

LET'S FOCUS ON LEXIS

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In this paper we want to explore some of the key issues of the lexical approach in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). The thesis that vocabulary needs to be learned and that we don't have to teach it has been largely abandoned, ever since modern theorists began to focus on lexis. The main propagator of the lexical approach, Michael Lewis, thinks that vocabulary should be at the centre of language teaching. This article deals with the importance of raising awareness of the lexical nature of language through various activities, such as: developing skills for efficient use of dictionaries, reading and guessing the meaning of vocabulary items from the context, raising awareness of collocations and language patterns, developing students' ability to analyse and understand „chunks”, translating and contrasting L1 and L2 by using „chunks” and not isolated words, repetition of the same vocabulary through various exercises to facilitate retention, systematic and organised recording of new lexical items, and use of vocabulary related metalanguage for forming new mental maps.

Apart from the steps necessary for the process of vocabulary retention, we suggest enhanced use of metalanguage by teachers as a foundation for new mental maps helping vocabulary acquisition. We also propose a new vocabulary recording technique in the form of „The Golden Notebook of Words” comprising headings for various lexical topics (collocations, compounds, metaphors, polysemy, idioms, false friends etc.). This technique assumes recording words in context and not isolated words, and thus aims to facilitate vocabulary acquisition in order to ensure better fluency and production.

Key words: vocabulary, lexis, metalanguage, recording

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Nowadays, in the second decade since Lewis launched his lexical approach, most teachers of English as a foreign language (TEFL) would agree that lexical proficiency is crucial for communicative competence. Learning vocabulary is a slow and difficult process and many exposures to vocabulary are needed to get us from reception to production. Qualitative knowledge of vocabulary means full familiarity or, as Lewis says, being able to use a word

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involves mastering its collocational range and restrictions on that range (Lewis, 1993).

Teachers must bear in mind many aspects of vocabulary that could expand the knowledge of words, meaning not only the ability to understand the words, but also the ability to use them actively and appropriately. This also means that time spent on vocabulary acquisition in the classroom is far from sufficient for this highly demanding task. The important aspect of vocabulary learning is acquiring independence in using techniques required for learning and recording new lexis beyond the classroom environment. Learning a foreign language is a life-long task and demands a systematic and organised approach.

The following activities might be used in promoting a more systematic and organised approach to vocabulary:

- development of skills for efficient use of dictionaries;
- reading and guessing the meaning of vocabulary items from the context;
- raising awareness of collocations and language patterns;
- development of the students' ability to analyse and understand „chunks“;
- translating and contrasting L1 and L2 using „chunks“ and not isolated words;
- repetition of the same vocabulary through various exercises in order to facilitate retention;
- systematic and organised recording of new lexical items using trees, maps, context, etc.;
- use of vocabulary related metalanguage for forming new mental maps.

DICTIONARIES

Efficient use of dictionaries is central to successful language acquisition. Apart from the range of meanings, dictionaries offer a wide variety of information on words. They tell us the part of speech for a selected word, whether the nouns are countable or uncountable, or the verbs transitive or intransitive. They give us the most frequent collocations, idioms, and contexts for the entry. For these reasons it is essential for students to receive a thorough instruction on the types of dictionaries available (monolingual, bilingual, multilingual, dictionaries of collocations, etc.), their structure, and how to use them as a learning as well as a reference source.

READING

Teachers should develop their students' interest in reading in the target language, as it provides a never-ending source of new vocabulary items and their interrelationship patterns. Reading allows them to practise noticing and guessing skills, both so important in vocabulary building. We should use every opportunity we get in the classroom to practise the identification of lexical „chunks“: collocations, multi-word verbs, fixed and semi-fixed expressions, idioms, lexical phrases. Although the „chunk“ is somewhat a unit of subjective organization, students need to understand that its components at any level must relate to each other in a significant way.

According to Lewis, language consists not of traditional grammar and vocabulary, but

often of multi-word prefabricated chunks (Lewis, 1997) which he considers the key to language production. Once students identify and analyse „chunks”, we need to help them organise and record them. Lewis (1993) suggests recording whole sentences. Instead of organisation in alphabetical order, he suggests word trees, mind-maps, collocation tables etc. This view is also supported by Nattinger and DeCarrico: „It is our ability to use lexical phrases that helps us to speak with fluency. This prefabricated speech has both the advantages of more efficient retrieval and of permitting speakers (and learners) to direct their attention to the larger structure of the discourse, rather than keeping it narrowly focused on individual words as they are produced” (Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992).



