**Vocabulary versus Lexis**

In this short workshop session we turn our attention to lexis. The reason for this is that lexis is increasingly seen as playing a pivotal or central role in language. Before we begin with this it is necessary first to introduce the concept of lexis and see how it differs from that of vocabulary. When we think of the term vocabulary we think of the words that people know (are able to use) or recognize. In the scale of language was can already see that vocabulary occupies a central position.

Sounds – Words – Sentences

But the term vocabulary refers to words alone. Lexis relates to not just words but element both above and below the word level, smaller elements such as particles (up in the phrasal verb step up) including bound morphemes (un as in unconscious) in addition to larger elements such as fixed expressions (raise your hands, on the fence about). In addition to differences in size lexis also relates to linguistic units which tend to co-occur but are not necessarily fixed such as collocations (black coffee, hot day, wonderful time). Looking at this more closely we can see that while vocabulary items are seen as being prey to grammatical rules, lexis sees grammar as being achieved (at least in part) by the words themselves.

Enhancing Vocabulary

Vocabulary is arguably the most important aspect of language learning. Without an ample amount of vocabulary items it is difficult to do things with a language. This is particularly true because vocabulary interfaces with all aspects of language, from sound and structure to meaning and usage patterns. All these things are connected to each other through the word units the language has.

Unfortunately, the nature of word units or what we will call lexis is often misunderstood, even by language teachers. First of all we need to embrace the above-mentioned distinction between lexis and vocabulary. To reiterate, vocabulary is made up of the word units themselves. It comprises just the word units and nothing more while lexis refers to the system of word units in a language. It is an important point that lexis comprises a system principally because lexis is the interface with other aspects of language.

There are several aspects of word units which have been undervalued or ignored in more traditional ways of teaching.

- meaninglessness
- polysemy
- ambiguity
- partnerships
- size
- frequency
- valorization
- cultural associations

The basic thing to remember is that lexis and word-based knowledge is much more useful to students when the words the students know are organized and not just one way but in many ways. Organization is the key to vocabulary use. This means that as we teach vocabulary we want to try to get the students to form connections with other words they already know.
**Word Learning**
All learning is defined by processes of memory and of course word learning is no different. Memory can be broken down into three basic stages; encoding, storage, and retrieval (Terry, 2002). As teachers we need to be aware of each of these and recognize that, while separate, each one affects the other. A word strongly encoded will draw more attention and thus continue to provide stronger links to other and more numerous words in its storage. Greater diversity (links) in storage leads to more opportunities for the word to be activated, even passively, and thus makes it easier to retrieve the word for use when necessary.

- For strong encoding we need to make sure that the learners’ attention is fully focused on the word. We also need to provide the target word in as many different perceptual routes as possible with a fairly high rate of repetition.
- For effective storage, we need to provide the word in as many different settings (contexts) and guises (forms) as seem appropriate to the level of our students. It is very important to try to foster as many connections as possible with other words as well as other pre-stored material like sounds, images, feelings, etc.
- For fast retrieval nothing works better than simple practice, but it is important to practice retrieval in a variety of settings and purposes and even when the students are in a variety of states (happy, sad, tired, excited, etc.)

**Overt versus Covert Dealing with Words**
There is no way a teacher can possibly overtly teach all the words s/he wants her/his students to learn or feels they need to know. Time is always limited and decisions must be made about what will be dealt with overtly and what is left to more a more covert treatment. This decision should be made based on the nature of the word in relation to the students’ current proficiency level and learning goals/course curriculum.

**Introducing Words**
Below you will find a list of some of the techniques often used for introducing new vocabulary overtly. With a partner decide what the good points and bad points of each of the techniques might be. Then decide which of the techniques might be the most useful.

A. Write the words clearly on the board and then say them out loud for the class.

B. Say the words and have the students repeat them.

C. Have students mark the target words in a text.

D. Have the students copy out the target words from a text.

E. Find or draw a picture which shows what each of the words represents.

F. Put each of the words in a sentence to show the students how the word can be used.

G. Ask the students questions using each of the new words.

Can you think of any other ways of introducing new vocabulary items?
Using Pictures
There are many different kinds of visuals we can use for teaching, but some may be more effective than others for specific settings.

Giving Example Sentences
The example sentences beside each of the words below may not be sufficient enough to let the students figure out the meaning of the words. With a partner, add one or two more example sentences to make the meaning of each word very clear.

- **plan (n)** The elephant had a plan for getting more peanuts from children.
- squeeze (v) He wanted to squeeze the hippo until it was thin.

- lazy (adj) She was so lazy, she wouldn’t do her homework.

- joy (n) What a joy it is to eat carrot cake.

- get into (v) John’s father loves golf, but John can’t get into it.

- slowly (adv) Georgette walks so slowly even a turtle would beat her in a race.

Is there any other way, besides using sentences, that you could use to make the meaning/associations any clearer?

Questions?

The pterodactyl below has just taught the word fly to its class of young pterodactyls. Now it is asking the students some questions. Why is it doing this?

Is there any special time of day when pterodactyls like to fly?

Do any other animals fly? Which are they?

Why is flying so fun/useful?

Why do pterodactyls fly instead of walking?

Can humans fly?

What other things can fly?
Can you think of some questions to ask your own students about the following words? knife to exercise laziness fortune slovenly

Combining Techniques
With a partner, decide on the best way of presenting each of the words below. Use any technique that you feel would be effective.

house huge plant garden wonderful chalk

**The Two Vocabularies**
Generally speaking, there are two different types of vocabulary items; active and passive. Active vocabulary includes words that we expect our students not only to be able to identify and understand but also use in their everyday lives. Passive vocabulary includes words which they should recognize and understand, but need not use themselves, at least not yet. Both types of vocabulary are very important.

