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Promoting Active Use of Lexical Items

Lina Marciulionyte

The School for International Training

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PROMOTING ACTIVE USE OF LEXICAL ITEMS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER OF ARTS IN TEACHING
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LINA MARCIULIONYTE

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This project by Lina Marciulionyte is accepted in its present form.

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Project Advisor Claire M. Stanley

Project Reader David Read

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Abstract

This paper examines ways to enhance learners' ability to communicate in their new language. It begins by questioning the traditionally accepted view of language teaching which views language as "lexicalized grammar". It also argues that teaching vocabulary has focused mostly on techniques of explaining words and storing them, while the importance of strategies to activate the learner's storage by retrieving lexical items from memory has clearly been underestimated. The paper analyzes the strategies for integrating a lexical item into the learner's linguistic resources for immediate access and suggests a variety of exercises and activities that promote active use of vocabulary in class, as well as outside the classroom. In conclusion, it suggests a number of implications for language teachers and modifications to classroom procedures.

ERIC descriptors:

Vocabulary Development

Speech Skills

Class activities

Language Fluency

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INTRODUCTION

Although many authors now agree that there is a greatly increased awareness on the part of most teachers of the importance of vocabulary development, traditionally, language teaching has been organized around the grammatical system of the language. Even today many textbooks take the view that language learning involves mastering grammatical structures and keep the vocabulary load to the minimum which is necessary to acquire these structures. My experience both as a teacher and a learner has encouraged me to question the traditionally accepted principle of language teaching which views language as “lexicalized grammar”.

Language which contains grammatical errors is unlikely to be misunderstood in context, while lexical errors can cause misunderstanding, incomprehension and even frustration on the part of the listener. Research evidence shows that native speakers find lexical mistakes much more annoying than grammar mistakes, while non-native teachers, on the contrary, consider the latter more serious than the former (Hughes and Lascaratou, 1982, Swan, 1997). Lewis (1998) holds that “recognizing the lexical nature of language, and the centrality of lexis to the creation of meaning, and consequently to communicative power, demotes grammar – and in particular, the often unnatural, inaccurate grammar of standard EFL – to a subsidiary role.” (p.16) The essential idea of his Lexical Approach is that fluency is based on the acquisition of a large store of prefabricated lexical items which are available as the foundation for any linguistic creativity. Neither Lewis and his

Lexical Approach nor I deny the value of grammar. In fact, grammatical knowledge enables the learner to creatively use lexis in different ways.

Although most teachers seem to concentrate on teaching grammatical structures, there is no doubt that a great deal of vocabulary teaching has always been going on in the language classroom. Whenever I observe an English lesson, I can see the board covered with words that have arisen during the lesson and the students putting them down in their notebooks. I can also hear the teacher and the student discussing the meanings of the words. However, it is my experience that teaching vocabulary has focused mostly on strategies permitting one to understand words and store them. It is also directed to naming objects, rather than enabling the learner to express themselves.

Meanwhile, the importance of strategies that activate one's storage by retrieving the lexical items from memory has clearly been understated. Frequently it is assumed that students will learn the necessary vocabulary by reading or listening. Teachers often devote a huge amount of time explaining the meanings of new words in the text, then, perhaps, do a structured exercise, and expect the new language to become part of the learner's productive capacity. In fact, the new word is usually forgotten while concentrating on the serious business of mastering the grammatical structure or, with a bit of luck, becomes part of receptive competence. Thus the result is clearly not worth the time spent on presenting the new item, unless we train learners to make the step from having the lexical item in their passive vocabulary to having it in their active vocabulary.

Indeed, some learners sit for hours passively reading and re-reading textbooks and notes. However, they rarely attempt to recall actively what they have read. Therefore, in most cases, their passive vocabulary increases noticeably, while their active performance remains poor. I have had quite a few opportunities to observe students' progress in terms

of their active performance at different levels of proficiency. To my disappointment, as well as concern, the range of vocabulary they had at their disposal had not improved significantly!

Being unable to participate in conversations with some degree of fluency discourages many learners from taking more chances with the language. Meanwhile, this insight has touched the very core of what I do in class and questioned the beliefs which are central to my teaching. Giving lexis a more prominent place in my lesson requires me to make a number of changes in my teaching.

In this paper I explore ways that enhance learners' ability to communicate effectively in their new language. In Chapter One I analyze strategies for integrating a lexical item into the learner's linguistic resources so that it is spontaneously available when needed. This chapter also addresses the distribution of these techniques in a lesson, as well as throughout the course. The techniques described in Chapter One are:

1. Teaching vocabulary within a thematic unit
2. Teaching collocations and larger meaningful units rather than single words
3. Ways of recording vocabulary
4. Types of exercises and activities
5. Ways of recycling vocabulary

Chapter Two gives a detailed description of a set of exercises and activities that integrate a lexical item into the learner's lexicon for immediate access. In Chapter Three I make some suggestions for teachers who are interested in promoting retrieval and active use of lexical items in class, and dwell upon the most important insights I have had from doing this project.

CHAPTER ONE

STRATEGIES ENHANCING LEARNER'S ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY IN THEIR NEW LANGUAGE

Teaching Vocabulary within a Thematic Unit

Language teaching has often recognized a thematic unit as a useful parameter for designing coursebook units and organizing curriculum. Topic is often the central focus of classroom discussions. It has also been the main way of organizing the lexical content of a course because it has obvious advantages over teaching randomly occurring words.

First, a thematic unit offers meaningful communication in meaningful contexts. Second, it offers a common thread to weave and connect one lesson to the next. By learning lexical items in semantic fields, the learning of one item reinforces the learning of another. "Many researchers in cognitive science now believe that we store words in our brains in meaning networks and that activating one 'node' of a meaning network alerts other parts of the network to be ready." (Sheerin, 1996, p. 181) Third, as Seal (1991) points out, items that are similar in meaning can be differentiated by illustrating how semantically similar words can have different syntactic, semantic and pragmatic restrictions. Fourth, students are more likely to feel tangible progress since a thematic unit enables them to talk about things rather than to do things to the language. Finally, the teacher can come up with interesting, varied and creative activities that incorporate the items of a certain lexical set. However, Lewis (1995) claims that teaching vocabulary within a thematic unit has usually resulted in word lists consisting almost entirely of

nouns. Indeed, my own investigations show that although students have large repertoires of words they are unable to use them effectively because most of them are nouns.

