Semantic Prosody in Bilingual Dictionaries and EFL Learners’ Sentence Writings

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The purpose of the current study was bi-fold. First it was to examine how the semantic prosody of eight lexical items that had a specific semantic prosody were presented and explained in the six English-Korean bilingual dictionaries. In addition, it was to investigate how those lexical items were used in university students’ sentence writings in relation to semantic prosody. The result showed that the semantic prosodies of the lexical items were not adequately presented in the dictionaries in general and a number of inappropriate uses of lexical items in relation to semantic prosody were identified in the students’ sentence writings. It was suggested that EFL dictionary publishers should explicitly address the issue of semantic prosody by providing information about the semantic preference and collocational behavior of a lexical item and they should be more cautious when presenting Korean translations/equivalents in the dictionaries. Along the same lines, it was also suggested that EFL/ESL teachers should (a) recognize the value of semantic prosody in L2 communication; (b) avoid the vocabulary teaching practice of explaining the meaning of words by simply providing near synonyms; and (c) make the students more aware of the difference in semantic prosody between English lexical items and their Korean translations/equivalents.

I. INTRODUCTION

With the advent of computer technology in storing and analyzing language data, linguistic research utilizing corpora has enjoyed popularity among linguists due to its effectiveness and efficiency. However, it was not until the 1990s that semantic prosody attracted much attention from corpus linguists (for example, Louw, 1993; Sinclair, 1991; Stubbs, 1995). They found that words are habitually associated with particular connotational meanings, which are typically positive or negative. Since the term ‘semantic prosody’ has been widely used by many corpus researchers
(Hunston, 2002; Partington, 1998, 2004; Tognini-Bonelli, 2001; Tribble, 2000), some of them (Hunston, 2002; Nesselhauf, 2003; Partington, 1998; Xiao & McEnery, 2006; Zhang, 2009) have begun to recognize the significance of semantic prosody in language teaching. Partington (1998) contended that it is crucial for non-native speakers to understand the notion of semantic prosody and to know semantic prosody of English words because such information can help them understand what is appropriate and what actually happens and help them avoid confusion that arises from the semantic disaccord. Similarly, Zhang (2009) argued that awareness of semantic prosody plays a crucial role in interpreting a text producer’s hidden attitudes and can help language learners to understand how to use lexical items appropriately. Furthermore, Pan and Feng (2003) argued that semantic prosody should be presented in dictionaries particularly when they are designed for EFL learners to whom such information is hardly accessible otherwise. In this vein, the purpose of the current study was to examine how semantic prosody was presented in the English-Korean bilingual dictionaries that Korean EFL learners often consulted and to see how Korean university students used the lexical items in their writings that have a specific semantic prosody.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Definition and Significance of Semantic Prosody

The term semantic prosody was first coined and used by Louw (1993), but the development of its notion is attributed to Sinclair (1991), who stated that “many uses of words and phrases show a tendency to occur in a certain semantic environment” (p. 112). A number of researchers tried to define semantic prosody. Partington (1998) stated that it is “the spreading of connotational coloring beyond single word boundaries” (p. 68). Louw (2000) defined it as a collocational meaning arising from the interaction between a given node and its typical collocates and said that it is “a form of meaning which is established through the proximity of consistent series of collocates” (p. 57). He further contended that the major function of semantic prosody is to express speakers’ or writers’ attitude or evaluation. Consistent with these definitions, Hunston and Francis (2000) stated that “a word may be said to have a particular semantic prosody if it can be shown to co-occur typically with other words that belong to a particular semantic set” (p. 137).

One of the plausible explanations of semantic prosody is derived from the concept of priming which was first introduced by Hoey (2003). He argued that “As the word is learnt through encounters with it in speech and writing, it is loaded with the cumulative effects of those encounters such that it is part of our knowledge of the word that it co-occurs with
other words” (p. 1). In a similar way, words are primed to occur with particular semantic sets as they are encountered repeatedly.

With regards to theoretical significance of semantic prosody, Morely and Partington (2009) contended that semantic prosodies provide strong evidence for the principle of co-selection. That is, semantic prosody robustly support the idea that discourse is not built up as each word delivers its meaning separately, rather speakers in communication chose features of discourse in batches when conveying meaning. They stated:

Semantic prosody is the mechanism that shows how one elemental type of meaning-evaluative meaning-is frequently shared across units in discourse and, by ensuring consistency of evaluation or evaluative harmony, plays a vital role in keeping the discourse together, in its cohesion. (p. 139)

It has been also argued that at a rhetorical level of discourse, semantic prosody can give a reader or listener an insight into the beliefs, opinions and tones of a speaker or writer. Low (1993) contended that by intentionally violating semantic prosody of the words, irony, insincerity, or humor can be achieved as shown in the following example.

