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Core and Networking in L2 Lexical Teaching in an Input-Poor Context

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Abstract

This paper discusses problems in developing L2 lexical competence in an input-poor environment, and suggests what we can do so as to minimize the negative effects of those problems on L2 lexical learning. As an unavoidable problem, we discussed a learner strategy unequivocally used by Japanese students when learning the meaning of a new word. To enhance L2 lexical learning, we suggested that lexical core, combined with the notion of network building, has a lot of pedagogical potential. With two cases (the preposition *on*, and the basic verbs of communication), we demonstrated how the core schema of a lexical item(s) becomes a common thread that weaves both intra-lexical and inter-lexical networks.

Keywords

1. Introduction

CLT or communicative language teaching, which highlights the engagement of L2 learners in communication, has been practiced worldwide (Littlewood, 1981; Savignon, 2000). It makes use of real-life situations that naturally necessitate communication; it lets learners engage in communication by instructing them to do so-called "task-based activities" and "content-based activities" (Richards, 2001; Ellis, 2003; Brown, 2007; Brandl, 2008). While CLT leaves room for a variety of methods and techniques (Richards & Rodgers, 2001), the activities are characteristically interactive and heuristic, and contextually authentic, because the proponents of CLT assume that an individual learns a language interactively in communication and it is important to provide students with opportunities to use the target language for communicative purposes.

The acquisition of task handling competence is the major objective of learning and teaching a second language. However, in L2 learning, task handling is one side of the coin, of which the other side is language resources. Without the L2 language resources (words, grammar, and formulas), there is no way of performing tasks verbally in the language. Focus on language resources turns our attention to formal instruction. In input-poor contexts, second language learning does not take place naturally. The learner needs to be taught in order to enrich their language resources. Formal teaching implies explicit instruction.

Some argue that explicit instruction indeed enhances L2 acquisition (Alanen, 1995; Carroll & Swain, 1993; DeKeyser, 2003; Ellis, 1993; Norris & Ortega, 2000; Robinson, 1997), while others question the benefit of it as a contributor to the acquisition of an L2 (Rosa & O'Neill, 1999; Sanz & Morgan-Short, 2004). The effect of explicit instruction hinges on how instruction is given to students. Some explicit instruction will give positive effects on L2 acquisition, and others will not.

In this paper, we take it that good explicit instruction enhances "awareness-raising" (Sharwood-Smith, 1981) and "network-building" (Crossley, Salsbury, & McNamara, 2010) on the part of language learners. Awareness-raising leads to better understanding, and network-building connects the scattered dots in a meaningful way. And in this paper, we claim that "lexical core" (or the core meaning of a word) is "a key" to both awareness-raining and network-building. Lexical core leads students to raise their awareness about the meaning of a word and to guide them in the task of network building. In this paper, we discuss why we need lexical core, and how lexical core works in lexical networking.

2. The Problem in L2 Lexical Development

Here we discuss major problems in the area of L2 lexical development in an input-poor environment. The following discussion assumes Japanese students learning English basic words in classroom situations.

In learning L2 lexicon, adult learners after the puberty period have a strong tendency to search the L2 translation equivalent for a target L2 word. Tanaka & Abe (1985) called this strategy "the search translation equivalent (or STE) strategy". Given a new word in context, the teacher typically explains its meaning in L1 (i.e., Japanese). The teacher may ask students the meaning of the word, and be satisfied if the answer is given in Japanese. With the word *governance* and *compliance*, for example, the teacher explains their meanings by referring to their Japanese equivalents. In a vocabulary test, students are asked to say the meaning of *governance* or *compliance*, and expected to give their Japanese equivalents (i.e., *touchi* for *governance*, and *houreijunshu* for *compliance*). This type of instruction is called "translation-based instruction (TBI)", which motivates and reinforces the learner's use of the STE strategy.

