



LEXICAL APPROACH: A WAY TO AUGMENT STUDENTS' VOCABULARY MASTERY

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ABSTRACT

"I think his dream job is different with mine". In classrooms, we often hear students incorrectly use choice of words. The word 'different' should go with the word 'from' instead of with the word 'with'. This occurs because vocabulary is taught in traditional way where it is understood as a stock of individual words with fixed meanings. As a result, students tend to guess randomly when they need to combine words. Michael Lewis's Lexical Approach argues that language consists of chunks that produce coherent texts when they are combined (Lewis: 1997). The basic concept on which this approach supports is the idea that an important part of learning a language encompass being able to understand and produce lexical phrases as chunks. Students are thought to be able to perceive patterns of language or grammar as well as have meaningful set uses of words at their disposal when they are taught in this way. This paper will elaborate on 1. types of lexis, 2) activities to develop learners' knowledge of lexical chains, and 3) students' responses to the use of lexical approach.

Keywords: words, lexis, chunk, and response

I. INTRODUCTION

English has been taught formally from primary level of education to higher education in Indonesia. In kindergarten English is also introduced although students just learn words on topical based only; not in given in context yet, such as numbers, days of the week, names of months in a year, colors, names of fruits, vegetables and animals.

There are some challenges faced by Indonesian teachers and students in the teaching and learning English. Firstly, English is served as a foreign language. Its usage is limited to classroom settings. Unless students are active or eager to use English outside classroom settings, they have little opportunity to practice using the target language. Secondly, there some differences between English and Bahasa Indonesia in terms of structures, tense, word order, irregular verbs, countable and uncountable nouns. For example, we just need to add time markers to indicate tenses (present, past, perfect and progressive) in Bahasa Indonesia, while in English we need to pay attention to the changes of the verbs which sometimes need me. Using the right word order can be troublesome for students due to their difference in position. In English we say, *a delicious cookie*; in Bahasa Indonesia it should be *a cookie delicious*.

Students should do a lot of practices to get used to using the pattern. Another difficulty faced by the students is due to verbs and nouns changes. Students must recognize that certain words are regular and the others are irregulars. Similar to the verbs, the nouns also have changes in plural forms. Students are also required to be able to identify that there are countable and uncountable nouns and know their usage.

Aside from the above challenges, the teaching of English weighs more to the teaching of grammar rather than to functional use. Reference [1] states that lack of exposure to functional uses of English makes it difficult for students to see learning English as a useful and relevant. Therefore the expected result of the learning is not yet satisfying.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Approaches and methods in language learning

Reference [2] elaborates that there have been some approaches in language teaching for over a century. Language educators have endeavored to solve the problems of language teaching by focusing attention nearly exclusively on teaching methods. Language teaching theory has highly developed mainly by conceptualizing teaching in terms of teaching methods. Adapted from Reference [3] Reference [4] summarizes the early approaches and methods in language learning:

- Audiolingual, which believes that learning is a habit formation, skills are learned more effectively if oral precedes written; analogy not analysis. The objectives are control of structures of sound, form and order, mastery over symbols of the language; and goal is native-speaker mastery. Activity types are dialogues and drills, repetition and memorization, pattern practice.
- Total Physical Response (TPR) suggests that L2 learning is the same as L1 learning; comprehension before production is 'imprinted' through carrying out commands (right-brain functioning) reduction of stress. The objectives are to teach oral proficiency to produce learners who can communicate uninhibitedly and intelligibly with native speakers. Type of activity suitable for this method is imperative drills to elicit physical actions.
- The Silent Way proposes that processes of learning L2 are fundamentally different from L1 learning. L2 learning is intellectual, cognitive process. Surrender to music of language, silent awareness than active trivial.