The modern conference resembles the pilgrimage of medieval Christendom in that it allows the participants to indulge themselves in all the pleasures and diversions of travel while appearing to be austerely bent on self-improvement. (p. 164)

According to Louw, bent on typically collocates with unfavorable/negative items such as destroying and mayhem, but by intentionally upsetting its semantic prosody, an irony effect can be achieved. Morely and Partington (2009) suggested that this special effect is a strong evidence that underlying semantic prosody undoubtedly persists; otherwise it cannot be read as creating this particular rhetoric effect.

2. Research on Semantic Prosody

A number of researchers have investigated semantic prosody by probing corpus data. Sinclair (1991), who first developed the notion of semantic prosody, contended that certain words and phrases tend to occur in a particular semantic environment that is either positive or negative. For example, he observed that happen and set in are often associated with unpleasant events such as accidents. Similarly, Partington (1998) found that commit, peddle, and dealings are habitually associated with negative events (e.g., commit suicide/crime). Louw (1993) also found that utterly and bent on were typically associated with the words that indicated unpleasant situations. Stubb (1995) showed that about 90%
of the words that collocated with *cause* were negative (e.g., *accident, cancer, and crisis*).

Nelson (2006) analyzed the data in the Business English Corpus (BEC) and showed how words in business English interacted with each other on a semantic level. The texts were collected from native speaker sources in the UK and USA that were actually used in a business field (e.g., *faxes, emails, reports, newspapers, articles*, etc.). Of the 50 words investigated 48 words displayed a tendency to collocate with the words that belonged to particular semantic sets and some of semantic prosodies were business-specific. For example, *boss* was often used with negative adjectives such as *mean and old-fashioned*.

Xiao and McEnery (2006) conducted a cross-linguistic analysis (English and Chinese) of semantic prosody and collocational behaviors focusing on near synonyms (e.g., *result, outcome, consequence, and aftermath*). It was revealed that semantic prosody and semantic preference of near synonyms are different, meaning that they are not generally interchangeable in either language. They suggested that the concept of semantic prosody should be clearly introduced and taught in the language learning classroom and that it is crucial to provide the closest L1 equivalents of L2 words, matching their semantic prosodies.

To my knowledge, there have been only a few attempts to investigate how semantic prosody is presented in bilingual dictionaries in EFL context. Ji and We (2000) investigated three lexical items (*set in, rife, and propaganda*) in three English-Chinese bilingual dictionaries and found that none of them noted the phrase *set in* has a negative semantic prosody. With regards to the other two lexical items, *rife and propaganda*, their semantic prosodies were wrongly presented in the dictionaries. For example, the word *rife* was translated as if it had a positive semantic prosody even though it had a negative semantic prosody in its actual use. They concluded that a poor representation of semantic prosody in the dictionary could cause an inappropriate use of English words.

Wang (2004) examined five lexical items (i.e., *incite, impressive, contribute to, and a pair of near synonyms persist and persevere*) in ten English-Chinese bilingual dictionaries that were widely used in China. He reported that positive semantic prosodies of the lexical items (i.e., *impressive, persevere*) were appropriately represented through their equivalent translation or usage notes, but negative semantic prosodies of lexical items (i.e., *incite, persist*) were not properly represented in the dictionaries. He also suggested that the misrepresentation of semantic prosody of words in the dictionaries could misguide dictionary users.

As presented above, there have been a number of studies that examined the semantic prosody of English words and the pedagogical value of semantic prosody has been increasingly recognized by a number of researchers. However, not much effort has been made to investigate how semantic prosody is presented in EFL reference books including dictionaries (except two cases on English-Chinese bilingual dictionaries presented above).
and little research has been done on the EFL students’ use of semantic prosody in their actual writings. Thus, the research on how semantic prosody is presented and realized in Korean EFL context may help fill this research gap and provide practical implications for English teaching in Korea. In this vein, the two following research questions guided the current study.

1) How are the semantic prosodies of the eight lexical items (i.e., cause, incur, bring about, fully, utterly, persist, persistent, and be bent on) presented in the English-Korean bilingual dictionaries?
2) How are the eight lexical items used in Korean university students’ sentence writings in relation to semantic prosody?