The STE strategy may work well in the area of topic-based vocabulary development (e.g., business-related vocabulary). However, it has intrinsic problems in dealing with polysemous words, or words with multiple dictionary meanings. Given the basic verb *take*, for example, the teacher presents his or her students an exemplar like "John took first prize in the contest", and explains: the word *take* in this case means *toru* in Japanese. Some teachers let students infer the meaning of *take* contextually, but in this case, the students use the STE strategy, and formulate the "*take = toru*" hypothesis. The story of *take* does not end here, because it has greater meaning potential. When a student encounters another exemplar like "Let me take your temperature", he or she realizes that his or her initial hypothesis does not work here, and instead, the student adds another translation equivalent *hakaru* to his or her hypothesis. The student will encounter a number of exemplars using *take*, and every time he or she experiences an exemplar which cannot be assimilated into his or her pre-existing hypothesis, the student adds another L1 equivalents to his or her list.

The STE strategy is a transfer-based learning strategy, which requires the student to make a great deal of interlingual adjustment or "relexification" (Sprouse, 2010), in which the concepts of Japanese lexical items are replaced by the words of English. However, this strategy has intrinsic problems which challenge relexification.

First, we have a problem of "semantic discontinuity". In English exemplars, *take* remains *take* irrespective of contextual differences; the same *take* is used across different exemplars. By contrast, the Japanese equivalents describing the meanings of *take* are all different words, which are semantically totally unrelated. In the process of learning the meaning potential of *take* using the STE strategy, the learner has a strong impression that the meanings of *take* are diverse and complicated. As the degree of diversity and complexity increases, learning burden increases. Polysemy refers to the case of a word having "multiple related meanings". Semantic discontinuity breaks the semantic relatedness of those meanings, and ends up treating the meanings as if they were dis-

tinct and unrelated.

There is another problem, which is called the problem of "semantic circularity". This problem is formulated as follows: No matter how many L1 equivalents the student adds to her or her list, the student always comes back to the original question of "what is the meaning of *take*?" Even if the student memorizes a complete list of dictionary meanings, the list does not successfully capture the meaning of the word, because Japanese *toru*, for example, corresponds not only to *take*, but also to other verbs such as *catch, hire, pick* and *pass*, as in the following expressions: "kawa-de sakana-o totta" ("I caught some fish in the river"), "kaisha-wa 3 nin no shainwo-totta" ("The company hired three persons"), "ote-nitottemitekudasai" ("Pick it up and take a look at it") and "shio-o tottekudasai" ("Could you pass the salt?"). The same goes for other L1 equivalents for English *take*. If English *take* corresponds to *n* L1 equivalents, then each L1 equivalent corresponds to *n* English verbs, and this process continues endlessly, thus resulting in sematic circularity.

2.1. A Solution: Lexical Core

Assuming that the learner's use of the STE strategy is inevitable because learning always depends on the pre-existing knowledge, we propose that focusing on "lexical core" minimizes the problems of semantic discontinuity and circularity.

Let us suppose that the teacher wants to teach the meaning of *take* to Japanese students. The question here is: Does a basic verb have multiple meanings as shown in a dictionary? The teacher may assume that a verb like *take* is highly polysemous, having a number of multiple meanings associated with it. This view is widely accepted, and if such is the case, then there is no way of avoiding the problems of semantic discontinuity and circularity in learning L2 vocabulary. If the verb *take* has 20 meanings, the teacher is most likely to present only some of them (a sample) in context. For example, the student will encounter the use of *take* in a sentence like "Let me take your temperature" or "Let's take a picture of this statue." The student will add "take one's temperature" and "take a picture" to his list of collocations using *take*. However, at the same time, the student understands the meanings of the collocations on the basis of their Japanese equivalents: for example, "take one's temperature" and "take a picture" will be understood as meaning "taion o hakaru" and "shashin o toru", respectively. Here, Japanese *hakaru* and *toru* are totally different verbs, and the student naturally suffers the problem of semantic discontinuity. Yet the question is: Is it true that the verb *take* has a number of distinct meanings? In this regard, Vygotsky (1962) noted:

> "A word acquires its sense from the context in which it appears; in different contexts, it changes its sense. Meaning remains stable throughout the changes of sense." (p. 146)

In a similar vein, Bolinger (1977) explains:

> "Now we find a single overarching meaning which performance variables imbue with local tinges that pass for distinct senses. The deception is like what happens when we meet an acquaintance in an unexpected setting: we may not recognize him." (p. 19)

More specifically, Miller (1978) distinguishes a core concept from contextual meanings as follows:

> "…Given an occurrence of *line*, the problem is not to choose among fifty or more pre-stored concepts or rules but to sharpen a core concept in a manner appropriate to the discourse and the sentence in which the word occurs. In other words, perhaps *line* looks so polysemous because lexicographers have dragged in a lot of contextual information that is really not part of its meaning." (p. 102)

Agreeing with Miller, Ruhl (1989) advanced "the monosemic hypothesis" when he says: common verbs such as *take*, *give*, *come*, *go*, *see*, *break*, and *hit* are indeed monosemic and judged polysemous by dictionaries and linguists because their essential general meanings are confused with contextual, inferential meanings.

We argue that the idea expressed here, or what we call "the lexical core hypothesis", is valid when it applies to verbal and prepositional polysemy, in that the meaning of a verb or a preposition is a function of the values of the arguments it takes. A preposition typically functions to relate two objects spatially. The phrase "an apple in the box" can be expressed as: IN (X, Y), where the value of X is "an apple", and the value of Y, "the box", and the two objects are spatially related with the preposition *in* [+within the bounds of space]. The phrase "an apple on the box", or ON (an apple, the box), expresses a different spatial relation between an apple and the box. A

verb like *take* functions to relate two things to describe an event: "John took a picture of Mr. Fuji" is analyzed as "TAKE [+past]" (John, a picture of Mt. Fuji). In other words, a verb (or a preposition) does not have a set of determinate meanings; rather, its core meaning is semantically indeterminate, and the semantic disambiguation of the verb in an expression depends on the context in which it appears.

Let us consider the sentence "John took some pills" to illustrate what it means by "semantic indeterminacy". Given the sentence "John took some pills", it is most likely that "took" here means "swallow". However, depending on the additional contextual information, the meaning of the verb differs as in:

John took some pills and got well. ["swallow"]

and put them on the table. ["seize"]

and got arrested. ["steal"]

to Mary. ["carry"]

This shows that the meaning of *take* is not fixed, rather, indeterminate and subject to contextual modulation. Lexical core takes the form of a schematic representation, and we call it "core schema" (Johnson, 1987). The lexical core of *take* can be schematically described as in **Figure 1**.

The core meaning of *take* can be described as "a movement of OBJECT into the HAVE space (prototypically by hand)," where the HAVE space refers to one's possessional space or territory. Thus, what is constant about the expression "John took some pills" is that John moved some pills into his HAVE space (by hand)," and the specific interpretation requires further contextual information. If the information "John had a headache" is given, then it is very likely that "John took some pills" means something like "John had [swallowed] some pills".

As shown in the core schema, there are three aspects one can highlight: (1) the source (S) where OBJECT is originally located, (2) the goal (G) where OBJECT is located as the result of taking, and the means (M) by which a movement of OBJECT takes place. The act of taking is usually achieved "by hand". The point here is that a list of dictionary meanings assigned to *take* can be classified into the three clusters, each representing S, M, or G. If the source aspect (S) is highlighted, then we interpret the meaning of *take* as similar to *extract, remove*, and *subtract*. Emphasis on the most important aspect, G, leads to the interpretation of take as similar to *inject, acquire*, *receive*, *accept*, and *understand*. The means perspective (M) can be highlighted to make take synonymous with *grab*, *seize*, and *grasp*.

A: Focus on the Source [S]

[+basic] Johnny took a plate from the table. → [+extended] He took 7 from 17.

B: Focus on Means [M]

[+basic] He took his pen and started writing. → [+extended] The police took the man in the act.

C: Focus on the Goal [G]

[+basic] I took the message from John. → [+extended] I can't take it anymore.