Teaching vocabulary is frequently directed towards naming objects, especially at higher levels of proficiency. Most of the teaching materials I have used deal mainly with nouns, be it a picture dictionary or exercises in the coursebook. It is natural, because the vast majority of the words in any language are nouns. However, if you want to talk about a noun you need words in other categories as well. In my teaching context, students often are short of verbs, adjectives, adverbs, determiners and intensifiers. Therefore, I think that when organizing lexical items within a thematic unit, we must include language that enables students to talk about the target topic rather than just naming objects.

There are a few ways of including other parts of speech into vocabulary lists. First of all, discussions and conversations related to a particular topic would most likely contain verbs, intensifiers, as well as different expressions, strategies for opening a conversation, taking or holding a turn and responding to talk appropriately. Being a non-native speaker myself I have experienced how important all of the above are in order to have a successful conversation and to avoid long unpleasant pauses. Therefore, it is critical to enable students to initiate and sustain conversation (Nolasco and Arthur, 1997). However, Ur (1992) suggests that students need a reason to speak rather than a topic. The lack of purpose causes the lack of interest and motivation to discuss the topic and use the target language. Second, stories within a topic can provide a powerful tool for organizing lexis, since to tell them we need a number of verbs and at least a few adjectives, adverbs, determiners, connectors and prepositions. For example, even arranging verbs or connectors into a story, takes the focus off nouns. Finally, and most importantly, no matter within what rhetorical structure we teach vocabulary, we must help our students

notice what comes before and after a certain word, in other words, learn collocations rather than individual words.

Teaching Collocations, Lexical Phrases and Expressions

In our classroom we had a so-called word bag where my students used to put words they learnt in class. Every other day I would ask them to make a sentence or a story using the words in order to recycle them. I often wondered why they were unable to do that with words the meanings of which they obviously understood and remembered. If they did produce one, in most cases it sounded clumsy and unnatural.

Acquaintance with the Lexical Approach proposed by Michael Lewis has enabled me to find answers to these questions. “ ‘Knowing’ a word involves a great deal more than being able to establish a one-to-one relationship between words and real world objects, or between a word in L1 and L2.” (Lewis, 1995, p. 119) McCarthy (1990) points out that recalling a word does not mean that one has mastered its use. I have realized that the main reason for my students’ failure to use new words accurately was the absence of knowledge of which language can precede or follow them. They simply had not been trained to notice it. Single words, prepositional phrases or dictionary-like patterns such as ‘to be frightened of sth’, ‘to let sb do sth’ do not enable the students to speak the language since they are unaware of what that ‘something’ might be and in what situations the phrase can be said. Therefore, breaking the language into single words or making generalizations from a few examples usually results in losing important information about how the language is used.

Many theories of language performance suggest that vocabulary is stored redundantly, and that it is often retrieved from memory in pre-assembled chunks.

Nattinger (1988) points out that "This prefabricated speech has both the advantage of more efficient retrieval, and of permitting speakers to direct their attention to the larger structure of the discourse, rather than keeping it focused narrowly on individual words as they are produced." (p. 75) The Lexical Approach recognizes that breaking continuous text into useful components and combining them to achieve fluency is central to effective communication. Lewis has observed that "it is more efficient to learn the whole and break it into parts than to learn the parts and have to learn the whole as an extra arbitrary item." (Lewis, 1995, p. 32)

The authors of the most recent publications recognize that the most important pre-assembled unit is collocation. There is an impressive number of definitions of collocation. According to Nattinger and DeCarrico (1997), "collocations are strings of specific lexical items, such as *rancid butter* and *curry favor*, that co-occur with a mutual expectancy greater than a chance." (p. 36) Lewis (2000) defines it as the way in which words co-occur naturally in language. It provides a plausible explanation why language should be learnt in chunks. Indeed, as words occur together naturally, we simply should not force them apart and then try to combine them when needed. As a non-native speaker I have experienced the difficulty in knowing which words collocate and which do not. It would have been undoubtedly more sensible to acquire the words as a chunk in the first place as I would not have had to learn one more item - a correct collocation.

There is a great variety of ways that words form chunks in language. Some writers enumerate up to 20 groups of words that are regularly found together (Lewis, 2000). For example, inadequate explanation (adjective + noun), ban exports (verb + noun), control carefully (verb + adverb), seriously damaged (adverb + adjective), feel at home (fixed expression), etc. are all different types of collocations. Some authors

distinguish between very strong, strong, and weak collocations or lexical and grammatical ones. However, I believe it is not so important whether or not a certain chunk is a collocation or which group it belongs to. The central role of the teacher is to shift the learners' focus away from single words to chunks of the language they encounter. Lewis suggests that the larger the acquired chunks are, the easier it is to re-produce natural language later.

Indeed many linguists recognize that every word has its own grammar. For instance, some verbs typically occur with a particular tense or a certain noun phrase is used with the definite article. Consequently, learning larger chunks enables the learner to acquire both the meaning and the grammar of the target collocation. The insight that language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar is the most fundamental principle of the Lexical Approach.

No matter how difficult it might be to implement this principle in both teaching and learning, I believe it is worth trying since focusing on a few grammatical structures and supplementing them with individual and often accidental words has plainly not yielded the desired results. Even though the learners know a huge number of individual words and have mastered the main grammatical structures, they often remain at intermediate level.

