Language has traditionally been divided into grammar and vocabulary. Crudely, the former consisted of elements of the generative system of the language and the latter was the stock of fixed nongenerative 'words'. Recently, this analysis has been challenged and shown to be seriously misguided from both strictly linguistic and pedagogical points of view (Lewis, 1993; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Willis, 1990).

In fact, language consists broadly of four different kinds of lexical items, the constituent 'chunks' of any language. Each chunk may be placed on a generative spectrum between poles ranging from absolutely fixed to very free. Although it is true that traditional vocabulary is usually close to the fixed pole, and grammar structures are frequently close to the free pole, this fact obscures the vastly more numerous and in many ways more interesting items that occur nearer the middle of the spectrum. These items may be 'words', or 'structures' in traditional language teaching terms, but, as we will see, most typically they are lexical items of types not recognised in most teaching material.

Four fundamental types of lexical item may be identified:

Type 1  a. Word
         b. Polywords
Type 2  Collocations


Michael Lewis
Type 3 Institutionalised utterances
Type 4 Sentence frames or heads

Such an analysis is not unique. There is some overlap between categories and sometimes it is useful to consider a particular item as belonging to different classes for different analytical purposes. This is particularly the case when considering how such items may best be dealt with in the classroom.

Words and polywords

Words have always been recognised as independent units. An utterance may change its meaning by the change of a single word (Could you pass my pen/calculator, please?) and single words may appear in speech or writing as fully independent items (Stop, Sure, Please.). This category of lexical item has long been recognised in language teaching.

Polywords are but a small extension of this category. Although all lexical items except words consist of more than one word, the term 'polyword' is restricted here to those (usually short) phrases that have a degree of idiomaticity (by the way, on the other hand), and have usually appeared in even quite simple dictionaries.

Collocations

Some pairs or groups of words co-occur with very high frequency, depending perhaps on the text-type of the data. Most typically this feature is associated with verb-noun and adjective-noun pairs (to raise capital, a short-term strategy), but it can apply to word groups larger than pairs, and to words from most grammatical categories. It will be noted that although the structures of highly frequent verb patterns have formed, and still form, a key element of most language courses, other highly frequent word patterns - which is precisely what collocations are - have usually been ignored or at best been seen as marginal to courses.

As Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) pointed out, collocation is not a 'conditional' or even a 'subjunctive'. If asked which two 'bits' make up the utterance, teachers almost invariably make the division between clauses. But this is incorrect. We recognise that If I were you is ALWAYS followed by I'd, so the lexical boundary between chunks is after I'd. Similar utterances are If I were you, I'd/did, get one, leave the car at home. Notice that, under this analysis, the utterance is simply the base form Go, Get one, Leave the car at home preceded by a fixed chunk. Far from being a 'difficult structure', it is as simple as it could be.

Traditional grammar has led teachers to believe that because language items can be analysed in a particular way, it must be helpful to analyse them in that way. But language can be analysed in many ways - phonemes, syllables, morphemes or words. Different analyses are useful for different purposes. Misidentifying the chunks of which language consists has led to many pedagogical problems. In many cases the word is too small a unit and the sentence is too large. Furthermore, those sentences that are fully institutionalised utterances can be learned and used as wholes, without analysis, thereby forming the basis, not the product, of grammatical competence. This perception, extensively discussed by Nat-
Michael Lewis

I'll give you a ring.
I'll be in touch.

I'll get back to you as soon as I can.
I'll be back in a minute.
I'll see what I can do.
You'll never get away with it.
It'll be all right.
It'll take time.
That'll do.
That'll be the day!
Nobody'll even notice.
There'll be hell to pay.
We'll see ...  

Although expressing instantly identifiable pragmatic meaning, and so of immediate use to learners, such language forms a relatively small part of the input in typical courses. Expressions like these deserve increased attention, both because of their immediate usefulness and because they provide input that is the basis for inductive acquisition of generalisable 'rules'. Additional emphasis on these institutionalised items must be accompanied by classroom strategies that make students more aware of lexical items, and provide ample opportunities for them to practice such language in the safety of the classroom.

Sentence frames and heads

These are to a large extent the written equivalent of institutionalised utterances. They are those often large discourse features that allow us to decode complex written text. The frustration of reading a student's essay and thinking 'I know what you mean, but that's not the way to say (= write it)', is most frequently caused by the student's failure to use this type of lexical item. Some are comparatively short and easy (sequencers such as secondly, ... and finally); some are sentence heads serving similar pragmatic purposes (We come now to a number of important reservations ... ); the largest represent those 'frames' that allow us to structure long passages of text, usually written (e.g., the essay), but sometimes spoken (the lecture or professional presentation). This type of lexical item remains outside the field of competence even of many native speakers; but it can be of great use to, for example, students of academic or professional English.