Read the text below, paying careful attention to the italicized words.

Sometimes people simply don’t know what to do with their lives. When they graduate from university they are at an absolute loss about what to do. As a result, they begin to feel a sense of foreboding when their graduation draws near. Money problems also loom large at this time in the average person’s life. The graduate might want to continue to study, but lack of money might stop them from even trying. The fact that the job market is so tight nowadays also makes people nervous. Also, many people do not want the same type of job in a big company that their parents had. Yet, they are certain they cannot get the job they want. All this can make life after college tough.

graduate university foreboding loom average money nervous company certain tough

Look at the words taken from the text above. Try to classify them as either passive or active. Put them in one of the two lists.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Passive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Explain how you would present each of the words as new vocabulary.

Here now are some specific types of activities we can use in the classroom.
Focus on Forms

1. Vocabulary Notebooks/Personal Dictionaries
Vocabulary notebooks or personal dictionaries can provide students with opportunities to develop a variety of vocabulary acquisition strategies and also help students have more control over their learning. Students who are in the beginning stages of language and literacy development can create their own picture dictionaries while older learners can make more sophisticated notebooks and dictionaries. It is best to encourage the students to use binder type booklets in which pages can be added and taken away easily. In this way their dictionaries can grow and expand with their knowledge. Learners can easily insert new words that they are learning in their vocabulary notebook as well as augment the entries already there. They can add new sentences, for new meanings and forms encountered, example pictures, new collocates, antonyms and synonyms, etc. This is something that learners should be encouraged to do on their own.

2. Sparkle
   - Students stand at their desks.
   - The teacher picks someone to begin from Team 1. Students will rotate through their teams.
   - When the teacher says the spelling word the student must say the first letter and the next student the second letter and so on until the word is spelled.
   - After the entire word is spelled, the student with the last letter (after saying the letter) will say "sparkle" and the student after that sits down.
   - Students also sit down if they say a wrong letter.
   - Keep going until there are only three students left. Each of those students will earn two board points for whichever team they’re in.

3. What’s Missing?
Display 12-20 picture or word cards on an overhead, power-point or on the board. Have your students look at the words. Then have them close their eyes. Take one word away. Ask the group or an individual learner to tell you which card was removed. To make the game more challenging and interesting have Learners describe the picture or word card that was removed. By describing what has been removed, your learners use more advanced higher order thinking skills.

4. Concentration
Play Concentration with new vocabulary words. Concentration games can be made using picture and/or word cards. There should be two sets of cards. On one set, the vocabulary words should be printed or illustrated with pictures. On the other set, there should be matching pictures, or definitions, the printed word, or the word used in a context rich sentence. It’s best to have a total of 16-24 cards.

The cards are placed face down on a table. The first learner turns over two cards and identifies them aloud. If they match, the learner keeps the cards. If they don’t match, the words are placed back on the table face down. The next person then turns over two cards. The players take turns until there are no more cards on the table.
Concentration Ideas
Words/pictures & symbols
Items/categories
- coffee & soda/ beverages
  - pies & jello/ desserts
  - cows & whales/ mammals
Synonyms
Antonyms
Completions
  - ham & eggs.
  - as cold as ice
Questions & answers
Grammar matches
  - Verb tenses (eat/ate)
  - singulars & plurals
  - real & unreal conditionals
Rhyming words
Cognates = Words sharing common roots
  - television/ telescope
Information & facts
  - countries/states/provinces & capitals
  - dates and events

As you can see there are many things we can do with this format and it can be taken,
with just a little imagination, way beyond word forms.

5. The Word Wall
In the front of the class create an "owning your vocabulary" display which contains
the words and phrases we know and use to communicate effectively. Next to that put
a hand with one finger extended and a sign that reads "I have no idea what this word
means;" then a hand with 2 fingers extended and a sign that reads "I've heard this
word before, but don't know what it means;" then a hand with 3 fingers extended and
a sign that reads "I think I can figure out a meaning for this word;" then a hand with 4
fingers extended and a sign that reads "I know this word and can use it in a sentence;"
then a hand with all fingers extended and a sign that reads "I own this word because
I've used it at least 3 times in my written and spoken communication."

Whenever you introduce a new vocabulary word, ask for a show of hands to quickly
assess where their level of ownership is. Then we add the words to the class word
wall. You can also post the students’ favorite new words on the wall in class and
remove them after everyone in class can hold up a five finger hand to show they own
that particular word.

The word wall is practically a living being with constant growth and "death" of words.
You can also make a big deal when someone in class uses a particularly interesting
word in class, asking if they would like to add that word to the wall.

6. Who Has…..?
This is a very simple game which can be used after introducing new vocabulary items
or alternatively can also be used as a way of introducing new vocabulary items prior
to a reading text. Just write "I have __________" on one side of an index card, on the other side it says "Who has a word that means __________?" When using this to introduce new vocabulary, set it up so that each word goes to the next card in line, etc... so the kids have to work together and pay attention to answer. If this is being used as a review you can mix up the cues and the answers so the students have to go looking for each other. To make it more interesting as well, you can give out the cards by group and time each group, the group that goes the quickest wins.