III. RESEARCH METHOD

1. Participants and Settings

One hundred and ten students at a university located in Seoul participated in the study. The first group of participants included 79 English freshmen who were taking “English Grammar” in the spring semester, 2010. The group consisted of 41 male and 38 female students and their age ranged from 19 to 25, but most of them (95%) were within the range of 19 through 21. Their TOEIC scores were available because they were strongly encouraged to take the test at the beginning of the semester and it was administered by the university for the diagnostic purpose. The mean test score was 598, but it could be biased because the test scores were not officially recorded and reported by the ETS and it only had a diagnostic purpose, which might influence students’ performance on the test. Besides, only 52 students took the test and thus the score should be interpreted with caution. The other group of participants was comprised of 27 English juniors and four English Education juniors who were taking “Second Language Learning Theory and Practice” in the fall semester, 2009. The numbers of the male and female students were 10 and 21 respectively and their age ranged from 22 to 25. Their standardized test scores were not available at the time the research was conducted. However, a relative comparison between the two groups was possible because the two courses were taught by the same instructor in English so that the students’ English skills could be compared through the exams and individual presentations required in the course. Even though there existed some individual differences, the English skills of the junior group were better than those of the freshman group.
2. Procedures

1) Data Collection and Analysis of Bilingual Dictionaries

The eight lexical items that were found to have a particular semantic prosody in previous research (Hunston, 2007; Kennedy, 2003; Louw, 1993, 2000; Stubbs, 1995, 2001; Wei, 2002; Xiao & McEnery, 2006) were probed in the six English-Korean bilingual dictionaries. The primary reason to select these eight lexical items was because they tend to show a clearer tendency in semantic prosody than other lexical items found in previous research, and it was also because by including the words that are considered to be near-synonyms but that actually have a different semantic prosody (i.e., cause and incur vs. bring about, fully vs. utterly), one can see how the semantic prosody of near-synonyms are treated in the dictionaries and how they are actually used by Korean EFL learners.

For the convenience of analysis, the degree of representation was categorized into four groups. It was labeled as excellent when the semantic prosody of each item was explained explicitly and adequate examples were provided accordingly. It was categorized as fair when it included both but either a clear explanation or appropriate examples were not adequate enough. Thirdly, it was classified as poor when only one of them was given. It was labeled as very poor when neither explanation about semantic prosody nor appropriate examples were given. It was also grouped as very poor when incorrect or inappropriate information was given.

In addition, the L1 translations of the lexical items in the dictionaries were searched on one of the most comprehensive Korean corpora, 21st Century Sejong Project to see the semantic prosody of L1 translation whenever necessary. The researcher tried to look at a general tendency of semantic prosody and see whether there was any semantic disharmony between L2 lexical items and their corresponding L1 translations. In addition, the lexical items were searched on the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA, hereafter) to give examples of their semantic prosody.

2) Data Collection and Analysis of Students' Sentence Writings

The eight lexical items probed in the dictionaries were tested by having students write at least two sentences per each item, and in so doing their actual use of each item in relation to semantic prosody was examined. In the task, the information about the part of speech of each item was given and if they did not know the meaning of the items, they were allowed to skip them. However, they were not allowed to consult other reference books including

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The six dictionaries were within the top-six list when they were searched on the three most popular online bookstores and they could be purchased in most of popular online and offline bookstores.
dictionaries in order to exclude the possibility that they would just copy the example sentences from the dictionaries.

The sentence writing task was performed during the class time and they were given about 35 minutes to complete the task. There was a large variance in the number of the sentences that they produced and it was mainly because they produced a relatively small number of sentences for a few lexical items (See Table 2). While having a conference with each student, which was a course requirement, many of the students who skipped those lexical items reported that sometimes they did not know the meaning of words clearly, and even though they knew the meaning of the words, they did not know how to make a sentence using those lexical items. It may be also related to the fact that a large proportion of the participants (about 72%) were freshmen who had been supposedly better trained for comprehension skills than production skills up until then. If an example sentence had been provided for each lexical item, they would have produced more sentences. However, as previously noted, this option was excluded from the beginning due to the possibility that they would just copy the example sentences.

Even though there was some initial confusion and controversy about semantic prosody, corpus linguists seem to be reaching general agreement in appreciating the good-bad, positive-negative distinction at the heart of the notion of semantic prosody (Hoey 2005, cited in Morley & Partington, 2009). Thus, following Partington’s (2004) scheme of semantic prosody (i.e., favorable, neutral, and unfavorable semantic prosody), two raters analyzed the sentences centering on the use of semantic prosody and grouped them into three categories (positive, neutral, and negative). The first rater was the author and the other was an instructor at the university who had earned a master’s degree in the field of language teaching and who were teaching English skill courses at the time research was conducted. The result of interrater analysis was Kappa=0.91 with p<.01 and showed high interrater reliability. While grouping the sentences by their semantic prosody, minor grammatical errors were ignored because grammaticality was not part of analysis. However, the sentences that did not make sense at all were excluded for the convenience of analysis. Then the frequency of each category was counted and presented as the percentage out of the total number of sentences produced per each item.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Semantic Prosody in Bilingual Dictionaries

Table 1 below shows how well the semantic prosody of each lexical item is presented in the six English-Korean bilingual dictionaries that are used by Korean EFL learners. As
aforementioned, they were categorized into four groups according to the degree of representation of semantic prosody and each category was assigned to a numerical number (i.e., excellent=4, fair=3, poor=2, and very poor=1).