Having worked with students at different levels of proficiency, I have realized that desperately trying to perfect their grammar enables them to do grammar exercises but denies them access to fluency. Concentrating on which tense, article, preposition or other words should be used with individual words demands tremendous processing efforts. Unable to express their idea easily, my students frequently prefer not to say anything or seem to say what they are able to say rather than what they would actually

like to say. Moreover, lacking the necessary prefabricated chunks, be it a collocation, an idiom or a larger unit which expresses ideas simply and precisely, the learner has to use so-called circumlocution - much longer and halting utterances to communicate something. As a result, the learner makes more grammatical mistakes which I used to patiently correct.

Now I understand that my role is to suggest an appropriate lexical phrase instead of going into elaborate grammar explanations. I paraphrase what has been said using an adequate expression and bring my students' attention to the way I have improved their utterance. It is a very useful technique for making learners aware of the importance of chunking.

Another way of directing learners' attention to chunks is helping them identify meaningful groups of words in the texts they read or listen to. Training to notice the precise way an idea is expressed is essential in helping the learner improve dramatically. There are a number of ways to heighten the learner's awareness of useful chunks in a text. Often students ask to explain the meaning of a new word in the text. The teacher's task is to take this opportunity to draw their attention to the surrounding co-text and to supply some collocations if appropriate. However, it is more effective not to work on a completely new lexical item, but on relatively new or even passively known vocabulary since it is less time consuming or overwhelming for learners. Morgan Lewis (2000) suggests that "time spent on half-known language is more likely to encourage input to become intake than time spent on completely new input." (p.24)

On the other hand, learners may not consider a collocation worth noticing and learning simply because they already know the individual partner words. Therefore, pointing out collocations which seem familiar to students is a very helpful tool in

increasing their communicative power. At the beginning my students consider noting words they learnt at the elementary level a waste of time, but I soon prove it is not. I just give them a few examples of mis-collocations they have produced while combining the words they assume they know and ask them to correct them. By focusing learners' attention on mis-collocations the teacher can prevent learners from typical errors and also raise their awareness of the importance of noticing and learning words in combinations.

Another way of training students to notice collocations is to gap the text they have just read and get them to insert partner words. A slight variation is to ask them to work in pairs and think of more collocations or find some in a dictionary of collocations.

Helping learners develop their ability to break the language into meaningful chunks is essential to enabling them to study efficiently outside the classroom. Our school has a library which has been used extensively by our students. Having been trained to notice collocations and larger meaningful groups of words, they improve their vocabulary noticeably.

An important point to make is, as Hill (2000) recognizes, that "the main implication is that learners need a great deal more input than they received in most traditional languages courses." (p. 66) Indeed the number of words taught in class should be increased since learning them as collocations tends to evoke more associations and enhances their storage.

To sum up, it is clear that a greater emphasis should be made on learning collocations and noticing grammatical patterns of words in order to improve the learner's active performance. Although implementing my new insights has not turned my teaching upside down as I still use textbooks and follow a syllabus that focuses on teaching grammar and keep vocabulary load to a minimum, I believe I can give collocation a more

prominent role without modifying the course dramatically. I have been trying to introduce some modest changes, reflecting on my observations and building on them. I know my students and I need time to understand, accept and respond to the new experiences (Moskowitch, 1978).

Another strategy for improving the learners' speaking abilities that I used to underestimate is recording the language in a way that it can enhance its active production. Whenever I look at a typical student notebook, I can see persistent problems with spelling, transcription and mistranslations which hinder the learner's active performance. Meanwhile, good note-taking habits usually lead to the most efficient learning.

Ways of Recording Vocabulary

The importance of having students keep a vocabulary notebook has clearly been understated. Its content and organization has been left to the learner. Being unaware of principles of recording vocabulary, they end up with random listings of single words among other notes only to forget them a few minutes later. Listings of this kind are simply pointless since the learners have no possibility to retrieve the item on demand. Thus I suggest that one of the essential skills for language teachers is the ability to heighten learners' awareness of the role and format of a vocabulary notebook and to encourage them to record new language in principled ways. Among many helpful strategies which teachers need to ensure learners understand and use are:

- Random listing of vocabulary should be discouraged.
- The lexical items must be recorded **accurately**.
- The notebook should contain collocations and larger meaningful units of language instead of single words which should be kept to the minimum.

- Since every notebook is a personal learning tool, it is essential that students include individually chosen items which are useful to them.
- It is necessary to encourage learners to experiment with different formats so they can choose the most helpful and memorable way of recording lexical items. They may also record things that particularly interest them about the items they have learnt (McCarthy and O'Dell, 1997).
- Learners should record language, and revisit the recorded items outside the classroom as well.
- The recorded language should be occasionally reorganized by putting the items into different patterns, categories or formats in order to help fix them in the learner's memory.

Most significantly though, teachers should encourage learners to see the notebook as a valuable personal recourse that is intrinsic to language learning. Taking responsibility for their own learning is critical, since they have to get used to studying more independently, especially at higher levels (Cranmer, 1996). However, it is not as easy as it may seem, since many language learners find vocabulary notes useless and boring. Therefore, it is very important to familiarize them with different ways of recording lexical items so each learner can find the one which is the most useful and enjoyable for them. Moreover, teachers should involve learners in making use of their vocabulary notes by referring to the recorded items in class or giving them appropriate tasks for homework. Students may find it very motivating to look back and see what they have already learnt (Ellis and Sinclair, 1993).

Types of exercises and activities

First of all I would like to review some traditional types of lexical exercises which check understanding of the new language, enhance storing it and enable the learner to produce it. However, at the same time, I include some general suggestions on how they can be adapted to enhance the active use of new vocabulary.

Matching Exercises

Most exercise types involve some kind of matching. It is one of the most effective ways of checking vocabulary comprehension. Learners are asked to match the target language words with their synonyms, antonyms, definitions or pictures. However, to ensure a successful retrieval of the target language, this type of exercise should also involve matching parts of collocations, expressions or lines of dialogues. By highlighting the word for which learners have to find a collocation, the teacher can train them to notice the words that combine naturally.