7. Index Card Review
Pass out an index card to each student and give them one of the week's spelling words. With markers, they neatly write the spelling word on the card and give it some decoration. When the students have written their word and their cards are ready, collect them. You will create a sentence based on the spelling word but leave the word out. For example, if the word is plastic, say “You should always recycle your BLANK.” Students will raise their hand and offer a spelling word to fill in the blank. They really get into it!

8. Vocabulary Basketball
This is a simple technique for reviewing the forms of words and works quite well with passive vocabulary items. First, put 3 strips of masking tape (a foot or so apart) on the floor of the classroom. Get the students to line up along the back line. Then, give the students a definition and they have to give the word, if correct they move to the next line. Finally, they have to spell the word in order to move to the free throw line. You can make this more challenging by adding a three point line where the students have to use the word in a sentence to get three points.

Focus on Meaning

9. Categories (I am indebted to Dr. Caroline Linse for this suggestion as well as a couple more of the suggestions below.)
Have each learner create a set of picture cards or word cards with different vocabulary items on them. As they are working on their sets of cards, walk around and discuss the different words for up to 40 words. You can then ask your students to sort the words into 3-5 different categories of their own choosing. Then have them explain, the class or in small groups, how they put the categories together. For younger or less advanced students, you may want to allow an other or miscellaneous category into which learners can put a few of their words.

10. Sample Questions
Listed below are questions that can be used instead of the traditional write a sentence using a target word.

   If you were to be any zoo animal which zoo animal would you be and why?
   What is your favorite season?
   Why would you make a good or bad politician?

The idea is that you are trying to get the students themselves to explore aspects of the target words by trying to answer the questions well.
11. Contextualized Search
Another idea is to take a set of new vocabulary words and put the words in a context clue passage on the board/OHP/PowerPoint. Assign each group a word and they need to find a definition, antonym, synonym, symbol/picture for their word. Then together as a whole class we fill in a vocabulary chart for each vocabulary word.

12. Cue Cards
Here's a simple and easy game that needs practically no set up. When you introduce new words, write them on 4 x 6 or 5 x 8 index cards with the definitions on the back. Make enough so that everyone has a vocabulary card. You may have to repeat some so repeat the ones that are harder to remember. To begin playing, give everyone a vocabulary card and have them hold it so that the word faces outward and the definition is facing them. At the go signal, they partner up with someone and give the definition for their partner's word. After that, they exchange cards with their partner and go in search of a new partner. Play for only 3 minutes or so and encourage kids to seek out as many partners as possible. This works great for a quick review. And if you get in the habit of writing the words on index cards as soon as they're introduced, you'll always have this game ready to go. With a little tweaking, you can modify this game for all kinds of subjects (math formulas, social studies or science facts, for example).

13. Vocabulary Races
First make sure each student has a dictionary (or you can do this in pairs). You can use an overhead projector, Powerpoint, or just the board to present the word and get this started. Turn the overhead off and write a word on it. Say “ready, set, go” and turn on the overhead back on, or simply advance to a new Powerpoint slide with the target word on it. The students look at the word and search for it in the dictionary as fast as they can. Once they find it they begin reading it (this way kids don't say "I found it" just to buy time). Whoever finds it first gets a point for his or her team. Everyone then needs to go and find the word and then write it down in their vocabulary notebooks. Then turn the overhead head off and repeat or advance to the next Powerpoint slide. You can expand this out to include more information about the word and also use a thesaurus as opposed to a dictionary to get more detailed information about synonyms and antonyms.

14. Mix and Match
This is a simple technique for engaging learners in a collaborative task which can be easily tweaked to be made more or less demanding. Take the words you want to review or preview and type them in a column on Excel. Skip a column and then type a corresponding definition. You can also use pictures, or other types of associations like collocates, co-hyponyms, etc… It is a good idea to format the typing to a large font but make sure it fits on one or two pages of cardstock. Print out a few copies and cut the definitions and terms apart and put each collection in a small zip lock bag, an envelope or what you have at hand. Have the kids work in pairs or trios to match up the terms and definitions or other corresponding information as a study/learning technique.

This is an easy way to review and also to allow the kids to talk about the vocabulary items. There really is no limit to what you can do within this simple format with a little imagination. Mix and match active and passive vocabulary as well as known and
unknown potential associates to make the task more cognitively demanding and rewarding. This may seem to be something very mechanical but it certainly doesn’t have to be so.

15. Rivet
This is an effective technique to use when you are introducing a new reading text to the students. It is supposed to "rivet" the kid’s attention to the reading text. To do this activity, you first need to identify the vocabulary you want to teach, along with several key words in the story. Then you make a transparency or a PowerPoint slide or something like that with blank lines for every letter in every word you want to do. For example if your target words were lair, gorged, and forlorn, your transparency would look like:

___ ___ ___ ___
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___

You give clues to each word, maybe the definition, maybe an example or a synonym, and reveal letters as the students make attempts at the word. As they get each word, write maybe a one or two word clue alongside the target word so they can remember what it means. After you introduce all of the key vocabulary and important words in the story, you have the students work in pairs to write two to three sentences that predict what the story might be about. After they have their predictions, they can open their books, and preview the story to see if they may be on the right track.

16. Categories with Point System
Select a word category (e.g. musical instruments, wild animals, nationalities...anything goes!) Allow students a minute or so to write down as many appropriate words as they can. The teacher should also write ONE word belonging to the chosen category. That's HIS/HER word...and it must be kept secret till the students have read their answers.

