

A NEW APPROACH IN ELT : A LEXICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT: The lexical approach to language learning has gained prominence during the recent years. Its proponents believe that learning lexis has a crucial role to play in the classroom. But, text books, the only source of language are unable to provide the ESL learners with sufficient exposure to lexis. Hence, there is every need in including materials containing lexis in the curriculum. The present study proposes news bulletins as such materials. The objectives of the present article are fivefold: firstly, it gives a brief introduction to the lexical approach. Secondly, it describes the concept of lexis and its importance in language learning. Thirdly, it describes the significance of using news bulletins to learn lexis. Lastly, it enumerates a few lexis-based teaching tasks using news bulletins.

Key words: English language teaching, lexis, news bulletins, lexical approach.

INTRODUCTION

A few decades ago, structural linguists traditional approaches believed that the English language learning depends on the mastery of structures and not much emphasis was laid on teaching vocabulary. The proponents of traditional approaches argued vocabulary and grammar are entirely two different concepts which should be taught separately. But this couldn't enhance language learning among the ESL students.

Hence, during 1990's, there came a shift from grammar –based approaches to lexis based approach with the publication of the book, the lexical Approach: The State of ELT and a Way forward by Michael Lewis. Basically, the Lexical Approach prioritizes lexis over grammar. The proponents of this approach argue that a lexical mistake often leads to misunderstandings, while a grammatical mistake rarely does. The importance of putting lexis before grammar is clearly expressed in the words of Lewis(1993)

Language consists of grammaticalized, lexis not lexicalized grammar and grammar as structure is subordinate to lexis.

However, in claiming the importance of focus on lexis, the proponents of the lexical approach do not mean that there is only need to teach

lexis, and grammar should be excluded. Rather, lexis and grammar are considered inseparable in nature and completely interdependent. Lewis says,

The grammar/vocabulary dichotomy is invalid; much language consists of multiword 'chunks'.

This approach believes that the native speakers store lexical chunks in their mental lexicon, to retrieve and use them whenever necessary. Hence, language learning depends on learner's ability to record and produce chunks successfully. Lewis in his Implementing the Lexical Approach: Putting theory into practice, says,

Fluency is based on acquisition of a large store of fixed and semi-fixed prefabricated items, which are available as the foundation for any linguistic novelty or creativity Speaking about language teaching Nattinger says, Teaching should be based on the idea that language production is the piecing together of ready-made units appropriate for particular situation (1980:34).

Learners can understand lexical chunks only if he knows to predict a pattern in various situations. Therefore teaching should center on such patterns and the ways they can be pieced

together, along with the ways they differ and the situations in which they occur. Having discussed that lexis plays a prominent role in the lexical approach, it is important to know the concept of 'lexis'.

The term 'lexis' is differentiated from the concept of vocabulary as it consists of both individual words and lexical chunks, phrases of two or more words, such as nice to meet you and good night. In the words of Lewis,

Lexis is a more general word than common vocabulary. Vocabulary is often used to talk of the individual words of language; lexis covers single words and multi-word objects which have the same status in the language as simple words, the items we store in our mental lexicons ready for use.

We are often familiar with individual words but it is worth understanding a lexical chunk. A 'lexical chunk' is a chain of words going together lexically as opposed to semantically or syntactically. Lexical chunks can be categorized according to their common thread of formulaic and predictable nature. However, this paper chooses Lewis taxonomy of lexical chunks to prepare tasks. Lewis identifies lexical chunks falling into four types:

1. a. Words (book ,pen)
- b. Polywords (by the way)
2. Collocations (prices fell, rancid butter)
3. Fixed expressions(I'll get it, That'll do)
4. Semi-fixed expressions (Speaking on the occasion,...)

What are the materials used in teaching lexis?

According to the Lexical approach, language demands immense exposure to lexis. But, text books, the only source of exposure to language for the ESL learners, are unable to cater learners needin learning lexis. Hence, it is

important to make the learners get acquainted with supplementary materials.

Now to consider news bulletins from radio as such materials, their use in language teaching cannot be overstated. The BBC, VOA and most particularly, the AIR in India have enjoyed appreciation for ages. In The use of Media in English Language teaching published by the British Council it was mentioned that

English teachers all over the world cry out for materials which can make English live for their students in schools and colleges, and for them the radio broadcasts and TV programmes of English by Radio and Television provide just such a resource.

The greatest advantage of using radio in the classroom is that large number of learners can assemble around one receiver. Besides, it is an easily accessible and affordable tool in India even at schools in rural areas. Apart from this, the broad casts may be recorded and played in the classroom or the periods of English can be adjusted with the broadcasts

How is the AIR news useful in English language teaching?

It is a source of real English materials for listening both inside and outside the classroom; it's a reminder that English isn't limited to a forty-five minute period every three days a week with an exam at the end of the year. It's a graded series of lessons in English which allows students to listen, learn, practise and above all have success in understanding because they're listening to a material in standard Indian English. Also it does not demand advanced language skills but rests on the learners listening, the basic skill. They help in promoting learner's imagination and predictability by highlighting the news story through the headlines. Hamish Norbrook speaking on the news bulletins says,

Perhaps the most important is their predictability – the structure of news bulletins remains constant whatever their length. There will be a

top, highlighting the main points, a number of stories depending on the length of the bulletin, and sometimes a tail, summarising the main points.

The learners can develop their listening comprehension through the news bulletins. They acquire correct pronunciation, stress and intonation by listening to the news. B.G Patil says,

The newsreader introduces standard pronunciation values to the phenomenon, words, phrases and sentences. It can be used effectively in the English classroom. The teacher of English may inform the students how English should be spoken with correct pronunciation, the pitch of voice and intonation.

The AIR News bulletins, besides being used in teaching many aspects of language, are a rich source of lexis. Not just providing the learners with a good number of lexical items, they also may repeat the same lexical item in different contexts, so that the listeners will be able to use them in their language. They can be considered as authentic materials in teaching lexis because they involve language in naturally occurring communication in selected context in which Standard English is a norm. Lewis says,

Authenticity doesn't lie in the traditional language used to direct the usage, signification and mastery of the structures of the language but is more based on real world experience and in the previous knowledge of the learner.

However, they have a few limitations. There might be a problem to the teachers in adjusting the time-table according to the broadcasts. Repetition of the news is not possible. In these modern days, there might be a possibility to consider radio as outdated.

Lexis based teaching tasks using news bulletins

The following tasks can be used in the classroom by the teacher to develop the lexical competence of the learner

Task1:

Select few lexical chunks from the bulletin give them to the students. Play it in the classroom. Ask the learners to identify the lexical chunks from the bulletin.

Task 2:

Play the bulletin in the class room. Ask the learners to select some collocations from the bulletin and write the other possible collocations of the given words. Note down their findings and cross check them with other groups/pairs.

Task 3:

Play the news bulletins in the classroom. Ask each individual to select the sentence heads (semi-fixed expressions) they want from the context and make their own sentences using them. Ask the learners to read out their sentences to the classroom.

Task4:

Play the news bulletin in the class room. Ask the student to select a news story they like from the bulletin and rewrite/retell it without repeating the lexical chunks from the bulletin.

Task 5:

Record some lexical chunks from the bulletin. Write the lexical chunks as clues on the board. Ask the students to explain the known news of the day using the clue chunks. Play the bulletin and ask the students to listen as to how the lexical chunks given to them are used in the news story.

Conclusion:

To conclude, by using news bulletins in the classroom we can enhance lexical competence of the students. The study recommends that news bulletins be incorporated into the curriculum as they are highly effective in breaking the monotony that crops up during the process of teaching/learning a language.

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