

# Teaching Lexically

Day One

Hugh Dellar

Lexical Lab

# Teacher beliefs about language and learning

**Work in groups. Discuss which sentences you believe. Explain why.**

- 1 Language is a list of grammar rules and vocabulary.
- 2 Grammar is the glue that holds language together.
- 3 Without grammar, you can say little; without vocabulary, you can say nothing.
- 4 It's unimportant if examples are invented and are unlikely to be used in real life as long as they clearly illustrate the meaning of the grammar.
- 5 We learn grammar by mastering one structure before moving on to the next.
- 6 Vocabulary should not be seen as single words, but as collocations and chunks.
- 7 If you teach grammar, students can learn words to slot into the grammar.
- 8 Grammar can be acquired through unanalysed phrases. (i.e. you can learn and use *Have you been here before?* without 'knowing' the present perfect)
- 9 How we experience and use vocabulary develops and shapes 'correct' grammar.
- 10 Students shouldn't see grammar that they haven't been taught yet.
- 11 You can't separate grammar from vocabulary.

# Teacher beliefs about language and learning

## Grammar + words

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- 2 Grammar is the glue that holds language together.
- 4 It's unimportant if examples are invented and are unlikely to be used in real life as long as they clearly illustrate the meaning of the grammar.
- 5 We learn grammar by mastering one structure before moving on to the next.
- 7 If you teach grammar, students can learn words to slot into the grammar.
- 10 Students shouldn't see grammar that they haven't been taught yet.

# Teacher beliefs about language and learning

## A lexical view

- 3 Without grammar, you can say little; without vocabulary, you can say nothing.
- 6 Vocabulary should not be seen as single words, but as collocations and chunks.
- 7 Grammar can be acquired through unanalysed phrases. (i.e. you can learn and use *Have you been here before?* without 'knowing' the present perfect)
- 9 How we experience and use vocabulary develops and shapes 'correct' grammar.
- 11 You can't separate grammar from vocabulary.

## The difficulty of sustaining a grammar + words view

- It's six less twenty
- It's two thirds of five
- It exceeds 5 by forty
- **It's twenty to six**
- It's forty past five
- **It's five forty**
- It's ten after half five

## The difficulty of sustaining a grammar + words view

- **There's no pleasing some people.**
- There's no angering some people.
- It's no satisfaction for some people.
- Making some people pleased is impossible.
- Some cannot be ensured happiness.
- A few can gain no satisfaction.

## The difficulty of sustaining a grammar + words view

- I bark, you bark, he barks
- You're not going to go to Norway.
- Venus Williams is taller than Messi.
- Are you waving?
- I've only got one back.
- There's a fat man sitting on a blanket playing the guitar.

## Some key principles of lexical approaches to language teaching

- Natural usage and choices often cannot be explained by grammar rules / ‘deep’ grammar

“Why can’t I say *I’ve been fancying seeing that for ages?*”

“Why don’t you say *It has been happened?* I mean, someone made it happen, right? So why isn’t it passive?”

“I know *I can’t stand it* means *I hate it*. So if I like it or love it, do I say *I can stand it* – or *I stand it?*”



## **Some key principles of lexical approaches to language teaching**

- Collocations, chunks and – to some extent – ‘grammar’ are formed through priming (which is essentially traces of how the words have been used thus far)

## A summary of a lexical view of language

- Ultimately, words have more value than grammar
- Language is essentially lexically driven (words with grammar)
- Our usage is determined by our experience of how language is used
- There are many patterns in lexis that are generative to at least some degree (including the traditional grammar patterns taught in ELT )
- The vast majority of the examples of any one pattern will be made up of a small percentage of all the possible words that are used / possible
- Collocations and patterns will be primed to go with other collocations and patterns in similarly limited ways.
- **EVERYONE'S ENGLISH IS DIFFERENT!**

# **A brief pause for breath – and reflection!**

- What do you think so far?
- Do you think it has to be black and white – one view or the other?
- What implications might there be for these two sets of beliefs on the way we teach?