Thus, core schema is not simply a static picture, or a static representation of the lexical meaning of *take*; rather, within one's mind, it functions in a dynamic and flexible way, which, in turn, makes it possible for an individual to produce a variety of context-sensitive senses. To explain this dynamic nature, we refer to cognitive operations such as schema-highlighting and schema-projection. As explained above, schema-highlighting is an operation of focusing on one aspect of the core schema. For example, highlighting or focusing on the source [S] aspect of taking, we have a sentence like "John took a plate from the table". The same S-focused schema can be projected onto a more abstract situation to produce a sentence like "He took 7 from 17". This is a case of schema-
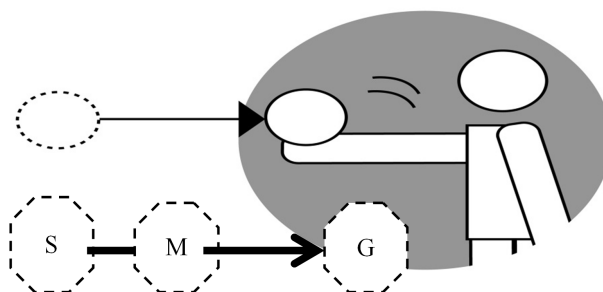

Figure 1. Schematic representation of *take*.

projection. Thus, the act of taking (removing) a plate from the table can be semantically connected with the act of taking (subtracting) 7 from 17.

2.2. A Solution: Lexical Networking

In our mind, a word or word concept does not stand alone in isolation of other words or other concepts, but rather it is linked semantically with others to produce a semantic network. Within the context of L2 acquisition, Crossley, Salsbury & McNamara (2010) point out that "connections between words allow newly acquired words to be easily assimilated within these networks because new words are not learned in isolation, but through links to already learned words" (p. 576).

Meara (2009) states that vocabulary is a network. Using association data obtained through a word association task, he analyzed how L2 learners' lexical knowledge is connected, and how it differs from the lexical networks of native speakers, using computer-based assessment tools. We can draw one conclusion from a series of studies done by and introduced in Meara (2009) that learning isolated words is one thing, and acquiring network knowledge is another (Read, 2004). As a pedagogical implication, the teacher should help students store newly learned lexical items in a lexical network of already existing words.

The question is what form a lexical network takes specifically. There are different organizing principles of lexical networking. Words can be related in many ways. Miller & Johnson-Laird (1976), however, note that "some efficient principles of organization exist in the lexicon in order to facilitate learning it" (p. 525). The associative principle assumes that a set of words are triggered and evoked upon hearing a given word (Meara, 2009). Those words are linked with the target word in some ways, thus forming an associative network. For example, the word *drum* triggers a number of words or concepts such as "instrument [superordinate concept]", "band [context]", "loud [attribute]", "trumpet [related concept]", "play the beat [action]", "Tom-Toms [part of the drum set]", and "Elvin Jones [famous drummer]", which will be clustered into an associative network. The thematic principle assumes that words are grouped by meaning referring to specific topics or fields such as cooking, stock market, nuclear energy, national election, desertification, globalization, and baseball.

We are interested in another dominant organizing principle, the conceptual principle, which assumes that words are categorized into semantic domains such as the domain of numbers and quantities, the domain of movement, the domain of utterance, and the domain of spatial relations (Miller & Johnson-Laird, 1976). For example, the verbal domain "movement" can be expressed by different verbs such as: *ascend*, *pivot*, *descend*, *depart*, *retreat*, *advance*, *progress*, *regress*, *flee*, *leave*, *sink*, *fall*, *revolve*, *rotate*, and *rise*. This is not a random list, but can form a conceptual network of movement as follows:

move + [direction]
      [+upward]: *ascend*, *rise*
      [+around]: *pivot*, *revolve*, *rotate*
      [+downward]: *descend*, *fall*, *sink*
      [+away]: *depart*, *leave*, *flee*
      [+forward]: *advance*, *progress*
      [+backward]: *retreat*, *regress*

The lexical network model applies not only inter-lexically, but intra-lexically as well (Lakoff, 1987; Norvig & Lakoff, 1987). In dealing with lexical polysemy, Lakoff (1987) represented the multiple senses of *over* in the form of intra-lexical network with the prototypical sense being the center of the network and other senses deriving from the prototype by means of cognitive operations such as metaphorical extension and profiling. As shown above, *take* is used in different situations, exhibiting different context-sensitive meanings. Those meanings are semantically related to each other and the lexical core of *take* explains how the different senses are related into a lexical network of word senses.