Then students take turns to read one of their words at a time. The first time an appropriate answer is given, the student who said the word (e.g. guitar) gets 3 points for it. All the others who wrote the same word get 1 point for their efforts. Suppose that the teacher's word was, for instance, piano. Should a student come up with that answer, Teacher says "My Word!" out and aloud and the lucky student gets 10 points for striking the right key, while the others get none for that particular word. This ends the round. Students add up their points and try another word category.

Should no one come up with the teacher's word, s/he says it out loud and the bonus 10 points accumulate for the following round, when a lucky student will get 20 points, 30 or even more...

After a few rounds, the student with the most points wins the game.

When you are done, you may wish to go through the students' lists again and check whether any appropriate words remained unsaid or just add a few more anyway.

The teacher is free to choose his/her word, of course. As a rule of thumb, the lower the students' level, the simpler your words should be. You don't expect a group of young beginners to say cymbals or tuba in the category of musical instruments. You
can also do this with synonyms, antonyms, collocates or any other associates that can be organized into a network.

17. Relating Words to a Setting
Look at the two sets of words. How are the words related to school or studying?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>teacher</th>
<th>student</th>
<th>chalk</th>
<th>pencil</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>principal</td>
<td>janitor</td>
<td>paper</td>
<td>overhead</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Look at the words below and think of at least four words that are related to them and that you could use to help your students understand them in settings.

- doctor
- wall
- drive
- sneakers

18. Grouping for Shared Features
Find the groups of words and say what they have in common. Each group consists of three words. The trick here is to mix and match familiar, less familiar, and maybe even unfamiliar words so the students have to think carefully while doing this.

Example: Lions, hyenas and giraffes are all African animals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>hyena</th>
<th>giraffe</th>
<th>lion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>corn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rice</td>
<td>hospital</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lizard</td>
<td>frog</td>
<td>tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>screwdriver</td>
<td>hotel</td>
<td>wheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>water</td>
<td>snake</td>
<td>hammer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wrench</td>
<td>cinema</td>
<td>lemonade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. Finding Synonyms in a Text
Read the text below and then do the grouping exercise below.

The Ghost Pilot

Just before midnight on December 12, 1972, Eastern Airlines Flight 401 fell out of the sky. The airplane crashed in the Everglades area of Florida. Of the 176 people on board, 99 died, including the airplane's pilot, Bob Loft, and the flight engineer, Don Repo.

About three months after the crash, a high-ranking executive of Eastern Airlines boarded an aircraft for Miami, Florida. He spotted a man in the pilot's uniform sitting alone in the first class section of the plane and went to sit down beside him. The executive struck up a conversation with the captain. After a few minutes he realizes he was talking to the pilot Bob Loft. Then the pilot faded away.

A week later, an Eastern Airlines pilot and two of his crew went into a staff room at John F. Kennedy Airport, in New York. They all saw Bob Loft in a chair. He talked to them for a while, then vanished. The men were so shocked that the airline had to cancel their flight.

Three weeks later, a passenger was sitting in the first class section of a flight to Miami. She was worried about a person in an Eastern Airlines uniform sitting next
to her. His face was white and he looked ill, so she called the flight attendant. The flight attendant leaned down to speak to the man but he ignored her. Then, as she touched his arm, he slowly faded away, leaving only an empty seat. When the plane landed in Miami, the passenger was taken to a hospital in a state of shock. Later, when she saw photographs, she identified the individual as flight engineer Don Repo.

Over the next few months, more than ten flight attendants claimed to see Don Repo. The ghost seemed to appear more often on some aircraft than on others. Rumors began to spread that he appeared only on flights with replacement parts from the crashed Flight 401. It was usual practice for an airline to use undamaged parts from a crashed plane in another plane if they passed strict safety tests.

The stories must have worried the bosses of Eastern Airlines. They ordered their engineers to remove from their planes all equipment from the 401 wreck. It seemed to work. When all the parts from Flight 401 had been removed, Bob Loft and Don Repo left Eastern Airlines and their aircraft in peace. No one has seen their ghosts since.

(Adapted from Lee & Gunderson. (2002). Select readings (Pre-Intermediate) Oxford University Press, p. 67-68.)

From the text above write down all the expressions related to time.

What are all the synonyms of man in the story?

How are the words 'flight' and 'plane' different?

**20. Grouping Synonyms**

Look at the list of words below. They are all synonyms of the word ‘funny’. Group them any way you want but make sure you can explain your groupings. Feel free to use a dictionary if it helps you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>funny</th>
<th>whimsical</th>
<th>facetious</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>humorous</td>
<td>bizarre</td>
<td>jocose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amusing</td>
<td>curious</td>
<td>witty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>entertaining</td>
<td>odd</td>
<td>fanciful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hilarious</td>
<td>strange</td>
<td>quaint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>absurd</td>
<td>unusual</td>
<td>zany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comical</td>
<td>droll</td>
<td>clever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>laughable</td>
<td>farcical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ludicrous</td>
<td>comic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Focus on Use**


Students are put in a circle. The teacher introduces the concept of a regular 4 beat rhythm: clap hands twice and then snap fingers twice. Students can only speak during the clapping time. During the clapping time they think. Words of any number of syllables can be used as long as they can be uttered quickly.

```text
<think> ‘duck’ <think> ‘animal’ …..
[clap] [clap] [snap] [snap] [clap] [clap] [snap] [snap] …
```
Set up the four-beat rhythm and then explain that students are to take turns coming up with words. The teacher can start and then the student to the right of the teacher in the circle comes up with the next word and so forth.

       knight – king – queen – etc.

Any student or the teacher can stop the rhythm at any time to challenge an association. A reasonable explanation of the link between the words should be given before the activity can begin again. If the student cannot give a good explanation of the association then the next student in sequence can or a new starting word is given and a new chain is made.