Gap-fill Exercises

The most common type of gap-fill exercise asks to complete sentences with the words given. In another type of gap-fill exercise, learners have to use an appropriate word from their own arsenal. It encourages learners to consider the typical linguistic environment, as well as the grammatical context in which the word can occur. The gap-fill idea is extended in the Lexical Approach by ensuring the gaps are the partner words from collocations or the words missing in fixed expressions.

Lewis (1998) holds that “useful lexis, acquired as unanalyzed chunks, can form the basis for grammatical generalization, rather than result from knowledge of

grammatical patterns.” (p. 90) Thus sentences can be easily retrieved as pre-fabricated chunks while exchanging utterances in real-world events or they can be used to generate similar sentences.

Sorting Exercises

In this exercise type, learners are given a group of words and asked to sort the words out according to different characteristics suggested by the teacher or perceived by themselves. For example, a group of adjectives can be sorted out into those denoting intellectual ability, attitudes towards life and attitudes towards other people. Sorting can be done by selecting verbs or adjectives which partner two given nouns. Expressions can be grouped under these headings: agree, disagree and not sure. It can be very helpful to encourage learners to classify the same words and expressions in a variety of ways later in the course.

Odd One Out

This variation on the sorting exercise enables the teacher to prevent some errors by predicting likely problems and asking learners to delete the odd one out. For example, which of the following words do not form a collocation with the word given?

Go – skating, skiing, thinking, dancing, shopping

Or which of the time expressions are used with the preposition ‘on’?

___ *Monday*

___ *the weekend*

___ *the morning*

___ *Sunday evening*

___ *Christmas Day*

Students can also make up sets of four or five similar items and add one that does not match. Then they can exchange the sets and see if other learners can spot it.

Sequencing Exercises

Some events or situations have a predictable order and sequencing takes advantage of this real world that learners have. For instance, they can be asked to put the days of the week into the correct order or order the instructions for making Shepherd's Pie. The learners can also put the following events into the usual order:

___ *You get married.*

___ *You fall in love.*

___ *You have a baby.*

___ *You meet someone.*

___ *You get engaged.*

___ *You go out with someone.*

Identifying Chunks

Lewis has devised one of the most important types of exercise – identifying chunks. “Learners who identify chunks correctly can make better use of dictionaries, translate better, and avoid certain kinds of mistake. It encourages accurate recording in their lexical notebooks, and more importantly, storage in chunks in the mental lexicon.” (Lewis, 1998, p. 89)

To enable learners to become aware of the chunks in a text rather than a sequence of individual words the teacher can ask learners to identify chunks of different kinds –

collocations and fixed expressions, and get them to compare with the teacher's copy.

Learners can also be asked to identify chunks while listening to a short passage. By doing such exercises learners will gradually develop the awareness of chunks of different kinds and therefore, will be able to make best use of the language they meet.

All these types of exercise enable learners to store any lexical item. The wider the range of exercises they do with it, the more likely it is to be memorized. However, very often they are not sufficient to help learners to make the step from having the new language in their passive vocabulary to having it in their active vocabulary. To ensure effective retrieval of the new language stored some form of active expression is essential. Therefore, the following types of activities can activate the learner's storage by retrieving vocabulary items from memory and using them in appropriate situations. Ideally, such activities should focus primarily on a non-linguistic outcome - a solution of a problem, winning of a game or a conclusion in a discussion. In the real world language is instrumental so this should be reflected by classroom activities.

Problem-solving Tasks

Problem-solving tasks provide a context or a situation in which learners need to interact in order to analyze real or hypothetical situations and to solve a problem or make a decision together. Learners are allowed time to prepare their simulation and present it to the class. For instance, students can be asked to take the role of the residents, the mayor and the representatives of Green Party as they discuss the advantages and disadvantages of building a factory in a residential town. In designing simulations for activating the target vocabulary, the trick is to design them so that they require learners to use it repeatedly while they are trying to solve the problem.

Role Plays

Role plays assign distinct roles to each learner and ask them to speak through these roles. Willis (1996) calls them “real-life rehearsals” which prepare students for typical life situations. There are roles which correspond to a real need in the learners’ lives. In this category we can include such roles as hairdressers dealing with their customers or business people traveling abroad. In a second type of role plays, learners play themselves in a variety of situations of which they may or may not have direct experience. A foreigner asking for directions to get to a certain place or a customer ordering a meal in a restaurant fall into this category. Most students find this type of role play highly motivating since the situations are usually relevant to them. Other roles are of the type that few students will experience directly themselves, but which are easy and fun to play because we all have such vast indirect experience of them. The journalist interviewing a famous actress is a good example of this kind of role taken from real life.

Role plays should be designed so that a given set of items will predictably have to be used by the role play participants. Learners are offered an opportunity to make personal use of language that has been presented to them and to develop fluency. Role plays also promote interaction in the classroom which increases motivation. According to Ladousse (1992) “not only is peer learning encouraged, but also the sharing between the teacher and the learner of the responsibility for the learning process.” (p. 7)

Debates

Debates can present opportunities for learners to engage in using extended chunks of language for a purpose - to defend one side of an issue. A debate is a type of role play where learners take sides on an issue and defend their positions. They require extensive

preparation by learners and involve a large variety of language functions such as describing, giving and asking for information, explaining, agreeing, and disagreeing. Therefore, they are more appropriate for intermediate and advanced levels.

Sharing Personal Experience

Sharing personal experience is something we do very often in our daily life: we tell anecdotes and stories that have happened to people around us, share personal reminiscences, express our attitudes, opinions and preferences, and react to what others say or do. This kind of casual talk can happen naturally at the beginning or the end of the lesson or during other activities. It is a very natural freer practice and not so goal-oriented as other tasks (Willis, 1996) where the teacher can use counseling to guide discussions according to the purpose she has at that moment and still remain removed as a generator of ideas. Thus it can be a way to find out what students know about the target arena, to check if they have mastered the previous material and even teach new language. Sometimes it can be helpful to bring in a very short reading and invite learners to respond. By reading or listening first, the teacher can inspire very free discussions that allow learners the opportunity to use the language they have.

