



Content list available at www.urmia.ac.ir/ijltr

*Iranian Journal
of
Language Teaching Research
(Book Review)*



Urmia University

Vocabulary: Applied Linguistic Perspectives (2nd ed.)
Ronald Carter. Routledge, London (2012). xii+ 308 pp.,
ISBN: 978-0-415-69934-1 (pbk).

Is'haaq Akbarian ^{a,*}

^a *University of Qom, Iran*

Vocabulary: Applied Linguistic Perspectives, first published in 1987, appeared as a second edition in 1998. It reappeared with an introductory chapter in 2012, hence deserving another review. Aside from the addition of this complementary chapter, the volume consists of the same early three parts: (1) Part 1, Foundations, has four chapters and deals with the basics, ranging from the analysis of the forms of words to their roles in discourse contexts, (2) Part 2, Reviews, with three chapters discusses the use of vocabulary in the domains of language learning and teaching, lexicography, and stylistic analysis, and (3) Part 3, Case studies, contains two chapters on lexical stylistics.

Chapter 1, 'What's in a word', explores the constituents of a word and raises potential problems, e.g. polysemy, in word meaning from an applied linguistic perspective. This chapter then moves from "more formalistic aspects of words" to "semantic (or meaning) features" (p. 29). Chapter 2, 'The notion of core vocabulary', examines an important feature of the basic structure of the lexicon of a language and attends to tests proposed to determine the *coreness* in vocabulary precisely and systematically. The tests measure two constructs (1) the syntactic and semantic relations, such as syntactic substitution, antonymy, collocability, extension, and superordinateness, (2) "expression of the discursal or pragmatic neutrality" (p. 53), including culture-free uses of words, summary, associationism, and neutral field and tenor of discourse. Despite overlap between certain tests, Carter cites other criteria for coreness, such as frequency of occurrence, range, and coverage.

Chapter 3, 'Words and patterns', clarifies varying degrees of word combination or lexical patterning such as collocation, idiomaticity, and other fixed expressions. It then raises the issue of lexical errors in second language production, that reveals complex factors (e.g., syntactic, semantic, stylistic, and collocational) involved in knowing a word. These dimensions can aid description of

* Corresponding author: University of Qom, Iran
 Email address: i-akbarian@qom.ac.ir

lexical structure, language pedagogy, and also lexicography. In contrast, Chapter 4, 'Lexis and discourse', considers lexis in larger units of language organization, i.e. a shift from the orthographic word level. Here, Carter provides an analysis of the part lexis plays in cohesion and coherence in spoken and written discourse. The author also looks at words in a range of discourses and genres, illustrating the overt and instrumental role of lexis in developing writing and signaling ideology. Carter emphasizes throughout that more corpora, processed by advanced software and complemented by conversation-analysis, would yield better linguistic insights.

Once the foundations are laid in the first part, Part 2, 'Reviews', attends to the applications of lexicological studies within the next three chapters. More specifically, reviewing research conducted through informant-based analyses, Chapter 5 on 'Lexis and literary stylistics' discusses "some theoretical issues underlying the nature of readers' responses to literary vocabulary" (p. 121). It then deals with the nature and operation of lexis in literary texts so as to measure lexical effects and associations more precisely. Next, the chapter explores the existence of literary lexicon and the part lexical features play in organizing tropes, such as metaphor. Carter argues, however, for literariness in language use rather than literary language since stylistic analysis of lexis in literary texts or otherwise has not advanced much.

Carter in Chapter 6, 'Lexis and lexicography', reviews a number of the main developments in EFL and ESL lexicography. To do this, he examines the specific properties of the monolingual dictionaries for language learners and evaluates the role of lexicographical theory and practice in developing such dictionaries, with contributions from applied linguistics. The innovative developments concern writing definitions, lexico-syntactic and idiomatic information, and the various senses of words. As a movement toward associative lexicon (Makkai, 1980), he reports on the COBUILD project as a successful pioneering attempt in lexicography which was materialized by more extensive corpora in spoken and written English and the advanced computer programs that could process large amounts of data.

Chapter 7, 'Learning and teaching vocabulary', focuses on the issues concerning the early stages of language learning and on the problems in advanced vocabulary teaching, such as the growth of word meaning. Carter then reports on lexical acquisition research on problems and procedures in teaching, ranging from first and second language differences, memorization, the difficulties of words, and so on, in order to consider "the intricate interdependencies between vocabulary *teaching* and theories of vocabulary *learning*" (p. 179, his emphasis). The author then reviews promising developments up until 1998. Good discussion, linked with those given in earlier chapters, is provided on the following areas: word lists, decoding the meaning of words, word sets and grids for advanced students, lexis in use, cloze procedure and its uses, and reconsideration of core vocabulary among others. The intention is to help learners and teachers know how to use words syntactically, semantically, and pragmatically.

