

Setting Sail on the Boat of Greek Mythology: Enhancing College English Vocabulary Learning

Mengyi Cai

Qingdao City University, Qingdao, Shandong 266106, China

ABSTRACT

Vocabulary acquisition has always been a major challenge for students. The traditional vocabulary learning mode easily causes students to lose interest and makes it difficult for them to master and apply the learned vocabulary. The paper explores three methods of using Greek mythology to promote vocabulary learning. First, construct myth - infused mind maps. Vocabulary is introduced by playing videos of mythological stories. Then, a vocabulary semantic network is constructed using mind maps, and by delving deep into the stories, the cultural significance of vocabulary is deepened. Second, conduct vocabulary drama performances. Students consolidate vocabulary through performances and post - performance reflection and review. Third, break the cultural code and interpret the connection between mythological symbols and vocabulary.

KEYWORDS

Greek mythology; English vocabulary; college education

1 Introduction

Vocabulary acquisition, as a core element of language learning, has always been a major challenge for students. Students often lose interest gradually in such a monotonous vocabulary learning mode and find it difficult to master and apply the learned vocabulary. To break this dilemma, this paper proposes integrating Greek mythology into the curriculum system. Greek mythology has rich and intricate stories, which construct vivid contexts and provide unique and favorable conditions for vocabulary learning. In the contexts of mythological stories, vocabulary is no longer isolated symbols but is closely connected with specific plots and characters. This enables students to understand and remember vocabulary more naturally and deeply in an immersive learning experience, making vocabulary acquisition more attractive and meaningful.

2 Myth - Infused Mind Maps: Weaving Vocabulary Webs Inspired by Greek Tales

In the realm of English vocabulary teaching, innovative approaches are constantly being sought to enhance students' learning experiences and outcomes. Shen proposed that in the visualized situation, teachers arouse students' vision, hearing, touch, etc., enabling students to obtain a variety of sensory experiences and effectively engage in vocabulary learning (Shen, 2024). Creating Greek mythological stories as a language situation for vocabulary teaching can further stimulate students' learning interest and improve the efficiency of vocabulary learning. This part will explore how to optimize vocabulary teaching based on the teaching content of Greek mythology from two aspects.

2.1 Introduce Stories with Videos and Construct a Vocabulary Semantic Network

Select Greek mythological stories with vivid plots and distinct characters as the carriers for vocabulary learning, such as the story of Apollo and Daphne, the story of Heracles, etc. Initially, play the video of the relevant story to enable students to gain a brief understanding. Then, extract key vocabulary from the story, including names of people, places, and objects. Finally, use tools like mind maps to establish connections among the story background, character relationships, and the development of the story plot. As Shao stated, mind maps are effective tools for cultivating students' radiating thinking. They can record the thinking process and present it in a clear and distinct visual way, thus making people's thinking, expression, and communication more effortless. (Shao, 2024) Therefore, mind maps can help students deepen their understanding of the stories behind the vocabulary.

2.2 Learning Greek Mythological Stories to Deepen the Cultural Significance of Vocabulary

Delving deep into Greek mythological stories can not only ignite students' enthusiasm for vocabulary learning but also enable them to have a more in - depth understanding of the cultural background knowledge behind words and proverbs. Li proposed that while learning vocabulary, getting to know Greek mythological stories can not only strengthen memory, enable the correct understanding and use of language, but also contribute to the understanding of Western culture (Li,

2002). For example, when the phrase "Pandora's box" is introduced in class, firstly, students might perceive it as nothing more than an ordinary box and be completely unaware of the fascinating story and its true meaning behind it. The obvious gap between the surface understanding and the deep meaning naturally stimulates students' curiosity.

Subsequently, the teacher can vividly tell the myth of Pandora. As the story unfolds, students will discover that Pandora, the first mortal woman created by the gods, was given a box and strictly told not to open it. However, eventually, driven by curiosity, she opened the box and released all the evils and misfortunes into the world, leaving only hope inside. With such rich background knowledge, students can fully understand that "Pandora's box" symbolizes the source of unforeseen troubles or problems. This story not only enriches their vocabulary but also allows them to appreciate the profound cultural heritage embedded in the English language. Teachers can further encourage students to actively find similar examples in their daily lives, classic literature, or contemporary media.

3 Vocabulary Dramas: Acting Out Greek Myths to Embody English Words

In college English vocabulary learning, the traditional rote - memorization method often makes it difficult for students to persevere. Incorporating vocabulary drama performances inspired by Greek mythology offers a new and effective learning approach. This method enables students to transform into mythological characters, breathing vivid life into the stories. During this process, students can remember English vocabulary in a more immersive state.

3.1 Selection of Appropriate Greek Myths

To enhance the effectiveness of language learning through this innovative approach of vocabulary dramas, the first step is to select suitable Greek myths. The storylines of Greek myths are full of twists and turns and are extremely gripping, and the characters have distinct and prominent characteristics. Greek mythological stories can provide rich contexts and vivid backgrounds for vocabulary learning, allowing learners to naturally engage with and understand vocabulary. For example, the story of Perseus and Medusa. The heroic Perseus has to overcome numerous challenges, from obtaining necessary weapons such as the adamantine sickle and the mirrored shield, to facing Medusa whose gaze can turn people to stone. Every element in the story, from the items Perseus uses to the actions he takes, corresponds to a series of English vocabulary. Words like "adamantine" (extremely hard or unbreakable), "sickle" (a tool with a curved blade), and "terrifying" (causing extreme fear) can all be vividly presented in the drama and practiced by students to reinforce their learning.