**22. Mystery Words**
Read or say a sentence aloud and leave out a word. Have your learners guess the mystery word, the word that has been omitted. For example, you might say, “I like to put __________ and mustard on my hot dog.”

If the students come up with a word other than what you had in mind you can tell them that it was a good guess but not what you were thinking. For example, if you say, “I wear a _________ on my head” and a learner says “cap” you could say that you were thinking of another word but that cap also works. Encouraging your learners to come up with creative answers often leads to interesting discussions and discoveries. Learners may be given different mystery words and asked to come up with their own sentences for their classmates to guess.

**23. Madlibs**
There are lots of these ready made on the web ([http://www.rinkworks.com/crazylibs/](http://www.rinkworks.com/crazylibs/)) but if your classroom is not equipped with a computer for every two or three students then you will have to do this as a pencil and paper activity. Take a text and replace certain target words with blanks. On a different sheet of paper make a list of the word class or other lexical information related to the word which has been blanked out from the text. It is up to you how specific or general you wish to make the cues for the words. Encourage the students to come up with interesting and maybe even strange words. Make sure to mix up the order of the cues for the blanked words and the order in which they appear in the text. Also, make sure there are numbers showing how they correspond to each other in the text so the students can fill in the blanks.

Give the students (you can do this in pairs or groups of three) the piece of paper with the clues about the words on it.

1. adjective ____________
2. noun (person’s name) ______________
3. verb _______________
4. abstract noun ______________
5. transitive verb ______________

Students take roles in filling in the list. Students will come up with any word which accurately fits the cues. One can be the asker and the other or other one or two will provide the words or the can simply so it all together. Again, encourage them to be creative with their choices. The asker is also the scribe and s/he writes the words
down in the list. Once they have gone through the whole list and come up with all the words, then they look at the text and write the words they came up with into the text in the right places. The result is a very strange and often hilarious text.

Next, the students, working together, have to fix the text by reading carefully to come up with the most appropriate sets of words which really do fit the context. Finally, the teacher will give the students the original version of the text from them to compare to their own.

### 24. Nonsense Words

This is a somewhat simpler version of Madlibs. Instead of having the students choose the word, the teacher replaces certain words with nonsense words. It is up to the teacher to determine how aberrant the nonsense words might be in relation to phonological structure or whether such words are to be highlighted or not in the text. Students have to try to reconstruct the original word from the text by thinking about meaning as well as usage cues.

Here is a very simple example.

Once there was a very strange elephant. It was strange because it thought it was human and liked nothing more than driving fast cars. One fine day, the elephant went walking down by the road with a grunk in its trunk looking for a car to steal. It got lucky. A man was standing by a beautiful sports car wearing a pair of leather troongs. The elephant, walking on its tippy toes, snuck up behind the man and hit him over the head with the grunk. Before the poor man had even hit the ground, the troonge elephant had already found the drimps, and was in the car driving away with the speed of the grinl. The joy it felt was great until it saw a rumch of zoo keepers blocking the road up ahead. The elephant panicked and tried to turn the car around but another rumch of police cars were approaching from behind. The unhappy elephant had no choice but to pull over. It bloonked out of the car and ran into the forest and flaskret. Neither the police nor the zoo keepers ever found it.

### 25. 20 Questions

This is a simple but effective way of trying to get the student familiar with the real world associations (schema) and other lexical items connected to a specific lexical item. One person needs to sit in a hot seat. The one in the hot seat is it and they will think of the word and the others will ask yes/no questions she or she must answer.

Students have only twenty questions they can ask and have to try to guess the word on the basis of the answers given. If someone guesses the word correctly within twenty guesses, she or he will be it. If no one guesses the word within twenty questions, the it person tells the class what the word was and the teacher selects another student to be it.

You can do this in class as described above or you can try it on-line using this cute website.

(http://www.20q.net)

### Introducing the Lexical Approach

The lexical approach, first explained in detail in Lewis (1993) and further explained in Lewis (1997; 2000), is an approach for teaching second or foreign languages based on
the concept of lexis as the center of linguistic knowledge, particularly from a developmental point of view. Lewis explains as follows:

....basic, or proto-language essentially involves nominalization - naming of concepts - and is lexical rather than grammatical. Language consists of grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar.

(Lewis, 1993: 51)

In reaction to the two questions on the nature of the lexicon briefly introduced in the previous section, the lexical approach tries to make use of some of the newer findings of various related fields in linguists and cognitive neuroscience and uses them to come up with a practical theory of how language is learned and therefore should be taught (Lewis, 1997). Central to the premise of the lexical approach is the belief that the organization of the lexicon goes beyond simple links to structural (phonological) and semantic elements of units. These links extend to other units which happen to co-occur and are commonly known as collocation. For Lewis, collocation forms one of the bases of grammar. Related to scope the lexical approach holds that bare word forms do not form the bases of the lexicon. Rather, unanalyzed chunks form an important part of the lexicon. Based on this observation two conclusions can be drawn. First, the lexicon is potentially highly redundant (there are all sorts and sized of lexical entries which vary across two dimensions, size and degree of fixedness. Second, this new view of the organization and scope of the lexicon propel lexis to the forefront of language.

While the Lexical Approach lacks the formalism that one would hope for, it is nonetheless important because it takes what were once thought to be ironclad theories (and practices) in the development of language and turns them on their head. Where lexis was once thought of as a small peripheral agent in language the Lexical Approach sees lexis as the core.