## **What does knowing a word involve?**

- **(Contextual) meaning**
- **Spelling / pronunciation**
- **Synonyms, antonyms and co-hyponyms**
- **Connotation**
- **Register**
- **Word form / word family**
- **Usage**

**Which of these areas is easiest / hardest to learn?**

**The easiest to handle is meaning.**

**Meaning can be quickly covered by:**

- translating**
- telling a short story to paraphrase and explain**
- using visuals**
- acting**
- drawing or pointing at the thing**

## **The hardest thing to handle is usage.**

**Usage covers a wide range of things – but particularly:**

- Contexts of use**
- Collocation**
- Colligation / the way the word grammars**
- Co-text**

## Peculiar features of colligation

Hoey notes that:

- (a) where a common sense of a word favours common colligations, then the rare sense of that word will avoid those colligations.
- (b) where two sense of a word are approximately as common – or rare – as each other, both will avoid the colligational patterns of the other.
- (c) where either (a) or (b) do not apply, the effect will be humour, ambiguity, or a new meaning combining the two senses.

## Cause:

(1) An event, thing or person that makes something happen.

This meaning of cause colligates with the preposition of, with definite articles and with a further noun / noun phrase:

The main cause of these accidents is drivers going too fast.

I have to write an essay on the causes of the First World War.



## Cause:

(3) An aim, organisation or idea that you support, for example in politics. This kind of cause often brings benefits to those in need.

This meaning of **cause** is more usually found near the end of sentences; indefinite / zero articles abound – as do a wider range of prepositions.

It's hard work, but it's all **in a good cause**.  
I'm not very **sympathetic to their cause**.  
Give what you can. **It's for a worthy cause**.

## And so it goes . . . for (almost) all words

Different meanings of the same word take different collocations, but also operate in very different ways grammatically.

This grammar is grammar that frequently lies outside the tense-dominated ELT canon.

Different meanings of words **pattern** differently.

## **So what?**

Students often claim to “know words,” but to “have problems with grammar.”

This may well mean they struggle when they try to use words then think they know – as these words neither collocate nor colligate in expected ways.

Often this is because students bring L1 primings with them into L2.

**How much support do vocab exercises offer with this?**

## **Exercises that focus on single words**

Coursebooks exercises often just look at single words.

These may be:

- words taken from a text that students have to match to meanings – or even synonyms
- ‘spot the odd one out’ exercises
- students may also be asked to match single words to pictures.

## **The problems with single-word exercises:**

- They suggest knowing meanings is enough.
- They can also imply that words have exact synonyms – when in reality, no two words are always interchangeable.

**Because of this, the teacher has to do more work!**

## **When checking single-word exercises:**

- add a bit extra to develop what students know about the items.
- you may just want to add a couple of extra collocations for most words and maybe a whole sentence example for the most useful items.
- you may not have time to add extra information for each item, and so need to choose items most worth spending time on.
- it's best to prepare what you plan to add in advance. Write a board plan before class.

## Practice 1

**Look at a single-word exercise and:**

- plan the extra information you'd write on the board for each item.
- decide which items have the most obvious / useful collocations?
- decide which best lend themselves to whole-sentence examples?
- if you were short of time, which two or three items would be most worth spending time on?

## Practice 1

- 1 a person **screaming**
- 2 a person getting **fined**
- 3 a person buying a **raffle** ticket
- 4 a person **snoring**
- 5 a person with a **scar**
- 6 a person being **arrested**
- 7 an **angry** person
- 8 a person looking **amazed**



- 1 a person **screaming**  
scream in pain
- 2 a person getting **fined**  
I got fined €100 for . . . speeding.
- 3 a person buying a **raffle** ticket
- 4 a person **snoring**  
I couldn't get to sleep. / He woke me up!
- 5 a person with a **scar** under my left eye
- 6 a person being **arrested**  
He was arrested and charged with murder.
- 7 an **angry** person  
an angry response / letter

## **Exercises that focus on collocations**

Exercises that focus on collocations offer more support and information about the items in question.

Also, when you check the answers and give feedback, you can add a few extra collocations – and write fully grammaticalised, whole-sentence examples for a few of the more useful collocations.

## Exercises that focus on collocations

Even if students know a collocation, they still need examples of how the item is typically used: what co-text it's used with, what grammar, and so on.