**TABLE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cause(v)</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>incur</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>bring about</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>fully</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>utterly</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>persistent</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>be bent on</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Average score</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.38</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.75</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.25</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.88</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.13</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.25</strong></td>
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</table>

1) *Cause, Incur and Bring About*

It has been found that *cause* and *incur* have negative semantic prosody, often associated with unfavorable events, and by contrast, *bring about* primarily accompanies positive events (Stubb, 1995; Wei, 2002; Xiao & McEnery, 2006). For example, when *cause* (v) was searched on the COCA, among the five most frequent noun collocates were *death, problems, damage, cancer, and pain*, and similarly those of *incur* were *cost, wrath, debt, loses, and risk*, most of which have negative meanings. By contrast, the common collocates of *bring about* included such words as *change* (mostly in a positive way) and *peace* that have normally positive meanings when it was searched on the COCA.

When the dictionaries were examined, *cause* was presented more adequately than the other lexical items. The five dictionaries (B, C, D, E, and F) provided the information about its semantic prosody, if not explicit but easily inferable from the examples. Most of the examples accorded with its semantic prosody by being associated with highly unfavorable events as shown in the following examples.

(a) His death was caused by cancer. (-)\(^2\)
(b) Careless driving causes accidents. (-)
(c) The fire caused damage worth $500,000. (-)
(d) The bad weather is causing problems for many farmers. (-)

In addition, the semantic prosody of Korean translation in the dictionaries closely

\(^2\) (+), (-), and (0) refer to negative, positive, and neutral semantic prosody respectively.
matched that of *cause*. For example, its most common translations were ‘야기하다’ and ‘초래하다’ and both of them were used with a negative connotation in most cases (more than 99%)\(^3\) when they were searched on the 21st Century Sejong Project. In particular, dictionary F provided adequate examples of its use along with the common collocates (e.g., *cause* problems/trouble/damage/harm/death) that co-occur with *cause*.

Meanwhile, the meaning and use of *incur* were presented fairly well in the four dictionaries (B, C, E, and F) such that learners can easily infer its semantic prosody. The most common Korean translations included ‘(손실을)초래하다’, ‘(빚을)지다’, and ‘(분노를)일으키다.’ As shown in the translations, the semantic contexts were specified enough for dictionary users to easily understand its particular use. The examples in the dictionaries clearly showed that it was typically associated with unpleasant events, matching its semantic prosody (See examples below). On the other hand, no example sentence was available in the other two dictionaries (A and B).

(a) You risk incurring bank charges if you exceed your overdraft limit. (-)
(b) He incurred the displeasure of his sovereign by declining his invitation. (-)
(c) She had incurred the wrath of her father by marrying without his consent. (-)

The most poorly presented lexical item among the three was *bring about* in that the four dictionaries (A, B, C, and D) provided neither appropriate translations nor adequate examples that correspond to its semantic prosody. As aforementioned, it is largely associated with positive situations\(^4\), but some of the examples in the dictionaries were misleading learners by offering mostly negative uses of *bring about*.

(a) Gambling brings about his ruin. (-)
(b) That plan could bring about our destruction. (-)
(c) Nuclear weapons may bring about the annihilation of man. (-)

It should be also noted that the common Korean translations of *bring about* in the four dictionaries (A, B, C, and D) were ‘야기하다’, ‘초래하다’, and ‘일으키다’ and they were very similar to those of *cause* and *incur*. Thus, there was a clear mismatch between the semantic prosody of *bring about* and that of its Korean translations.

Meanwhile, the two dictionaries (E and F) presented the meaning and use of *bring about* relatively better than the other dictionaries. For example, dictionary F specified its

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\(^3\) 273 occurrences out of 276 were used negatively in the cases of ‘초래하다’ and 578 occurrences out 589 were used negatively in the case of ‘야기하다.’

\(^4\) When *bring about* was searched on the COCA, among the five most frequent noun collocates were *change, changes, peace, end, and revolution* that are normally associated with positive situations.
use by providing its common collocates in its translation (e.g., [변화, 개선 등을 가지오다]), helping learners understand specific semantic context in which it can be used. However, the examples of its use were not sufficient enough to imply its semantic prosody.

