

# Exploring college English teaching of rhetorical knowledge: A Legitimation Code Theory analysis

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## Abstract

Despite a voluminous literature addressing English language teaching, the explorations focused on knowledge-building are rather limited in number. This is particularly the case with China's tertiary English education. Unlike existing research, this study investigated Chinese college English teachers' knowledge-building about rhetorical figures by drawing on the ideas of Autonomy and Semantics in Legitimation Code Theory. Designed as sequential mixed-method research with a development purpose, the study takes as its analytical data the pedagogic discourse generated in the finals of China's National College English Teaching Context. It was found that the knowledge practices about rhetorical figures vary, for one thing, in their likelihood of shifting to introjected codes and returning to the initial sovereign code and the motivations for their possible drift into exotic codes; and for another, in whether they are unpacking-oriented, repacking-oriented, or unpacking-and-repacking-integrated. With this, the study demonstrated how varied knowledge practices in English language teaching or English-medium teaching can be portrayed, distinguished and explicated in terms of autonomy and semantic code shifts and by reference to their display of autonomy pathways and semantic profiles. The study also makes contributions by actualizing the perspectival complementarity between Autonomy and Semantics in describing and interpreting pedagogic practices, shedding light on the design and improvement of knowledge-building in both English language teaching and disciplinary teaching, and highlighting the necessity of developing non-native English teachers' metalinguistic awareness of Legitimation Code Theory and systemic functional linguistics.

## Keywords

autonomy pathways, college English teaching, knowledge-building, Legitimation Code Theory, rhetorical figures, semantic profiles

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## I Introduction

Tertiary English education has been implemented in China for 40 years since its reform and opening-up in the twentieth century. In the duration an extensive body of literature has been produced addressing issues related to Chinese teachers' English teaching, including a plethora of investigations dealing with Chinese teachers' college English teaching (hereafter CTCET), which is typically carried out in English-as-a-foreign-language pedagogic contexts. Among the investigations, there is no lack of research considering the issues of what to teach and how to teach regarding college English, a compulsory course for all Chinese undergraduates who are non-English majors. Yet, like most other educational research, the investigations also suffer from what Maton (2014a) calls knowledge blindness. Significant evidence is a scarcity of research that takes knowledge as an object of study and thus looks into the knowledge-building practices in CTCET.

As a matter of fact, the appearance of investigations into the pedagogic knowledge practices in language teaching, generally inspired by Maton's (2014a) Legitimation Code Theory (henceforth LCT), is only a very recent story and hence, unsurprisingly, very limited in number. Specifically, existing research includes Jackson's (2016) analysis of South African high school English literature pedagogic practices and Christie's (2016) discussion of the knowledge practices of school English literary studies from the LCT dimensions of Specialization and Semantics. By way of contrast, existing LCT-informed research on Chinese teachers' English teaching is characterized by an exclusive concern with the idea and ideal of creating semantic waves for cumulative teaching or learning (e.g. Li & Wang, 2018; Zhang, 2017; Zhang & Qin, 2016), and attention to actual pedagogic processes is far from sufficient.

What is said above applies to the teaching of English rhetorical figures, though there have been studies of a concern with teaching or learning English rhetorical or figurative language. Literature shows that these studies are commonly undertaken with a cognitive linguistic approach. For example, the ubiquity of metaphor in language has motivated considerable cognitive linguistic research efforts to reveal the effects of enhanced conceptual metaphor knowledge or awareness on second or foreign language learners' acquisition of figurative or idiomatic expressions (e.g. Boers, 2000, 2011; Chen, 2019; Doiz & Elizari, 2013; Gao & Meng, 2010; Veliz, 2017), but relatively little interest is shown as to how the knowledge can be taught, let alone whether the knowledge presented to learners is complex or simple, abstract or concrete, strongly or weakly insulated.

The above situation makes it clear that the subject English, as a discipline of elusive, invisible content (Christie & Macken-Horarik, 2007; Macken-Horarik, 2014), remains under-explored in respect of its pedagogic practices focused on knowledge-building, especially its knowledge practices targeted at the language of English per se. Meanwhile, it becomes apparent that the pedagogic process of teaching rhetorical knowledge should be given more attention in language teaching research, considering the pervasiveness of rhetorical devices in language use and the importance of mastering them to English language learners' improvement in receptive fluency and productive fluency. With these in mind, the present research approaches the teaching of rhetorical knowledge in CTCET from the perspective of LCT, a sociological theory that enables exploration of knowledge practices both inside and beyond education (see, for example, Maton, Hood, & Shay, 2016), and helps analyse and interpret, by

collaborating with systemic functional linguistics (hereafter SFL), how linguistic resources reflect and enact knowledge practices (Martin & Maton, 2017; Maton, Martin, & Matruglio, 2016; Maton & Doran, 2017a).

Specifically, this research chooses to examine a range of CTCET pedagogic practices that are meant to develop students' rhetorical knowledge by drawing on the Autonomy and Semantics dimensions of LCT (Maton, 2013, 2014a, 2014b; Maton & Howard, 2018). The central concern is with the variations in the pedagogic practices, which will be demonstrated by integrated analysis of the autonomy pathways and semantic profiles of actual CTCET instances involving teaching the usage of rhetorical figures, such as but not limited to antithesis, metaphor and hyperbole. The research aims to make contributions to identifying and explicating the differences between knowledge practices in English language teaching and shed light on exploring pedagogic patterns which may boost non-native teachers' English language teaching as well as English-medium delivery of disciplinary knowledge.

## II LCT's Autonomy and Semantics

As a sociological theory taking knowledge seriously as an object of study, LCT emerges by integrating and extending, most centrally, concepts and insights from Pierre Bourdieu's field theory and Basil Bernstein's code theory (Maton, 2014a). It provides a multidimensional conceptual toolkit for making visible and exploring knowledge practices regarding their choice, change and diversity in organizing principles conceptualized as different legitimation codes. The concepts underlying the present research are from the LCT dimensions of Autonomy and Semantics to be elaborated as follows.

