consideration, the accurate interpretation from native speakers is substantially needed in order to determine lexical priming, and thus can be applied to learning a second language effectively.

Bearing the term 'native' and 'non-native' speakers in mind, it is apparent that native speakers have acquired a large corpus of language examples of the English words in their typical contexts and learning environment. Hence, they learn how the words are actually used. In sharp contrast, non-native speakers have been typically exposed to a narrow range of language and even the more common words in actual use and have therefore had less opportunity to acquire the words typically

occur. It seems, therefore, unavoidable that this influential factor initially affects the way we are primed in English.

Indeed, this book of lexical priming offers a nuanced and insightful description regarding the importance of lexis in language use from psychological and linguistic perspectives. Its value for teachers and researchers in the field of applied linguistics and second language acquisition is immeasurable as lexical priming is one of the most elucidating accounts of producing language by putting words which work together in predictable combination. The book affords an excellent window into the challenges and complexities of language acquisition.

References

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