When rainbows have different colours: teaching colour terms in Chinese to Spanish speakers

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Thinking Colors: Perception, Translation and Representation

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Introduction

- Aim: a new approach towards teaching colour terms in Chinese
- Motivation:
  - Chinese and Spanish present remarkable differences at both the linguistic and the cultural levels as far as colour terms are concerned
  - Traditional approach to the teaching of colours in second language learning
    - Classical approach to categorisation
    - Lexical items are monosemic
    - One-to-one equivalent
    - Neglect of symbolic meanings, metaphorical uses and collocations
- New approach in second language learning
  - the use of cognitive linguistics can encourage learners to explore the deeper meanings of grammatical and lexical items, and to think about why languages express things the way they do, making the learning process more enjoyable and less dependent on memorisation.

State of the art

- Approaches to the study of colours
  - Cultural anthropology (Berlin and Kay 1969; Rosch 1972, 1975)
  - Linguistic analysis
  - Monolingual studies on colour symbolism and its literary use
  - Contrastive approaches (zh-en)
  - Translation studies approach (zh-en)
- Cognitive linguistics and foreign language teaching
  - Mainly English as foreign language
 - Chinese: measure words, zhe particle, motion

New approach: Cognitive linguistics

- Polysemy is the norm
- Prototype theory of categorisation
  - prototypes
  - natural extension members
  - metaphorical extension members
  - fuzzy boundaries between categories (continuum)
- Principle of family resemblance
- Figurative thought (metaphor and methonomy)
- Categories are motivated
- Categorisation varies across cultures

Case study: colour terms

▸ Colour terms constitute a "closed" category

▸ High frequency words (applicability)

▸ Central members coincide across languages

▸ Complex categories, with outstanding differences across languages/cultures

▸ White

  ▸ Basic colour

  ▸ Rich in meanings (natural and metaphorical extensions; positive and negative)

  ▸ Very productive in word formation

Cognitive map of the category (white/白)
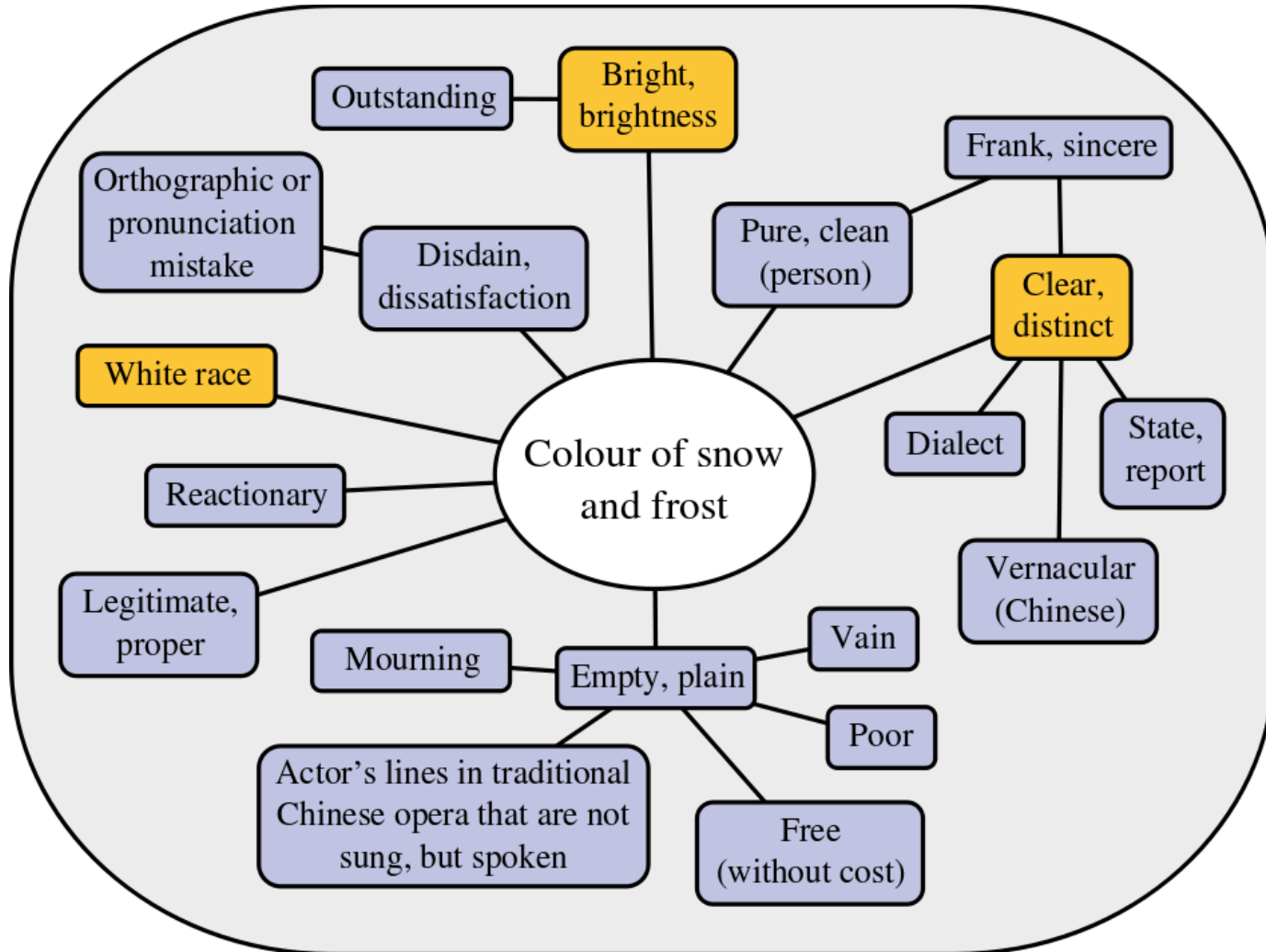
Constrastive analysis

