

The Analysis of Semantic Components and the Patterns of Lexicalization of "Discussing" Verbs in EAP Writing

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Abstract: With the aim of enhancing teaching instruction in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) writing classrooms, the study investigates the semantic components and the patterns of lexicalization of "discussing" verbs under an EAP writing context. Eleven words related to the word "discuss" were collected from Thesaurus of the British Academic Written English Corpus. Based on Talmy's theory of lexicalization (1991, 2000), the "discussing" verbs, as realisation event words, were categorised into four different groups according to their conflation patterns. Group 1 comprises words with the most frequently occurring conflation pattern [Motion + Goal + X], while Group 2, 3, and 4 contain verbs with the conflation pattern of [Motion + Manner + X], [Motion + Degree + X], and [Motion + Figure + X], respectively. Teaching implications drew from the categorisation of the "discussing" verbs, suggesting teachers paying attention to the semantic entities between and within each group, thus bringing learners a clearer understanding of the written context of using the "discussing" verbs.

Keywords: realisation event, lexicalization pattern, semantic component, EAP writing, SLA

1. Introduction

While the grammar translation method still plays a major role in English vocabulary teaching in China, the word-to-word translation from Chinese to English and vice versa brings problems to language learning. Learners always assume that the meaning stated in English-Chinese dictionary is the exact meaning that the word in the targeted language implies. However, it is hard to understand the semantic attributions of English words with a simple translation. To enhance teaching quality, language teachers need other teaching methods which could guide learners to use the targeted words more accurately. Therefore, based on Talmy's lexicalization pattern (1991, 2000), this study demonstrates how words can be decomposed into distinguished semantic pieces named the meaning components, thus, assisting teachers in sharing more precise linguistic knowledge with learners.

In English for Academic Purposes (EAP) writing, it is relatively frequent to use "discussing" verbs when writing about a topic or subject regarding previous literature or authors' own views. In this article, related "discussing" verbs are selected. Eleven verbs are chosen for analysing their semantic components and the patterns of lexicalization, aiming to help English language teachers differentiate the "discussing" words and hence assist them in facilitating learners' EAP writing performance.

2. Literature review

Research on Talmy's lexicalization patterns (Talmy, 1991, 2000) has gained wide interest among linguists. According to Talmy, English is a satellite-framed language, in which semantic entities like Path are obtained from the "satellite" of the motion verb, such as the particles and prefixes; while the motion verb itself also contains various types of semantic information, typically Manner or Cause. The lexicalization pattern of the verb itself is thus usually expressed as [Motion + Manner/Cause]. While many researchers in recent years investigated the typology of language with the aim of language-based acquisition and/or comparison (e.g., Aktan-Erciyes, 2020; Aveledo & Athanasopoulos, 2016), some others examined bilingual languages, aiming at discovering the relationship between language and thought, with an ultimate goal of enhancing language-related studies such as translation, or revealing how lexicalization can be affected by demographic or socio-cultural factors such as previous knowledge, background, attitudes, proficiency, etc. (Łozińska & Pietrewicz, 2018; Nozaki, 2019; Toan, 2020). In China, there is a similar trend among researchers who are interested in investigating language lexicalization. Chinese scholars primarily provide theoretical descriptions of lexicalization patterns of Chinese and/or English words. A number of studies examined the pattern of lexicalization of motion verbs such as "shouting", "cutting", "writing" and verbs like "criticising", aiming at improving translation quality (Xue & Luo, 2018; Zhou & Zhu, 2016) or aiding the understanding of the relationships between language and thought (Wan, 2018; Xue & Luo, 2018; Zhang & Gui, 2017). Researchers like

Ji (2017, 2020, 2022), Ji and Hohenstein (2014), and Jiang and Chen (2019) also investigated how learners' proficiency and their L1, specifically Mandarin Chinese and/or English, may influence the discrimination of language typology and the production of the target language. However, there is a relative paucity of research aiming to assist language teaching, more specifically, focusing on improving EAP writing class teaching instruction. Though some of the previous literature has pointed out that their findings could provide learners with a better understanding of the target language (e.g., Chen, 2022; Zhou & Zhu, 2016), related implications were not clearly identified. To fill this gap, the present study intends to offer language teachers a more comprehensible teaching implication for instructing EAP writing classes.