2) Fully and Utterly

Fully, together with absolutely, completely, entirely, perfectly, totally, and utterly, have been known as an amplifier that maximally intensifies a sense of an adjective or a verb. In particular, fully has been known to be used in favorable situations \(^5\) (Kennedy, 2003). On the other hand, utterly has been known to have negative semantic prosody, collocating with such words as destroy, fail and useless (Kennedy, 2003; Louw, 2000). The four dictionaries (C, D, E, and F) included the proper examples of fully that matched its semantic prosody (See example (a) and (b) below). However, the other two dictionaries (A and B) were negligent in explaining its usage and provided only Korean translations

(a) She was fully aware of the case. (+)
(b) We are fully equipped for an expedition. (+)

The most common Korean translation of fully in the dictionaries were ‘충분히’ and ‘완전히,’ and ‘충분히’ seemed more suitable for its corresponding Korean equivalent because when they were searched on the 21st Century Sejong Project, ‘충분히’ was mostly used in a positive way (about 95\%)\(^6\), whereas ‘완전히’ was used both positively and negatively. Overall, the semantic prosody of fully was relatively better presented than other lexical items in the dictionaries.

Meanwhile, utterly was not presented as fairly as fully. The four dictionaries (A, B, C, and D) provided only Korean translations (i.e., 완전히, 아주, 충분히, 순전히, 전적으로) that did not match its semantic prosody, and did not provide any example sentences. On the other hand, the two dictionaries (E and F) presented its semantic prosody relatively well. For example, dictionary F noted that utterly tended to collocate with the verbs that have a negative meaning and provided appropriate examples that matched its semantic prosody as shown below.

\(^5\) When fully was searched on the COCA, the top five lexical verbs nearby (within 3 words on each side) were understand, develop, realize, appreciate, and recover, and the top five adjectives that co-occur nearby were aware, human, operational, awake, and functional.

\(^6\) Out of 1580 occurrences of ‘충분히’ in total, every 10th case was examined and about 150 cases were found to be used positively.
(a) She utterly failed to convince them. (-)
(b) The whole story is utterly ridiculous. (-)

3) Persist and Persistent

It has been known that *persist* (Wang, 2004) and *persistent* (Hunston, 2007) are normally associated with negative occurrences. When *persist* was searched on the COCA, the top five frequent lexical nouns to the left were *problem[s]*, *pain*, *students*, *symptoms*, and *rumors*. Except for *students*, most of them were related to undesirable situations. Similarly, *persistent* has been known that it consistently co-occurs with negative events especially when it is followed by a noun (Hunston, 2007). When *persistent* was searched on the COCA, the top five frequent lexical nouns to the right were *problem[s]*, *state*, *pain*, *rumor[s]*, and *cough*, and all of these words were associated with unfavorable events.

The presentation of *persist* in the four dictionaries (A, B, C, and D) was somewhat misleading by including many positive examples (e.g., *I hope the good weather will persist for our holiday*). Among the examples provided, the number of positive use was a little higher than that of negative use (positive: 4, negative: 3, neutral: 3) and little information about its semantic prosody was available. On the other hand, the two dictionaries (E and F) provided a better presentation of its meaning and use compared to the other dictionaries. For example, dictionary F specified its use and meaning (e.g., [(나쁜 상황 · 상태 등이) 지속되는]) along with the examples that conformed to its semantic prosody (e.g., *if the pain persists, call a doctor*).

*Persistent* was presented properly in the three dictionaries (C, E, and F). They included the examples that evidently showed the context in which it could be used and provided a number of common collocates: *a persistent cough*, *a persistent offender*, *a persistent drought*, and *a persistent headache*. In addition, its Korean translations were detailed enough so that dictionary users could recognize its semantic prosody very easily. For example, the translation in dictionary F included ‘(나쁜 상황·상태 등이) 지속되는,’ ‘만성적인,’ ‘(범죄자/범죄 등이) 상습적인,’ and ‘(노력 등이) 근질한.’

On the other hand, the other three dictionaries (A, B, and D) did not provide adequate examples that showed its semantic prosody. Particularly, dictionary D presented only the positive use of *persistent* (e.g., *a persistent worker, persistent efforts*) and present *enduring* as its synonym. Even though it rarely co-occurs with such words as *effort* that normally has a positive meaning, it predominantly co-occurs with the words that have a negative

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7 The total frequency of *students* within three words to the right of *persist* was 61 and most of them (58) were found solely in academic writing and used with positive meanings (e.g., *they will persist in achieving their educational goals*).

8 *State* is predominantly used in the form of *persistent vegetative state* (94 out of 100).
meaning. Therefore, the examples provided were not representative of its typical use, causing dictionary users to misinterpret its use.

4) Be Bent On

Of the six dictionaries, only two of them (E and F) denoted the semantic prosody of *be bent on* and the other four dictionaries provided little information about its semantic prosody and even misled learners by providing inappropriate examples that did not accord with its semantic prosody. The examples below were not necessarily incorrect, but highly unrepresentative of typical use of *be bent on*.

