Unit 3

How to guess unknown words from word formation clues

This unit is about how to guess unknown words from word formation clues, and what you are going to learn includes the following parts:

- The definition of word formation;
- Ways of guessing unknown words from word formation clues;
- How words are formed.

You'll serve your purpose of learning this unit if you know how to guess unknown words from word formation clues.

Pre-reading Activity

Please get prepared to find information about the following points while reading the text in the While-reading Activities entitled "How to guess unknown words from word formation clues".

- A brief introduction to word formation;
- How many ways can be employed to guess the unknown words from word formation clues;
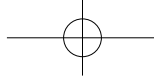- How to define the ways that are employed to guess the unknown words.

Bearing the above points in mind, now you can start your reading.

While-reading Activities

Read the following text and complete the exercises in the After-reading Activities.

How to guess unknown words from word formation clues

To improve your reading comprehension ability, guessing unknown words from word formation clues is an essential skill for you to master.

A brief introduction to word formation

Word formation is the formation of words in a language by the processes of derivation and composition. It is the creation of a new word, through which we can enlarge our vocabulary more easily. For example, after studying the last unit, we can know that "enlarge" means "to make something larger" without looking it up in the dictionary, because we know "en", a verb prefix, means "to make, to put into".

Ways of guessing unknown words from word formation clues

Besides affixation, there are other ways of guessing unknown words. They are compounding, blending, clipping, conversion, acronym and onomatopoeia.

Compounding

Compounding refers to the process of putting two or more words together to form a new word. There are several types of compounds, including noun compounds, verb compounds and adjective compounds.
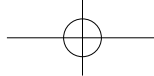
(a) Noun compounds

"Newspaper", "hand-writing", "speakbox", "swimming pool", "warm-up", "blackboard", "overcoat" and "forget-me-not" are examples of noun compounds formed by combination of different parts of speech. How they are formed is shown as follows:

newspaper	n. + n.
hand-writing	n. + v-ing.
speakbox	v. + n.
swimming pool	v-ing. + n.
warm-up	v. + adv.
blackboard	adj. + n.
overcoat	adv. + n.
forget-me-not	其他

Let's take the word "overcoat" as an example. In this word, "over" means "above" and "coat" is the main part, so it can be inferred that "overcoat" is a noun and refers to the clothes worn over the coat.

(b) Verb compounds

"Babysit", "sleep-walk", "white-wash", "overcome" are examples of verb compounds formed by combination of nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs with verbs. How they are formed is shown as follows:

babysit	n. + v.
sleep-walk	v. + v.
white-wash	v. + v.
overcome	adv. + v.

For example, we can get the meaning "walk while sleeping" from the structure of the word "sleep-walk".

(c) Adjective compounds

Likewise, adjective compounds with examples are listed as follows:

short-sighted	adj. + n-ed
long-lasting	adj. + v-ing.
far-reaching	adv. + v-ing.
heart-breaking	n. + v-ing.
heartbroken	n. + v-ed
ready-made	adv. + v-ed
self-satisfied	n. + adj.

Sometimes, the meaning of a compound is not equivalent to the combined meaning of the components that constitute the compound. For example, "busboy", "mad doctor", "personal remark" and "capital idea" do not mean "公交售票员", "发疯的医生", "个人评论" and "资本主义思想". Instead, they should be interpreted as "餐馆勤杂工", "精神病科医生", "人身攻击" and "好主意".

Blending

Blending is a process of word formation in which a new word is formed by combining parts of two or more words or a word plus a part of another word. There are four kinds of blending.
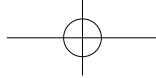
(a) head + tail

Blending can be formed by a head plus a tail. For example, "smaze" is blended by "smoke" and "haze", meaning "烟霾". And "botel" is the blending of "boat" and "hotel", meaning "汽艇游客旅馆".

(b) head + head

Blending can also be formed by a head plus a head. For example, "sitcom" is blended by "situation" and "comedy", meaning "情境喜剧". And "anacom" is the blending of "analog" and "computer", meaning "模拟计算机".

(c) head + word

"Motown", an example of a head plus a word, is the blending of "motor" and

"town", meaning "汽车城". And "telequiz" is the blending of "telephone" and "quiz", meaning "电视问答".

(d) word + tail

"Workfare", the blending of "work" and "welfare", formed by a word plus a tail, means "工作福利制". And "lunarnaut" is the blending of "lunar" and "astronaut", meaning "登月宇宙航行员".

Clipping

Clipping is a process by which parts of a word have been cut off. There are four kinds of clipping.

(a) Cutting off vowels

"MKT" and "MSG" are the clipping of "market" and "message" with vowels being cut off.

(b) Keeping first letters

"INFO" and "INS" are the clipping of "information" and "insurance" with first letters kept.

(c) Keeping first and last letters

"WK" and "PL" are the clipping of "week" and "people" with first and last letters kept.

(d) Pronunciation-based clipping

"R" and "THRU" are the clipping of "are" and "through". For this formation, the clipping is pronunciation-based.
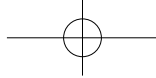
Conversion

Conversion is the word-formation process whereby a lexical item is simply converted or adapted from one grammatical class to another without an affix. The types of conversion are listed in the following table.

n.→v. hand 手→交给 face 脸→面对	adj.→v. empty 空的→倒空 better 较好的→改善	n.→adj. noble 贵族→高贵的 key 钥匙→关键的	adv.→v. down 向下→击倒 up 向上→提高
v.→n. drink 喝→饮料 study 学习→书房	v.→adj. perfect 使完美→完美的 fit 适合→适合的	adj.→n. chief 主要的→首领 first 第一的→第一个	the + adj.→n. the wounded→伤员 the blind→盲人

Acronyms

An acronym is a pronounceable word formed from the initial letter or letters of the constituent words, such as SARS, NATO, OPEC and TEFL. And an initialism

is an abbreviation that consists of the first letter or letters of words in a phrase, such as IQ, SOS, VCD, GDP and GNP. Acronyms differ from initialisms in that they are pronounced as words rather than as sequences of letters.

Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia refers to the naming of a thing or action by a vocal imitation of the sound associated with it. Onomatopoeic words are echoic ones whose sounds suggest their senses.

There are three kinds of onomatopoeia which can be categorized as follows:

1. Sounds made by animals: buzz, hiss, meow.
2. Sounds made by humans: murmur; giggle.
3. Sounds made by things: click, bubble.

From word formation clues such as compounding, blending, clipping, conversion, acronyms and onomatopoeia, we are more likely to grasp the meaning of unknown words.

After-reading Activities

I. Questions for discussion

Work in pairs to discuss the following questions based on what you have read above.

1. What is compounding and how is it formed?
2. What is blending and how is it formed?
3. What is clipping and how is it formed?
4. What is conversion and how is it formed?
5. What is an acronym and how is it formed?
6. What is onomatopoeia and how is it formed?

II. Exercises

Please guess the parts of speech and the meaning of the following words.

| 1. upgrade | 2. baby-blues | 3. sugar-free | 4. comsat | 5. kidult |
| 6. chute | 7. fridge | 8. IMF | 9. DINK | 10. coo |