Intra-lexical networking requires a common thread, that is, lexical core, which links the different usages of a word. By contrast, inter-lexical networking requires semantic differentiation among the related words. To differentiate the meanings of semantically related words, however, we need the lexical core of each word. Lexical core has both the uniting power and the differentiating power.

3. Lexical Core as a Guiding Principle of Lexical Networking

In the following sections, we will look at how intra-lexical networking and inter-lexical networking are achieved

with the common thread of lexical core: the case of *on* for its intra-lexical networking, the case of *speak*, *talk*, *say*, and *tell* for their inter-lexical networking.

3.1. Intra-Lexical Network: The Preposition *on*

The preposition *on* has different dictionary meanings associated with different situations. With the core meaning of *on* (i.e., [+contact]) as the common thread, the teacher asks to explore the meaning world of *on*. To start with, the teacher may use prototypical exemplars to introduce the usage of *on*. The teacher asks students to imagine the situations described by the following sentences.

1) There is a cat on the sofa.
2) Look at the fly on the ceiling.
3) The picture on the wall was painted by a famous artist.

At this point, the teacher presents the core schema of *on* as below, and explains that the essential meaning of *on* is something to do with "contact" (see **Figure 2**).

With the semantic feature of "contact", the teacher continues presenting examples such as the following:

4) You have mud on your shoes.
5) I saw a shadow on the wall.
6) He has a bump on the head
7) Read the label on the bottle.

At this point, the teacher demonstrates that the "contact" sense of *on* can be not only "surface-contact" but also "point-contact," and gives the following examples to show the point-contact (see **Figure 3**).

8) There's a fish on the hook.
9) There are apples on the tree.
10) My dog is on the leash.

As the extended usage of *on*, the teacher may introduce the different uses of *on*, and encourages students to think how the concept of "contact" is related to these uses.

11) Stand on one foot.
12) Can you stand on your hands for 60 seconds?
13) I usually sleep on my stomach.

At this time, students will be able to see that the core schema of *on* can flexibly apply to a variety of situations. The teacher will give examples of *on*, which require metaphorical interpretations.

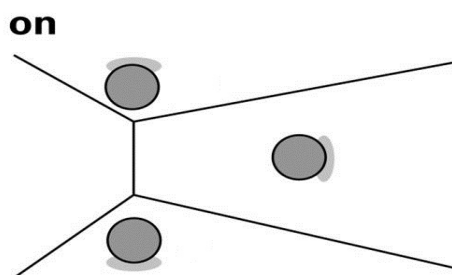14) Japanese live on rice.
15) Buy jackets on your credit card.

on

Figure 2. Schematic representation of the preposition *on.*
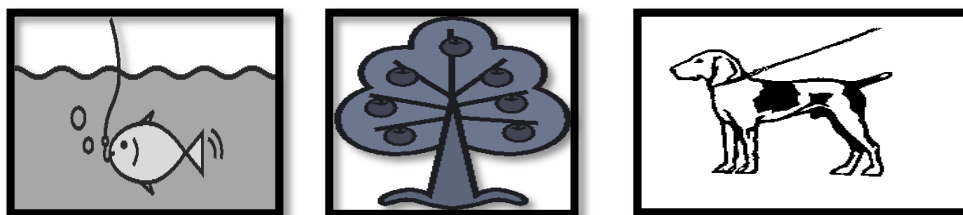

Figure 3. Exemplars of the usage of *on* [+point contact].

The "surface-contact" extends to the notion of "support". If A is on B, B supports A; if there is a book on the table, the table supports the book. Likewise, when we say, "Japanese live on rice", we imply that rice support the life of Japanese. In the same way, that your credit card supports your buying jackets is implied in "Buy jackets on your credit card." As a person is on the (moving) train, a person can be on schedule or on a diet.

