Abstract

The Chinese written language is a logographic system, where each character represents a morpheme, the smallest meaningful unit in a language. The morpheme meaning of a Chinese character can either be a monosyllabic word or form part of a compounding word.

It has been accepted that although a character may be used to represent multiple meanings, the frequencies of implications among the meanings differs; for example: the basic meaning (基本义) of a character is the most frequently used. Therefore, the teaching and learning of the basic meaning of a character should be prioritized over its other meanings. Hence, this paper aims to do a quantitative study on the Chinese characters taught in the primary school syllabus of Singapore. The key criterion for defining a main meaning of a character is the frequency of its application in both monosyllabic words and compounding words.

The paper is divided into three main sections. First, it focuses on the usage pattern of all the basic meanings of the characters when they appear as part of a new word in the textbook. The theory of preferring basic meaning is emphasized in this chapter. It is observed that a significant portion of
words does not appear with basic meaning of the compounding characters. Next, through an analysis of all related lexicons in the syllabus, we examined how low and mid-frequency characters are used to form a word. Lastly, the coverage of multi-meanings of characters in the syllabus is discussed.

Based on the findings, the thesis aims to offer suggestions for improvements in the teaching of Chinese language.