TRANSLATING AND CONTRASTING

The most delicate area of language learning is contrasting and comparing of L1 and L2. In this area languages do not overlap and most errors our students make derive from there. Although advances in computer-based studies of language are tremendous, teachers should not fear losing their jobs to computers thanks to the language development in this exact area, which is vast and mostly not covered by rules. Most mistakes happen due to negative transfer. For example, in Croatian we use expressions like „blue hair” (meaning blond) and „black wine” (meaning red), and we never think about them as being strange combinations of words. Only when our students literally translate these into English, do we become aware that these are collocations, and highly unpredictable ones. However, they are typical collocations in Croatian as are so many in English. Thus we can say that collocations are words that go together for no specific reason, and this is what makes this area of vocabulary learning quite difficult for students to understand. Students need to be aware of the correlation between fluency and the way words are combined. Hill explains that most learners with „good vocabularies” have problems with fluency because their „collocational competence” is very limited, and that, especially from intermediate level, we should aim at increasing their competence in this area (Hill, 1999).

Students need to become aware that some word combinations are more probable than others at an early stage of learning, although the real acquisition of collocations starts at an intermediate level and is the main vocabulary focus for advanced learners. As there are no rules that can assist students in the acquisition of collocations, it is very important to raise students' awareness of the nature of English in this sense.

To avoid negative transfer, students should be taught at an early stage that the L2 equivalent to the L1 word combination in most cases does not consist of the same words, e.g. „blue hair” in Croatian stands for „blond hair” in English, „black wine” in Croatian is „red wine” in English. In Croatian, we say „to work the job” or „to make the job”. We also say „to be good/bad in something”, as opposed to the English „good/bad at something”. Regarding this last example, we need to point out that English verbs in most cases call for different prepositions. Students could be presented with a funny mental picture that the native speaker forms when he/she hears expressions like „blue hair” or „on” the station instead of „at” the station etc.

REPETITION



Repetitio est mater studiorum seems to be more true for language learning than for anything else. To retain an item in long-term memory, students need to practise it through meaningful exercises. Recycling helps storing of items together with their contexts. With each repetition exercise, the item should be viewed in another aspect. One exercise may focus on grammar while others might aim at collocation range. Sufficient recycling and repetitive practice enhance the memorising process. Repetition through meaningful exercises can supply the sufficient number of exposures required for qualitative storage of fixed and semi-fixed prefabricated items. What is most important, these activities help raise awareness of the nature of the language, and that is why we must use authentic materials directed toward naturally occurring language. Repetition and recycling help achieve successful production, and therefore teachers should not hesitate to practise same vocabulary items in different contexts. Collocations are noticed during reading and listening activities and practised in writing and speaking exercises. As already mentioned, the knowledge of collocations is vital for a competent use of a language.

USE OF METALANGUAGE

According to Andrew Sheehan, most English language teachers know and use the metalanguage of grammar, such as *past perfect*, *first and second conditional*, *past participle*, and *irregular verb*. But few English language teachers are familiar with and understand the essential terms and concepts associated with linguistics and lexis, such as *collocation*, *chunks of language*, *fixed expressions*, *sentence heads* (Sheehan, 2004). We also think that more extensive use of metalanguage by teachers would enhance achievements in the lexical approach. Teachers need to start using the vocabulary related metalanguage at an early stage of learning, just as they do with the metalanguage of grammar. Most students are perfectly comfortable with the metalanguage of grammar and they need to become as familiar with the vocabulary metalanguage and terms like *chunks*, *polysemy*, *homophones*, etc. This would allow the creation of new mental links by placing new words under different headings, grouping them in a way so as to help their association.