### *I The dimension of Autonomy*

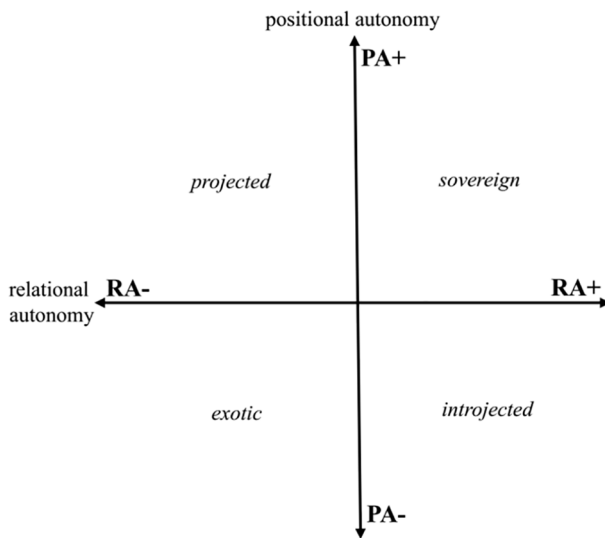
The Autonomy dimension of LCT conceptualizes social fields of practice as comprising constituents that are arranged into particular relations (Maton & Howard, 2018). Here both the constituents and their relations may take multifarious forms: the constituents may be actors, ideas, artefacts, institutions, body movements, pedagogic content, etc., and how such constituents are related together may be governed by explicit procedures, tacit ways of working, explicitly stated aims, formal rules, purposes, etc. Autonomy deals with the issue of insulation or external boundaries between different practices. To explore how insulated are the constituents of different practices and how insulated are the principles governing their relations, LCT makes an analytical distinction between the positional and relational aspects of Autonomy, as detailed below.

- positional autonomy (PA) between constituents positioned within a context or category and those positioned in other contexts or categories; and
- relational autonomy (RA) between relations among constituents of a context or category and relations among constituents of other contexts or categories.

The two types of autonomy can vary independently along a continuum of strengths, where stronger (+) represents greater insulation and weaker (−) denotes lesser insulation. While stronger positional autonomy (PA+) indicates where constituents positioned in a

context or category are relatively strongly delimited from constituents attributed to other contexts or categories, weaker positional autonomy (PA-) signifies where such distinctions are drawn relatively weakly: constituents may be shared with or drawn from other contexts or categories (Maton & Howard, 2018, 2020). Similarly, stronger relational autonomy (RA+) denotes where the principles governing how constituents are related together in a context or category are autonomous: alternatively, the aims, purposes, ways of working, etc. are relatively specific to that set of practices; and weaker relational autonomy (RA-) indicates where the relation-governing principles are heteronomous: they may be drawn from or shared with other sets of practices (Maton & Howard, 2018, 2020).

Intersecting the two continua of strengths of insulation, as visualized in Figure 1, generates topologically an autonomy plane and typologically four principal autonomy codes, including sovereign codes, projected codes, exotic codes and introjected codes. Sovereign codes (PA+, RA+) contrast with exotic codes (PA-, RA-), with the former featuring strongly insulated positions and autonomous principles, and the latter weakly insulated positions and heteronomous principles. Put another way, sovereign codes attribute legitimacy to internal constituents for internal purposes, whereas exotic codes associate legitimacy with external constituents for external purposes. By the same token, projected codes (PA+, RA-) are in contrast with introjected codes (PA-, RA+), and their distinctive legitimacy resides respectively with strongly insulated positions coupled with heteronomous principles and weakly insulated positions coupled with autonomous principles. These two types of autonomy codes can be alternatively defined as valuing, in sequence, internal constituents turned to external purposes and external constituents turned to internal purposes. The above autonomy codes explore the basis of legitimacy, and thus help identify what knowledge constituents and pedagogic purposes are possible, intended, valued and enacted in specific classroom knowledge practices.



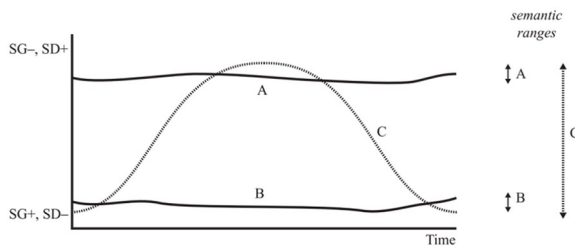
**Figure 1.** The autonomy plane.  
 Source: Maton & Howard, 2018, p. 6.

The autonomy plane provides a means of capturing how knowledge practices within a context may shift autonomy codes over time. Four instances of code-shifting pathways identified by Maton and Howard (2018, p. 8) are as follows: (1) ‘stays’ that remain within a single code; (2) ‘one-way trips’ that begin in one code and conclude in a second code; (3) ‘tours’ that begin in one code, move through one or more other codes, and return to where they began; and (4) ‘return trips’ that move back and forth between two codes. These pathway instances illustrate how knowledge practices within a specific context can be construed in terms of code-shifting and code-patterning. In empirical analysis of pedagogic practices, tracing the pathways enables the clarification of how diverse knowledge practices are integrated or simply brought together, thereby informing us how effectively teachers have managed their classroom discursive production to present the target content and achieve the target purpose.

## 2 The dimension of Semantics

The Semantics dimension of LCT construes social fields of practice as semantic structures whose organizing principles are captured with the semantic codes comprising semantic gravity and semantic density (Maton, 2014b). While semantic gravity attends to the degree of context-dependence of meaning, semantic density deals with the extent of condensation or complexity of meaning. As the strengths of the two types of semantic codes can vary infinitely and independently, Maton (2014a) proposes to represent the relatively stronger and weaker semantic gravity and semantic density with the symbols SG+/- and SD+/- in sequence.

The variations of the above two semantic codes in strengths can be plotted along two infinite continua. Tracing the variations over time, as noted by Maton (2014a), reveals the semantic profiles and associated semantic ranges of unfolding practices between their highest and lowest strengths. Shown in Figure 2 are three semantic profiles illustrating how the inverse co-variation of semantic gravity and semantic density can be plotted respectively as a high semantic flatline (A), a low semantic flatline (B), and a semantic wave (C). Among the semantic profiles, semantic waves are conceptualized as a crucial characteristic of cumulative knowledge-building or cumulative teaching (Macnaught et al., 2013; Maton, 2013). Whatever semantic profiles are considered, it is our belief that they are, together with their manifestation of different semantic ranges, useful for visualizing the characteristics of different knowledge practices, including the pedagogic knowledge-building practices explored in the present research.