We have, then, four types of lexical item: the first two categories concerned principally with referential meaning, the latter two with pragmatic meaning. A balanced language programme will have to take account of all four types and, depending on the goals of the course, of the balance between them. Broadly, the categories equate to the traditional ones of Vocabulary (now Words and Collocations) and Function (now Institu-
tionalised Utterance and Sentence Frame). Interestingly, no lexical item-type corresponds to such traditional structures as the present perfect, conditionals or the passive. Grammar in this sense is radically de-emphasised within the Lexical Approach.

Methodology

Krashen and Terrell (1983) contend that ‘we acquire language by understanding messages’. If they are right, formal teaching may be of little benefit to the learner. Indeed, it may be counterproductive in that it frequently directs the learner’s attention to individual words or grammatical structures that, as we have seen, are not the fundamental components of the language. Although I am largely sympathetic to their view – I believe the structure of the language is acquired, as is the vast majority of a learner’s lexicon – I believe that activities that raise conscious awareness of the lexical nature of language and its component chunks can aid acquisition. The claim is a modest one – conscious awareness of what constitutes a possible chunk provides learners with a tool that enables them to process input more effectively.

It must be stressed that the primary purpose of the activities is awareness-raising, rather than formal ‘teaching’. Estimates of the minimum functional vocabulary for the learner vary widely, depending on technical factors such as what constitutes a ‘word’ or ‘item’, and different views of functional competence. Nobody, however, estimates lower than 20,000 separate items (and most estimates are much larger). If each item were formally taught, and took only 2 minutes of class time, and learning were 100% efficient, nearly 700 hours would be required for this element of the course alone. The truth is much closer to Krashen and Terrell’s position than many teachers find comfortable – the types and quality of input must be carefully chosen, but we have less understanding of which items will be acquired, and thus retained for future use, than is usually acknowledged. Probably the best we can do is select input that is appropriate and encourage a low-anxiety atmosphere conducive to acquisition.

Within the lexical approach, less attention will be paid to individual words and substantially less to traditional grammar structures; in contrast, much more time will be devoted to ensuring that students are aware of the lexical items, particularly collocations, which carry much of the (referential) meaning in written text, and institutionalised utterances, which carry the meaning (in this case mostly pragmatic) of natural spoken text. Many of the activities will be of the receptive, awareness-raising kind. Teachers used to formal vocabulary teaching, using largely productive practice, need to make an important change of emphasis, learning truly to value receptive practice.

Practices in the Lexical Approach

Productive practices are possible. In some ways the exercise types resemble those of standard vocabulary or grammar teaching, although the linguistic focus is different. In the sample exercises only a few examples are given to illustrate the type of practice proposed; student materials would need longer exercises with more examples.

Exercise type 1

In each of the following, one word does NOT make a strong word partnership with the word in capitals; which is the odd word?

1. HIGH season price opinion spirits house time priority
2. MAIN point reason effect entrance speed road meal course
3. NEW experience job food potatoes baby situation year
4. LIGHT green lunch rain entertainment day work traffic

Note that there is little dispute about the word in examples 1 and 2, while 3 and 4 may give rise to discussion and doubt. This is intentional – collocation is not a possible/impossible dichotomy, but likely/unlikely. Although students (and teachers) prefer certainty to uncertainty, an element of doubt is intrinsic to collocation. Care must be taken not to make this type of exercise confusing, but totally unambiguous examples should not be the sole target either.

Exercise type 2

Choose from these words four that make strong word partnerships in business English with each of the verbs below.

bill presentation invoice discount debt lunch
deal calculation mistake service message expenses

PAY MAKE GIVE

Use some of the word partnerships to say something about your own job.

Again notice the use of the phrase strong word partnerships in the instruction. Most partnerships are possible; the exercise raises awareness of strong or very likely partnerships.
Exercise type 3

Complete the table with five adjectives and five verbs that form strong word partnerships with the noun VISIT.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>(Key word)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VISIT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that this simple array is most useful at the size proposed here; smaller arrays are rarely sufficiently generative to be of pedagogical value, while larger ones are confusing to students. The words that are included in the array may be

a. Found from an accompanying source text.
b. Chosen from lists prepared in advance by the teacher.
c. Chosen from student suggestions.

In the last two cases the teacher must exercise careful judgement both of the possibility of the collocation and, more importantly, of its value to the student. ‘Weak’ adjectives (big, new, nice) rarely justify their place in the recorded array. Collocates should be selected for inclusion on the basis of their value in increasing the students’ communicative power.