Moreover, the above-mentioned articles mainly focus on the lexicalization of motion event verbs. Whereas based on Talmy's five types of the framing event (2000), besides motion event, there are other four framing events, that is, temporal contouring, state change, action correlating, and realisation. While the Motion event is discussed the most by subsequent researchers, which is an event of motion or change of location, the event of state change has been described massively by Talmy, which has an attribute of change in state, condition, or involving transition. The event of temporal contouring shows the degree of manifestation, revealing how the event is changed by time in terms of completion degree, such as to the end, to continue, or to be -ing. The event of action correlating emphasizes the interplay of the subject and the object, such as accompaniment, surpassment, and demonstration, which can be identified from the semantic component of the satellite. The event of realisation, on the other hand, reveals the fulfilment of the intention of the agent. The "discussing" verbs that are examined in the study can be grouped as realisation verbs, through which authors' intention of writing about a particular topic or an idea can be fulfilled. (1) illustrates the situation where the agent has an intention or a goal of talking about the issues, with the further-event satellite "clearly" to add a semantic increment.

(1) Realisation verb + Further-event satellite:

We discussed the impact of race and gender on class clearly.

This study hence investigates the patterns of lexicalization from another perspective, aiming to categorise and provide distinguishment among the 11 frequently occurring realisation words, that is, the "discussing" verbs. Accordingly, language teachers could thus provide more comprehensive instruction to learners, so that learners can obtain a better understanding of the meanings of those words. As a result, it is expected that learners can use those words in a more appropriate written context. Research questions of the study are as follows:

- a. What are the semantic components of the "discussing" verbs?
- b. What are the lexicalization patterns of the "discussing" verbs?
- c. How can the "discussing" verbs be further categorized based on the semantic components and the lexicalization patterns?

3. Material and Data Collection

The "discussing" verbs were selected from the British Academic Written English (BAWE) Corpus, a freely available corpus for language learners. The BAWE Corpus collects high standard undergraduate and master's assignments across 35 different disciplines from thirteen types of writing genres (Hauboeck, Holmes, & Nesi, 2010). The written pieces were gathered from three UK universities, namely Oxford Brookes, Reading, and Warwick (Hauboeck, Holmes, & Nesi, 2010). By offering 3000 assignments with around 6.5 million words, the BAWE Corpus provides language learners with plenty of academic language samples.

By using the primary verb discuss as the search word, according to frequency counts and similarity scores, related words were found in Thesaurus of the BAWE Corpus. The words were further filtered based on their dictionary meanings, words in the meaning cluster of "testing" and "analysing" were removed, such as examine, analyse, and investigate. Therefore, 11 related words, including discuss, explain, describe, mention, consider, highlight, identify, present, illustrate, introduce and demonstrate appear to be the most relevant and frequently used academic verbs of "discussing".

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The semantic components of the "discussing" verbs

The "discussing" words share the core meaning of [+WRITE ABOUT] (hereafter referred to as [+WA]) in EAP writing context, but slight differences occur in the semantic components. Table 1 presents the dictionary meanings and relative semantic components of the 11 "discussing" verbs based on the Cambridge English Dictionary.

Based on Table 1, we know that the verbs discuss and mention have opposite meaning components of how much information should be provided to the audience, and the verbs like explain, illustrate and introduce carry the component of how to write about the subject, for example, to provide examples. Words like explain, consider, highlight, identify,

present, and illustrate share similar types of meaning components, which is to make the discussed subject clear/be known/be recognised. The semantic meanings of verbs such as describe, consider, identify, illustrate, and demonstrate contain the types of content that should be written about. Besides that, the three words, discuss, consider and introduce incorporate the meaning components of Condition. The following section will discuss the semantic components and relative lexicalization patterns in more detail.

Table 1. The Dictionary Meanings and Semantic Components of the "Discussing" Verbs

Verb	Dictionary Meaning	Semantic components
Discuss	To write about a subject in detail, especially considering different ideas and opinions related to it	WA + in detail + consider other related ideas/opinions
Explain	To make something clear to understand by describing or giving information about it	WA + make it clear + understandable + describe/give information
Describe	To write what someone or something is like	WA + what is like
Mention	To write about something using few words, or giving little detail	WA + little detail/few words
Consider	To give attention to a particular subject or fact when judging something else	WA + fact/subject + give attention to + when judging other things
Highlight	To attract attention to or emphasise something important	WA + attract attention + emphasise
Identify	To recognise a problem, need, fact, etc., and to show that it exists	WA + problem/fact/need + show its existence
Present	To give, provide, or make something known	WA + make it known
Illustrate	To show the meaning or truth of something more clearly, especially by giving examples	WA + meaning/truth + make it clear + give examples
Introduce	To write before the beginning of a performance/ programme or book and give information about it	WA + before the beginning of sth. + give information
Demonstrate	To show how to do something, explain	WA + show + how to do

Note. sth. = something

4.2 The lexicalisation patterns of the "discussing" verbs

As shown in Table 1, besides the core meaning [+WA], all "discussing" verbs contain other semantic entities, such as Manner, Cause, and Figure. Table 2 illustrates the lexicalization patterns of the 11 verbs. Note that the semantic entity "Figure" is specifically used by Talmy in motion event categories (2000, p. 153), as this study investigates the semantic components of realisation event, Figure here refers to the thing that is being written about. In addition, Degree in Table 2 refers to whether the agent provides more or less information with an action relative to some norm.