(a) He is bent on becoming a doctor. (+)
(b) She is bent on getting the driving license. (+)
(c) He is bent on mastering mathematics this summer. (+)

The most frequently used Korean translations were ‘전념’ 9 (열중) 하는’ and ‘결심 (각오) 하는’ in the dictionaries and when these Korean equivalents were searched on the *21st Century Sejong Project*, they were found to have a positive or neutral semantic prosody, mismatching the semantic prosody of *be bent on*. Meanwhile, dictionary E and F denoted that *be bent on* is related to negative occurrences. However, they did not provide adequate examples that showed its typical use. Only one appropriate example was available in dictionary F (i.e., *she is bent on making life difficult for me*).

In sum, the four dictionaries (A, B, C, and D) did not seem to present the semantic prosody of the eight lexical items properly in general: Average scores of presentation were 1.4, 1.8, 2.3, and 1.9 respectively (See Table1). Especially, the examples given were often unrepresentative of its typical use and meaning, sometimes causing semantic disharmony between the semantic prosody of the lexical item and the one denoted or connoted in the example sentences. It may be because they did not rely on such comprehensive language database as corpora, through which the typical use and meaning of words can be identified and extracted. Thus, it seems critical to conduct a corpus-driven analysis when describing lexical items in a dictionary and it is more so when providing such information as semantic prosody and collocation, which would be hardly accessible otherwise. With the information provided by corpora, a usage note for a lexical item can be created that includes a list of frequent collocates along with semantic preference and example sentences that are congruent with its semantic prosody. This kind of supplement is more critical when a lexical item shows a clear tendency in semantic prosody. Meanwhile, it was

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9 Out of 230 occurrences of ‘전념’ 223 cases were used in a positive or neutral way and only 7 were related to negative situations. Among the most frequent collocates of ‘전념’ were ‘임’ and ‘연구.’
also found that some of the dictionaries (E and F)\textsuperscript{10} were on the right track in their presentation of semantic prosody even though some problems were identified as well. Maybe it is because, unlike the other four dictionaries, the results of corpus-driven analysis have been substantially reflected in these dictionaries, and accordingly more attention has been paid to collocations and semantic prosody.

In addition, it can be suggested that a more cautious approach should be taken when providing Korean translation. For example, a number of semantic clashes were identified between an English lexical item and its Korean translation in the dictionaries (e.g., bring about: 초래하다, 이야기시키다; utterly: 충분히; be bent on: 전념(열중)하는). It cannot be naively assumed that Korean translations in the dictionaries would influence the L2 production of dictionary users, but it is also premature to totally exclude its chances as other researchers (Ji & We, 2000; Wang, 2004; Wang & Wang, 2005; Xiao & McEnery, 2006) suggested. A partial solution to the problem would be to examine the semantic prosody of Korean translation by searching it on a Korean corpus and see if its semantic prosody matches that of an English lexical item. If they are largely matched semantically, it can be safely used as a Korean equivalent, but if they are totally mismatched, available Korean translations should be pooled and the one that matches as closely as possible should be selected. When an appropriate translation is not available at all, the semantic prosody of a lexical item along with typical collocates should be explicitly denoted in its translation (e.g., [사건, 사고를] 일으키다; [나쁜 일에] 열중하는) so that dictionary users can easily recognize the semantic context in which a lexical item can be used appropriately.

2. Semantic Prosody in Students’ Sentence Writings

The students produced from 77 to 215 sentences in total per each lexical item and each sentence was analyzed focusing on semantic prosody. Then, it was categorized into three groups (positive, negative, and neutral). The frequency of each category was counted and then presented as the percentage out of total number of sentences per each item as shown in Table 2 below. However, it should be noted that some biases can be introduced by low response rates for a few lexical items, and as noted previously it is related to the fact that some of the participants did not know how to write a sentence using the lexical items and were not allowed to use reference books including dictionaries.

\textsuperscript{10} The two dictionaries (E and F) were affiliated with the foreign publishing companies that have been establishing the comprehensive language database for the purpose of publishing textbooks and dictionaries.
TABLE 2
Semantic Prosody in Students’ Sentence Writings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lexical Item</th>
<th>positive</th>
<th>negative</th>
<th>neutral</th>
<th>total frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cause (v)</td>
<td>15 (7.3%)</td>
<td>161 (78.5%)</td>
<td>29 (14.1%)</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incur</td>
<td>25 (24.5%)</td>
<td>67 (65.7%)</td>
<td>10 (9.8%)</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bring about</td>
<td>33 (21.0%)</td>
<td>85 (54.1%)</td>
<td>39 (24.8%)</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fully</td>
<td>139 (64.7%)</td>
<td>22 (10.2%)</td>
<td>54 (25.1%)</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>utterly</td>
<td>43 (46.7%)</td>
<td>8 (8.7%)</td>
<td>22 (23.9%)</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>persist</td>
<td>50 (46.3%)</td>
<td>36 (33.3%)</td>
<td>22 (20.1%)</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>persistent(^{11})</td>
<td>43 (44.3%)</td>
<td>32 (33.0%)</td>
<td>22 (22.7%)</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be bent on</td>
<td>57 (74.0%)</td>
<td>10 (13.0%)</td>
<td>10 (13.0%)</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) *Cause, Incur, and Bring About*

A majority of uses of *cause* (78.5%) in students’ writings were related to unfavorable events and only a small number of its uses (7.3%) were associated with favorable events. Most of the students seemed to assume that *cause* has a negative semantic prosody and were able to use it in an appropriate context that conformed to its semantic prosody as shown below.