Creative Tasks

Creative tasks tend to have more stages than other more usual classroom activities. They can involve out-of-class research and are often referred to as 'projects'. Learners can be asked to write a poem, a short story, a song or a short play based on a text they have read or listened to. They can also write diaries for either personal use or to be read by the teacher. Learners can also produce a class magazine or a newspaper,

design an advertisement for their school or produce and record a short play in audio or on video. A creative task can ask them to interview people about a certain subject and report the results in class.

Oral Reports

Learners may occasionally be called upon to present a research or other project in the form of an oral report. Oral reports develop the public speaking skills of the speaker, as well as provide practice to listeners in asking questions, agreeing and disagreeing, discussing and taking notes. Oral reports require thorough preparation but can be designed at all levels of proficiency.

Ways of Recycling Vocabulary

It is obvious that new items need to be recycled if they are to be fully acquired. This happens naturally through reading and listening or doing a variety of exercises, but it is obviously not enough to ensure the full acquisition of the new language. Many researchers have concluded that we only acquire a new lexical item after meeting it at least seven times (McCarthy, 1990, Lewis, 1998). According to Lewis (1998), meeting it frequently in context enables learners to understand more of its meaning, and gradually integrate it into their lexicon for successful retrieval. Therefore, it is important to consciously recycle words, collocations and expressions in class.

No less important is the need to encourage learners to come back to the language they have recorded and do something with it. There is a large variety of things you can do with the new language to revisit it. The teacher can ask the learners a few days later if they remember the words that were written on the left-hand side of the board, and get

them to use them in sentences. She can also have them recall the vocabulary learnt in the previous class and write down three lexical items they like for some reasons and three lexical items they hate. As a variation of this activity students together negotiate a common list of three words they liked from six they had originally. They can use whatever criteria they like to argue for or against them (Cambel and Kryszewska, 1993). Then they can share their words as well as the reasons with a partner.

It may be useful for the teacher to ask questions regularly using the new language, since they also give learners more examples of how it is used in a way that involves the whole class, and give a chance to practice other language related to the same topic. Lindstromberg (1993) suggests that student-produced vocabulary reviews get them to use lexical items in sentences because they need to take account of their partner words as well as their grammar.

Repeating certain kinds of activities, such as summarizing the text they have listened to or read, and recalling it a few days later may be an efficient way of improving the learner's language. Morgen and Rinvulcri (1992) suggest a few activities in which retelling is both necessary and enjoyable.

One of the most powerful ways of recycling is counseling. I became aware of it at SIT and it has become an integral part of my teaching. The essence of counseling is providing learners with access to correct language by recalling what they have said in a correct and natural way and inviting them to repeat it. This cycle can be repeated two or more times by involving the whole group. As Stevick (1989) has pointed out this leads not only to greater correctness, but also to memorization, since learners can draw on memorized material while speaking.

There is a great variety of ways the teacher can use restating and teach the

learners everything – grammar, vocabulary and even the lexical items that do not seem to fit in any vocabulary lists. Using counseling during informal talks, as well as in any discussion that arises in class is a very helpful way of solidifying the previous material or checking if learners have integrated the new language, and recycling it at any stage of the lesson or the course. Moreover, it enables learners to experiment with that language in different contexts. Meanwhile, the teacher can incorporate the presentation of new language into the discussion since it comes up naturally.

Recycling in my classes is not merely recalling what I have restated. I summarize what has already been said with an oral cloze, recall their sentence incorrectly and get them to correct it, put key words or pictures on the board and have them report what has been said both orally and in writing. I have noticed that this gives weaker students more time to digest what they hear and others to reflect upon the language as well as to relate it to other words, structures and situations.

CHAPTER TWO

CLASSROOM EXERCISES AND ACTIVITIES

In this chapter I propose some activities that can be applied to teach the language learners vocabulary they have encountered while reading, listening or trying to express themselves. All teachers understand that knowing a word involves much more than encountering it once and perceiving its meaning. However, many of us tend to spend a great deal of time conveying the meaning of words just to forget about them later in the course. We smoothly proceed from one text to another, 'teaching' more and more new items and sooner or later realize that our students cannot use them.

To avoid this, I consciously try to recycle words, collocations and expressions. I usually start with controlled exercises and move towards fluency based activities. Working within the same thematic unit enables me to come up with a variety of texts and activities that activate the items of the target lexical set and reinforce the learning of other semantically related items.

To demonstrate how it works in my teaching context, I have chosen to present here a thematic unit that aims at enabling students to talk about adventures. In the coursebook I use for teaching intermediate students, this topic is dealt through a few ordeal stories (Bell and Gower, 1996). First they listen to a story about a kidnapping incident. Since the purpose of my paper is to examine ways of enabling the learner to use the new language, I will not discuss strategies for presenting it but start with exercises

and activities I do in the following lessons to activate the new vocabulary. The exercises described below focus on collocations and expressions, and, I believe, enable the learner to participate actively in the activities that will follow. Most importantly, they give the learner confidence to use the new lexical items rather than relying on their arsenal of old words. The target words in the first story are:

kidnapping (incident) (n), kidnapper/captor (n), kidnap (v), hostage (n), ransom (n), blindfold (n/v), captivity (n), release (v/n), escape(v/n), rescue(v/n), tie up(v)

Exercises

Here are a few examples of exercises which can be done to make sure students learn words in relation to other words:

1. Make a phrase from words in columns A, B and C.

A	B	C
demand	the hostage	from captivity
rescue	a blindfold	one's escape
release	good	rescue
tie up	the child	for \$100000 ransom
put	a narrow	on the hostage
organize	the victim	ransom
make	a dramatic	securely
horrendous	a \$30,000	incident
have	kidnapping	escape

2. Fill in the gaps with the word that strongly collocates with the word in italics and an appropriate preposition.

1. The kidnappers _____ *a ransom* of \$ 500000 _____ his family.

2. The police *rescued* the _____ captivity.
3. The captors _____ *the hostages* _____ the ransom of \$10000.
4. The thieves left the night – watchman _____ *the chair* and gagged.
5. The men _____ *blindfolds* _____ both of the hostages and pushed them into a van.
6. The fishermen were saved in a _____ *sea rescue* _____ the Welsh coast.
7. She *made* _____ *her escape* _____ prison.
8. The couple finally managed to escape after *suffering* _____ the hands of their captors.
9. We had *a narrow* _____ death.
10. An Australian couple were kidnapped and _____ *one month* while the captors demanded large sums of money for their release.