The "point-contact" sense can be extended to the sense of "continuation," as in: "I'm on duty", "Be on guard", "Go on walking". The "point-contact" sense can be also extended to the sense of "fixation". For example, the song "Georgia on my mind" suggests that the protagonist always thinks of his hometown Georgia, which never leaves from his mind. Thus, "fixation" is implied here. We use the preposition *on* to describe a day in a calendar such as "on Monday", "on Independence Day, and "on my birthday". Here, *on* is used because the days of a week (e.g., Monday), national holidays (e.g., Independence Day), and one's birthday are fixed in a calendar.

If the preposition *on* implies "fixation", then we can account for the difference between "a book on Indian economy" and "a book about Indian economy". The expression "a book on Indian economy" suggests that the book is fixed on the topic, without shifting from it, while the expression "a book about India economy" permits some degree of freedom in a way that the book deals with the topic.

Thus, students will be able to build an intra-lexical network of *on* in the following form in **Figure 4**.

The core meaning of *on* is described as [+contact], which can be either [+surface contact] or [+point contact]. This is the case of spatial contact. Metaphorically, [+surface contact] can be extended into the concept of [+support], and [+point contact] into the concept of [+continuation]. The core meaning of *on* can apply temporally, suggesting the sense of [+fixation on a calendar].

The extended sense of "continuation" is useful even when explaining the difference between the two constructions below:

16) On arriving at Tokyo Station, I called John at his office.

17) As soon as I arrived at Tokyo Station, I called John at his office.

The "on" construction suggests that there was no break between the two actions (i.e., I arrived at Tokyo Station and I called John at his office). In other words, the two actions are on the continuum. On the other hand, the "as soon as" construction can be used even when there was a few minutes break between the two actions. An example like "On (the count) of one, two, three, they lifted the stone" can be explained in the same way. The notion of contact can transform into "continuation" if applied to a linear sense.

3.2. Inter-Lexical Network: Speak, Talk, Say & Tell

Japanese learners often get confused in their selection of a right word between *speak*, *talk*, *say*, and *tell* (Sato & Batty, 2012). A learner who is lexically competent and functional should be able to discriminate the semantic differences of these verbs. And the point to emphasize here is that lexical choice is not simply a matter of convention, but is semantically motivated. Thus, inter-lexical competence is learnable.

The verbs *speak* and *talk* are both translated into *hanasu* in Japanese, which is a cause of lexical confusion among Japanese students, and the teacher needs to explain the principle of lexical choice. The teacher may start with the following examples, and ask why a gorilla cannot speak, while a parrot can.

18) A gorilla can talk, though it doesn't speak.

19) A parrot can speak, and it may talk.

A gorilla can talk to people by using sign language, not by making vocal sounds. We call such a gorilla "a talking gorilla". If you are a user of a sign language, you can talk freely without speaking. A parrot—"a speaking parrot"—can somehow manage to imitate human sounds. For some who have a parrot in their rooms, they may feel that their parrot actually talks, responding to their questions. In that case, we will call it "a talking parrot." The lexical cores of *speak* and *talk* are schematically and verbally described as in **Figure 5**.
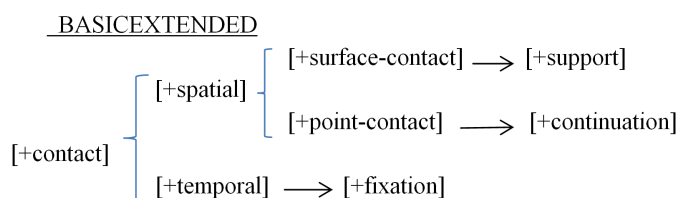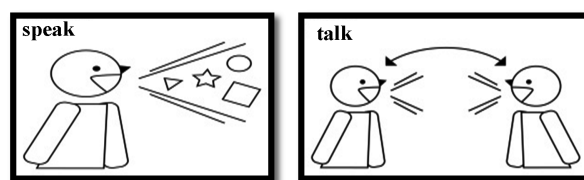
Figure 4. Intra-lexical network of the preposition *on*.