MEANING	CHINESE	SPANISH	TYPE OF EXTENSION
1. Colour (of snow, frost, milk, etc.) (白色)	✔	✔	Central member
2. Light color (浅色)	✘	✔	Natural extension
3. Empty, plain (空白， 没有加上什么东西)	✔	✔	Metaphorical extension
4. Bright, brightness (明亮)	✔	✘	Natural extension
5. White race (白种人)	✔	✔	Natural extension (metonymy)
6. Reactionary (反动)	✔	✔	Metaphorical extension
7. Mourning (丧事)	✔	✘	Metaphorical extension (metonymy)
8. Pure, clean (person) (清洁)	✔	✘	Metaphorical extension
9. Frank, sincere (坦白)	✔	✘	Metaphorical extension
10. Vain (徒然)	✔	✘	Metaphorical extension
11. Free (without cost) (无代价)	✔	✘	Metaphorical extension
12. Outstanding (显著)	✔	✘	Metaphorical extension
13. Disdain, dissatisfaction (轻视， 不满)	✔	✘	Natural / metaphorical extension (metonymy)

Constrastive analysis

MEANING	CHINESE	SPANISH	TYPE OF EXTENSION
14. Vernacular language (白话)	✓	✗	Metaphorical extension
15. Dialect (方言)	✓	✗	Metaphorical extension
16. Orthographic or pronunciation mistake (白字)	✓	✗	Metaphorical extension
17. Clear, obvious (明白，清楚)	✓	✗	Metaphorical extension
18. Legitimate, proper (合法的，正当的)	✓	✓	Metaphorical extension
19. Poor (卑贱，贫寒)	✓	✗	Metaphorical extension
20. Actor's lines in traditional Chinese opera that are not sung, but spoken (戏曲中只说不唱的台词，戏剧角色所说的话)	✓	✗	Metaphorical extension
21. To state, to report (陈述，表明)	✓	✗	Metaphorical extension
22. Goal, aim (目标，对象)	✗	✓	Natural / metaphorical extension (metonymy)
23. Coward (胆小的)	✗	✓	Metaphorical extension
24. Old coin (made of silver) (古代银币)	✗	✓	Natural extension (metonymy)
25. Musical note (二分音符)	✗	✓	Natural extension (metonymy)

▶ 8

Learning activities (1)

▶ Contrastive analysis of figurative meanings of colours

1. Students are asked to write associations and the figurative meanings of a list of colours in Spanish.

2. Based on their experience and intuition, students match words from a list of different meanings associated to colours in Chinese with the corresponding colour.

3. Group discussion about similarities and differences, cultural motivation, implications (NVL, translation, community interpreting).

Learning activities

颜色	西班牙文	中文
白色 báisè		
黑色 hēisè		
红色 hóngsè		
黄色 huángsè		
绿色 lǜsè		
蓝色 lánsè		
紫色 zǐsè		
灰色 huīsè		

Learning activities

颜色	西班牙文	中文
白色 báisè	Pureza, virginidad	
黑色 hēisè	Ilegal, sucio, humor negro	
红色 hóngsè	Pasión, violencia, peligro	
黄色 huángsè	Mala suerte	
绿色 lǜsè	Ecología, esperanza	
蓝色 lánsè	Cielo, mar, sangre azul	
紫色 zǐsè	Feminismo	
灰色 huīsè	Triste, apagado, policía	

boda, en vano, menosprecio, luto, cornudo, ilegalidad, seriedad, mezquino, vacío, alegría, pornografía, brillante, revolucionario, reaccionario, mar, peligro, salud, éxito, entre legalidad e ilegalidad, permiso, fortuna, etnia han, emperador, juventud, cielo, poder, envidia

