

to add intensifiers to semi-fixed expressions, e.g. 'It is obvious something's gone wrong (quite)', and getting students, once they have read a text, to underline all the nouns they can find and then to underline any verbs that collocate with those nouns (Lewis 1997).

Conclusion

The Lexical Approach reinforces the importance of word combination patterns in language and their use in teaching and learning. As Lewis (1997, 2000) maintains, native speakers carry a pool of hundreds of thousands, and possibly millions, of lexical chunks in their heads ready to draw upon in order to produce fluent, accurate and meaningful language. Sentences and texts, it seems, are primarily constructed from vast store of set lexical phrases -not from grammatical lexical phrases. It is, thus, beneficial for language learners to gain exposure to lexical chunks in order to begin the process of internalization.

Because contrast is true of the nature of meaning, the Lexical Approach requires contrastive methodology. Bahns (1993) suggests that "the teaching of lexical collocations in EFL should concentrate on items for which there is no direct translational equivalence in English and in the learners' respective mother tongues". Nesselhauf (2003) maintains that not only should the collocations be selected for teaching with reference to L1, but those collocations (or at least some of them) that have been selected on this basis should also actually be taught with reference to L1. Learners have to be made aware of L1-L2 differences, otherwise, despite having learnt the correct collocation, they are still likely to produce the L1 equivalent.

In short, if the teachers seriously understand how lexis works in real world communication,

they will naturally make sense of the Lexical Approach. But without that deeper understanding, they will trivialize again, and just replace one set of jargon terms with another.

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most out of any language they meet, both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers should aim to develop classroom activities which help learners to see or hear text correctly chunked. As Willis (1990) maintains, "Teachers [should] abandon the idea of the teacher as 'knower' and concentrate instead on the idea of the learner as 'discoverer'".

Regarding the role of the learner, the Lexical Approach affords a great deal of flexibility. In the Lexical Approach, it is the learner who must use all available methods for developing all language. To promote learner independence, learners are encouraged in learner initiated activities, e.g., learners acting as teachers in organising and checking class activities, learners creating their own methods like posters, flashcards, games or role-plays, learners giving a choice of activities for different pairs/groups, etc. Learners are encouraged to focus on a particular feature of the text, identify instances of the feature, make discoveries and articulate generally about its use. 'Learners learn what they are ready for and in ways that may or may not match what the teacher does' (Morgan Lewis 2000).

Implementing the Lexical Approach

According to Lewis (1997) implementing a lexical approach in the classroom does not lead to radical methodological changes but a major shift in the teacher's mindset. The Lexical Approach involves a bit change in the teacher's understanding of the language, but only small, consistent changes in the classroom so that the approach can be introduced without serious upheaval. Lewis (1997) provides a checklist of the changes in both content and methodology which implementing the Lexical Approach involves. In the Lexical Approach

more attention is paid to:

- Lexis - different kinds of multi-word chunks
- Specific language areas not previously standard in many EFL texts
- Listening (at lower levels) and reading (at higher levels)
- Activities based on the dictionary as a resource for active learning
- Probable rather than possible English
- Organising learners' notebooks to reveal patterns and aid retrieval
- The language which learners may meet outside the classroom
- Preparing learners to get maximum benefit from text

And less attention is paid to:

- Sentence grammar-single sentence gap-fill and transformation practices
- Uncollocated nouns
- Indiscriminate recording of 'new word'
- Talking in L2 for the sake of it because you claim to use 'a communicative approach'

In the Lexical Approach, teaching procedures typically involve activities that:

- Provide the learners with valuable input
- Enhance the learners' familiarity and fluency with holophrastic units
- Enable the learners' to examine their own experience of the language
- Aid retrieval of the larger phrasal units from memory
- Consolidate chunks that are already identified and drilled
- Help learners to notice for themselves how language is typically used
- Build confidence

Typical activities include asking students

to present these in expressions. Rather than trying to break things into ever smaller pieces, there is a conscious effort to things in larger, more holistic ways”.