Collocation
Collocation is a highly common phenomenon in language wherein certain words have a strong tendency to pattern or associate with a certain other words and in doing so form a kind of bond (Singleton, 2000). In this phenomenon all words are seen as having some relation to collocation. That is, all words show collocational patterns but in different ways. The simplest of these ways is in what is termed `collocational range’. Some words have a wide collocational range meaning that they can collocate or tend to co-occur with a wide range of many other words. An example of a word with a very wide collocational range would be nice. *Nice* collocates or is able to co-occur with a virtually unlimited number of different words as in the examples below.

(1) Joan was wearing nice dress.
(2) Bob is always such a nice person.
(3) Have you seen my nice sweater today?
(4) The traffic was so nice today.
(5) That was a really nice storm.

An interesting peripheral phenomenon we see in looking at the *nice* examples below is that *nice* does not seem to have real specific type of meaning. The *nice* in *nice*
storm is going to contain different aspects of meaning that the nice in nice dress. Other words, however, tend to have a very narrow collocational range and may be able to collocate or co-occur with only one or two other words. An example would be bloodshot. Unless someone is a doctor or nurse or involved deeply in the medical profession the only real collocate for bloodshot is eye(s). All words in a language can, then, be placed in a continuum based on their collocational range. Words that are like nice and seem to be able to collocate more or less freely are located at the one end of the continuum while words like bloodshot or addled (eggs, brain) are located at the other end. Most words are located somewhere in the middle but lean toward one side or the other of the continuum.

In general we can associate 4 different variables which seem to have an effect on collocation. In doing so it should be acknowledged that we are following the highly generalized view of collocation offered in Singleton (2000). It should here be noted that many other researchers into the area divide what Singleton (2000) refers to as collocation into several different types of lexical groups with different names. We are following Singleton’s generalized view here because it is extremely hard to justify the different groups except for a few core members (All categories are fuzzy and collocational categories are often fuzzier than others.) and in the end they are all prey to the same basic linguistic/cognitive forces and can easily be described within and attributed to the same system once we take the different variables below into account.

Size
Collocations vary in size from the extremely common two or three to up to seven or more units in what are often termed 'chunks.' Linguists working in the field often or even generally refer to units of four or more as chunks, but really they are just collocations of a different order. Here are few examples or collocations of different sizes.

(6) drastic measures, black coffee, lined paper, finger splint, blue sky
(7) down and out, black and blue, eggs over easy, war is hell, spill the beans
(8) raining cats and dogs, as I was saying, to be perfectly honest
(9) you know what I mean, to put things another way
(10) a stitch in time saves nine, every cloud has a silver lining
(11) to be or not to be - that is the question, the shoe is on the other foot

As we can see from the list above, it is much easier to think of two and three part collocations than 4, 5, 6, or 7 part collocations. Two or three part collocations are not only more prevalent but are also much more diverse in their behavior (functions). They are simply much more productive. As we move up in the size variable we begin to see that the functions and type of collocations begins to become much more limited. In the higher range we seem to have collocations that are either idioms (the grass is greener on the other side) or are discourse markers (allow me to explain), but even these discourse markers tend to disappear at the 5 or 6 range. At the very highest range of size we tend to have only quotes or idiomatic expressions.

Fixedness
The variable of fixedness has been widely studied by linguists dealing with chunks. Fixedness really only becomes an issue in the collocations above the two-part size.
The simple idea is again, collocations can be placed in some sort of continuum based on fixedness in that some collocations, while undoubtedly units, are quite adaptable while others are fixed in their form. Less fixed collocations may be adapted through insertion of another unit in between parts (and here we are intruding a bit on the distance variable’s territory) or they might be altered by changing their order or having parts replaced with other parts. Here are some examples using some of the collocations presented above in examples (6)-(11).

(12) *Well, you know what they say, a stitch in ten saves time.
(13) Unbelievably, John was down and in.
(14) There are after all many other ways to put it.
(15) While Chomsky (2002) originally claimed that in the 9/11 bombings the US was prey to a long awaited shoe is on the other foot phenomenon, he later claimed that it was more a case of the shoe being taken off the foot and placed in a steel tipped boot.

In (12) above we see an example of an idiom which seems to be very fixed. We cannot replace any of the component parts or change the order of the components. Not all idioms, however, are so fixed as is demonstrated by (13) when one of the component parts can be changed to form a unique use and meaning. In such cases it should be clear that there is a connection between the new derived form and the original collocational unit that created it. That is the meaning of down and in is clearly based on the meaning of the standardized down and out. In (14) we see that it is possible both to shift the order of the component parts (in constituents) and even alter one of the forms (another <-> other). Lastly in (15) we see a rather large alteration of the original collocational chunk by extending it with a different component. Based on this we can see that collocations do indeed behave differently as regards their degree of fixedness.

Distance
The amount of distance between the component parts off collocations has been tentatively demonstrated in some of the examples presented above. Here, then, we will focus out attention on two-part collocations and how distant they might be in certain utterances. We focus on them because they not only excellently show how distance operates a variable but also demonstrate a point we will; return to later in discussions of grammatical systems and collocation.

(16) John loves his coffee black.
(17) John loves black coffee.
(18) John loves his coffee exceedingly black.
(19) When John drinks coffee, he always takes it black.
(20) For John the only way to drink coffee is black.
(21) Black is the only way for John to ever consider drinking coffee.
(22) In John’s world drinking coffee only ensues when it is black.