(a) Smoking can cause lung cancer. (-)
(b) Traffic jam can cause air pollution. (-)
(c) The accident was caused by a drunken driver. (-)

In a similar vein, many students perceived *incur* to be associated with negative events. Their perception was not as strong as that of *cause*, but still a relatively large number of its uses (65.7%) in students’ writings were related to negative affairs, matching its semantic prosody (See example (a), (b), and (c) below).

(a) His bad action incurred a disaster. (-)
(b) Global warming is incurred by air pollution. (-)
(c) Your attitude would incur serious problems. (-)
(d) It incurred his happiness. (+)

However, a number of the students appeared to perceive that *bring about* could be used in the similar context in which *cause* or *incur* could be used. In fact, about 54% of its uses were associated with negative situations, causing a number of semantic clashes. (See

\(^{11}\) The use of *persistent* was not counted when it was used as a predicate (e.g., *He was persistent in...*) because the research findings (e.g., Hunston, 2007) showed that the semantic prosody of *persistent* was not conclusive when it was used as a predicate.
example (a), (b), and (c) below).

(a) It brings about the diplomatic problem. (-)
(b) The social atmosphere brought about cruel crimes. (-)
(c) Bad weather brought about the cancellation of party. (-)
(d) The advertisement brought about a huge amount of donation. (+)

2) *Fully* and *Utterly*

A large number of *fully* were used in a positive (64.7%) or neutral (25.1%) way, corresponding to its semantic prosody. However, *utterly* was also used mostly in a positive (46.7%) or neutral way (23.9%), disaccording its semantic prosody. The students seemed to perceive that *utterly* could be used in the context in which *fully* could be used and had a positive or neutral semantic prosody as shown in the examples below.

(a) The hotel was fully booked. (0)
(b) I fully understood his lecture. (+)
(c) She was fully recovered. (+)
(d) I utterly agree with you. (+)
(e) I utterly believe in you. (+)
(f) It is utterly your responsibility. (0)

3) *Persist* and *Persistent*

*Persist* was used positively in about 46.3% of the sentences and negatively in about 33.3% of the sentences produced. As previously noted, the negative use of *persist* is much more frequent than the positive use, but the students seemed to believe that it could be used both positively and negatively as shown below.

(a) He persisted in his own opinion. (-)
(b) The parade will persist because it is fun. (+)
(c) I hope that our friendship will persist for a long time. (+)

Along the same lines, they appeared to perceive that *persistent* can be used both positively and negatively, sometimes mismatching its semantic prosody as shown in example (a) and (b). It was used positively in about 44.3% of the sentences and negatively in about 33.3% of the sentences that the students produced.
(a) He needs persistent help. (+)
(b) She was moved by his persistent love. (+)
(c) He had a persistent problem. (-)

4) Be Bent On

The students used *be bent on* positively in a majority number of the sentences (74.3%) and negatively only in a few cases (13.0%). As found in previous corpus-based research (e.g., Louw, 1993), it has a very strong tendency to be associated with negative situations. However, they did not seem to know its semantic prosody and ended up with a number of inappropriate uses of *be bent on* as shown in the following examples.

(a) I am bent on studying hard. (+)
(b) He is bent on getting a good grade. (+)
(c) My sister is bent on going on a diet. (+)
(d) I’m bent on volunteering at the child hospital. (+)

In sum, a number of the lexical items were used inappropriately in the sentences that the students produced, mismatching their semantic prosodies. In particular, the five lexical items (i.e., *bring about*, *utterly*, *persist*, *persistent*, and *be bent on*) were frequently misused by being incongruent with their semantic prosodies. The inappropriate use of those lexical items may be related to the common vocabulary teaching practice in Korea. That is, EFL teachers in Korea do not seem very cognizant of semantic prosody and its value in language communication. They normally focus on the denotational meaning of an English lexical item without explaining its semantic prosody in their vocabulary teaching. Furthermore, they often explain the meanings of words by offering their near-synonyms that may have totally different semantic prosodies. The problem of this approach would be that students may wrongly equate not only the meaning of near-synonyms but also their semantic prosodies.