**Figure 2.** Illustrative semantic profiles and semantic ranges (Maton, 2014a, p. 143).

Typically, the upward semantic shift inscribes the weakening of semantic gravity and the strengthening of semantic density, which in turn signals that the corresponding discursive practice is moving ‘from the concrete particulars of a specific case towards generalizations and abstractions’ and meanwhile ‘from a term condensing a small number of meanings towards one implicating a greater range of meanings’ (Maton, 2014b, p. 37). Conversely, the downward semantic shift symbolizes the strengthening of semantic gravity and the weakening of semantic density, which are in turn indicative of the movement of the corresponding discursive practice ‘from abstract or generalized ideas towards concrete and delimited cases’ and simultaneously ‘from a highly condensed symbol to one involving fewer meanings’ (Maton, 2014b, p. 37). The copresence of the upward and downward semantic shifts, as argued by Maton (2013, 2014a), is a vital condition for cumulative knowledge-building, which enables students to transfer or recontextualize knowledge through time and across context.

### III Methodology

The data used for the present research were selected from a range of pedagogic practices generated in the finals of China’s SFLEP (Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press) National Foreign Language Teaching Contest. The Teaching Contest, organized with a rigorous contest system, has been held annually nine times since 2010, providing a fair and authoritative platform for Chinese tertiary English teachers to demonstrate their pedagogic competence. As the pedagogic practices were carried out with real college students in classroom contexts, they reflect and display, to a considerable degree, the contestants’ conceptions of and capabilities in the design and implementation of foreign language pedagogic activities.

Since the pedagogic practices have been videoed and published by SFLEP, it is possible for us, as the first phase of a sequential mixed-method research study (see Riazi, 2016), to collect, identify, categorize and transcribe the pedagogic data of interest to the current research. The quantitative data analysis in the first phase showed that the target pedagogic practices, each of which lasts for twenty minutes, were those produced in the first, second, fourth and seventh national foreign language teaching contests, which were designed specifically for Chinese college English teachers. Moreover, it was found that a total of ten contestants’ pedagogic practices can be identified as containing knowledge-building practices attending to the usage of rhetorical figures in the curricular texts being taught. In this article, however, only three instances of the knowledge practices are presented for illustrative purposes on the grounds of their joint display of the ten contestants’ typical ways of teaching knowledge about rhetorical figures.

Designed with a development purpose, this mixed-method research study gave the most weight to the second phase of qualitative data analysis, centering on uncovering and characterizing the variations in the target knowledge practices in terms of LCT’s autonomy pathways and semantic profiles. In so doing, the analysis was methodologically language-based and meaning-oriented. This is because knowledge practices in pedagogic contexts are essentially, as argued in SFL (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Webster, 2007), social-semiotic meaning-making activities wherein language plays the

most central role. However, to enact LCT in qualitative linguistic analysis of knowledge practices requires an external language, termed a translation device by Maton and Chen (2016), for relating theory to empirical data. In this regard, the present research turns to extant external languages for adoption or adaption.

Specifically, the analysis of autonomy pathways in this study adopts the translation device created in Maton and Howard's (2018) discussion of secondary school history and science lesson, but only the categories at its first level, namely target and non-target, are thought to be necessary for the research goal. Hence, both the positional and relational autonomy of the knowledge practices concerned were examined by focusing respectively on their specific pedagogic content points and purposes, with the target ones symbolized as PA+ and RA+, and the non-target ones as PA- and RA-.

For the semantic profiles of the target knowledge practices, the explication was conducted in terms of the translation devices detailed in Table 1, where the translation device for SG+/- is inspired by Jackson's (2016) semantic gravity analysis of high school English literature lessons, and the translation device for SD+/- is adapted from Maton and Doran's (2017b) characterization of different degrees of semantic complexity of knowledge practices at the level of words. These translation devices offer a rough guide for drawing semantic profiles that outline the locations and patterns of the semantic changes in the knowledge practices concerned.

By now, it is necessary to note that the notion of rhetorical figures, or figures of rhetoric, refers to those linguistic resources that involve artful deviations from normal, expected usage of language and thus demonstrate either excessive regularity in expression or irregularity in expression (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996). Alternatively, the notion can be clarified as referring to linguistic devices that 'deviate from the ordinary pattern or arrangement of words' or 'deviate from the ordinary and principal significance of a word, producing semantic or lexical deviation' (Smith, 2006, p. 162). In line with these characterizations, typical examples of rhetorical figures include alliteration, antithesis, assonance, hyperbole, metaphor, rhyme, synecdoche, etc., as set out by McQuarrie and Mick (1996) in their taxonomy of rhetorical figures used in advertising discourse.

In our pedagogic data, the teaching of rhetorical knowledge generally occurs amid detailed analysis of a curricular text when the teacher engages students in identifying a rhetorical figure employed in a specific sentence. How the teacher explicates the usage of the rhetorical figure is deemed in this research worthy of investigation not simply because it usually involves spelling out a term or a concept that may challenge students' comprehension. Rather, it is more crucially because it is a tripartite pedagogic process that, following Halliday's (2015) language-based theory of learning, integrates teaching English, teaching through English and teaching some knowledge about English.