- Types of activities are learner responses to commands, questions and visual cues. Activities encourage and shape oral responses without grammatical explanation or modeling by teacher.
- Community Language Learning believes that language learning involves the whole person. It is a social process of growth from childlike dependence to self direction and independence. It has no specific objective. The goal is near-native mastery. The activities employed are combination of innovative and conventional. Translation, group work, recording, transcription, reflection and observation, listening and free conversation.
- The Natural Approach suggests that there are two ways of L2 language development: 'acquisition' - a natural subconscious process and 'learning' - a conscious process. Learning cannot lead to acquisition. The objectives are to give beginners and intermediate learners basic communicative skills. Four broad areas; basic personal communicative skills (oral/written); academic learning skills (oral/written). Types of activities suitable are those that allow comprehensible input, about things in the here and now. Focus on meaning not form.
- Suggestopedia believes that learning occurs through suggestion, when learners are in a deeply relaxed state. The objectives are to advanced conversational quickly. Learners are required to master list of vocabulary pairs although the goal is on understanding not memorization. Types of activities are initiative, question and answer, role play, and listening exercise under deep relaxation.
- Communicative Language Teaching focuses on activities involving real communication; carrying out meaningful task; and using language which is meaningful to learner promote learning. Types of activity employed engage learners in communication, involve processes such as information sharing, negotiation in meaning and interaction.

The above development of approaches and methods depict an interesting picture of how varied the interpretations have been of the best way to teach a foreign language. Obviously, each new method broke from the old but took with it some the positive aspects of the previous practices.

2.2. Lexical approach

In the past few decades, the major view in the language teaching weighs more on the grammar than vocabulary. Linguists and educators at that time strongly believed the dichotomy of grammar and vocabulary and they tend to put emphasis on the structures of language rather than the words. Also, they viewed acquisition of a language is dependent on the grammatical rules mastery of the language and vocabulary is of secondary importance.

It was not until the early 1990's that there was an increased interest in vocabulary teaching and learning. The turning point started when Reference [5] proposed the lexical approach. As in Reference [6] "There was a change from the traditional approaches to a lexis based approach which hold that "the building blocks of language learning and communication are not grammar, function, notions, or

some other unit of planning and teaching but lexis, that is, word and word combinations." Lexical approach focuses on developing learner's proficiency with lexis, or word and word combinations. Following are suggested in this approach:

- Lexis is the basis of language;
- Lexis is misunderstood in language teaching because of the assumption that grammar is the basis of language and that mastery of the grammatical system is a prerequisite for effective communication.
- The key principle of a lexical approach is that "language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar."
- One of the central organizing principles of any meaning-centered syllabus should be lexis.

Reference [3] adds that 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. He also urges that native speakers store chunks in their mental lexicon to retrieve and use them in their language. Also, he states that the ability to chunk language successfully is central to an understanding of how language works. Therefore, the language teaching should include the teaching of lexical phrases or chunks. Otherwise, comprehension and production of the language will be limited and decelerated.

2.3. Types of Lexical Units (Lexis)

Cited from Reference [7] Reference [8], and [9] suggest the following taxonomy of lexical items:

- Words, refer to what we traditionally known as vocabulary; they come from the parts of speech (Noun, Verb, Adjective, Adverb, Conjunction, Interjection), like *book, go, wide, strongly, because, and ouch!*
- Polywords is a small group of lexical items which falls between words and major multi-word categories. These chunks are normally not reversible. For example: *bread and butter*. Other forms are: sentence adverbs: *on the other hand, in some ways*; expressions of time: *the day after tomorrow, every now and then*, and prepositions of place: *on either side of, upside down*. Phrasal verbs are also including in polywords, like, put off, look up, look up to. Adverbial phrases are of different kinds as polywords such as, *by the way, upside down*.
- Collocations or word partnerships
These are words of the four main parts of speech which go together, such as, *community service, absolutely convinced; take in, first time, little bit*.
- Institutionalized utterances or fixed expressions
These are expressions which cannot be changed or can only be changed minimally. Most fixed expressions are idiomatic or are those used in polite speech, for examples, *How's it going?, I'll get it, We'll see, That'll do, If I were you . . . , Would you like a cup of coffee?*, and idiom *take the bull by the horns*.
- Sentence frames and heads or semi-fixed expressions
These expressions have at least one slot into which a number of different words or phrases can be inserted. For example, *that is not as . . . as you think, the fact/suggestion/problem/danger was . . .* and even text



frames, like in *this paper we explore . . . ; Firstly . . . ; Secondly . . . ; Finally . . .*

Reference [9] states that, “*the Lexical Approach focuses not on individual words but on clusters or chunks of words. Part of the reason for this is that individual words, particularly many of those which are high in frequency, can change meaning depending on the other words they are chunked together with.*” To give clear understanding of how words may have totally different meaning when chunked with other words, the following five sentences indicating how the word “*take*” can change depending on the words it is associated with.