ORGANISING AND RECORDING NEW LEXIS (THE GOLDEN NOTEBOOK OF WORDS)

Many methods of vocabulary learning and memorising have been suggested, and their practical value very much depends on the learning style the students prefer. We believe that teachers should not ignore this issue, as there is no single technique that suits all students. Teachers need to be informed about memorizing techniques that can be used to a greater advantage with different learning style inclinations (visual, kinaesthetic, aural, and tactile) and make students aware of these learning aids. However, noting down new words in a

structured way should work for almost everyone and is more suitable than leaving it up to students to choose their own technique. They should definitely be encouraged to find and practise the technique that suits them best, but teachers need to be sure that something is being done about the vocabulary, and this is why they might as well prescribe the same method for all of their students. Our suggestion is „The Golden Notebook of Words” that can be used for a life-long learning process. The notebook would comprise important sections with permanent headings. Pages could be added and taken out depending on the student's accomplishment level. Students might be encouraged to organise vocabulary items in their notebooks under the metalanguage headings (see Appendix 1). Each heading is followed by the definition and enough examples, which will allow students to grasp the idea and enable them to add their own examples that they encounter when reading texts and elsewhere. Their notebook should be of a ring binder kind since students would be advised to take out the items that they have permanently acquired. The list of adjectives in Appendix 3 might be used as a starting point, and students might be asked to divide the adjectives into positive and negative ones, or it could be the result of a brainstorming exercise in which they are asked to produce as many adjectives to describe people. Students might be asked to make sentences with different words for ways of speaking, looking and moving (Appendix 2). Appendix 4 is suitable for brainstorming exercises with endless possibilities for new branches and large lists of new entries for the Notebook. The aim is for this notebook to become a principal aid in language acquisition. As Sheehan (2004) says, words should be recycled and revised as soon as possible after they are introduced; otherwise, we tend to forget them.

To enhance the use of the lexical approach, we could introduce five-minute activities that would benefit to familiarization with the metalanguage. Each time we could present a new heading from the table in Appendix 1. This would not affect the concept of the lesson, but it would (in the long run) provide a systematic approach to dealing with lexis.

CONCLUSION

Nowadays most teachers would argue that the only right approach to language learning is the lexical approach. This view is largely supported by modern theorists (Lewis, Hill, Sinclair, etc) who focus on vocabulary teaching as the main constituent of communicative approach. Words are not learned in isolation, and the lexical approach emphasises acquiring proficiency in word combinations. Therefore, it is important for language teachers to raise their students' awareness of lexis complexity and interrelationships, the understanding of which leads to better fluency and productivity. To have a wide range of vocabulary means to understand language „chunks” through which learners comprehend language patterns. The article gave a review of some indispensable activities and suggested more extensive use of vocabulary metalanguage. It also proposed a strategy for lexis recording in the form of „The Golden Notebook of Words” which could become an important tool in vocabulary acquisition. The sections of the notebook include the metalanguage headings which are intended as a new mental map/drawer for helping vocabulary retention.



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Appendix 1

ACRONYM – a word formed from the initial letters of words that make up a descriptive phrase or a proper name.	UN (the United Nations) C.O.D. (cash on delivery) FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation)
ANTONYM - a word that means the opposite of another word.	Empty/full, good/bad, new/old, clever/stupid, happy/sad, poor/rich, boring/interesting
BLEND - a word formed by joining parts of morphemes of two other words.	brunch = breakfast + lunch petrodollar = petroleum + dollar Interpol = international police Smog = smoke fog
CLICHÉ - a phrase or an idea that has been used so often that it no longer has much meaning.	Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today. Any friend of yours is a friend of mine. There's no place like home. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link.
CLIPPING – a subtraction of one or more syllables from a word, which is also available in its full form	Phone (telephone), ad/advert(isement), photo(graph), memo(randum), rep(resentative)
COLLECTIVE NOUN - a singular noun that refers to a group of people, animals, concepts or things	A staff of teachers, a crowd of people, a pride of lions, a caravan of camels, a team of rugby players, a crew of sailors, a board of directors, a flock of birds, a pack of wolves
COLLOCATION - refers to the restrictions on how words can be used together, for example which prepositions are used with particular verbs, or which verbs and nouns are used together. - Combination of words in a language that happens very often and more frequently than would happen by chance.	1. adjective+noun genuine article, fast food 2. noun+noun pocket money 3. verb+noun accept responsibility, declare war 4. verb+adverb live dangerously 5. adverb+verb half understand 6. adverb+adjective highly desirable 7. verb+preposition+noun run for office