#### **IV Autonomy and Semantics analysis**

To unravel how rhetorical knowledge, i.e. knowledge about the usage of rhetorical figures in English texts, is likely to be taught in CTCET, this research first examined the pedagogic data from the perspective of LCT's Autonomy. The findings suggest that the target knowledge practices can be broadly classified into three groups by reference to



**Table 1.** The translation devices for SG +/- and SD +/- in Chinese college English teachers' knowledge practices.

Expressions embodying abstraction, generalization and symbolization, e.g. abstract notions or terms, nominalizations, definitions, and general introductions	SG-	SD+	Technical words: with embedded modification; with categorized modification; with located modification.
Expressions embodying exemplification, illustration and specification, e.g. specific examples, concrete descriptions, and simpler explanations			Incongruent everyday words encoding happenings (processes or events) and qualities as things (elements or items): with embedded modification; with categorized modification; with located modification.
Expressions promoting student engagement and embodying personalization and subjective orientation, e.g. information-seeking questions and personal likes/dislikes			Congruent everyday words encoding happenings, qualities and things: with embedded modification; with categorized modification; with located modification.
SG+			SD-

Notes. SG = semantic gravity. SD = semantic density. + indicates relatively stronger. - indicates relatively weaker.

their display of autonomy pathways. How the three groups of knowledge practices vary from one another will be shown below with integrated analysis of their respective code-shifting in the dimensions of Autonomy and Semantics.

*1 Knowledge practices manifesting tours through introjected codes*

The knowledge practices falling into the first group are the ones whose autonomy pathways involve tours through introjected codes. Here it is necessary to highlight that what is meant by tours in LCT also includes return trips, which are characterized by Maton and Howard (2018, p. 8) as ‘the simplest forms of tours’. Accordingly, the autonomy pathways manifested by the first group of knowledge practices can turn out to be either shorter return trips to introjected codes or longer tours through introjected codes, or even a combination of both patterns. This is well exemplified by the knowledge practice in Extract 1, which presents part of the teaching of a curricular text entitled ‘Why do friendships end?’

Extract 1

- T: Then we can see ‘flowers’, ‘flowers’ and ‘a flower’ everywhere. A question here, is the writer really talking about flowers?
- S: No.
- T: No, what is she talking about?
- S: Friendship.
- T: Friendship, good, Ok. In order to better understand, I prepared a picture for you. Then, flowers refer to friendship here, so what does ‘sunlight’ and ‘get watered’ mean?



- S: Friendships get care and eh . . . commitment.
- T: Thank you, ok. So, friendship needs care, commitment, devotion, dedication, time and energy, and so on. Ok, what about ‘withered and die’? You please?
- S: Intimacy may decrease, and friendship may fade away.
- T: Thank you! So, that means a kind of friendship may get affected or even end, right? Thank you! So, since the author has compared friendship to flowers, then my question for you, what else would you like to compare friendship to? Use your imagination, please. This boy?
- S: I think it’s like the stars.
- T: Why, can you explain the reasons?
- S: We can’t always see them, but we know they’re there.
- T: Impressive, very impressive imagination, good. Then, if I were you, I would like to compare it to the wine. Do you know why? Because the wine will become more fragrant and aromatic as time goes on, in the same way as friendships do. On the contrary, the wine will also become sour, unless it is carefully preserved, so will friendships, right? Now, ladies and gentlemen, right here, right now, we’re talking about a very important rhetorical device, can you name it? Ok, that is metaphor. You know what is metaphor? Yeah, metaphor is a figure of speech containing an implied comparison in which a word or phrase ordinarily and primarily used of one thing is applied to another. Then the function of metaphor is to make the expression more powerful, clear, vivid and effective. One of the most classical examples in English literature is the sentence by Shakespeare, ‘All the world is a stage’, in which ‘all the world’ is a very abstract concept for us, but we’re quite familiar with ‘stage’ in our life, ok? Shakespeare used the metaphor here in order to help us better understand what the world is like. Thank you, that is metaphor. One important reason why we’re so attracted by the essay is the metaphor employed by the author.

Like other knowledge practices in our data, the one represented above unfolds with teacher-led exchanges and teacher-dominated discursive production. Prior to the extract, the pedagogic practice has just finished a detailed reading of the following three sentences from the above-mentioned curricular text.

1. Well, if flowers don’t get exposed regularly enough to sunlight and don’t get watered enough, flowers will wither and even die.
2. Sure, if a flourishing flower gets stepped on, it might revive on its own.
3. Meanwhile, if a flower gets repeatedly trampled on, it’ll probably eventually break.

Given the repetitive use of the word ‘flower’ as grammatical subjects in these sentences, the college English teacher starts the above knowledge practice with the question ‘is the writer really talking about flowers?’ After affirming the students’ recognition that ‘flowers refer to friendship’, the teacher engages them to work out the implied meanings of ‘sunlight’, ‘get watered’, ‘wither’ and ‘die’, a group of words used to describe flowers in the first sentence specified above. The teacher also polishes the students’ answers each time they are provided.

Up to this point, it is critical to recognize that the teacher’s pedagogic practice is not simply meant to inform the students of the implied meanings of some expressions. Rather, it is intended to awaken them to the writer’s rhetorical way of describing friendships. This is patently suggested by the teacher’s incomplete recap ‘the author has compared friendship to flowers’, though the name of the rhetorical figure has not yet been disclosed for the moment. This fact allows us to argue that the pedagogic practice so far generated is

organized via a sovereign autonomy code, with target content mobilized for the target purpose of building certain rhetorical knowledge.

Instead of continuing in the vein of the sovereign code, the on-going pedagogic practice undertakes a code shift along with the teacher’s student engagement question ‘what else would you like to compare friendship to?’ The undesired answer from a student and the teacher’s comment ‘impressive imagination’ indicate clearly that the knowledge practice has inadvertently drifted into an exotic code: neither content nor purpose concerns target educational knowledge. To prevent the knowledge practice from going too far off track, the teacher proffers his own comparison of friendship to wine and explicates their similarities. As this act is equally meant to facilitate the students’ appreciation of the rhetorical style of language use in the text being taught, it can be considered as strengthening the relational autonomy of the teacher’s knowledge practice, and thereby shifting it to an introjected code.

This second code shift is then consolidated by the teacher’s enunciation that he is ‘talking about a very important rhetorical device’. Noteworthy here is that the consolidation not only makes it possible for the non-target content, the teacher’s own comparison, to be integrated with the target purpose of teaching rhetorical knowledge, but also enables this target purpose to be integrated with the subsequent target content, the introduction of the definition and function of the rhetorical figure of metaphor. This accounts for why there is a return, as the dashed lines in Figure 3 portray, of the teacher’s knowledge practice to his sovereign code.