- What’s your **take** on this?
- It didn’t **take** the first time.
- You need to **take** in the top a little bit.
- Have you **taken** into account the cost?
- **Take** the bull by the horns.

Reference [9] also adds that it is crucial that learners know collocation forms. This may enable learners to be aware of possibilities of certain words to be chunked with other words. Following is the table:

Form	Collocation
Adj. + N	lexical chunks
V + Prep + N	keeping with the idea
V + N + N	give students strategies
V + N	process (new) language
V + N	gain practice
Adj + N	new language
Adj. + N	global knowledge
Adj. + N	simple example
Adj. + N	basic generalizations

Reference [8] argues that collocation is the readily observable phenomenon whereby certain words co-occur in natural text with greater than random frequency. Furthermore, he adds that collocation is not determined by logic or frequency, but is arbitrary, decided only by linguistic convention. Some collocations are fully fixed, such as *to catch a cold, rancid butter, and drug addict*, while others are more or less fixed and can be completed in a relatively small number of ways, as in the following examples:

- *blood/close/distant/near(est) relative*
- *learn by doing/by heart/by observation/by rote/from experience*
- *badly/bitterly/deeply/seriously/severely hurt*

2.4. Activities to Develop Learners' Knowledge of Lexical Chains

The implication of this approach is that attending lexis in its various types is a central role in the teaching and learning English. Cited in Reference [7] reference [10] suggests that teaching should be based on the idea that language production is the piecing together of ready-made

units appropriate for a particular situation. Comprehension of such units is dependent on knowing the patterns to predict in different situations. Instruction, therefore, should center on these patterns and the ways they can be pieced together, along with the ways they vary and the situations in which they occur.

Following are activities used to develop learners’ knowledge of lexical chains:

1. Intensive and extensive listening and reading in the target language.
2. First and second language comparisons and translation— carried out chunk-for-chunk, rather than word-for-word— aimed at raising language awareness.
3. Repetition and recycling of activities, such as summarizing a text orally one day and again a few days later to keep words and expressions that have been learned active.
4. Guessing the meaning of vocabulary items from context.
5. Noticing and recording language patterns and collocations.
6. Working with dictionaries and other reference tools.
7. Working with language corpuses created by the teacher for use in the classroom or accessible on the Internet (such as the British National Corpus [<http://thetis.bl.uk/BNCbib/>] or COBUILD Bank of English [<http://titania.cobuild.collins.co.uk/>]) to research word partnerships, preposition usage, style, and so on.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

This research employed a naturalistic qualitative research method, which means that the classroom activities were not manipulated or interfered. Reference [11] as quoted in Reference [12] asserts that qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seek to understand phenomena in context-specific settings such as ‘real world setting’ where the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest. Therefore, the focus is on the observation, describing, and understanding what the students did and experienced during the learning process in the classroom. A set of procedures is used to obtain the data. The steps are conducting class observation, distributing response journals, and giving interviews.

3.1. Research Site

The study was conducted at Widyatama University. It can be said that the researcher’s role was teacher as researcher. The study was aimed at gaining respondents’ reactions during the teaching and learning and the learning outcome.

3.2. The Subjects

Reference [12] states that qualitative paradigm ‘ignores’ the fact that most samplings in qualitative research is neither probability sampling nor convenience sampling but falls into a third category: purposeful sampling’. Moreover, he asserts that purposeful sampling



is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or events are selected deliberately in order to provide important information that cannot be gained as well as from other choices.

Based on the statements above, the subjects were students of English Department who took English for Daily Communication I subject. Most of the students were first semester students. There were thirty students who were divided into two classes; class A and class B.

3.3. Procedures

This part describes how data were obtained. Following are the description:

- Observation

Direct observation was conducted during the teaching and learning process. Teacher observed and took notes on important events in the classroom, such as students' engagements, interactions with peers and teacher, challenges faced by students in dealing with the topics, whether or not objectives of the learning was achieved.