The Psychological Reality of Lexical Phrases

According to Schmitt (2000), there is good psychological basis for believing that the mind stores and processes lexical chunks as individual wholes. The main reason stems from the structure of the mind itself. It can store vast amounts of knowledge in longterm memory, but is only able to process small amounts of it in real time, such as when one is speaking. In effect, the mind makes use of a relatively abundant resource (long-term memory) to compensate for a relative lack in another (processing capacity) by storing a number of frequently-needed lexical chunks as individual whole units. These can be easily retrieved and used without the need to compose them on-line through word selection and grammatical sequencing. This means there is less demand on cognitive capacity, because the lexical chunks are ‘ready to go’, and require little or no additional processing.

Lexis and Grammar

As stated earlier, the Lexical Approach places communication of meaning at the heart of language and language learning. This leads to emphasis on the main carrier of meaning, vocabulary. The basic principle of the lexical approach, then, is: ‘Language is grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar’ (Lewis 1993). In other words, lexis is central in creating meaning, grammar plays a subservient managerial role. According to Lewis (1993), grammatical explanations have

a minor role. Instead, learners explore grammar by themselves and construct their own personal, provisional rules. Grammar is primarily receptive and should aim at learner awareness. Learners would be given the opportunity to observe language by themselves and critically reflect on what they perceive.

If one acknowledges this shift of attention from grammar to lexis, two corollaries follow. First, some patterns which traditionally receive grammatical pedagogic treatment might indeed be best introduced as lexical phrases. This may apply to the conditionals; the passive; reported speech; the -ing form; the past participle; and will, would, and going to. Irregular past tense forms such as was, had, got, said, may be first learned as lexical items. Second, some patterns relegated in language teaching, and usually reserved for advanced learners, might have a larger role than is often assumed (Porto, 1998).

Implementing the Lexical Approach, however, does not deny the value of grammar. Grammatical knowledge permits the creative recombination of lexis in novel and imaginative ways, but it can not begin to be useful in that role until the learner has a sufficiently large mental lexicon to which grammatical knowledge can be applied.

Teacher and Learner Roles

The Lexical Approach implies a shift away from some traditional teacher roles. In this approach, the role of teacher is that of provider, model and guide: a comfortable role, somewhat like a coach. The teacher helps the learners see when they have it right and when they need to adjust. A central task for teachers is to do everything they can to help learners turn input into intake; to help learners get the



co-occur in natural texts with greater than random frequency'. Collocations are pairs of lexical content words commonly found together. These are combinations which, through custom and practice, have come to be seen as normal and acceptable. They are not determined by logic or frequency, but are arbitrary, decided only by linguistic convention. Some collocations are fully fixed, such as 'to catch a cold' and 'drug addict', while others are more or less fixed and can be completed in a relatively small number of ways, as in the: 'blood/close/distant/near(est) relative'.

- **Institutionalized utterances:** These are lexical chunks which are typically related to functional language use. They would not exemplify 'the grammar' but be

pragmatically identifiable chunks which students could both use immediately to increase communicative power, and as a resource the analogy of which would provide a basis for the gradual perception of pattern. For example, 'to make a long story short' is an institutionalized utterance which facilitates clear, relevant, and concise language use.

- **Sentence heads:** These are very similar to institutionalized utterances. They are chunks that occur at the beginning of sentence and can be composed in different ways, for example, 'Do you think you might....?' or 'Would you like, please,....?'.

Within the Lexical Approach, great importance is laid on collocations. As Lewis (1997) maintains, "instead of words, we consciously try to think of collocations, and

Introduction

The Lexical Approach to second language teaching, discussed by Dave Willis (Willis, 1990) and popularized by Michael Lewis (1993, 1997, 2000), has become the subject of intense interest in the recent past. It puts the acquisition of words and word combinations in a central role in language learning. Following the tradition of communicative approach, the Lexical Approach places communication of meaning at the heart of language and language learning. The essential idea is that fluency is based on the acquisition of a large store of fixed and semi-fixed prefabricated items, which are available as the foundation for any linguistic novelty or creativity. Instruction focuses on relatively fixed expressions that occur frequently in spoken language, such as, "I'm sorry", "I didn't mean to make you jump", or "That will never happen to me", rather than on originally created sentences (Lewis, 1997).