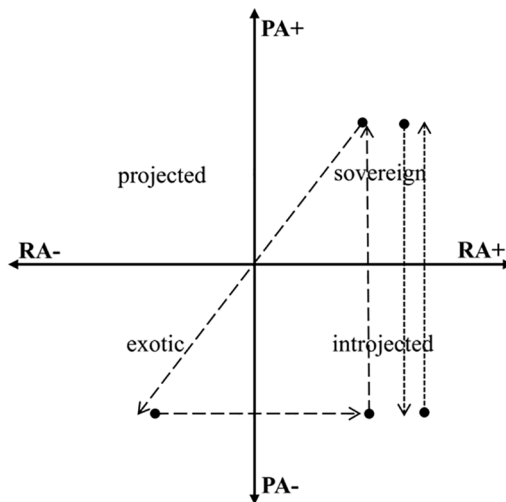
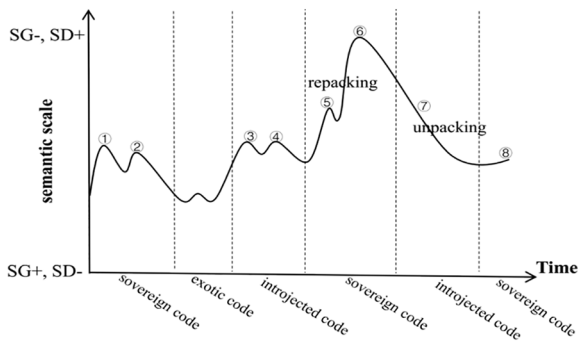


Figure 3. Autonomy pathways manifesting tours through introjected codes.

After the autonomy tour, the teacher additionally takes a quick return trip to the introjected code, which is visualized in Figure 3 with dotted lines. Such a return trip is accomplished first by using Shakespeare's classical sentence to illustrate the rhetorical figure of metaphor, an act of presenting non-target content and weakening positional autonomy; and then by foregrounding the importance of the rhetorical figure to the literary appeal of the text being analysed, an act of connecting non-target content to target content and strengthening positional autonomy. Taken together, the autonomy pathways traced by the knowledge practice in Extract 1 effectuates what Maton and Howard (2018) term integrative knowledge-building, rendering the target rhetorical knowledge explicit and accessible to the students.

In addition to its complex tour-form autonomy pathways, the knowledge practice in Extract 1 also distinguishes itself by its unique semantic profile shown in Figure 4, where the axis of time is designed to capture roughly the chronological order of the autonomy code shifts identified above. The semantic profile, mapping the fluctuations in semantic density and semantic gravity, signals that the teacher demonstrates a relatively wider semantic mobility range in his knowledge practice. Focused on building knowledge about the rhetorical figure of metaphor, the knowledge practice exhibits the most salient strengthening in semantic density and weakening in semantic gravity when it moves into the second sovereign code, providing the definition of the rhetorical notion of metaphor. Linguistically, the most salient semantic change is achieved by an intense use of technical and abstract terms (i.e. 'metaphor', 'figure of speech', and 'implied comparison') and what are called downranked finite and non-finite clauses used as embedded post-modifiers in Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) systemic functional grammar.



**Figure 4.** A knowledge-building semantic profile integrating repacking and unpacking.  
 Notes. 1 = friendship needs care, commitment, devotion . . . energy; 2 = friendship may get affected or even end; 3 = in the same way as friendships do; 4 = so will friendships; 5 = rhetorical device; 6 = metaphor is a figure of speech containing an implied comparison . . . applied to another; 7 = All the world is a world; 8 = One important reason why we're so attracted.

Prior to the entry into the second sovereign code, the teacher engages in revealing the comparability or specifying the similarities between the abstract thing of friendship and the substantial things of flowers and wine. In so doing, the teacher first resorts to the metaphorically phrased expressions, specified with the numbers of 1 and 2 in Figure 4. Then he associates friendship with the attributes of ‘fragrant’, ‘aromatic’ and ‘sour’, which is inferable from the verbal resources labeled with the numbers of 3 and 4 in Figure 4. Compared to the definition in the second sovereign code, all of these verbal maneuvers are weaker in semantic density and stronger in semantic gravity, but they aid in illustrating and explaining the rhetorical notion at issue and contribute to strengthening the semantic density and weakening the semantic gravity of the teacher’s knowledge practice in the initial sovereign code and the first introjected code. In between these two autonomy codes, however, the exotic code manifests much less semantic variation on the grounds of its presentation of simple classroom exchanges. Despite the contrast, the pedagogic practices produced in the first three autonomy codes jointly serve to prepare the students for the subsequent semantic generalization about the rhetorical notion of metaphor in the second sovereign code.

After the exit from the second sovereign code, the teacher’s pedagogic practice starts to exemplify the rhetorical notion of metaphor with Shakespeare’s sentence ‘All the world is a stage.’ As the exemplification is realized by simpler lexico-grammatical resources and structures, it is natural to see in the introjected code after the second sovereign code a downward movement in semantic scale, which signals a decrease in semantic density but an increase in semantic gravity. Produced to unpack the abstract rhetorical notion of metaphor, the exemplification contributes to forming a big semantic wave together with the aforementioned comparisons of friendships to flowers and wine, which are generated to be repacked into the definition of the rhetorical notion. For this reason, the knowledge practice in Extract 1 can be perceived as integrating repacking and unpacking. This integration is crucial to the success of the knowledge practice because, as argued in LCT works (e.g. Clarence, 2016; Macnaught et al., 2013; Maton, 2013, 2014a), it enables the verbally-built rhetorical knowledge to be lifted out of the specific curricular text and pedagogic context and then transferred and enacted over time and across a wider range of new contexts.

## 2 Knowledge practices manifesting one-way trips to introjected codes

In our analytical data, the second form of teaching rhetorical knowledge is found to be manifested by knowledge practices manifesting one-way trips to introjected codes. Such knowledge practices are special in that they are characteristically produced as separate pedagogic stages devoted specifically to building knowledge about a rhetorical figure employed in a curricular text. This kind of knowledge practice normally starts with target content used for target purpose, thus embodying a sovereign code, as illustrated below by Extract 2.