Imagine that students learn the collocation *heavy rain*. You might also want to mention the collocations *light rain*, *occasional rain*, *rain pours down* or *rain eases off*.

However, just knowing that words frequently co-occur doesn't help students say things like *They're predicting heavy rain for this afternoon* or *It's starting to ease off a bit*. *The rain's not as heavy as it was earlier*.

## **Exercises that focus on collocations**

Extra examples can help to better prime students and to expand understanding of how items are typically used.

Thinking about extra collocations – as well as thinking about how collocations are used (and writing examples that show this) – should be built into planning.

## Practice 2

**Look at a collocations exercise from an Intermediate book.**

- Plan the extra information you'd write on the board for each item.
- What are the most obvious / useful extra collocations?
- Which collocations best lend themselves to whole-sentence examples?
- If you were short of time, which two or three items would be most worth spending time on?

## Practice 2

Match the words in 1-8 with the best endings in a-h.

- |   |              |   |                |
|---|--------------|---|----------------|
| 1 | a light      | a | the TV on      |
| 2 | a telephone  | b | crashes        |
| 3 | the screen   | c | a button       |
| 4 | the computer | d | rings          |
| 5 | press        | e | freezes        |
| 6 | switch       | f | flashes        |
| 7 | plug         | g | the machine in |
| 8 | dial         | h | the number     |

## Practice 2

Match the words in 1-8 with the best endings in a-h.

1 a light    f flashes

This light ..... flashing and I don't know why.

2 a telephone                                      d rings

3 the screen                                        e freezes

My screen ..... freezing.  
What do you think I ..... do?

4 the computer                                    b crashes

The stock market crashed  
Their car crashed / They crashed (into a tree)

## **Exercises that focus on whole sentences**

Plenty of vocabulary exercises feature whole sentences. Generally, these will be gap-fill exercises – or part of a matching exercise.

Longer examples allow you to point out a range of features that may be in the sentences: collocations, chunks, common patterns, and so on.

When checking answers and giving feedback, you can also add extra examples of any interesting features.



## Exercises that focus on whole sentences

Imagine students are doing a gap-fill exercise on doctor-related vocabulary and the first sentence is :

1 Can I come in late on Friday? I've got an ..... with the doctor.

When eliciting the answer (*appointment*), you could point out the pattern *I've got (a doctor's appointment) on Friday* - and ask students about other nouns that could fill this slot:

*I've got an exam on Friday.*

*a date tonight.*

*a job interview next week.*

*a meeting at three.*

## Exercises that focus on whole sentences

Alternatively, you could ask for / point out other people you could have an appointment with

*I've got an appointment with my lawyer  
the dentist  
the optician.*

You may even want to point out that **come in** here means *arrive at work* and give other examples:

*The day after the office party, no-one came in until midday!*  
*He doesn't normally come in on a Friday.*

## Practice 3

Look at the rest of the exercise on doctor-related vocabulary. The answers are underlined.

- What interesting features / patterns / chunks / collocations do you notice?
- Plan what you'd say / ask about each - and then decide what you might write on the board for each item.
- If you were short of time, which two or three items would be most worth spending time on? Why?

## Practice 3

- 2 That's a nasty cough you've got. You really ought to stop smoking.
- 3 I sometimes get a rash on my arm after eating seafood.
- 4 I need to pop into the chemist's later to pick up that prescription.
- 5 Are you having any trouble swallowing at all?
- 6 I'll give you something to relieve the pain.
- 7 There's a really nasty virus going round at the moment.
- 8 I was jogging and I fell over and sprained my ankle

## Practice 3

2 That's a nasty cough you've got. You really ought to stop smoking.

*That's a nasty cut. You ought to get that looked at.*

3 I sometimes get a rash on my arm after eating seafood.

4 I need to pop into the chemist's later to pick up that prescription.

***Anywhere else you might need to pop into? Why?***

5 Are you having any trouble swallowing at all?

*I've been having trouble sleeping recently.*

*I've been having trouble logging into my account.*

***Anything else you might have trouble doing?***

## Some final thoughts

**Beware material ‘that teaches itself’.**

The idea that matching to meanings / pictures are easier and less of a test is seductive, but false!