Speak: [+utterance of linguistic sound]   →Focus on "one direction"
Talk: [+verbal interaction] → Focus on "bi-direction"

Figure 5. Schematic representation of the verb *speak*.

The verb *speak* is used in the following examples.

20)He speaks both German and Russian.

21)Could you speak a little louder?

22)Mr. President spoke the White House press corps to the American people. He spoke forcefully and with surprising candor and empathy.

Sentence (20) is a prime example of *speak* [+utterance of linguistic sound]. If an illness prevents someone from making vocal intelligible sounds, we may say, for example, "He is unable to speak after a stroke". In (22), *speak* [+one direction] is used because when the president of the United States makes an announcement or a speech on TV, for example, he delivers a message in one direction without expecting immediate responses from the audience. The same goes for a person who makes a speech at a formal occasion.

The feature [+utterance of linguistic sound] highlights the manner of speaking. Thus, as in (21), one can ask the partner to adjust the way of speaking. Other examples include "speak at a higher volume" and "speak at a normal volume", Likewise, in (22), modifiers like "forcefully" and "with surprising candor and empathy" refer to the manner of speaking. In other words, "speak" tends to collocate with manner adverbs: "He spoke softly", "She spoke with B.B.C. precision", "Speak out!" and the like. To add more examples, one can say, "speak in a bitter tone" and "speak in a blank voice", referring to the manner of speaking. The manner of speaking sometimes suggests a social role. Thus, we have expressions like "speak as a judge" and "speak as a public official". The feature [+utterance of linguistic sounds] can be metaphorically extended to non-linguistic sounds as in "Trumpets spoke loudly". And we have an idiomatic expression, "Actions speak louder than words".

The verb *talk* highlights the feature [+verbal interaction], which is well exemplified in "summit talks" and "talk shows," where the participants are actively exchanging their ideas and opinions. To explain the difference between *speak* and *talk*, the teacher may compare "We talked a lot" and "We spoke a lot". The sentence using *talk* implies the amount of interaction, while the expression "We spoke a lot" can be interpreted as a speaker-oriented act, implying the amount of words produced by the speaker(s). The verb *talk* suggests the presence of, and verbal interaction with, an interlocutor. The fact that the sentence "John and Mary spoke to each other" sounds awkward suggests that in the act of speaking, interaction is not necessarily highlighted. The teacher may compare this with a natural expression, "John and Mary talked to each other."

The claim that "talking" is an interactive act is well illustrated in the sentence "Let's talk before fighting", which does not permit the substitution of *speak* for *talk*. One can "talk back", but one does not "speak back". Both imply "bi-directionality". There is a saying, "Money talks", which suggests a negotiation scene in which money plays an important role. Even the expression "He is talking to himself" assumes the interlocutor (i.e., oneself).

The preceding discussion about *speak* and *talk* has implications in terms of their semantically related clusters.

Speak-related verbs: {express, whisper, voice, groan, scream, vocalize, utter, etc.}

Talk-related verbs: {chat, gossip, debate, discuss, consult, confer, converse, negotiate, etc.}

The teacher moves on to discussing the difference between "say" and "tell", both of which are translated into *iu* in Japanese. The verb *talk* does not contain [+message] as its intrinsic feature, and, hence, requires prepositions like *about* or *of* in order to indicate the topic of talking. The lexical core of the verb *say* is described as [+message], and that of *tell*, as [+message conveyance to someone] (see **Figure 6**).

Let us compare the two forms "saying" (noun) and "telling" (adjective). The word "saying" is something said (especially, an adage, a proverb, or an axiom), thus highlighting the message itself. The verb *say* has another noun form "a say", which means "an opinion", as in "I have a say about your suggestion". By contrast, the word "telling" is not something told; rather, "telling" means "having an effect", or "striking" as in "a telling story", "a

telling argument", and "a telling smile", with emphasis being placed on the "conveying" part.