### Extract 2

- T: And in Paragraph 5, we can see this sentence, where the writer uses a figure of speech, that is called antithesis. So, what is antithesis? Antithesis is a figure of speech that involves seeming contradiction of ideas, words, clauses or sentences within a balanced grammatical structure. Here we have *the sense of responsibility to step in* and *the humility to step back*, paralleled structures but opposite meanings, right? Here’s another example, *help the many who are poor, save the few who are rich*. Parallel structures, right? but opposite meanings. Here’s another example, would you want to have a try? As you may have seen the answer,

this sentence is actually taken out of a holy Bible, Psalms. Psalms means, ah, actually, according to the legend, it was written by? Who?

S: (inaudible)

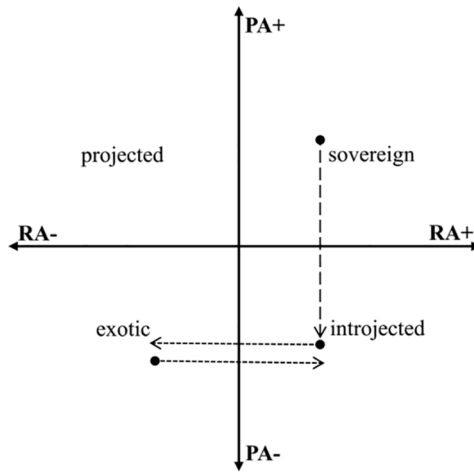
T: Soloman. Do you know Soloman? One of the wise kings of Israeli country. All right? *They that sow in tears shall reap in joy*, sow and reap, in tears, in joy, parallel structures but opposite meanings. This is a good sentence, right? Maybe we can save it for future writing.

The above knowledge practice begins with the teacher directly pointing out that one sentence from the text being analysed is worded with the rhetorical device of antithesis. After introducing the definition of antithesis, the teacher proceeds to illustrate the abstract notion by drawing the students' attention to the sentence being focused on and highlighting its display of 'paralleled structures but opposite meanings'. As the pedagogic discourse thus far produced centers entirely on building knowledge about the rhetorical figure of antithesis, it can be argued that the knowledge practice in Extract 2 is initially organized via a sovereign code.

In order to further consolidate the students' understanding of the rhetorical notion, the teacher continues to illustrate it with 'another example'. As the example is from beyond the text being taught, it can be claimed here that the teacher is applying external or non-target content for target pedagogic purpose. This means that the teacher's knowledge practice shifts to an introjected code, where the same relational autonomy is retained through the teacher's concise explication 'parallel structure, right? but opposite meaning'. The autonomy code shift is portrayed in Figure 5 with the dashed line.

Instead of staying within the introjected code or returning to the initial sovereign code, the teacher's follow-up knowledge practice takes, as the dotted lines in Figure 5 show, a return trip to an exotic code. This is brought about sequentially by the teacher's introducing still another illustrative example 'They that sow in tears shall reap in joy', an act of weakening positional autonomy; her adding the non-target knowledge about the source of the example, an act of weakening relational autonomy; and her foregrounding the 'paralleled structures but opposite meanings' of the example, an act of turning non-target content to target purpose. Notably, the autonomy trip back to the introjected code is necessary and important, because without it, the teacher's talk about the source of the final example would remain digressive, and hence segmented from her preceding knowledge practice about antithesis. Even so, it also needs to be noted that the teacher's knowledge practice in the introjected code is still weakly integrated with that in her sovereign code, considering the shortage of further effort to connect the non-target content to the target content. This shortage blocks the teacher's returning knowledge practice to her sovereign code, and as a result may affect students' appreciation of the beauty, variety or force of the language use of concern.

Looked at from the perspective of Semantics, the knowledge practice in Extract 2 also displays a distinctive semantic profile. As shown in Figure 6, it is within the initial sovereign code that there can be seen the most salient strengthening of semantic density but weakening of semantic gravity. This has much to do with the definition of the abstract rhetorical notion of antithesis, which is heavily loaded with context-independent meanings encoded by such nominal groups as 'a figure of speech', 'seeming contradiction of ideas' and 'a balanced grammatical structure'. Moreover, it is after rather than before the most salient semantic change that there appear a few semantic waves embodying weaker semantic density but stronger semantic gravity. To Maton (2013) and Macnaught et al. (2013), this can be ascribed to the fact that much of the teacher's pedagogic effort is



**Figure 5.** An Autonomy pathway manifesting a one-way trip to an introjected code.

devoted to unpacking or exemplifying the abstract concept of antithesis rather than preparing meanings to be repacked into the concept. Specifically, this is reflected by the three exemplifications in Extract 2, each of which is followed by the same explicating and generalizing utterance ‘parallel structures but opposite meanings.’ The repetition of the unpacking provides the grounds for arguing that the pedagogic practice in Extract 2 can be characterized as unpacking-oriented in respect of constructing rhetorical knowledge.

### *3 Knowledge practices manifesting return trips from projected codes*

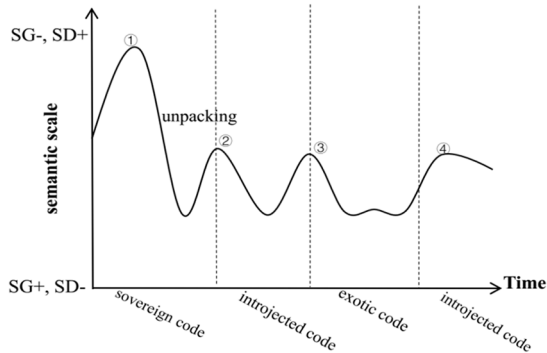
Unlike the preceding knowledge practices, the third form of teaching rhetorical knowledge revealed by our analytical data features a return trip starting from the projected code. That this form of knowledge-building is possible is primarily due to the pedagogic relegation of rhetorical knowledge to the periphery of teaching or analysing curricular texts. A case in point can be seen in Extract 3, where the teacher starts her pedagogic practice by pointing out the critical importance of understanding the meanings of some key sentences in the text being taught.

#### Extract 3

T: Now, that is to say, if we want to grasp the hidden idea of what the author wants to express, we’ll have to understand the meaning of those key sentences. And now let’s say how they come up as an organic whole to connect those examples. First example, at the very beginning, in the first example, the author has mentioned a discovery of creatures. Is that right? Now can you find out the name for that creature in the first paragraph?