***Match the words 1-3 with the English translations a-c.***

- |                   |                         |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>1 blasport</i> | <i>a boots</i>          |
| <i>2 karka</i>    | <i>b leather jacket</i> |
| <i>3 tome</i>     | <i>c helmet</i>         |

**Matching exercises are as much a test as gap-fills**

## Some final thoughts

CELTA-style CCQs about vocabulary in matching exercises exacerbate the problem and create the illusion of ease. Questions like those below seem pointless when items have already been matched to meaning / pictures:

*Do you wear it on your head or feet?*

*Is it hard or soft?*

*Does it protect you?*

However, as we've seen, meaning is only a (small) part of what students need to know.

## Some final thoughts

Think of better questions to ask about the word **helmet**.

- In what jobs or activities do people usually wear a helmet?
- Why do people wear them?
- What do you do with a helmet – what verbs go with it?
- What else might you wear along with a helmet?
- When might you say ‘Luckily he was wearing a helmet’?



## **Some final thoughts**

These questions are messier and more likely to result in students 'making mistakes', but . . .

- they increase the level of challenge and engagement
- they create a space for you to teach from where students are at.
- they lead to more interesting, productive practice

. . . especially if used in tandem with whole-sentence exercises!

**How much of what we've discussed here do you do already?**

**What would you like to next add to what you do?**

**The bad news: even meaning can be tricky**

**How would you explain these words to your students?**

**pull      table      card      out**

## What about now?

*pull out* of the deal

*pull out* without looking

lay your *cards* on the *table*

lay your *cards* on a *table*

lay a *card* on the *table*

lay *card* on the *table*

## Decide the unit of meaning based on the words in red.

- 1 He's **applied** for several jobs, but he he hasn't found anything yet.
- 2 We were late because there had been a car **crash** on the motorway.
- 3 There's no **harm** asking if you can go as well.
- 4 The weather's been **miserable** for the last two weeks.
- 5 I had to **queue** for ages in the bank.
- 6 In the interview, she **came** across as confident and knowledgeable.
- 7 I usually take the **dog** for a walk in the evening.
- 8 Nothing goes better with spicy food than an **ice** cold drink.

# Some key ideas

- explain, exemplify, expand
- vertical / horizontal development
- understand, notice, do

# Explaining vocabulary

**What does *grasp* mean?**

- A It's this: mimes grasping a bag
- B Seize, clutch.
- C If you grasp something you take it and hold it firmly.
- D You *grasp someone's arm*, or *you grasp a rope* or *grasp a bag* like this [demonstrate] tightly.
- E Translates into students language
- F *Grasp?* What was the sentence? What did they say?

## Explaining vocabulary

**The grammar is difficult to grasp. What does *grasp* mean?**

A *Grasp* means comprehend.

B Because the grammar is very complicated – there are lots of rules—*it's hard to grasp* – it's difficult to understand.

C Translates *grasp* into students language

D It means it's difficult to comprehend – to understand fully. So you often look back and realise you didn't fully understand something. For example:

*I knew the changes were big, but I didn't grasp how much they'd affect me.*

*I didn't grasp how serious the illness was*

*I didn't grasp the importance of planning.*

*I didn't grasp the significance of the decision at the time.*

E It means XXX [translates]. For example:

*I knew the changes were big, but I didn't grasp how much they'd affect me.*

*I didn't grasp how serious the illness was*

*I didn't really grasp the importance of planning.*

*I didn't grasp the significance of the decision at the time.*

## How might you improve the way meaning is conveyed in each of the following?

### A a whale

“It’s like a big fish, like a big dolphin. It’s in the sea. It jumps out of the sea. You know Moby Dick, the book. Moby Dick was a whale. Very big. Woosh! Woosh! [mimes water blowing out of their back].”

### B do up

“it means refurbish”

### C rush

“If you rush you run you do it quickly”. T acts out “rushing” by running to the door.

### D portion

“if you had a pizza and divided it into 4, you have a portion for each person”

### E make

‘hacer’ in Spanish

### F He was screaming in agony

“He was crying loudly because it hurt a lot”.



# Exemplifying language

- Think of examples of the words / phrase.
- When would you say it? Why? Who to?