With the lexical core of *say*, we can explain why one can say, "He talked [spoke] a lot, but didn't say much," meaning that he did a lot of talking (in a verbal interaction) or speaking, but his talking or speaking did not contain much substance. Since the lexical core of "say" is "the utterance of a message", it is the only verb that can be used to report the message spoken by someone else, as in "John said, "I like you". If someone says, "Say cheese," you are like to repeat the content "cheese". The verb *say* can be colloquially used as in "Whatever you say", "Enough said", and "You can say that again!"

On the other hand, "tell" has the "message-conveying" role; the verb assumes a message itself and its conveyance to someone else. Thus, "tell" is the only verb that takes the interlocutor as the object without a preposition, as in "John told me something". The remaining three verbs require the preposition to as in "say [speak, talk] to me." The verb "talk" appears in a context such as "John talked me into something". Notice, however, that the interpretation here is "John's talking caused me to be into something." In this case, "me" is not simply the receiver of what John said. The verb *tell* is used colloquially as: "You're telling me," meaning "You're right" and "I'm telling you," meaning "Believe me." In these usages, the message part is mutually assumed between the speaker and the interlocutor.

Thus, we have shown that the semantics of each lexical item is prerequisite to developing inter-lingual competence. When "speak" and "talk" are similar in some cases, the similarity disappears and the difference emerges with the addition of an adverb like "out." Even when "speak to" and "talk to" are used interchangeably, there are some semantic differences, which are due to the difference in lexical core meanings. To help learners develop their lexical network competence, the teacher may show how the four basic verbs of utterance function in the form of a lexical network like in **Figure 7**.
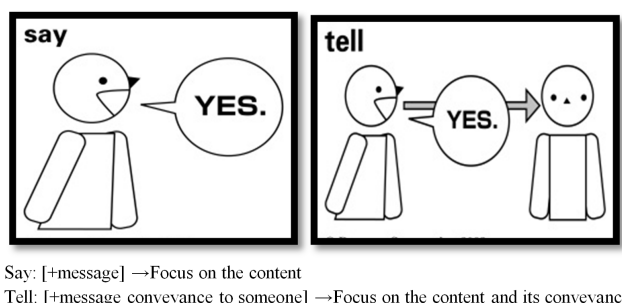

Say: [+message] →Focus on the content
Tell: [+message conveyance to someone] →Focus on the content and its conveyance

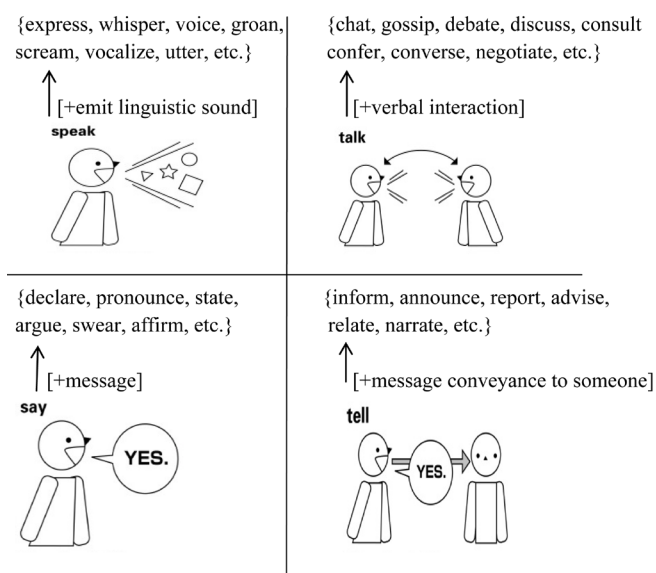**Figure 6.** Schematic representations of the verbs *say* and *tell*.

Figure 7. Inter-lexical network of basic verbs of communication.

4. Conclusion

We discussed that the search-translation-equivalent strategy becomes a cause of major problems in developing L2 lexical competence in an input-poor environment. We argued that knowing the nature of the problem is a starting point of devising an effective pedagogical support. We then suggested that lexical core, combined with lexical networking, can be a powerful guiding principle in helping students develop basic lexical competence. With two case studies (the preposition *on*, and the basic verbs of communication), we demonstrated how the core schema of a lexical item(s) becomes a common thread, or a pedagogical device that weaves both intra-lexical and inter-lexical networks.

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