3. Find the words which do not form a strong collocation with the word given in this context. The partner words are taken from *LTP Dictionary of Selected Collocations* (1999).

suffer: *badly, terribly, strongly, in silence*

ransom: *demand, pay, ask for, charge*

rescue: *dramatic, brave, daring, heroic*

tie up: *loosely, neatly, securely, firmly*

escape: *narrow, miraculous, successful, close*

release: *bring about, demand, make, order*

happen: *by chance, suddenly, unexpectedly, badly*

This type of exercise has a twofold purpose: to teach more words that collocate with the words students learnt in the previous lessons and to prevent most likely mistakes.

Another story is about a boat ordeal. The following exercise can be done before or after reading it. If done after reading the text, this exercise enables students to check if they remember the meaning of the target words (in bold) and revise them in their micro context.

4. Put the words and expressions in the most likely order:

- ___ *the violent winds **carried them out** to sea*
- ___ *the family were suffering from **sunburn, thirst and hunger***
- ___ *their motorboat **ran out of** petrol*
- ___ *a Spanish boat **picked them up***
- ___ *their boat **drifted** helplessly*
- ___ *they tried **filtering** seawater*
- ___ *they ate **seaweed***
- ___ *they put up their boat **for sale***

The following exercises may be done with the lexical items in the story about an earthquake ordeal which students read for homework.

5. In class they are given a number of collocations from the text and asked to find their co-text. Then they find some example sentences with the words in bold in a dictionary.

Collocation	Chunk in the text	Examples in the dictionary
building <i>collapsed</i> the fifth floor <i>apartment</i> <i>shake</i> violently <i>die</i> of thirst bitter <i>cold</i> <i>stories</i> of bravery a jar of blackberry <i>jam</i> try on a black <i>dress</i> earthquake <i>ordeal</i> fully <i>recovered</i>		

6. This text is rich in prepositional phrases, so I ask students to sort them out into phrases which are used to express time and place.

for over a week to the door in the Arctic to a hospital in intensive care in the dark near them 60 miles away	after a building collapsed under their feet on the second day on December 14 th for four days on top of them into the basement on the eighth day of their captivity
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Activities

A Newspaper Story

In the following lesson I bring a newspaper article about a kidnapping incident which contains similar vocabulary. If needed, I adapt the text slightly to fit the intermediate level. Here is the procedure I follow while working on the text.

1. Students read the story and compare it with the story they listened to in the previous lesson. During the feedback we try to answer any questions that arose after they have read the text, be it a language point or text interpretation. I also write on the board a few mis-collocations they produce while comparing the stories. Their task now is to replace them by correct ones which we noted and recorded in the previous lesson.
2. Students read the newspaper article again and in pairs choose some key words which they consider to reflect the main events in the story. Then they compare their choice with another pair of students.
3. Next, students compare the words as a class and together agree upon the best. I write them on the board.
4. Students read the text again and find the words that collocate with the key words they have chosen.
5. Without looking at the text they restore the sentences in which the collocations were used. I ask them to write the sentences down in their notebooks. Then I ask them to compare their sentences with those in the text and we explore the grammar of these collocations: the tenses, articles, prepositions, pronouns, etc. Since they usually struggle over restoring the sentences with the target

collocations, this task enables me to show students the importance of noticing larger chunks.

6. Before students recall the whole story, they should recall any details they find relevant to the text. Then they tell the story in pairs.
7. I ask them to record the new collocations in larger chunks in their vocabulary books.
8. Finally, I ask students if they have read or heard about a kidnapping story. They should then share them in small groups. I also encourage students to tell the story to a friend or a family member who speaks English.

This activity revisits the language of the previous lesson, as well as enriches it. Moreover, it integrates the four skills, and since it enables students to tell the story quite fluently, it also gives them the feeling of achievement. The same procedure can be followed while listening to a story on a tape or told by the teacher. Ur (1998) points out that stories narrated by the teacher are most warmly responded to by students and may arouse natural talk on similar subjects.

The next three activities can be done in the following lessons using the same or a similar story in order to revise the lexical items and clear the remaining fog around it. Depending on the students' needs I might do all three or choose one or two of them.

Paraphrasing

Before lesson I change the newspaper story a little by paraphrasing the collocations they focused on in previous lesson. In class I elicit the target collocations and put them on the board. Then I read the story with the paraphrases and ask students to stop me as soon as they hear one and to repeat the sentence substituting the collocation.

In fact, I ask a few students to repeat the correct sentence so everyone hears it and is able to memorize it. This exercise is adapted from 'Vocabulary' in Morgan and Rinvogluceri (1997, p. 33).

Correct the Mistakes

For this activity I rewrite the same story making some mistakes in it, such as a wrong preposition, tense and especially, an inappropriate partner word in a collocation and ask students to correct them. Then they compare the improved texts with a partner and finally, compare them with the original story.

Suggest a Collocate

During the following activity it may be more useful to bring another short passage related to the same topic rather than use the same story so students can revise the language and learn some new phrases. I read out the passage and stop in certain places for students to come up with some words. I pause after the first word of a collocation or phrase and write all the suggestions on the board together with the word after which I have paused. Then we discuss the lists they have produced and cross out mis-collocations.

The above activities can be used at the beginning or the end of the lesson since they are short and involving.

Two Interviews

I divide students into two groups and give each group a set of collocations and expressions taken from two stories they have recently read in class. For example, one

group gets a list of vocabulary from the kidnapping story and the other group gets a list of phrases from a boat ordeal story. I write the phrases on small pieces of paper.