Part 3, 'Case studies', reports two case studies in lexical analysis using native-speaking informants. In Chapter 8, 'Case study: lexis, tones and ironies', the author argues for "an approach to the linguistic study of literary irony" (p. 233). Carter uses specific tests which require informants' responses to lexical items and intends to illustrate how lexis operates in some poetic and prose texts, a level which is not revealed in the preceding procedures in literary stylistics. However, in

Chapter 9, 'Case study: style, lexis and the dictionary', Carter discusses the operation of lexis in style-marking in dictionaries for language learners. He takes the position that the dictionary should provide "information about the operation of words at different levels and about the interaction of words in and across levels" (p. 251). In this study, he again uses informants who rate words on scales of formality and evaluation to describe the associative meaning of some examples of words, suggesting that this approach, if implemented more in dictionaries, will lead to the learners' greater competence in producing language. Carter supports using informants since the procedure has inter-subjective validity and results in evidence-based decisions concerning lexical associations.

Thus far, the review has gone over the discussion of the organizational structure in the second edition (1998). At this point, we will flashback to the introductory updated chapter added in 2012 – that might as well be called an attachment – covering pages 1 to 16. The complement has two purposes: (1) "to reflect on major changes in the field of vocabulary studies" (p. 1) since the second edition appeared and (2) to provide a short view of some future directions that the area of vocabulary studies is likely to take. More particularly, the chapter discusses (a) formulaic language or chunks, of which fixedness is a key feature, (b) developments in learning and teaching chunks with reference mainly to fluency, processing, and writing, (c) creativity and literary vocabularies relating to stylistics, and finally (d) vocabulary and the spoken language. What is significant in this chapter is the ubiquity of corpus linguistics; innovation in the area of vocabulary studies has been possible largely due to corpus linguistics and methodology. It seems that the study of larger corpora will add to further creativity and delicacy in all dimensions of the field in the future.

The discussions raised in the volume are, from an applied linguistic perspective, seriously important, prevailing, and relevant even today. That is, they are here to stay. However, apparently they need to be updated by fresh data and backed by current research. It suggests that had the volume been penned today, the organization of the materials that are quite useful would have taken a different structure.

Furthermore, the volume, as it stands, should make it known that currently many outlets are specifically devoted to different aspects of vocabulary studies or lexicography. Yet no mention is made of the special issues of prestigious journals on vocabulary, nor of many books published in the area. For example, *Language Learning Journal*, to cite only one journal, has recently published two special issues on vocabulary in 2008 and 2012. From among the books published, a good volume on collocation can be Meara (2009). In the field of lexicography, two scholarly journals are published: *International Journal of Lexicography* and *Lexikos*.

All in all, *Vocabulary: Applied Linguistic Perspectives* is an important contribution to the field of vocabulary studies and still remains a needed book. It discusses important applied linguistic issues that are still of significance and value to specialists in the field. Yet, some of the questions have been investigated by the young generation of researchers with better facilities or larger corpora in the last decade. Therefore, rather than adding an introductory chapter as a complement to it, the volume might have served the community of applied linguistics better had it been rewritten; along with referring to the recent research findings, it could have been updated more systematically with additions to some sections, modifications in some other areas, and deletions of some parts altogether. For instance, vocabulary learning and teaching are extensively discussed in the book but

no section is devoted to the issues in assessing vocabulary. That is, how the applications of lexicological studies are implemented in vocabulary assessment is not touched upon at all.

In its current form, the volume still needs a proof-reading to sort out minute and trivial problems, e.g. delete 'I wisely chose' on page 90. However, it has a clear and fluid style in organization of the contents and writing to follow, moving from theory to practice. The book is mostly focused on word and text. Thus, it would be of interest to researchers and post-graduate students, specifically in the fields of vocabulary studies, lexicography, and literary stylistics.

References

- Makkai, A. (1980). Theoretical and practical aspects of an associative lexicon for twentieth century English. In L. Zgusta (Ed.), *Theory and Method in Lexicography* (pp. 125-46). Columbia, SC: Hornbeam Press.
- Meara, P. (2009). *Connected words: Word associations and second language vocabulary acquisition* (Vol. 24). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.