S: Coelacanth.

T: Yeah, how to read it? Coelacanth, right? Very good, very good! That’s the discovery of coelacanth, but why does the author mention coelacanth? What’s special about it? We human beings have believed that coelacanth has become extinct long time ago, is that right? But quite recently, we found it. We found the specimen in the ocean. So what? It’s



**Figure 6.** An unpacking-oriented knowledge-building semantic profile.

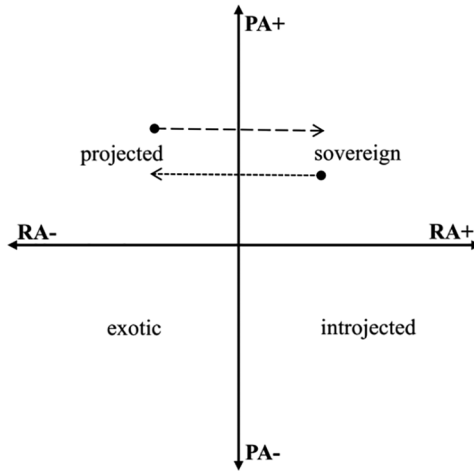
Notes. 1 = Antithesis is a figure of speech that involves . . . within a balanced grammatical structure; 2 = parallel structures but opposite meanings; 3 = Parallel structures . . . opposite meanings; 4 = parallel structures but opposite meanings.

just an example and it doesn't tell us any extra information. Is that right? That's why the author added up one more key sentence right after it, what he really wants to say is *Man's influence is as yet but a passing shadow*. Now the author is using passing shadow to describe the influence. He is doing a kind of comparison, is that right? He has compared 'influence' to 'passing shadow', and in the sentence pattern of 'A is B'. So that's the typical sentence pattern of metaphor. Right? Metaphor. But then, why does the author use 'passing shadow' to describe 'influence'? Let's see, if something is passing, it means *come very quickly*, right? How about the shadow? If you're walking in the moonlight, you'll have a shadow follow you everywhere you go. Is that right? But compared to your body, which one do you think is more important? Your body or the shadow? Yes, of course, the body, right? The body is more important. So, in this way, we may also say the shadow is always something less important, right? That's what the author really means. Nowadays, we human beings still has no important influence on the deep sea. Ok?

Since the key sentences are included in the examples narrated in the text, the teacher initially directs the students' attention to the first example, which is about human beings' discovery of coelacanth, a creature long believed to have become extinct. To clarify the author's intention of mentioning the creature, the teacher leads the students to the first key sentence 'Man's influence is as yet but a passing shadow', which is thought to be indicative of what the author really wants to express through the first example.

Up to this point, it is not hard to find that the teacher's pedagogic practice is initially organized with the purpose of working out what the first key sentence is intended to convey. As the pedagogic practice progresses to the next phase, however, there appears a change in its purpose. The pedagogic practice turns the discussion of the first key sentence to the purpose of explicating its embodiment of metaphor rather than its implied meaning. This means that the practice starts from a projected code, but shifts to the sovereign code, where the target content gets connected to the target purpose of teaching rhetorical knowledge about metaphor. Such an autonomy trip is portrayed in Figure 7 with the dashed line.

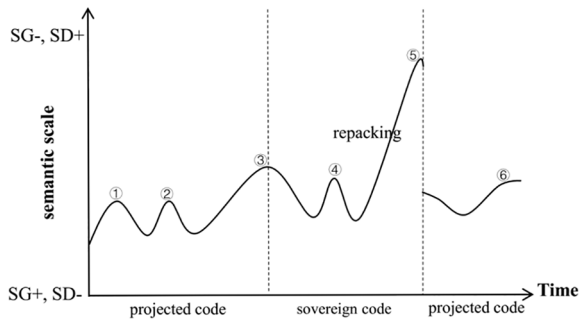




**Figure 7.** An autonomy pathway manifesting a return trip from a projected code.

After revealing the rhetorical figure of metaphor, the teacher devotes little pedagogic effort to further elaborating or illustrating the rhetorical notion of metaphor. Instead, she steers the pedagogic practice back to an interpretation of the implied meaning of the key sentence mentioned above, as signaled by the discursive production ‘if something is passing, it means come very quickly’ and ‘That’s what the author really means.’ Obviously, this return is an act of reconnecting the target content to the original non-target pedagogic purpose. The result is the teacher’s returning pedagogic practice to the prior projected code, as represented by the dotted line in Figure 7. Though the return guarantees the teacher’s uncovering the implied meaning of the key sentence concerned, it should be clear that the deficiency in elaborating or illustrating the abstract notion of metaphor may leave the rhetorical knowledge segmented from that about the text in question, and the students may feel somewhat perplexed about the definition and stylistic function of metaphor as a result.

Apart from its distinct autonomy pathway, the knowledge practice in Extract 3 also manifests a semantic profile different from those displayed by the foregoing extracts. The explanation for this difference is that the knowledge practice in the extract is primarily carried out within the sovereign code which is, as shown in Figure 8, both preceded and followed by a projected code. Within the preceding projected code, the sentence ‘Man’s influence is as yet but a passing shadow’ is generated as expressing what the writer really wants to say. Within the sovereign code, the sentence is explicated with reference to its internal semantic comparison and metaphorical sentence pattern. The explication is crucial for the building of rhetorical knowledge because it provides the



**Figure 8.** A repacking-oriented knowledge-building semantic profile.

Notes. 1 = the hidden idea of what the author wants to express; 2 = a discovery of creatures; 3 = Man's influence is as yet but a passing shadow; 4 = comparison; 5 = Metaphor; 6 = That's what the author really means.

meanings to be repacked into the rhetorical notion of metaphor, a highly context-independent and meaning-condensing concept.