1. In their group they create their story using as many phrases in the list as they can.
To encourage them to deviate from the stories they have read, the lists contain vocabulary which makes them do so.
2. Next, I tell them they are going to interview someone from the other group about the experience they have been through recently and ask them to prepare ten questions.
3. Then I put them in pairs and appoint an interviewer and a 'survivor'. The latter has to use the phrases in the list while answering the questions. Every time the interviewee uses the lexical item from the list, he or she throws it into the bin or puts it into his or her pocket. When they have finished, they reverse roles.
4. Finally, students write an article for their newspaper and give the interviewee the chance to read it first.

The aim of this activity is to make students use the new language while speaking.

In my experience, students tend to avoid using the new language as they feel less confident with it than with the old resources. Correct chunks of language they have on slips of paper evoke various situations and enable them to describe them. This activity also integrates the four skills and is very engaging.

Picture Story

I choose a few photographs from newspapers for this activity.

1. In class, I put the students in groups of three and ask them to brainstorm as many questions about the picture they get as possible. For instance: *Why is the man*

smiling? or *What is the weather like?* This task is adapted from 'Class Readers' in Greenwood (1990, p. 37).

2. Then they exchange the pictures and the questions with another group and try to answer the questions they receive. I ask them to write down any collocations or larger chunks they use while brainstorming the answers on a piece of paper and after they have finished, to pass the list to another group.
3. The students work on the list of collocations they received – if necessary, look them up in a dictionary of collocations or any other dictionary, add their own collocations and cross out the ones they do not consider appropriate for the picture. Meanwhile, I monitor closely and help with any problems.
4. In their group they make a story about the picture using the vocabulary in the list. Then they write up their story individually.
5. Finally, I ask them to stick their stories on the walls around the classroom. Their task then is to circulate around the room and read the stories. Once they have read all of them, I ask them to vote which story is the best or the funniest.
6. I collect the stories after the lesson and mark them using symbols which my students are familiar with.
7. In the next lesson the students try to improve the marked stories working individually first and then in pairs. I also help them by restating the clumsiest language which usually means supplying more appropriate collocations.

Guess the Story

For the following activity I write the first few sentences out on cards one word to a card so that they are clearly visible from a distance. On the back of each card I write the

same word in very small letters. I prepare two or three sets of cards depending on the size of the class and put the cards in the correct sequence big letters face down on the floor at both ends of the classroom. I also write the title of the story on cards and in the same way stick them on the board.

1. I invite students to uncover the title on the board one word at a time. I tell them the topic the story is based on and may also uncover a few words before they start guessing.
2. After students have guessed the title, I divide them into two groups and ask to come to the middle of the classroom and stand so each group faces their set of cards and stands back to the other group. I make sure they are standing far enough away not to be able to see the small letters on the cards.
3. I allow a volunteer from each group to read the text first so they know it and can uncover the hidden text more easily. Students call out words and the volunteer uncovers the ones they guess. I usually set a time limit and the group which manages to uncover the most words within that time limit is the winner.
Depending on the text, I might uncover some words before they start guessing.
4. Then the whole class brainstorms words that can be used to continue the story and I put them on the board. Next I elicit partner words for any single words on the board, e.g. a verb or an adjective for a noun, an adverb for a verb, etc.
5. Then in pairs the students finish the story and compare their ideas with another partner.
6. Finally, they listen to or read the original story.

The guessing part of this activity encourages the students to recall possible collocates for the words they have already guessed and think of the grammar of these

collocations – articles, tenses, pronouns, prepositions, etc. This activity is adapted from ‘Vocabulary’ in Morgan and Rinvolucris (1997, p. 96).

Story Swop

I ask students to read an adventure story at home and get ready to tell it in class or may as well give them stories to read in class.

1. In pairs they tell each other the story they have read. The listener draws the picture the story has evoked. On their picture each of them writes related words and then adds the words that collocate with them. Next I encourage them to work with the same partner and check their collocations against the original and expand them into a larger chunk.
2. Then they tell another partner the story they have heard and repeat the same procedure. I continue this until each student has told at least three stories.
3. Next they write down the last story they heard and compare it with the original story. I ask them to note the differences and try to improve their version. I collect their pieces of writing afterwards and use their mis-collocations, obvious circumlocutions and grammatical mistakes for preparation of different exercises that I ask my students to do in the following lessons.

Home Reading

As I have mentioned above, I believe that one of the most important task of the teacher is to enable learners to collect collocations outside the classroom independently from the input they meet in class. However, unwilling readers are a problem in many classrooms, so as teachers, we should attempt to motivate students to read more and to

equip them with ways of making the most of it as far as vocabulary is concerned. The following activities are designed to get students interested in a book, as well as to show them a helpful way to record, revisit and re-activate the significant vocabulary they meet while reading it.

Creating interest

First, I read the book myself. It is usually a story from Penguin Readers available in our library.

1. In class I invite students to ask me yes/no questions about it. They keep asking until I decide I have aroused their curiosity and yet have not said too much.
2. Then I elicit a few more questions, but I do not answer them. Instead, I ask students to read a few chapters and try to find answers to the questions. I also give them a list of recurrent words taken from the story and encourage them to find the chunks with these words. I make sure that the words I choose are different parts of speech, so their attention is drawn to a variety of chunks.
3. In the following lesson, we answer the questions that can be answered. Then I elicit some chunks they have picked from the chapters and put them on the board.
4. Next, we discuss if the language has been broken down into appropriate chunks and improve them if necessary. Then in pairs they analyze the other examples they have recorded.

It may be very useful to repeat the same procedure a few times with the chunks they record from the next chapters so they feel confident to continue chunking on their own. I also remind them to keep adding to their lists of examples with the same word through subsequent encounters with it.