Learning activities (2)

▸ Conceptual map: fill in the gaps
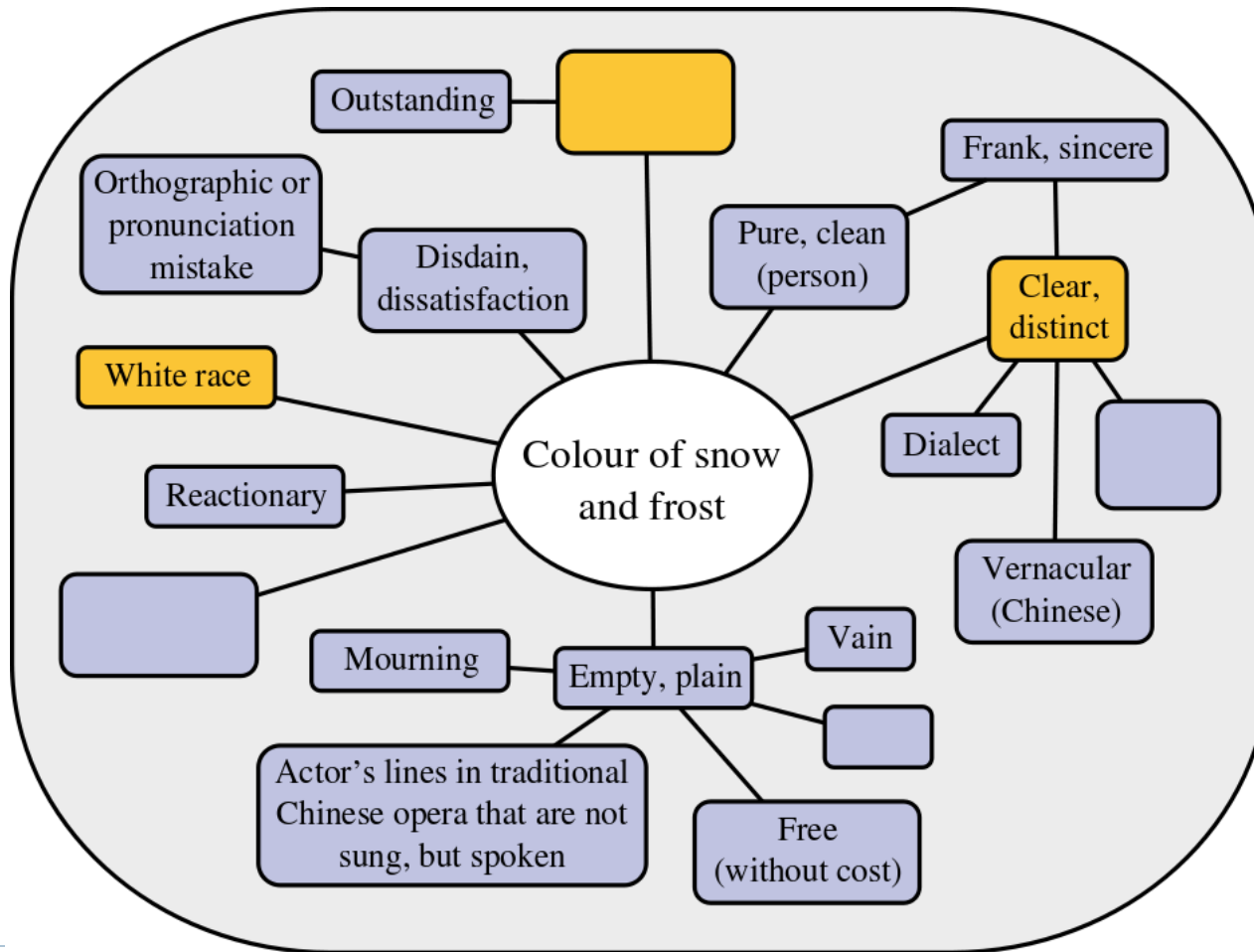
Learning activities (3)

▶ Ask students to match expressions with 白 with the corresponding meaning within the conceptual map.

Expressions with 白	meaning
祝福你们俩白头到老早生贵子。	空白
这家公司是他白手起家建成的。	丧事
我去他家参加一堂白事。	看不起
小谢生气地白了我一眼。	白色

Concluding remarks

- Increases students' cultural awareness and linguistic competence.

- Positive feedback from students:
  - enjoyable and fruitful activity
  - raises curiosity and motivation

- The CL approach is a valid methodology in teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

- Great potential for all aspects of language, not just vocabulary but also grammar, etc.

- This methodology can be used at all stages of the learning process.