Within the following projected code, however, the pedagogic practice does not further unpack the abstract concept of metaphor. Rather, it unfolds to explain the implied meaning of the sentence embodying metaphor. This lack of unpacking enables the building of rhetorical knowledge in Extract 3 to be characterized as repacking-oriented. As represented in Figure 8, this form of knowledge practice manifests a semantic profile that only contains the upward semantic curve. The semantic profile breaks in the final projected code because the pedagogic practice therein is not meant to unpack the concept of metaphor. In light of the LCT idea of cumulative knowledge-building (Macnaught et al., 2013; Maton, 2013), this absence of unpacking may keep the knowledge built about the rhetorical figure of metaphor locked into the pedagogic context, consequently constraining the students' recontextualization of the knowledge into new instances of language use employing metaphor.

## V Conclusions and discussion

The analysis in the preceding section has demonstrated how knowledge practices dealing with rhetorical figures in CTCET can be portrayed and distinguished by applying the conceptual tools of Autonomy and Semantics in LCT. However, instead of simply reporting the possible fashions and features of the teaching of rhetorical knowledge in CTCET, this research has also, most importantly, made explicit how the dynamics and variations of pedagogic knowledge practices in English language teaching or English-medium teaching can be captured and explicated by integrally examining their manifestation of autonomy pathways and semantics profiles. As far as the knowledge practices considered in the current research is concerned, the variations can first be noticed and

characterized by reference to their likelihood of shifting to introjected codes. Those shifting into introjected codes may then differentiate between themselves as to whether they will return to the initial sovereign codes. Moreover, the knowledge practices may display variations in relation to their digression into exotic codes, which may be motivated by introducing non-target content for the purpose of making instructions more informative or by engaging students and enlivening classroom interactions. Furthermore, taking into account the semantic profiles provides another lens for viewing the possible variations. At least it can be found whether specific knowledge practices are unpacking-oriented, repacking-oriented, or unpacking-and-repacking-integrated, and how these variations are related to the varying of the pedagogic linguistic practices in terms of SD+/- and SG+/-.

The integrated representation of the above variations has in a sense actualized the perspectival complementarity envisaged by Maton and Howard (2018) between the LCT dimensions of Autonomy and Semantics. The two dimensions not only illuminate different aspects of the same knowledge practice, but are also able to, as has been demonstrated by the studies drawing on the LCT dimensions of Specialization and Semantics (e.g. Christie, 2016; Jackson, 2016), provide complementary insights into the same object of study. For example, it can be seen in the preceding section that when a phase of knowledge practice works to unpack an abstract rhetorical notion or definition, the required exemplification and concretization demands its move into an introjected code that integrates non-target content into target purpose; and when a phase of knowledge practice proceeds towards abstraction, generalization or conceptualization, the repacking process typically involves connecting non-target content to target content as well as target purpose, which results in an autonomy pathway back to a sovereign code. To a large extent, these suggest how pedagogic knowledge practices could be more revealingly described and interpreted by linking their semantic weaving with their autonomy code shifting.

Summarizing the above remarks lead us to claim that by investigating the tertiary English pedagogic practices in which teachers' ways of building knowledge are still under-explored, the present research not only adds to the growing body of knowledge about the specific and generic attributes of various pedagogic practices in English-medium higher education (see, for example, Brooke, 2017; Clarence, 2016; Mouton & Archer, 2019), but more importantly sheds light on how knowledge-building in English language teaching could be maneuvered, improved and assessed in terms of semantic weaving and autonomy code shifting. For example, as revealed in Section IV.2, the introduction of non-target content, though perhaps instrumental to enriching classroom instruction, should be done without losing sight of the target purpose; otherwise, as Maton and Howard (2018) suggest, the lesson may get stranded in an exotic code and thereby leave different knowledge practices segmented. Besides, it should be clear that not merely failure to integrate different pedagogic content can lead to students' segmented learning, lack of cumulative knowledge-building may also yield the same result (Maton, 2009, 2013). Therefore, when integrating knowledge from diverse fields and sources, teachers should consider how to make semantic waves so as to narrow the gap between context-independent knowledge (e.g. abstract concepts) and context-dependent knowledge (e.g. concrete examples and everyday experiences).

Given the ways of teaching rhetorical knowledge in CTCET, these naturally point to the necessity of raising and enhancing non-native English teachers' metalinguistic awareness about the knowledge-building principles proposed in LCT and the meaning-making resources described in SFL. As a code-based metalanguage for analysing knowledge practices, LCT provides conceptual tools for exploring and understanding what constitutes a good teaching experience (see, for example, Blackie, 2014; Clarence, 2016; Mouton & Archer, 2019); and SFL, as a meaning-based metalanguage for enacting linguistic analysis of knowledge practices, afford powerful and systematic means enabling the transformation of disciplinary knowledge and expanding teachers' potential to talk about language and meaning in curricular texts (Macnaught et al., 2013; Maton et al., 2016; Moore et al., 2018; Schleppegrell, 2013). Thus, it is believed that a certain degree of awareness of the two complementary metalanguages will empower non-native English teachers with the pedagogic capabilities of unpacking, repacking and integrating knowledge. Put more generally, developing a metalinguistic awareness of LCT and SFL aids the teachers in designing and presenting cumulative and integrative teaching, which is probably a key to rendering linguistic and disciplinary knowledge 'visible, palpable, material' (Bernstein, 1990, p. 17) to students.

Finally, it is noteworthy that knowledge-building in CTCET, as a hitherto under-researched issue, invites empirical explorations of greater scale and scope so that a fuller view of its possible organization and unfolding could be obtained. This research approaches the issue from the perspectives of LCT's Autonomy and Semantics, and the analytical data covered are circumscribed to the knowledge practices focused on rhetorical figures. However, knowledge-building also involves aspects that may call for other analytical tools from LCT and SFL to unravel its complexities and nuances, and to grasp the features and patterns of knowledge-building in CTCET also require detailed and in-depth accounts of the teaching of generic, stylistic, and other linguistic or literary knowledge in the future as well. In addition, the new *College English Teaching Guidelines* issued by the Chinese Ministry of Education has incorporated English for specific purposes as an important part of college English curriculum, therefore, it may be more fruitful in future LCT-grounded research to explore how this curricular change can affect the pedagogic practices and dispositions in CTCET and how the teachers can engage students more effectively in the tripartite process of learning language, learning about language and learning through language.

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