## Noticing: examples and highlighting patterns

We often can help students speak more fluently by showing 'chunks' of language or patterns in sentences. Tenses are a kind of pattern but there are many more around words or that 'frame' sentences. For example:

**Sorry. I'm in a rush.** (chunk based on *rush*)

**Do you fancy** a coffee (pattern based on *fancy*)

a cigarette?

doing something later?

going out for lunch?

**Just because** I'm English **doesn't mean** I'm cold and unfriendly. (sentence frame)

## Can you see any patterns in the following?

- 1 I stayed in and watched the latest episode of Mad Men.
- 2 Learning to manage a budget may be boring, but it's essential.
- 3 I didn't expect it to be so polluted.
- 4 More and more people are working longer hours.
- 5 I'm going to run a marathon.
  - > Really? Rather you than me!

# Can you see any patterns in the following?

- 1 I stayed in and watched the latest episode of Mad Men.
- 2 Learning to manage a budget may be boring, but it's essential.
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- 4 More and more people are working longer hours.
- 5 I'm going to run a marathon.  
> Really? **Rather you than me!**

# Vertical development

Explore how one conversation develops  
(questions / answers)

A: I'm *pregnant*.

B: That's great. When's it .....

A: June.

B: Do you know if ..... is a boy or a girl?

A: It's a girl.

B: Have you ..... a name yet?

# Horizontal development

- Explore different variations of chunks
- Look at varieties of answer to same question
- Give / elicit follow-up comments to the same answer / function

Have you been to France?

*No. I've never really fancied it*

*No, but it's supposed to be great.*

*No, but it's supposed to be awful*

*No, but I'd love to.*

*No. Have you?*

*I'm really sorry. I'll get a cloth*

*I'll clean it up*

*I'll buy another one.*

*I'll pay for the damage*

# Horizontal and vertical development

Think about how you would explain the items below  
– and then how you could give both horizontal and  
vertically developed examples for each one

run down (adj.)  
to undermine  
a nightmare

## Expanding examples horizontally and vertically

**Horizontal development** means thinking about what a speaker says after – or before – an utterance.  
The whole area's really run-down.  
It's in dire need of investment.  
There's quite a lot of dealing round there.

**Vertical development** means thinking about what the other speaker says in response.  
What's it like round where you live?  
□ It's alright. It's a bit run-down, but not as bad as it used to be.  
How long have you been living there?



## Put the words in each group in order of frequency

- 1 ambitious / fun / serious / hard-working
- 2 arise / supermarket / store / beard
- 3 trademark / controversy / criticism / headline
- 4 paramedic / contend / Muslim / whereby
- 5 singer / in terms of / after the / by the time

**You have five minutes to write examples of some of these words / structures**

**ambitious**

**beard**

**Muslim**

**paramedic**

**criticism**

**the past continuous**

**arise**

**in terms of**

**whereby**

# Assessing frequency

serious	fun	ambitious	hard-working
122	52	16	2

arise	store	supermarket	beard
96	93	17	9

criticism	controversy	headline	trademark
47	21	16	2

whereby	Muslim	contend	paramedic
20	17	9	1

after the	in terms of	by the time	singer
219	99	37	18

Numbers refer to occurrences per million in BNC:  
source [phrasesinenglish.org](http://phrasesinenglish.org) / [Macmillan dictionary](http://Macmillan dictionary)

## The attraction of simple examples

She is ambitious.

He has a beard.

She is Muslim.

He is a paramedic.

She faces a lot of criticism.

The phone rang while I was having a bath.

A problem has arisen.

My job is bad in terms of money.

whereby ....

**You have five minutes to write examples of some of these words / structures**

**ambitious**

**beard**

**Muslim**

**paramedic**

**criticism**

**the past continuous**

**arise**

**in terms of**

**whereby**

# Explaining the attraction

**Availability bias**

**Representational bias / a simple *X is Y* pattern**

**(ELT) priming**

# Why this might be a problem

## Frequent words:

- are what students will see / hear and want to speak / write.
- might be the 'glue' as much as grammar.

## Single words / simple examples:

- may not illustrate meaning.
- may not reflect actual use.
- will not provide sufficient exposure to *grammar*!
- will not recycle frequent words sufficiently.