In general, unlike the lexicalization patterns of motion event verbs which have a typical pattern of [Motion + Manner/Cause], the results show that the conflation pattern [Motion + Manner/Cause] only occurs in four verbs of "discussing", with the semantic components of "give examples", or "give information". In contrast, the most characteristic pattern of the "discussing" verbs is [Motion + Goal], which aligns with the typology of realisation verbs. Table 3 presents the overall frequency counts of various semantic entities. The Goal of the words includes "to make it clear", "to emphasise its importance", "to show its existence", "to make it known", "to attract attention to" or "to give attention to". Figure is the second frequently occurring semantic entity that conflated in half of the "discussing" verbs. Despite the words consider, identify, and illustrate that carry Figure with the semantic components of fact, problems/fact/need, and meaning/truth, respectively, the other two words that incorporate Figure have the semantic components of "what is like" and "how to do". The least frequently occurring entities are Condition and Degree, which have been discussed in section 4.1.

Table 2. The Lexicalization Patterns of the "Discussing" Verbs

Verb	Semantic components	Lexicalization patterns
Discuss	WA + in detail + consider other related ideas/opinions	Motion + Degree + Condition
Explain	WA + make it clear + understandable + describe/give information	Motion + Goal + Result + Manner
Describe	WA + what is like	Motion + Figure
Mention	WA + little detail/few words	Motion + Degree
Consider	WA + fact/subject + give attention to + when judging other things	Motion + Figure + Goal + Condition
Highlight	WA + attract attention + emphasise importance	Motion+ Goal
Identify	WA + problem/fact/need + show its existence	Motion + Figure + Goal
Present	WA + make it known	Motion + Goal

Verb	Semantic components	Lexicalization patterns
Illustrate	WA + meaning/truth + make it clear + give examples	Motion + Figure + Goal + Manner
Introduce	WA + before the beginning of sth. + give information	Motion + Condition + Manner
Demonstrate	WA + show + the way of doing	Motion + Manner + Figure

Table 3. Frequency Counts of the Semantic Entities

Semantic entities	Frequency
Motion	11
Goal/Result	7
Manner	4
Figure	5
Condition	3
Degree	2

4.3 The Categorisation of "Discussing" Verbs

Based on the semantic components and the patterns of lexicalization of the 11 "discussing" verbs, the verbs can be further categorised into four groups.

Group 1 is the group of realisation event verbs, more specifically, the moot-fulfilment verbs, which refer to a situation in which an agent intends to take the action that can further lead to a particular result (Talmy, 2000). This group comprises explain, consider, highlight, identify, present, and illustrate, with the most characteristic conflation pattern [Motion + Goal + X], where X can be zero or more than one semantic entities such as Manner, Result, Figure, or Condition. Those Goal verbs can be further distinguished in terms of self-agentive and agentive construction. Examples are illustrated in (2) and in (3). In (2), consider is used when Englishmen themselves regard "it" to be their right; while in (3), with using highlight, what should be aware of is raised by "it" to the audience, with the Condition of "when embarking on this debate". Based on the semantic components of the six words, consider, illustrate and identify are more appropriately used in a self-agentive construction, by using which, the purpose can be fulfilled once the action is taken; while explain, highlight, and present are used to represent agentive motion, and the purpose is fulfilled when the targeted information is reached to the audience. Note that explain and illustrate incorporate Manner, and consider contains Condition in the lexicalization conflation.

Self-agentive

(2) Consider

Consequently, Englishmen considered it to be their right and duty to subjugate the populations of non-Western countries.
= [Englishmen gave their attention to it] WITH-THE-GOAL-OF [Englishmen considered it]

Agentive

(3) Highlight

It does highlight what should be aware of when embarking on this debate. = [(Someone) realises the importance of the thing] WITH-THE-GOAL-OF [It highlights the thing]

Group 2 includes verbs that incorporates Manner, that is, introduce and demonstrate. With the conflation pattern [Motion + Manner + X], the word introduce is used in the manner of giving information with the condition of "before the beginning of something", whereas demonstrate is to write about how to do something with the manner of showing. Group 3 includes words discuss and mention, with the conflation pattern [Motion + Degree + X]. As compared within the group, discuss should be used when writing about the topic with plenty of information, while using mention to briefly writing about something. Describe is the only word of the 11 "discussing" verbs that is categorised in Group 4, with the pattern [Motion + Figure + X] to write about what is like (e.g., the appearance, the representation, the flow of a protocol, etc.). As compared to the verbs in Group 1, which are moot-fulfilment verbs, the verbs in Group 2, 3 and 4 are intrinsic-fulfilment verbs, referring to an agent having no further intention other than executing the action itself. In other words, Goal is not part of the semantic conflation of the verbs in Group 2, 3, and 4.

