

Two kinds of verbs of comparison can be distinguished: those which encode comparing proper, that is the process of assessing the distance and thus the degree of similarity (e.g. *compare*); and those which profile the processes showing the consequences of comparing proper (e.g. *differ, correspond*).

Comparing is viewed as a complex process consisting of a set of single acts of comparison. Each single act of comparison concerns a certain single aspect of the entities under comparison. The entities and their aspects elaborate the PART-WHOLE schema, while the aspects themselves are containers for specific values they can assume. Comparing takes place only within the confines of the container, and it is only its contents that are subject to comparison.

These two phenomena combined have led to the hypothesis that the process of comparing employs a scale involving a cognitive distance along which there are placed a range of values that can be assumed by a certain single feature of the entities under comparison. The conclusion is, consequently, that comparing is the process of measuring a relative distance between the entities under comparison by means of a scale (or scales if the process consists of more than one single act of comparison).

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Teaching multi-word lexical items in the second language classroom: from theory to practice

Recent years have witnessed an unprecedented concern with the lexical structure of the language on the part of linguists and practitioners. To a considerable extent this growing interest in lexical matters can be attributed to the findings of the research in real life texts, which revealed the manifold and complex relationships between words in discourse, not rendered by the rules of traditionally understood grammar. In particular, the research has brought recognition of the importance of items variously known as idioms, lexical phrases, preassembled chunks or prefabricated units, showing that they are by no means a peripheral or negligible aspect of the language. The impressive amount of these phenomena seems to indicate, that meaning is not so much conveyed by individual words as by longer-than-one-word chunks. From the perspective of language teaching methodology the emerging view of vocabulary, extended over multi-word units, bears consequences for classroom procedures and techniques of dealing with words. The purpose of this article is to present some current views of the nature of complex lexical items and to discuss their implications for the treatment of such items in the second language classroom.

The role of multi-word lexical items in communication

Multi-word lexical items constitute, beside individual words, a considerable proportion of native speaker's mental lexicon as corpus evidence suggests. Pawley and Syder, quoted by Nattinger (1990)

claimed, that the number of single morpheme lexical items known to an average mature English speaker is relatively small - a few thousands, while the number of morphologically complex units is quite impressive and it amounts to hundreds of thousands. The proliferation of such linguistic phenomena in naturally occurring texts led Sinclair (1991) to the postulating of the principle of idiom according to which, every language user makes extensive use of a large number of semi-preconstructed phrases, available to him as single linguistic choices, even though they may be analysed into smaller segments. The usefulness of multi-word lexical items in organising daily communication is then closely related to the notion of the so-called prefabricated language, defined as preassembled, superficially complex strings of language acting as building blocks in spoken and written discourse. Widdowson (1989) remarks, that communicative competence is not a matter of knowing generative rules for the composition of sentences, but rather it is built on the knowledge of a set of partially preassembled patterns and frameworks, together with a small number of rules, applied to them in order to adjust to the demands of the context. Sinclair (1991) makes an even stronger claim, saying, that the traditional model of highly generalised formal syntax with slots to be filled by discrete words - static and ungeneralisable, is applicable only in rare and specialised language uses, and that on the whole much language is composed by sticking together preassembled multi-word chunks of meaning, i.e. collocations, idioms, formulaic expressions or institutionalised sentences. Multi-word lexical items, stored, retrieved and interpreted as wholes minimise the amount of encoding work and thus play an important economising role in production, comprehension and interpretation of messages, making the process of communication manageable and contributing to fluency.

Multi-word lexical units are also closely related to the concept of idiomatlicity and idiomatic language use. *Idiomatic*, according to the definition in the Oxford English Dictionary means „peculiar, characteristic of a particular language, pertaining to, or exhibiting the

expressions, constructions or phraseology, approved by the usage of the language, especially as differing from strictly grammatical or logical use of words." If one considers the way that language is produced by non-native speakers, it becomes immediately evident, that most often they operate with a stock of single words, trying to put them together (often with much effort) into sentences in accordance with the rules of syntax. Even if the language generated in this way is perfectly correct in terms of grammatical structure and understood by the addressees, it may still sound odd, artificial and foreign to a native speaker; as Lewis (1997) rightly observes, not all possible sentences of English are actual or even probable utterances of the language. Multi-word units are idiomatic or language-specific by nature in the sense, that they provide most natural and convenient ways of referring to various concepts, according to the language norms and conventions accepted within a particular speech community.

Different taxonomies of multi-word lexical items

Multi-word units fall into a large number of groups and classes, often overlapping and of fuzzy edges, with many marginal cases emerging. Different writers propose different classifications and taxonomies, intending to capture the variety and complexity of longer-than-one word lexical items. Nattinger and de Carrico, in their work devoted to lexical phrases (1992) put forward the following categorisation, based on the analysis of corpus data:

1. *Polywords* - associated with a variety of functions, such as expressing speaker's qualifications on the topic, relating one topic to another, summarising, e.g. by the way, for that matter, in essence, strictly speaking, to make a long story short, etc.;
2. *Institutionalised expressions* - proverbs, aphorisms, invariable formulas for social interaction, e.g. a watched pot never boils, have a nice day, be as it may, etc.