Corpus research is making it clear that the patterning resulting from lexical phrases is major component of language. As such, lexical phrases are likely to become an increasingly important topic in Applied Linguistic circles, simply because lexical phrases are a key element in how language is used. In light of their essential nature, we need to come to a better understanding of their behavior and develop innovative ways of incorporating lexical phrases in instruction into the language syllabus (Schmitt & Carter, 2000).

Lexical Chunks

Although vocabulary has conventionally been conceptualized as individual words, it has now become clear that much of the lexis consists of sequences of words which operate

as single units. Talking about vocabulary exclusively in terms of words is not sufficient to account for the different kinds of meaning units which language users have at their disposal. These meaning units are referred to by different and overlapping terms, including 'prefabricated phrases', 'holophrases', 'gambits', 'lexical phrases', 'formulaic language', 'speech formulae', lexicalized stems, and 'frozen and semi-frozen phrases'. The importance of these lexical units in a language such as English have been discussed by a number of linguists. Cowie (1988) argues that the "existence of lexical units in a language such as English serves the needs of both native speakers and English language learners, who are as predisposed to store and serve them as they are to generate them from scratch".

Lewis (1993) treats lexical items as belonging to several categories:

- **Words:** Examples are all content and function words. They have been considered as essential vocabulary for learners to memorize. Lewis (1993) suggested that although function words carry least meaning, they should be dealt with early in the course from a lexical point of view. For example, 'would', a modal auxiliary, deserves high priority as a one word lexical item.
- **Poly words:** Poly words refer to any pair or group of words which are commonly found together or in close proximity, especially, a content word and one or more function words, e.g., 'by the way', 'up to now', 'upside down'.
- **Collocations:** Lewis (1997) defines a collocation as 'the readily observable phenomenon whereby certain words



The Lexical Approach to EFL/ESL Teaching: A Review

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چکیده

رویکرد واژگانی در آموزش زبان، به رویکردی اطلاق می‌شود که در آن، واژگان و ترکیب‌های واژگانی از عناصر اصلی تشکیل دهنده زبان به شمار می‌رود. بر اساس این رویکرد، زبان از الگوهای پیش ساخته چند واژه‌ای تشکیل شده که نقشی اساسی در تسهیل فرایند تولید زبان دارند. از جمله این الگوها می‌توان به هم‌آیی‌ها، عبارات‌های ثابت و نیمه ثابت، و اصطلاحات اشاره کرد که به راحتی از حافظه خواننده می‌شوند و زبان‌آموز را در کسب دانش زبانی در سطح دانش یک گویشور یاری می‌دهند. در این مقاله، اصول آموزشی رویکرد واژگانی و کاربرد آن در تدریس زبان بررسی می‌شود. کلید واژه‌ها: رویکرد واژگانی، جمله‌واره، واژه، هم‌آیی واژگان، عبارتهای ثابت.

Abstract

The Lexical Approach to EFL/ESL teaching refers to an approach derived from the belief that the building blocks of language learning and communication are not grammar, functions, or some other units of planning and teaching but lexis, that is, words and word combinations (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The Lexical Approach highlights the importance of lexis as being basic to communication. However, the Lexical Approach does not simply imply a shift of emphasis from grammar to vocabulary. It is believed that language consists not of traditional grammar and vocabulary, but of multi-word prefabricated chunks. Chunks include collocations, fixed and semi-fixed expressions and idioms, which according to Lewis (1997), occupy a crucial role in facilitating language production, being the key to fluency.

This article looks at the methodological foundations which form the basis of Lexical Approach to teaching English and the pedagogical implications suggested by them.

Key Words: Lexical Approach, lexical phrases, lexis, collocation, institutionalised utterances, sentence heads.