In the above examples we have not only played around with the distance factor as can be shown in a straightforward way in examples (18), (20), (21) and (22), but have also tried to show that the collocation here can operate in different directions. That is, they can occur either anaphorically or cataphorically. Interesting to note is that pronouns like it also seem to be involved in the relations between these two parts and a certain degree of distance can also be shown between the pronoun which is undoubtedly
carrying features of the NP coffee and the collocational modifier black. This is important because we see that collocations seem to be able to engage in similar behavior as other grammatical units.

Usage/Frequency
The last variable that we are going to look at is usage/frequency. There seems to be a correlation between the frequency of collocational unit and its range as well as size, fixedness, and distance. The ability to make these correlations underscores the claim that all collocations, no matter what their surface differences may appear to be, are part of the same system.

In general, lexical units that have a frequent pattern of usage, like nice, will not only have a much wider collocational range but they will tend to engage in smaller collocational units, be less fixed and show more possible distance. Larger collocational units, as well, will tend to be more fixed than smaller ones. More observations can be made but the main point to be made is that these variables seem to definitely affect each other, indicating one large system which may actually ultimately be able to be expanded beyond the scope of words alone.

How can we develop the lexicon?
Here I will present a few points for learning which I hope will be of use to you.

10 Key Points in Learning Vocabulary

Part 1 - Theoretical Pointers
1. A vocabulary item can be more than one word.
As a way of getting into this we first need to make a crucial distinction. The distinction we need to make is between vocabulary and lexical items or lexis. Vocabulary is generally thought of as the words that a speaker knows. The focus here is on individual words in their own self-contained little worlds. A lexical item, on the other hand is what is stored in the brain as regards units of language. A lexical entry includes a wealth of information about a lexical item including grammatical as well as many other types of information. Lexis, then, is the entire system of lexical entries. When we think of vocabulary we think of individual words and their meanings, which are seen as being fixed but we do not generally think of any underlying system which connects the words much. In stark contrast, lexis is all about the interacting systems which connect lexical items and thus render them useful. This means that lexical items must contain information which allows then to be organized in a multitude of connecting and overlapping ways.

Having briefly mentioned the vocabulary-lexis distinction it would seem appropriate to delve into the nature of lexis. Words do not need to be the basis of lexis. Lexical items exist both above and below the word level as well as at the word level. One of the most widely discussed lexical phenomena which has driven this idea is collocation. It has been noted for a long time that certain words tend to partner up. They belong together. For example, a highly limited list of the words (dark, light, soft, callous, black, yellow, red, white) are able to be used with the word skin. Likewise, we can stretch time, kill time, use time, and have time, but we cannot live time, breathe time or do much else with time. This is the basic idea behind collocations. Collocations are not the exception in language use; they are the norm in any
functioning natural language. Every word in language is associated with a limited set of other words and to variant degrees. Simply put, these are groups of words, which are necessarily connected and the ones showing the strongest links are housed in the brain as one lexical item. Following this idea, a lexical item can be made up of many words and even complete sentences. The sentence, *How’s it going?*, is a simple example of a sentence that is also a single lexical item. There are many different kinds of collocations depending on the strength of the connection between the words and the types of connections. Collocations form the basis of efficient and effective language use that is readily comprehensible to others.

2. Words are often best learned in groups. According to lexical theory, there is an almost unlimited array of organizational strains running through the brain of the average language user. Obviously, our goal for our students of English is to be able to get them to use language both efficiently (fast) and effectively. In order to do that, we need to get them to share elements of cognitive structure with all speakers of the same target language. One of the basic ideas behind doing this is in guiding our students in forming associations between words. No word exists in a vacuum. Think of the brain as a giant bowl of noodles. There are millions of different strings each with their own job connecting elements within their range, but each of these strings is, in turn, touching another string thus creating an entity in which everything is actually touching everything else but with various degrees of strength and efficiency. There are many different ways in which words are connected or associated. Lexical items in the mind are connected according to the sounds which make them up. They are connected according to their meaning or semantic field. They are connected according to the types of elements that they allow to precede or follow them in a sequence as well as according to the types of sequences they allow as regards both structure and meaning. It is these connections that make language what it is and let a proficient speaker know how to put a piece of language together effectively.

3. Avoid hard and fast generalizations of meaning. Words do not have fixed meanings as most dictionaries would mistakenly lead us to believe. All words are polysemous but of course to variant degrees. There are very few examples of things such as dictionary-like definitions being used to define words in the minds of proficient users of a language. Words acquire their meanings in many ways, the most important of which is through associations with other similar or somehow related words. The lexical item *dog*, for example is defined, in part, by its associations to other lexical items, *animal, fur, bark, pet, teeth* to name just a few. Meaning is derived from each learner’s personal experience with the language and with the world at large. This means that each of us will and does have different associations in the brain and, therefore, slightly different meanings and patterns of use for the same concepts/lexical items. In a natural learning situation there is a tremendous amount of variation in the internal linguistic components of native speakers of a language. Despite all the apparent variation, words do seem to have a similar core of meaning, particularly for concrete nouns and verbs, but the fringes of the word meaning will show a large amount of variation. Based on this, forcing a certain hard and fast meaning on a particular word/lexical item may actually be detrimental in the long term. Students should be encouraged to discover for themselves additional associations which form parts of the meanings of words by encountering them in a
variety of codes and contexts. This will allow them to fine-tune their own meanings for the words and make them truly theirs.

