
Iconicity in the Written Vocabulary of Chinese as a Second Language and as a School Subject: English School Learners' Perception of Iconicity in Chinese Written Words

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Résumé

This study aims to explore iconicity in a specific written vocabulary list used for the first year of learning and teaching of Chinese as a Modern Foreign Language subject in the English secondary schools delivering Mandarin Excellence Programme (MEP) - which is funded by Department for Education in England.

An analysis of the vocabulary list - including set sentences, phrases, expressions and words - is first carried out, and a list of words is subsequently generated. The nouns from the list of words are targeted. A further analysis is carried out upon the semiotic relations between their aspects of written form and their aspects of meaning. Through the - vertical (Gamkrelidze, 1974) - analysis investigating the relations between the form and the meaning of each selected noun, this study aims to reveal Imagic Iconicity (Everaert-Desmedt, 1990; Nöth, 1999) of the nouns; through the - horizontal (Gamkrelidze, 1974) - analysis investigating the relations between the forms of the selected nouns, and the relations between the meanings of those, it aims to reveal Diagrammatic Iconicity (Everaert-Desmedt, 1990; Nöth, 1999) of the nouns from and within this specific written vocabulary list

This study also aims to explore Chinese as a Second Language (CSL) learners' perception of iconicity of the selected nouns (Dingemanse, Perlman, & Perniss, 2020). First-year learners of Mandarin on MEP from four secondary schools (two state selective schools and two state comprehensive schools) - selected by strategic sampling - are invited to undertake an anonymous questionnaire. The questionnaire first requires the learner participants to identify from memory the meanings of the selected nouns; then it requires them to rate on a 10-rating Likert scale (Motamedi, Little, Nielsen, & Sulik, 2019) indicating how similar the form of each selected noun - the imagic icons generated from the observational investigation - is to its meaning, how similar the forms of certain pairs of selected nouns - the diagrammatic icons generated from the observational investigation - are, and how similar the meanings of certain pairs of selected nouns are. The learner participants are also required to write

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down a brief explanation for each rating question as to demonstrate their thoughts. The quantitative data are analysed by correlation via SPSS; the qualitative data from the open questions are analysed by thematic analysis via NVivo. Adopting the mixed methods allow the researchers to obtain a full picture of learners' perception of the iconicity of Chinese written words.

To sum up, this study aims to respond to two preliminary questions: What are the iconic words from and within a specific written vocabulary for CSL? How are those iconic words perceived by the beginner school learners of CSL?

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