5. Implications and Conclusion

When instructing learners to use those "discussing" verbs in their EAP writing, language teachers should be aware of the semantic entities of each verb. Although they share the core meaning of [+WA], some of them should be used in different

situations. When advising learners in using the words in Group 1 ([Motion + Goal + X]), learners need to note that by making an action, their intention is to be fulfilled, and to a certain extent, the action leads to a particular result. For example, when using highlight, the intention of the author is not only to write about an issue but also to emphasise its importance to readers. Similarly, when using explain and illustrate, teachers could compare the semantic components of the two. While the Goal of the two is similar, that is, to make something clear, the Manner is different as illustrate is used with examples provided, but explain is more appropriate to use in a situation when describing or giving information about something.

Moreover, when instructing learners to use the verbs in Group 2 ([Motion + Manner + X]), the focus should be on distinguishing between the Manner of the two verbs, with further emphasising that introduce should be used before the beginning of something. As pointed out in the previous section, as intrinsic-fulfilment verbs, learners could use words from Group 2, 3 and 4 without concerning the result beyond the actions. Nonetheless, a further-event satellite can be included to present the change in state of the Figure because of the action, as shown in (1). Furthermore, as a polysemy, introduce has another meaning which is to "put something into use, operation, or a place for the first time", which is also widely used in the EAP writing context. Language teachers may make a distinction between the written contexts of the two meanings.

As for Group 3 ([Motion + Degree + X]), teachers should pay attention to the Degree when providing teaching instructions. As stated in the previous section, discuss is used to write about an issue with detailed information. In contrast, teachers should emphasise that it is more appropriate to use mention in the situation of referring to learners' own article, as illustrated in (4a). Learners are not suggested using mention when citing others' works, as shown in (4b), since if others only "mentioned" an issue in their articles, the issue is not significant enough for learners to make a reference, and if the issue is one of the important points, it is impossible that the author only "mentioned" it.

(4)

a. I would like to briefly discuss/mention the execution of the system.

I would like to discuss/*mention the execution of the system in detail.

b. Talmy (2000) discussed/*mentioned the typology of the framing event.

He did not discuss/mention the importance of the typology.

Describe is the only word in Group 4 ([Motion + Figure + X]), teaching instruction should be given to the object of the word. When using describe, the object should hold a characteristic of "appearance" for learners to describe, for example, a process, a behaviour, an attribute, and so on. Also, it is suggested that in a learner-centred writing class, the language teacher could provide the semantic components to learners, and let learners themselves generate any patterns of the context of using those words.

The current study obviously has some limitations. First, the number of "discussing" words is limited, with only 11 words collected and analysed. More words related to discuss can be gathered to reveal meta-patterns of the typology of the words. This may also provide language teachers with a broader view of instructing "discussing" verbs. Future studies can be conducted to explore the lexicalization patterns of various other realisation event verbs, since the lexicalization of realisation event verbs remains to be further explored. In addition, the semantic components of "discussing" words can be further investigated based on various dictionary meanings. It is revealed that there are slight differences in definitions across different dictionaries, which might affect the determination of lexicalization patterns and the categorisation.

To conclude, this study explores the semantic components and the patterns of lexicalization of 11 "discussing" verbs. The verbs can be categorised into four different groups based on Talmy's typology. Group 1 includes six Goal words, that is, explain, consider, highlight, identify, present, and illustrate, which incorporates the conflation pattern [Motion + Goal + X]. With the conflation pattern [Motion + Manner + X], introduce and demonstrate are categorised into Group 2. The Degree words discuss and mention are in Group 3, and describe is in Group 4, with the pattern [Motion + Degree + X] and [Motion + Figure + X], respectively. With the categories in mind, it is suggested that language teachers could pay attention to the semantic entities when providing teaching instruction in EAP writing classes, differentiating the words between and within groups based on the entities, and further distinguishing them according to the X entities as necessary. For example, when instructing the use of explain and illustrate, teachers could first compare the Goal of the two words. While they obtain a similar Goal, X could be compared, in this case would be Figure and/or Manner. In this way, learners could have a clearer understanding of the context in which they can use the words more appropriately.

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