Exercise type 4

Fill in the middle column with an adjective that is opposite in meaning to the word in the first column, but makes a correct word partnership with the word in column three.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1</th>
<th>Column 2</th>
<th>Column 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>helpful</td>
<td>suggestion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>efficient</td>
<td>system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>careful</td>
<td>piece of work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>safe</td>
<td>choice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that the idea of ‘opposites’ is invalid unless confined to contextual or collocational opposites. Too often teaching oversimplifies this idea unhelpfully.

Exercise type 5

His behaviour was very strange.
– Yes, very odd.

Her work is very careless.
– Yes, she’s not careful at all.

Those roses are lovely.
– Yes, I like flowers around the house.

Everything seems to get more expensive all the time.
– Yes, especially food.

These examples, suggested by McCarthy (1991), show possible ways of agreeing, using synonyms, or antonyms, and with more general or more specific words. Recent work in discourse analysis suggests that ‘lexical agreement’ of this kind is typical of natural conversation (Pearson, 1986; Pomerantz, 1984). Oral exercises, resembling traditional grammar drills but with a freer choice of lexically appropriate responses like those above, provide excellent fluency practice.

Exercise type 6

The first part of each sentence in List 1 can be completed with the group of endings given in List 2. Match the first parts with the endings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List 1</th>
<th>List 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I’m wondering</td>
<td>a. to concentrate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to understand it but I can’t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to remember where I put them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I’m trying.</td>
<td>b. quite pleased with myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a bit off colour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>more confident than I did.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I’m feeling</td>
<td>c. what I can about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nothing yet!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the best I can.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exercise type 8
It must have been difficult.
- Difficult! It was absolutely impossible.
You must have been really fed up.
- Fed up! I was absolutely suicidal.

Can you think of a situation where you would say each of the twelve sentences? Choose one of them and write a short dialogue so that one of the people in the dialogue says exactly the sentence you have chosen.

Exercise type 7
Rearrange the following to make natural sentences.
1. It two about hours TAKES.
2. How it long will TAKE?
3. You I what don’t say seriously TAKE.
4. I’ll to a have just chance TAKE.
5. I’ll a the from station taxi TAKE.
6. Don’t to home books forget your TAKE.
7. I more any can’t TAKE!
8. Nobody the of your parents can place TAKE.

When you go on holiday, do you take a lot of photos? Of what people or places? What sort of souvenirs do you like to take home?

Are you the sort of person who:
  a. takes responsibility  b. takes advice  c. takes risks?

Underline all the word partnerships with take in the examples.

Note that the rearrangement exercise is simplicity itself for the native speaker but comparatively difficult for learners. It is essential that the ‘answers’ be institutionalised utterances chosen as input appropriate to the particular group of learners. The ‘conversation topics’ are intended to introduce a more affective quality, while still focusing on collocates of the same de-lexicalised verb. The final underlining activity is important in checking that students really have correctly identified the chunks. This exercise type is useful for de-lexicalised verbs and nouns such as thing, point, way. Whether the keyword should be highlighted or not is a matter of taste (if it is not, many students simply do not notice that all the examples contain the same word).

Exercise type 9
Complete the following by adding one word. Only one word is possible in each case. Make sure you know the equivalent expressions in your own language.
1. I’ve no idea where my bag is - it’s just disappeared into . . . air.
2. We weren’t expecting her. She just turned up out of the . . .
3. It’s . . . time something was done about it.
4. It’s a difficult . . . of affairs. I’m not sure what to do.
5. It might have been quicker to take the car . . . all.
6. He might have changed his job by now, . . . all I know.
7. Oh, no! I’ve spilled coffee all . . . the place.
8. Revise carefully, but . . . all, don’t panic during the exam.

The Lexical Approach widens the concept of ‘idiom’ so that attention needs to be drawn to many natural phrases and whole sentences that were previously excluded from course materials. As the examples above indicate, both apparently meaning-carrying words (nos. 1–4) and de-lexicalised words (nos. 5–8) need to be considered. The idea of ‘equivalent expressions’ (rather than translations) is important in dealing with institutionalised utterances.

Exercise type 10
Match each of these remarks with a response.
1. Would you like a cup of coffee?
2. Are you ready?
Recording formats

Exercise type 13

Some pairs or words can only be used in a particular order: Ladies and gentlemen, but not Gentlemen and ladies. Make pairs from these words, find equivalents in your own language and use the English pairs in natural sentences.

bread now rights down then ins back forth outs butter out wrongs there here

Although polywords and pairs represent only a minor part of the total lexicon, they should not be totally ignored.

Pedagogical implications of the lexical approach

List 1 List 2 List 3
1. by and then a. occasionally
2. in the long away b. immediately
3. every now and again c. repeatedly
4. time and large d. generally
5. straight run e. eventually

Exercise type 11

Answer briefly – and honestly!