4. Focus on differences of meaning, not meaning itself.
Following from the point above, where it was claimed that it is detrimental, if not actually impossible to come up with fully accurate concrete definitions for words, it seems logical to avoid trying to explain with any authority what a word actually means through a definition. An important part of how words get their meaning is through negative association. This means that words are defined not only by what they are (components), but to a certain extent by what they are not. For example, part of knowing what makes a dog a dog is knowing that it is not a cat, or a mouse, or an elephant and why. For this reason a contrastive approach is a welcome addition to a hard and fast definitional or compositional approach in trying to enhance word meaning. Meaning is a highly complex and personal thing. It is not something that can be shoved on someone’s throat if we want them to be able to store and retrieve a word effectively.

5. Words can link grammatically as well as thematically.
As mentioned above the number and type of links between word units is staggering. Words are linked not only according to meaning or form, but also and uncontested according to their grammatical properties. Words that have similar grammatical properties undergo or allow for similar movement or operations, as well as call for similar grammatical environments (constructions) (Goldberg, 1995). By unwittingly knowing and using the grammatical properties of words native speakers are able to put together grammatical utterances quickly and easily. In the lexical approach, grammar is a phenomenon that is encoded on lexical items in the form of specific information contained in the entry for the lexical item and through connections to other similar words. In this view, a particular lexical item opens up a cognitive space or construction which generally involves a typical, specific grammatical structure. Following this, it is very hard to separate lexical items and grammar in language use and, therefore, the language classroom because they are certainly not separated in the brain of native speakers. Many linguists are beginning to identify the role of the lexicon, in collaboration with meaning and constructions, as the main determiner of sentence structure. In short, it is not grammar rules which usually tell a native speaker how to compose an utterance it is the connections in the lexis.

Part 2 - Practical Learning
6. There is a difference between active and passive vocabulary.
English, it has been claimed, has the largest vocabulary of any language which has ever existed. Estimates of the number of different vocabulary items in the English language run as high as 150,000. Yet, it has also been claimed that only 2000 of these items are really necessary for daily survival in the English-speaking world (Crystal, 1995). These numbers show the serious gap in what is known and what is needed to communicate. Teachers need to be aware of this major distinction for it is important to know in both the daily running of the class and in course planning. Obviously if the target vocabulary is intended for active use then the teacher will have to engage in more overt practice with the word in question as well as overt explanation and a more complete and carefully planned approach. It should be clear that the lexical entries for words that are part of the active vocabulary (high frequency
words) will have to be much more complex than the entries for those words that are more passive (lower frequency). Also built into this distinction is the idea of frequency. The brain is a muscle and the connections in the brain work like muscles. The more often a word is used the easier it is to use. Thus, if you, as a teacher, want your students to be able to use a word you need to give them maximum exposure to the word in many different ways and frequently.

In approaching this topic it is also helpful to think about the history of English because the development of the language into its present-day form has had a lot to do with vocabulary. Basically, English has three main strands of vocabulary. Most of the words that people use for daily basic communication are from the original Germanic strand. The middle strand consists primarily of French borrowings. The third and most formal strand is comprised chiefly of words of Latin and, to a lesser extent, Greek origin.

7. Vary the way you encounter and think about lexical units.
Variety is the spice of life and teaching is no different. In order to try to get your students to form as many associations as possible with a word, it is important that the teacher uses and explains a vocabulary item in as many different ways as possible. This includes the codes that the word comes in, including, graphemic, auditory, and visual (when appropriate). As mentioned above, you need to expose your students to a given lexical item as often as you can and in as many varying forms as you can, obviously within reason.

8. Word lists are your secret weapon.
This point and the next one would seem to contradict each other, but they only follow the previous key point related to diversity in dealing with vocabulary. Word lists are wonderful because they can and should be made to reflect psychological reality. A word list can be likened to the associations that are mentioned above except they occur in a fixed linear order while associations do not. There has to be a rhyme and reason behind a word list though. Too many vocabulary lists are put together haphazardly and without reason are therefore destined not to be helpful in the way they can and should be. The words in a word list need to be related or connected in some way. They should sound similar, or have similar meaning, or belong to a single semantic field or something. Also the order of the word list is of paramount importance. Alphabetical order has tenuous ties to our psychological reality. It is not a psychologically useful order to follow.

9. Context is essential.
This is the golden rule of learning real language and not facts about language. The only way for the students to get any kind of idea of how language is really used is to use contextually rich chunks of language throughout the entire lesson and for all assignments and work.

10. Do not worry too much about the structure of lexical items.
The bottom line here is that within the field of lexis, it is hard to pin down lexical items that are necessarily harder or more difficult than others. Any estimation of the relative difficulty of a lexical unit is to be based not on its structure, but on its functional use and the possible contexts that it can be used in. For example, the lexical entries I would like that, I would like to do that, and That sounds good to me have similar general meanings and similar functional purposes, yet are very different from
a structural perspective. Does this mean that they have to be taught separately at
different stages carefully planned according to their internal syntactic structure? The
answer is no. Here is another example. In the lexical entries Just kill me instead and
I’d rather not, the situation is the same. The structural differences do not help us as
teachers decide what should be taught first, it is the degree of formality within the
functional group.

**Follow-up**

Now, answer the following questions with a partner.

1. What do you think is the best way for students to practice vocabulary once it has
   been introduced to them?

2. Do you think there is a large difference between the vocabulary of spoken and
   written English? If the answer is yes, how can you make the students aware of this
difference?

3. How can you decide which vocabulary items you are going to teach?

4. Is there such a thing as useless vocabulary?

5. Is teaching word origins a useful way of teaching English vocabulary? If so, in
   which situations?

**References**