In addition to the influence of traditional vocabulary teaching practice, some of the students’ errors in semantic prosody might be related to the Korean translation which had been presumably provided by the teachers or EFL reference books. For example, one of the most common translations of *persistent* was ‘지속적인’ in the six dictionaries examined in the current study, and if it was the closest Korean equivalent of *persistent* that they could think of when they tried to write sentences using it, there existed some chances that the students’ choice of collocation was influenced by its L1 equivalent. In fact, a number of collocations were identified in the students’ sentence writings that were possible in Korean but that were not possible or very rare in English. Those collocations included...
persistent development’ (지속적인 발전), ‘persistent love’ (지속적인 사랑), and ‘persistent help’ (지속적인 도움). In a similar vein, a number of such collocations were found in the use of be bent on as well. Among the common collocations were bent on studying (공부에 열중[전념]하는), bent on going on a diet (살빼기에 열중[전념]하는), and bent on helping (도움주기에 열중[전념]하는), all of which were possible in Korean, but not possible or very rare in English. It is quite premature to infer that there was a certain degree of L1 influence on some L2 collocations produced without providing sufficient empirical evidence showing the direct relationship between them. Maybe an extensive analysis of learner corpora would be much more conducive to examining their relationship (e.g., Granger, 1998; Man-Lai, 1994). However, some of the findings of the current study still seem to echo the findings of previous studies on the use of collocation by EFL learners (Gabrys-Biskup 1992; Granger, 1998; Man-Lai, 1994; Nesselhauf, 2003). For example, Nesselhauf found that about a half of students’ mistakes in their use of English collocation seemed to be related to their L1 and Granger also found that the overuse of particular amplifiers (e.g., completely, totally) were related to their frequently used L1 equivalents. In a similar vein, Man-Lai found that the use of delexical verbs is often modeled on their L1. They argued that L1 influence on the use of L2 collocation seems stronger than it has been assumed and suggested that the tendency to downplay L1 influence and disregard L1 in foreign language teaching seems to be somewhat misguided.

IV. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As found in the current study, many of the English-Korean bilingual dictionaries (particularly A, B, C and D) did not adequately present the semantic prosody of the eight English lexical items. Some of the dictionaries (E and F) did better job on its representation, but they somewhat fell short of the standard and it would have been much more informative to note the semantic prosody of each lexical item explicitly along with sufficient examples. This does not necessarily mean that all English words should be specified in its semantic prosody. In fact, it is not possible because the semantic prosodies of a large number of words are still inconclusive, and besides it is an extremely time-consuming task. However, the lexical items that have a clear tendency in semantic prosody should be noted and the contexts in which they are commonly used need to be explicated. In this vein, the publishers of EFL reference books including bilingual dictionaries should be more attentive to semantic prosody when explaining lexical items, and this appears to be critical when considering the fact that beginner/intermediate EFL learners still

12 When the sequences of ‘persistent development’, ‘persistent love’, and ‘persistent help’ were searched on the COCA, the frequency of each sequence was 1, 1, and 0 respectively.
frequently rely on them.

In addition, a number of errors in the students’ sentence writings in relation to semantic prosody were identified in the current study. Those errors implied that the students were not fully aware of semantic prosodies of the words examined. As discussed in the previous chapter, the students’ errors may be related to how English words were explained and introduced in their classroom and in EFL reference books. It was also suggested that there might be a certain degree of L1 influence on their use of English collocation and thus, a more cautious approach should be taken when presenting the Korean translations/equivalents of English lexical items.

This leads to some pedagogical and research implications. That is, semantic prosody should be integrated into ESL/EFL pedagogy. One of the critical prerequisites for the successful integration would be that EFL teachers themselves should be cognizant of the notion of semantic prosody and be trained to teach the semantic prosodies of English words. Maybe it can be done by introducing semantic prosody as an important aspect of L2 vocabulary teaching in both pre- and in-service teacher training, and it will ultimately help students improve their ability to use language appropriately, which is one of crucial aspects of communicative competence. Furthermore, for relatively advanced learners of English, teachers may encourage them to utilize corpora through which the semantic prosody of lexical items can be found and learned. At a college level, it may be necessary to integrate the corpus component into undergraduate- and graduate-level courses, so EFL college students would naturally consult corpora as if they looked into a lexical item in a dictionary, which would ultimately lead them to be more conscious about the semantic prosody of English lexical items. From a research perspective, little work has been done on analyzing and contrasting the semantic prosody of English lexical items and that of Korean equivalents/translations. This type of research has important pedagogical implications because once the differences between them are identified, teachers can make learners more aware of these differences, which may help reduce the errors that might be rooted from L1-L2 semantic prosody difference.

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Semantic Prosody in Bilingual Dictionaries and EFL Learners’ Sentence Writings


Applicable levels: secondary and tertiary education
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