1. Think of three jobs you do at home – what are they and where in your home do you do them?
2. Mention three public places or situations in your country where smoking is not allowed.
3. Think of two or three important ideas you have had in connection with your work or studies. Where did you get the ideas from?
4. Can you think of three ways you personally have made money without working?

Note that the answers for this type of exercise must be true, thus avoiding the random lexicalisation of practices of which Widdowson has complained. Most of the answers will be short phrases, and many of these, although not recognised as such by teachers, will be institutionalised: In the kitchen, On public transport, From my parents, As Christmas or birthday presents.

Of particular interest here is that the prepositional phrases are institutionalised and, as such, precisely the kind of learned wholes that provide the basis for, rather than being the product of, grammatical competence.

Exercise type 12

Some fixed expressions are made with more than one word. Complete each of the phrases in List 1 with a word from List 2, then match the expressions to the word in List 3 that is more common in written English.

1. I'm so unfit. If I climb the stairs I'm completely out of...
2. I couldn't steer the car at all. It was completely out of...
3. I've repaid all the money I borrowed. At last I'm out of...
4. There are none left, so you can't have one. You're out of...
5. You certainly can't do that! It's out of...
Note the alphabetical order of the answers, and the format, which highlights key expressions.

**Format 2**

You can HAVE lunch, a cup of tea, a plane to catch, a lot to do
PAY an invoice, bill, expenses
PAY FOR the tickets, lunch, a colleague

See also the 5 adjective-5 verb-key noun box already referred to (exercise type 3).

**Format 3**

emphasise
point out
I should draw your attention to the fact that
remind you
explain

The precise formats vary; however, the important point is that the recording formats should be designed to suit the collocations, institutionalised utterances, or sentence headings rather than simply listing items.

**Additional exercises**

As with all language practice, not all useful lexical exercises lend themselves to the generalisation that is clearly possible with the types listed above. This is fortunate, for if the Lexical Approach is to work in the classroom, as well as promote language proficiency, it must also provide variety and enjoyment in class. Here are some activities that serve to indicate the range of possibilities that are consistent with the Lexical Approach.

1. **Lexical Crosswords.** The clues are lexical items, most typically utterances, with missing words. The answers to the crossword are in fact further clues to the utterances. The clues therefore represent valuable input.

2. In pairs or small groups, write a story. Your story must:
   a. Contain exactly 100 words – not one more or less.
   b. Not use any English word (including a, the, is and other easy words) more than once.

Once you have discovered some simple guidelines, this activity ensures lexically dense stories. The most effective tend to use incomplete sentences and ‘de-grammaticalised dialogue-type’ exclamations.

3. The teacher reads (or plays on tape) a story, chosen to include, for example, a number of expressions using a de-lexicalised verb such as get, keep. Students:
   a. Raise a hand (silently) each time they notice an expression containing the keyword (which keeps all involved and helps weaker students).
   b. Write down the expressions containing the keyword.

4. **Jigsaw Dialogues.** The lines of a dialogue are rearranged, either as a textbook exercise, or on strips of paper so that students can physically rearrange them on the table or walk around the room sorting themselves into the correct order. Students then read the dialogue in the correct order. It is important that the dialogue be written so that many of its turns are, or contain, institutionalised utterances.

5. **Lexical Dominoes.** A set of cards is prepared so each card is divided into like dominoes; on one half is written a noun, on the other a verb. Students draw a group of cards – say 7 each – and take turns to add dominoes in the usual way. The two halves that touch must make a strong word partnership.

This can also be done with noun-adjective cards. The words may be chosen from a relatively small field such as the language for a particular job, or, by using a number of de-lexicalised words, particularly verbs, a more linguistically generative game can be constructed.

Many other activities with which teachers are familiar may be used within the Lexical Approach. What is important is the attitude the teacher takes toward the language of the input material. The two most essential changes to the teacher's mind-set are a willingness to search for, identify and direct attention toward the chunks of which all naturally occurring language consists, and, methodologically, a ready acceptance of the value of receptive, awareness-raising activities. Any classroom procedure that respects these two key principles has a valid contribution to make to a course informed by the Lexical Approach.

**References**


PART V: SUMMING UP

In this concluding section, James Coady draws from the preceding chapters to construct general pedagogical guidelines for second language vocabulary learning. He begins by reviewing the reasons for neglect of vocabulary instruction in the past, and the main approaches being taken to remedy this problem. He then reviews a broad spectrum of empirical research on contextual acquisition, individual learning strategies, direct instruction, L2 vocabulary acquisition, collocations, reading, bottom-up processing, lexicon size, dictionary use, and general learning theory. Coady concludes by discussing the rationale for pedagogy that this research points to.