3. *Phrasal constraints* - variable phrases, serving a variety of purposes, e.g. a ago (a day, year, long time), in.....(sum, short, summary), as far as I(know, remember, can tell), etc.
 4. *Sentence builders* - e.g. I think, that X, let me start by X/withX, my point is, thatX, etc.
- Lewis (1993) in turn, draws special attention to the following major categories of complex lexical items:
1. *Polywords* - short phrases, idiomatic to some extent, e.g. by the way, on the other hand, in my opinion; phrasal verbs, e.g. put off, look up to, irreversible binomials, e.g. back to front, ladies and gentlemen, sick and tired, etc.;
 2. *Collocations* - possible and at the same time most likely word combinations, e.g. miss/catch the buss, make a mistake, suspicious/guilty of, slump dramatically, etc.;
 3. *Institutionalised utterances* - commonly found in spoken interaction and expressing pragmatic meanings, such as social greetings, e.g. Good morning. Happy New Year! politeness phrases, e.g. No, thank you, I'm fine. I'll have to be going. I'll be in touch. I'll give you a ring.; phrases expressing emotional attitudes, e.g. I can't believe it. That's too bad. That's just not fair. etc.; 'phrase book' language, e.g. Can you tell me the way to; please? I'd like a twin room for nights, please.; and perhaps less important group of traditionally understood *idioms*, such as: make a mountain out of a molehill, put the cart before the horse, kick the bucket, etc.;
 4. *Sentence frames and heads* - a large and important category which covers many different types of items, ranging from short and fixed, e.g. That's not my fault, through rather long, containing slots for variations, e.g. Could you pass; please? Nice to see you. I haven't seen you for/since; to quite extended frames governing larger stretches of written (essays) or spoken discourse (lectures) and performing segmenting functions, e.g. It appears/seems/is quite clear/ suggests that..... What was really interesting/surprising/annoying/

- strange/..... was.....; There are broadly speaking two views of The more traditional, associated with....., suggests that; while the more progressive view, associated with; suggests..... etc.;
- Moon (1997), provides yet another taxonomy and divides multi-word units into five major categories:
1. *Compounds* - two-word items resulting from word formation processes and characterised by high information content and denotational meaning, e.g. car park, tennis racket, brown-eyed, Prime Minister, crystal ball, etc.;
 2. *Phrasal verbs* - versatile with respect to formality level and transparency of meaning combinations of common core verbs - take, put, do, go, come, get, etc., and adverbials or prepositional particles - up, out, off, in, etc.;
 3. *Idioms* - mainly metaphorical expressions of connotational meanings and potential for conveying evaluative judgements, interpreted as wholes and subjected to severe grammatical constraints, e.g. have an axe to grind, smell a rat, make a scene, be head-over-heels in love, be knee-high to a grasshopper, give someone the cold shoulder, bite off more than one can chew, fall prey to sth/sb, etc.;
 4. *Fixed phrases* - strongly institutionalised, situationally bound, performing a variety of pragmatic functions, e.g. of course, in fact, sorry I'm late, excuse me, how do you do, what a pity, how come? that's great, enough is enough, white as a sheet, dry as a bone, etc.
 5. *Prefabs (prefabricated routines)* - highly conventional preconstructed phrases, phraseological chunks, stereotypical collocations or semi-fixed strings, which have a vital role to play in the shaping of discourse structure as they indicate larger textual patterns, such as problem-solution-evaluation or hypothesis-evidence-conclusion patterns, e.g. the thing/fact/point/problem is....., first of all, that reminds me of, let me start by saying....., etc.
- The diversity of categories, terms and criteria of division proposed by different writers clearly demonstrates the unquestionable pervasiveness of complex lexical items in the language, so

highlighting these phenomena for language learners seems to be a worthwhile policy in the second language classroom.

Complex lexical items in the second language classroom: in search of practical solutions

The need for extending foreign language instruction over multi-word lexical items has been recognised by a growing number of writers. Nattinger (1990) argued in favour of teaching complex lexical items, because they are highly memorable and when embedded in socially appropriate situations, they allow students to use communicatively powerful expressions that they are yet unable to construct creatively. Lewis (1993) believes, that increasing competence of the language is achieved not through learning words for the sake of words, or ever more and more complex structures, but through extending and enriching students' knowledge of complex lexical items, collocational power, all kinds of fixed phrases and through the mastery of common words and structures of the language. The ability to interpret and use multi-word items appropriately by language learners is an indication of their proficiency and nativelike command of the language. Moreover, complex lexical units provide raw material for analysis and segmentation, which may help to understand the syntactic rules and avoid pitfalls of generative grammar - producing violations of lexical restrictions or incongruities of register. Teaching different complex lexical items is then not only beneficial to the development of the four language skills, i.e. listening, reading, speaking and writing, but it additionally provides an alternative, possibly more feasible method of exploring the grammar of the language. An extra advantage of teaching more-than-one-word lexical items is probably a psychological one - students find them motivating to learn, because they can see their immediate utility and appreciate the feel of naturalness to them. The awareness that the language taught in the classroom is not after all a far cry from the language used by the native speakers is bound to stimulate and encourage learning.