COLLOQUIAL EXPRESSIONS	Rings a bell (sounds familiar). <i>I don't think I've met him but his name rings a bell.</i> On the house (free) <i>The drinks were on the house because the proprietor was celebrating his wedding anniversary.</i>
COMPOUND – two or more words together that act as a single word.	Good-looking, a must-have, white-collar, absent-minded, user-friendly, airtight, performance-enchanting
CONFUSING WORDS look, sound or mean very similar and tend to cause confusion.	Brake - <i>To stop, put your foot on the brake, but don't brake too suddenly.</i> Break - <i>If you drop the glass on the floor it will break.</i> suit - <i>A regular suit is a jacket with matching trousers or skirt.</i> Suite - <i>A suite is a set of adjoining rooms in a hotel; set of furniture; set of musical compositions</i>
EUPHEMISM an inoffensive word or phrase substituted for one considered offensive or hurtful.	rather plain /ugly, senior citizen /pensioner, low IQ /stupid, departed /dead
FALSE FRIENDS -are pairs of words in two languages (or letters in two alphabets) that look and/or sound similar, but differ in meaning.	Sympathy (sućut)/a ne simpatija (liking, affinity) Stylish (elegantan, sa stilom)/ a ne stilski (period npr. period furniture) Provision (odredba; opskrba)/a ne provizija (commission, fee)
HOMOGRAPHS - are words that are spelled alike, but differ in meaning and sometimes in pronunciation.	Sentence, plot, quarter <i>Sentences are given by both English teachers and judges.</i> <i>He plans to grow oranges on a plot he inherited.</i> <i>I find the plot of his latest novel rather dull.</i>
HOMONYM – a word that is spelt like another word (and may be pronounced like it) but which has a different meaning.	Fire „sth burning” and „shoot”, Can „be able” and „put sth in a container” Poach, seal, tender, tap, rate
HOMOPHONES - are words that have the same pronunciation but different spellings and meanings	Cereal/serial, rose/ rows, missed/mist, fair/fare, meet/meat, tail/tale <i>What's your favourite TV serial?</i> <i>I stopped eating cereals for breakfast since I gained weight.</i>
HYPONYM - a word or phrase whose semantic range is included within that of another word (their hypernym).	scarlet, vermilion, carmine, and crimson are all hyponyms of red. Draught, breeze, hurricane, gale are all hyponyms of wind.
IDIOM - a group of words whose meaning is different from the meanings of the individual words.	Go through the roof! become very angry <i>His boss went through the roof when John damaged his new car.</i> Put your mind to something <i>You could succeed if you put your mind to it.</i> Out of the blue /unexpectedly <i>I hadn't seen him in years and his showing up at the party really came out of the blue.</i>
IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS	In a stew angry, worried or frustrated; Hit the bottle drink alcoholic beverages excessively or compulsively; Patch up to stop quarrelling with sb and be friendly again. <i>We've managed to patch up our differences.</i>





METAPHOR - a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action that it does not literally denote in order to imply a resemblance.	All the world's stage, I've got my eye on you, You are my sunshine.
MULTI-WORD VERBS are made up of a verb, an adverb and a preposition. Because they end with a preposition, multi-word verbs always take a direct object. Also, the three words that combine to form multi-word verbs cannot be separated.	Catch up on/with something to do something you did not have time to do earlier <i>I'm hoping to catch up on some sleep.</i> Go in for sport - train
NOUN PHRASE a group of words in a sentence that behaves in the same way as a noun i. e. as a subject, an object, a complement or as the object of a preposition	An expensive brand new four-lane highway connects Zagreb to Split.
OXYMORON - a figure of speech in which two contradictory terms are used in conjunction, forming an epigrammatic effect.	Pretty ugly, beautiful tyrant, bitter sweet, plastic glasses, inside out, working holiday.
PHRASAL VERB is a verb plus a preposition or adverb which creates a meaning different from the original verb.	run + into = meet <i>I ran into my neighbour at the movies last night.</i> run + away = leave home <i>She ran away from home when she was fourteen.</i>
POLYSEMY - ambiguity of individual words, having many meanings	Head- part of body; part of an object (head of nail); head of an organization.
POLITICAL CORRECTNESS (often abbreviated to PC) is a term used to describe language or behaviour which is intended, or said to be intended, to provide a minimum of offence, particularly to racial, cultural, gender or other identity groups.	African American (instead of black), visually challenged (instead of blind), sales person (instead of salesman and saleswoman), flight attendant (instead of steward and stewardess), police officer (instead of policeman) and chairperson or chair (instead of chairman)
PROVERB - a well known phrase or sentence that gives advice or says something generally true.	All is fair in love and war, Curiosity killed the cat, Nothing ventured nothing gained, Once bitten, twice shy
REDUPLICATIVES – are words where only a part of the root or stem is repeated, the repeated portion may be called a 'reduplicative'.	Double-trouble, Humpty-Dumpty, rick-rack, mumbo-jumbo, airy-fairy, criss-cross, topsy-turvy
SYMILE a figure of speech that expresses the resemblance of one thing to another of a different category, usually introduced by -as or -like.	As tough as old boots, as good as gold, as quiet as a mouse, as sober as a judge, like father like son.
SYNONYM - a word that means the same or nearly the same as another word.	Glasses/spectacles, simple/easy, clever/intelligent