- Response Journals

Response journals were distributed to respondents to fill in as soon as they finished the class session. This aimed at facilitating them to recall what they experienced during the learning. The questions given in the response journals attempted to explore their experiences in the learning process.

- Interviews

To assure that the respondents were consistent with their answers and to obtain more comprehensive information that they gave in the response journal; interviews were conducted. Semi-structured interviews were employed. Respondents were randomly interviewed about their experience of learning. The questions given in the interview sessions concerned to the questions in the response journals, the objective of the interviews was to gain deeper information from the respondents.

3.4. Methods of Analysis

Descriptive inductive analytical approach is applied in this study. The general patterns of data analysis are a simultaneous action during the data collection stage. In the observation method it is suggested that the analysis is carried out as soon as the observation finishes as in Reference [13], otherwise it will lose visual details that might be important and they might be forgotten if it waits to be analyzed at a later time.

IV. RESULTS

3.1. Types of Lexical Units (lexis) students learned

Following were the five types of lexical units that students learned:

- Words,
- Polywords
- Collocations or word partnerships
- Institutionalized utterances or fixed expressions
- Sentence frames and heads or semi-fixed expressions

Topics discussed in class were *Daily Activities*, *Personality Characteristics*, *Learning Styles*, and *Community Services*. The objectives of the learning were by the end of the session, students were able to talk about the topics using the target lexical units or lexis.

3.2. Activities to develop learners' knowledge of lexical chains

The activities applied were some of the activities proposed by Reference [10] cited from [7]. The teacher elicited for the target words or expressions through pictures. For examples, to make students say the prior vocabulary that they had about daily activities, the teacher provided pictures of a person doing his daily activities starting from getting up in the morning until going to bed in the night. The expected words or polywords to be elicited were (for topic: Daily Activities): *get up*, *early in the morning*, *make the bed*, *have breakfast*, *take a bath*, *go to campus*, *do homework*, etc. Students were expected to come up with words or phrases of different parts of speech. When the expected vocabulary did not all come out, then the teacher could expose the students to new lexis through listening and reading activities.

Contrasting first (L1) and second language (L2) can be useful because there are collocations which are not the same in both L1 and L2. For example, *have breakfast* is used instead of *eat breakfast*; *take a bath/a shower* instead of *bath/shower* only. By contrasting L1 and L2, students are expected to be aware of collocations, fixed expressions and semi-fixed expressions.

Purposive drillings or repetition is also employed to help students remember the target vocabulary so that they can reuse them in students' daily communication. Giving cyclical activities, ranging from matching, closed tests, completing, substituting can also help students to learn expressions in different contexts.

Having sufficient practice, then students were asked to use the target lexis by making a dialog, doing role play, reporting, or short presentation. Through different activities, it is expected that students may internalized the lexis and can use them in the future naturally.

3.3. Students' responses to the use of lexical approach

In general, students gave positive responses. They could engage gradually with the stages of the learning, starting receptive to productive stage. After having several activities, by the end of the session students can use the target vocabulary. Idiomatic expressions were considered to be challenging. However, students were able to cope with them; they could remember and use it in a dialog because they are given in themes, such as idioms taken from sports like, *skate on thin ice*, *hit under the belt*, *let's get the ball rolling*, etc; colors, like *green with envy*, *every cloud has a silver lining*, *in the pink*, and others. In my opinion, employing this approach in my class is worth trying. Most students could reach the goal of the learning. The outcome can be a lot better if the students maintain practicing the language outside the classroom regularly. Naturalness of using the language like native speakers may be realized.

Grammar or structure also needs a portion of attention. Since students are taking speaking subject, my ultimate goal is enabling students to communicate fluently on arrays of different topics. However, feedback on grammar still needs to be given so that students are aware of the correct forms of English and they can reproduce them in the future use.

V. CONCLUSIONS

There is no one perfect method to teach all aspects of language in language teaching. Approaches and methods have been proposed by linguists and educators in order that the learning outcome can be satisfying. However, being aware of the established approaches and methods may lead to wisely choosing the right way for teaching certain units of language. Eventually, the expected objectives of the teaching and learning may be achieved. Employing lexical approach can be a wise way to get better learning results.

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