As a rule, there are often students who have not read the chapter for some reason, so they cannot do the above described activities. In such cases I pair them off with the students who have read the chapter so they can find out its content and learn some new phrases. In this way both can benefit from the situation – the former can catch up with the content and learn at least a few words, while the latter can revise the words they have recorded and activate them through telling the story to somebody interested in it.

Student-written Exercises

For each chapter I ask the students to produce an exercise focusing on the vocabulary in it. I define the type of the task and demonstrate a few examples before asking them to do it independently. Here are a few examples:

1. Students choose some sentences from the chapter and make a collocation mistake in each. The partner has to find and correct the wrong word.
2. They prepare a gap-fill deleting a certain part of speech in a collocation or a larger phrase. The partner completes the gaps with the words given or their own words depending on the task.
3. Students write a definition of a word and pick all collocates they can find in the text including an odd one out. Their partner has to guess the word and cross out the mis-collocation.

Since these exercises are short and often contain very similar language, they can be done as a mingling activity so students can revisit the vocabulary a number of times. Moreover, students have an opportunity to analyze and memorize chunks while producing exercises. Most importantly, students become more deeply involved in the learning process and feel responsible for it.

Chain Story

During this well-known activity each student is given a single word and the teacher starts a simple chain of events with a sentence.

1. The first student continues, repeating the teacher's sentence but adding a sentence including his or her word.
2. The second continues likewise. The activity continues until all the students have contributed.

This activity can be slightly adapted to keep to the concept of learning words in larger units. Therefore, instead of giving each student a card with a single word on it, the teacher should give a collocation or a larger expression taken from the home reading text. Then divide students into small groups and ask them to reconstruct the events in the chapter or the story so far, by joining in with his or her chunk when appropriate. In the following lesson the same chunks and procedure can be used to create a new story. Next, each student tells the story created by his or her group to a partner from another group. This activity is adapted from 'Grammar Practice Activities' in Ur (1993, p. 214).

Guess what my collocation means

Students write down ten collocations they remember from the chapter.

1. Then in pairs they test each other on their meanings. If they do not know the meaning of a collocation, they question their partner by asking yes/no questions.
2. Each student scores two points for every collocation they knew and one point for every guessed collocation.

Writing

It is undoubtedly useful to give students written assignments to activate the vocabulary they acquire while reading at home. According to Raimes (1983), students "... discover a real need for finding the right word and the right sentence" (p. 3), so they become very involved with the new language. Here are some examples of written tasks:

1. Describe an event or a situation from a character's point of view.
2. Describe one of the characters.
3. Write what would have happened if...
4. Before finishing the book, predict the end of it.
5. Write a review of the book – why you liked or did not like it.

While providing feedback on their written assignments, I think the teacher should focus their attention on collocational errors rather than on grammatical mistakes. This can be achieved by drawing students' attention to a long clumsy phrase and encouraging them to replace it by a more appropriate chunk. If they fail to do that, I give them concrete suggestions on how to improve their piece of writing.

In order to facilitate integration of reading and writing, Silberstein (1994) suggests encouraging students to write "dialogue journals" in which students and teachers share reactions to a book. The author claims that it is important not to correct or grade journals so students can write freely without fear of evaluations.

CHAPTER THREE

CONCLUSIONS

Realizing the phrasal nature of language after my own frustrations in learning and teaching English has changed my approach to teaching in a number of ways. This insight has encouraged me to re-evaluate many of my accepted ideas about the learning process. I have realized that spending a lot of class time on teaching grammatical structures does not empower my students as language learners but "...condemns learners to remaining on the intermediate plateau."(Hill, 2000, p. 68) It is obvious that learners at the intermediate level need to increase their collocational competence with newly acquired words, as well as with the words they already know.

Therefore, the primary aim of teaching must be ensuring that learners become aware of the phrasal nature of language and notice the collocations and larger chunks in the input language. I now recognize that noticing input and breaking it into meaningful units is crucial to expanding learners' mental lexicons and enhancing their productive capacity. Knowledge of a wide range of collocations and expressions rather than a huge number of single words reduces the processing time. This also reduces the amount of mistakes learners inevitably make while producing long, complex sentences instead of expressing their ideas with a precise lexical phrase. Consequently, their language becomes more natural and accurate. Moreover, the sense of a satisfying achievement and considerable progress encourages learners to accept further challenges of the

learning process.

In order to master a lexical item, it is crucial to revisit it and recall it in the production of language. Therefore, the teacher must train learners to record and revisit the items they meet, as well as create the environment in which the language can be activated. It is obvious that we should give the vocabulary notebook a far more prominent role so it becomes a tool that learners can rely on while reviewing and producing language. It is no less important to train them to record lexical items they meet outside the classroom while reading and listening, and to revisit them on a regular and systematic basis.

There is no doubt that the more times the phrase is heard or read in different contexts, the more likely it is to be retained for the long-term and become accessible for future use. It is safe to say that memory plays a significant role in language acquisition, thus I believe that referring to the same texts or even doing the same tasks more than once is of benefit to the learner.

On the other hand, talking about the same topic may become boring in the long run, and memorizing larger phrases may appear dull and tiring. Therefore, to maintain involvement and motivation, a variety of productive exercises and activities are essential. Learning within a thematic unit provides a great number of opportunities for meaningful and exciting communication.

All of the above has involved some important changes of perspective on my teaching. Firstly, devoting more time to teaching vocabulary means spending less time on formal grammar work. It is not an easy thing to do since the textbooks and tests still focus on teaching grammatical structures. Moreover, students, who are used to traditional EFL grammar, insist on receiving a considerable amount of it. Therefore, it is crucial to

balance the learning strategies so that students can experience the advantages of the new approach and have no grounds for worrying about the lack of grammar input.

Finally, although promoting active use of lexical items requires active performance on the part of the learner, we should bear in mind that talking in the new language for the sake of it does not yield the results we aim to achieve. Thus the teacher's role is to ensure that students receive appropriate input first and make use of it while speaking or writing.

I believe that the insights I have had from working on this project, will guide me in helping my students to achieve the breakthrough they all hope for when they come to my classes.

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