Appendix 2

Ways of looking: scrutinize, peer, distinguish, stare, peep, catch someone's eye, eye, observe, glare, glimpse, look at, notice, stare, watch, gaze, glance, gape, view
Ways of speaking: talk, chat, converse, gossip, chatter, utter, snap, shout, stammer, scream, screech, bawl, roar, bellow, holler, yell, cry, swear, groan, cheer, whisper, murmur
Ways of moving: walk, stroll, stride, stagger, hike, pace, toddle, totter, march, limp, race, run, trot, crawl, tiptoe

Appendix 3

Adjectives for describing people: affectionate, aggressive, aloof, ambitious, artistic, astute, attractive, beautiful, broad-minded, caring, charming, cheerful, clever, competitive, conceited, confident, conscientious, conservative, creative, cruel, cunning, decisive, dependable, diffident, diligent, discerning, disdainful, distrustful, down-to-earth, effusive, elegant, emotional, excitable, extravagant, flexible, flirtatious, friendly, fun-loving, gallant, garrulous, generous, good-looking, gullible, hard-headed, hard-working, haughty, idealistic, imaginative, impetuous, impulsive, industrious, intelligent, introverted, intuitive, kind, lazy, logical, loud, materialistic, modest, moody, morose, nad've, nervous, obliging, observant, obstinate, optimistic, perfectionist, pessimistic, pig-headed, placid, prejudiced, proud, pushy, quick-tempered, rational, rebellious, reckless, reliable, reserved, sagacious, self-confident, selfish, sensitive, sentimental, serious, servile, smart, superficial, stingy, sharp-tongued, shrewd, shy, sincere, sly, snobbish, stubborn, sullen, taciturn, tactful, talkative, thick-skinned, tolerant, ugly, understanding, unprincipled, unhelpful, unscrupulous, unsystematic, vain, well-behaved, wise, witty...



Appendix 4

Vocabulary of food: fruit (strawberry), meat (lamb), vegetables (tomato), fish (trout), seafood (prawn), dairy products (yoghurt), food made of wheat (pasta), cakes and desserts (chocolate), drinks (orange juice); dinner, supper, breakfast, lunch; wholesome, wholemeal, organic, reduced fat, flavour, baked, savoury, sour, sweet, grilled, light, vegetarian, vegan, coffee, burger, steak, roast...)

O LEKSIČKOM PRISTUPU U NASTAVI ENGLESKOGA JEZIKA



Sažetak

U članku se razmatraju neka od glavnih pitanja leksičkoga pristupa u sklopu učenja engleskoga kao stranoga jezika. Teza da se vokabular mora naučiti i da ga ne treba podučavati u većini je slučajeva napuštena, osobito otkako su moderni teoretičari počeli isticati važnost podučavanja leksika. Glavni zagovornik leksičkoga pristupa, Michael Lewis, vokabular stavlja u središte podučavanja.

U članku se naglašava važnost podizanja svijesti o leksičkoj prirodi jezika kroz različite aktivnosti.

Ističe se da bi povećana uporaba metajezika od strane nastavnika trebala omogućiti stvaranje nove mentalne mape koja bi pridonijela boljem usvajanju leksika.

Također se predlaže inzistiranje na temeljitijem načinu bilježenja leksika u obliku „Zlatne bilježnice riječi” koja bi sadržavala naslove za različite leksičke teme (npr. kolokacije, složenice, metafore, polisemija, idiomi, lažni parovi, frazni glagoli itd.). Naglašava se važnost navođenja riječi u kontekstu, a ne pojedinačno, s ciljem da se olakša usvajanje leksika, a sve bi to vodilo tečnijem i pravilnijem služenju engleskim jezikom.

Ključne riječi: leksik, vokabular, metajezik, bilježenje riječi