3.2 Drama Performance and Interactive Learning

The actual performance of vocabulary dramas is the most exciting part. Students play their respective roles and convey the emotions and meanings related to the vocabulary through body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions. During the performance, other students, acting as the audience, can actively participate by asking the performers questions related to the vocabulary used in the drama. For example, after the scene where Theseus explores the labyrinth, the audience can ask questions like "What word would you use to describe the complexity of the labyrinth?" or "How do you think Theseus felt when he first entered the labyrinth?" This interactive element not only makes the learning process more interesting but also helps to strengthen the understanding of the vocabulary.

3.3 Post - performance Reflection and Review

After the drama performance, it is crucial to conduct post - performance reflection and review. Teachers can guide students to discuss what they have learned during the performance process, which words were the most difficult to use, and how to improve their vocabulary usage. Teachers can also provide more examples of how the learned vocabulary is used in different contexts to further expand students' knowledge.

To further enhance students' vocabulary-using abilities, teachers can make full use of the post-performance review stage to guide students to re-create the script. After the performance, teachers first organize students to conduct a discussion, allowing them to talk about the difficulties they encountered in vocabulary usage during the performance. For example, some students may find that when describing the emotions of characters, the vocabulary they use is too monotonous to accurately portray the complex emotional states of the characters. Some other students may mention that in specific scenes, they don't know how to select appropriate vocabulary to enrich the description of the scenes. Based on these discussions, teachers guide students to re - create the script and encourage them to have the courage to try using diverse vocabulary to express the same or similar meanings.

This review stage helps to consolidate the vocabulary in students' long - term memory and assists them in continuing

to use these words in future English - language communication.

4 Cultural Code - Breaking: Unraveling Hidden Vocabulary Meanings in Greek Myths

Greek mythology, a rich and colorful cultural treasure trove, is the source of the hidden connotations of numerous English words. Through these diverse teaching methods, students can study these mythological stories in depth and unlock the cultural connotations embedded in the vocabulary. Xue indicated that by interspersing Greek mythological stories, it can enhance students' interest in vocabulary learning and improve their basic language skills. Moreover, with an understanding of the Western cultural background, it is conducive to their better comprehension, memorization, and spelling (Xue, 2018).

4.1 Decoding Mythological Symbols and Their Lexical Representations

In the fields of language learning and cultural exploration, understanding the connections between language and its cultural background is of vital importance.

Malinowski (1989) emphasized the importance of in - depth research on the social and cultural environment of language for accurately interpreting the meaning of language. Greek mythology is full of symbols with profound cultural connotations, and these symbols are frequently directly linked to English vocabulary. For instance, the "olive branch" in Greek mythology symbolizes peace. When the goddess of wisdom Athena competed with the sea god Poseidon for the status of the patron deity of Athens, Athena presented an olive tree to Athens. The people of Athens considered this gift to be more beneficial, so the olive branch also became a symbol of peace and prosperity.

4.2 Linking Mythological Meanings to Modern-day Usage

During the teaching process, teachers also guide students to connect the hidden meanings in Greek mythology with modern language usage. Many English idioms originate from Greek mythology. For example, the phrase "Achilles' heel" comes from the story of Achilles, who was invulnerable all over his body except for his heel. In modern English, this phrase is used to refer to a person's weak point or vulnerable area. By studying this mythological allusion, students can use this idiom more appropriately in conversations, writing, and daily communication.

5 Conclusion

This study explores the innovative integration of Greek mythology into college English vocabulary learning. By leveraging Greek mythology, three strategies are proposed: Myth - Infused Mind Maps, Vocabulary Dramas, and Cultural Code - Breaking, aiming to enhance students' vocabulary learning.

The Myth - Infused Mind Maps, with the help of videos and the construction of semantic networks, provide students with an overall understanding of vocabulary within the context of mythological stories. This approach not only helps students memorize words better but also deepens their understanding of the cultural meanings behind the vocabulary, promoting a more profound connection between language and culture. On the other hand, students actively participate in the performance of mythological stories in class, enabling them to remember vocabulary in a vivid way. The reflection and review after the performance further consolidate their learning achievements and help apply them to real life communication scenarios. The Cultural Code - Breaking approach enables students to unlock the hidden meanings of English words. By linking mythological meanings to modern day usage, students can expand their vocabulary knowledge and improve their language application skills. They can better understand the subtleties of the English language and use it more accurately and appropriately.

References

- [1] Shen, Y. F. (2024). Practice of optimizing junior high school English vocabulary teaching based on situation creation. *Campus English*, (4), 3 - 6.
- [2] Shao, Y. J. (2024). Research on the application of mind maps in college spoken English teaching. *English Square*, (26), 87 - 91.
- [3] Xue, X. Y. (2018). Introduction of Greek mythology in the teaching of College English Integrated Course. *Anhui Literature (Lower Monthly)*, (11), 225 - 226.
- [4] Li, X. L. (2002). Introduction of cultural factors of vocabulary in English teaching. In *Proceedings of the 2002 Annual Meeting of the Foreign Languages Society of Fujian Province (184 - 187)*. School of Foreign Languages, Huaqiao University.
- [5] Malinowski, B. (1989). The problem of meaning in primitive languages. In C. K. Ogden & I. A. Richards (Eds.), *The meaning of meaning* (312). Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.