We crave simplicity and yet . . . chess masters & the 10,000 hours

# Getting better at judging frequency

<http://www.macmillandictionary.com/red-word-game/>

Google

Find a friend



# Giving better examples

**START** with collocations

[ambitious](#)

adverb - adjective

adjective - noun

# Think about collocations of collocations

extremely, hugely, overly, too, wildly  
ruthlessly

artistically, politically, socially

attempt, plan, programme, proposal, venture

aim, goal, target

adv - adj - noun

adj - noun - verb

verb -adj - noun

noun - verb - adj - noun

# From collocations to stories to examples

**overly ambitious  
face criticism**

# Giving better examples

How did the workshop go?

> I was *overly ambitious* as usual. I didn't do half of what I'd planned.

> It was OK, but I was *overly ambitious* and I ran out of time / I didn't finish

Theresa May has *faced a lot of criticism* about her leadership because she's seen as out of touch with normal people.

**Ask yourself when? Why? Who to?**

**Beard**

**Muslim**

**Paramedic**

**Whereby**

# Giving better examples

*Who was the guy with the beard? I haven't seen him before.*

*As a Muslim, I believe we have a responsibility to help others.*

*When the paramedics arrived, his heart had stopped beating.  
They got it going again and then rushed him to hospital.*

*Immunization is the process whereby a person is made immune  
or resistant to an infectious disease, typically by the  
administration of a vaccine.*

# From examples to noticing: grammar

Who was the guy with the beard? I haven't seen him before.

As a Muslim, I believe we have a responsibility to help everyone.

When the paramedics arrived his heart had stopped beating, they got it going again and then rushed him to hospital.

Immunization is the process whereby a person is made immune or resistant to an infectious disease, typically by the administration of a vaccine

How did the workshop go?

> OK, but I was overly ambitious as usual and I ran out of time / I didn't finish

Theresa May has faced a lot of criticism about her leadership, because she is seen as arrogant and out-of-touch.

# From examples to noticing: grammar

- Why *haven't seen* him before?
- Why *had stopped beating* not *stopped beating*?
- Why a person *is made* immune not a person *made* immune



# From examples to noticing: patterns and vocabulary

Who was the guy with the beard? I haven't seen him before.

As a Muslim, I believe we have a responsibility to help everyone.

When the paramedics arrived his heart had stopped beating, they got it going again and then rushed him to hospital.

Immunization is the process whereby a person is made immune or resistant to an infectious disease, typically by the administration of a vaccine

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Theresa May has faced a lot of criticism about her leadership, because she is seen as arrogant and out-of-touch.

# From examples to noticing: patterns and vocabulary

Who was the guy with .....? I haven't seen him before.

As a ....., I believe .....

When the paramedics arrived...

... stopped / broke down .... got it going again  
rush him to hospital

..... is the process whereby ...  
resistant to  
an infectious disease, [academic language]

How did .... go?  
as usual / ran out of time

faced a lot of criticism *about* ...  
.... Is seen as (being) ...

# Questions that check understanding and generate language

- **Why might you ...** face a lot of criticism?
- **How might you feel if ...** you run out of time in an exam?
- **What might you say if ...** you're asked how an interview went?
- **What happens if ...** a person is ruthlessly ambitious?
- **What's the opposite of ...** a highly infectious disease?
- **What verbs go with ...** beard?
- **What else ....** might paramedics often do?

**Exploring networks around words create alternative kinds of  
lexical sets.**

# Some final tips

- 1 Plan what language - not what activity.
- 2 Plan not just to complete aims, but to allow for students' talk.
- 3 Think about what students might say in **Speaking** tasks.
- 4 Write dialogues for particular situations.
- 5 Brainstorm new lexical sets / networks.
- 6 Write your own exercises.

## **Find a buddy and ...**

- 7 Discuss interesting errors you came across.
- 8 Discuss interesting questions I was asked in class today.
- 9 Discuss new language you'd never taught / thought about teaching until it came up in class.
- 10 Discuss

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- How would you start it?
- What would you add / remove?
- Which words would you focus on more?
- Any examples / questions to add?
- How long would it take?

**Now plan it!**