

○ **M. HOEY, *LEXICAL PRIMING: A NEW THEORY OF WORDS AND LANGUAGE***

(LONDON: ROUTLEDGE. 2005. PP. XIII, 202.)

With its solid argument and in-depth analyses of corpus data, Hoey's book is powerful in lending theoretical support to the significance of lexis in language. Being innovative in proposing that lexical structure determines grammar rather than the reverse, it invites readers to ponder on the critical role of lexical priming in language use.

In Chapter 1, Hoey criticizes the traditional view that grammar precedes and disciplines lexicon by pinpointing its failure to address the naturalness of language. What contributes to both meaningfulness and naturalness of utterance, he argues, is collocation, i.e., an association between words occurring in corpora more often than random distribution. Collocation is closely related to the psychological phenomenon of priming that arises from a language user's repeated encounters with a word within various contexts. These encounters make possible the construction of mental concordances in which certain words frequently co-occur and thus prime each other.

In the subsequent chapters, Hoey presents statistical evidence of priming as seen in a corpus of newspaper English, *The Guardian*. First, he lays out in details the effects of priming on semantic association in Chapter 2. The word *consequence* (with the sense of "result") is taken as an example to illustrate the semantic set of collocates that are constantly associated with the word. Four major types of association are identified through a comprehensive corpus analysis: (1) logical association, (2) negative evaluation, (3) seriousness of the consequence, and (4) unexpectedness of the consequence. Taking into account the influence of grammatical structures on a word's semantic associations, he analyzes in Chapter 3 the primings in colligation, a word's favorable or avoided positions in sentences or texts. The investigation of uses of *consequence* reveals that the word has an overwhelming tendency to occur as head of a nominal group but rarely functions as either pre- or post-modification. Textually, it is primed to occur in Adjuncts with a role of Theme. In the examination of the colligations of its synonym, *reason*, a phenomenon of colligation nesting emerges. The author observes that the nesting of *reason* + clause without connector is primed for the pragmatic association of affirmation whereas the nesting of *reason* + *why* clause primes for denial. These findings imply that primings of a combination of words are separate from those of individual words.

Such a tendency also manifests in the priming patterns of co-hyponymy, synonymy, and synonymous expressions as discussed in Chapter 4. In the cases of co-hyponyms and

synonyms, the corpus data show a limited proportion of shared primings in collocations, colligations, and semantic associations. By contrast, synonymous expressions that differ in a single letter morpheme (e.g., *round the world* and *around the world*) share a greater extent of primings than co-hyponyms or synonyms, but they diverge in the weighting of primings and pragmatic associations. All the above results lead to a conclusion that priming tends to vary from word to word. It is the word form, rather than the meaning, that contributes to the uniqueness of individual priming patterns.

What, then, are the priming patterns of an identical word form with different senses? Three hypotheses pertaining to the primings of polysemy are proposed in Chapter 5. The first hypothesis states that when a polysemous word has a common sense and a rare sense, the rare sense tends to be primed to avoid the collocations, colligations, and semantic associations that are primed for the common sense. Consequently, the priming patterns of these two senses seldom overlap, as mentioned in the second hypothesis. The third hypothesis proposes that when the first two hypotheses are violated, the effect of humour or ambiguity is intentionally created. Although the author's hypotheses are supported by analyses of the priming patterns of *consequence* (= result) versus *consequence* (= importance) and *reason* (= cause) versus *reason* (= rationality, logic), his argumentation is not watertight. While determining the intended sense of a polysemous word in each corpus instance, one has to go through a word sense disambiguation process that involves a variety of knowledge sources, including collocational knowledge (Kilgarrieff, 1997). Even a corpus lexicography system has to resort to a concordance for a word, i.e., a line of context that contains information of its collocations, semantic associations, and colligations as well. This is particularly true when a polysemous word is an adjective or adverb whose sense is dependent on the entity it modifies (Fellbaum, Grabowski and Landes, 1998). I get the impression that Hoey, when determining the sense of an example from the corpus, likewise refers to the distinct priming patterns of that sense in his judgmental system. In so doing he falls into the danger of circularity.

As disambiguation of polysemy often goes beyond local context, priming at the lexical level is not sufficient for describing the multiple uses of a polysemous word. Indeed, the aforementioned third hypothesis is also related to textual priming, an issue covered in Chapters 6 and 7. Using text in a travel book as an example, Hoey highlights the intimate connection between textual and lexical priming and their mutual influence. In terms of textual collocation, corpus data show that some words tend to collocate in a larger textual environment and thus create textual cohesion while others are primed to avoid their occurrence in cohesive chains. The preference of a particular lexical item to either positive or negative priming also manifests in the item's semantic relation at a

discourse level. For example, the textual semantic association of PLACE NAME is positively primed for cohesion by repetition and pro-form (e.g., *there*). Changing the text by replacing place names with other words seriously affects the coherence and naturalness of the original text. In terms of textual colligation, some words primed for sentence-initial occurrence are found to also appear at the beginning of a paragraph (e.g., surnames); other words, however, have negative priming for both positions (e.g., *his*).

While emphasizing fluency in language as embraced by corpus linguists, Hoey does not shy away from confronting the issue of language creativity stressed by generative grammarians. In Chapter 8, he explores whether lexical priming can account for a language user's natural ability to produce novel utterances. He argues that lexical primings start with primings of stretches of sounds and then move systematically from the syllable to the word, to the lexical item, and ultimately to the larger text. During this process, language users gradually become aware of the priming patterns of related words and different uses of polysemous words. Such awareness allows them to abstract grammatical patterns and eventually create their own grammar. Hoey also proposes a language model that consists of three linguistic levels: phonic substance, lexical primings, and discursal needs in the extra-textual context. In that model, morphology serves as an interface between phonic substance and lexis, whereas text functions to connect lexis and the discursal need. As for grammar, it becomes a product of lexical primings and regulates the acceptability of sentences and texts. All types of lexical and textual primings of individual words harmonize with each other and contribute to the naturalness of an utterance. Following the above threads of argument, the author advocates that lexicon, rather than grammar, holds the central place in a linguistic description. Hoey further explains the adequacy of lexical priming in accounting for linguistic creativity in Chapter 9. He demonstrates that creativity found in humour, ambiguity, and literary language is a result of deliberate deviations from dominant primings of a lexical item.

After guiding readers through the intricacies of lexical primings, Hoey highlights in the last chapter implications of his priming theory in teaching and learning a second language (L2). To compensate for the lack of an objectively correct grammar for language users, every culture creates several mechanisms to ensure that the primings of different speakers harmonize. Among these mechanisms, education is most influential for L2 learners. To help learners acquire primings in accordance with native speakers' priming patterns, L2 teachers should use authentic data such as those found in a corpus to reinforce existing primings and create new ones. As for the learners, they ought to produce acquired primings as often as possible. Hoey's upholding of the use of corpora is appealing, but he fails to address how to determine what corpus evidence is "good" for building

up learners' mental concordance. As we know, for any target language there exist corpora produced by native speakers of different regions or cultures. Take English L2 learners as an example. With the globalization of English, they are exposed to diverse sources of language input, some of which deviates, to a certain degree, from the so-called "native speakers' norm". Deciding what constitutes "good" corpus data is thus never an easy task.

Hoey's book aspires to provide a coherent and comprehensive account of the issue of lexical priming. It contains balanced organization and thorough analyses of many critical aspects of lexicon. Despite a few points awaiting further clarification, it is a valuable contribution to language study that foregrounds lexis as a subject worthy of investigation in and of itself.

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