Bearing in mind the proliferation and variety of lexical forms one has to concede, however, that teaching complex lexical items poses quite a number of problems. Cowie (1988:137) remarks, that „much of the lexical competence of mature native speakers has developed through exposure to established meanings and fixed word combinations whose recurrence characterises day-to-day lexical performance". He then admits, that foreign learners drastically lack such exposure and it is very much the teacher's responsibility to create conditions which effectively make up for this disadvantage. It can be done by providing students with a lot of lexically rich material to work with to maximally help them unravel the complex interactions and intricate connections between words in the language. According to some contemporary methodologists (Nattinger and de Carrico 1992; and Lewis 1993, 1997) the foremost responsibility of the teacher in this respect is to develop students' ability to „chunk" the language, or to break a continuous text into useful multi-word components. Students should be trained to read in manageable chunks, noticing how words co-exist together, looking not so much for the unknown words as for the ones they are already familiar with, analysing textual environment of these words. This is hoped to be achieved through the observation of language material in the form of representative samples of authentic or semi-authentic texts, enhanced by awareness raising tasks, based on comparing and contrasting, and activities involving the use of the receptive skills, i.e. listening and reading.

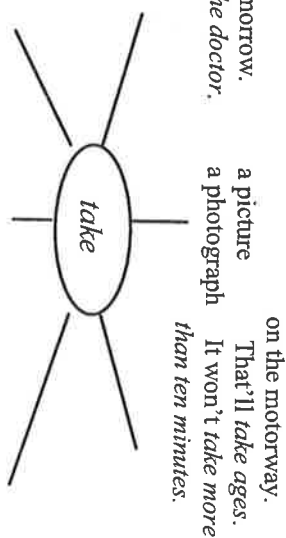
At this point a reservation should be made, that not all the fixed phrases occurring in texts will be equally useful for foreign learners. Gains and Redman (1986) note, that students are eager to learn original and picturesque, but less common expressions, e.g. 'a wolf in sheep's clothing', suitable for passive recognition only. It is the teacher's responsibility to demonstrate the usefulness of more natural idiomatic expressions which are regularly used in everyday communication and which, when incorporated into the students' repertoire of productive vocabulary do not seem salient and incongruous with the rest of their language. Special attention should

be also drawn to those collocations and complex lexical units which do not have their equivalents in the learners' mother tongue or which are made up of semantically different items.

Another problem connected with teaching complex lexical items is that of register and the fact, that different kinds of lexical devices are typically found in spoken and written discourses and in their formal and informal varieties. It is important to ensure, that lexical items are presented, recorded and practised in the contexts, in which they most naturally occur in real life situations and for which they are most typical and relevant - expressions integral to spoken interaction will be highlighted through dialogues, and those that are characteristic of the written mode will be most conveniently contextualised in articles, letters, pieces of academic writing etc. A pedagogically sound strategy would be then, the adoption of a set of diverse rather than uniform procedures when dealing with different types of lexical items.

The diversity of techniques of dealing with complex lexical units will be vivid, among other things, in the organisation of vocabulary notebooks. Systematic and principled organisation of items for future reference and revision is a prerequisite to successful learning of vocabulary in general, and multi-word lexical items in particular. Recording lexis in appropriate formats, different for different items, is important for its storage and consolidation in the mental lexicon, as well as for its more efficient retrieval when the need arises. In order to maximally facilitate access to particular items it is essential to train foreign learners how to utilise a range of clear, transparent and informative recording formats, highlighting nature and behaviour of different kinds of lexical items.

One of the most problematic kinds of lexical items are de-lexicalised verbs and prepositions which enter a myriad of commonly used phrases and expressions and seem therefore difficult to arrange in a principled way. Lewis (1993) suggests the following type of visual format for recording phrases containing general verbs, such as *have*, *take*, *get*, *make*, etc. and prepositions, e.g. *with*, *from*, *at*, etc. (take someone somewhere)
Who takes the children to school?
(a period of time)
I took over an hour



(travelling)
Shall we take the car?
Don't worry, I can take a train.

(physical feature)
with blue eyes
with grey hair

(illness)
He was shaking with anger. He was in bed with flu. She agreed with reluctance.

(an institution)
I'm with IBM now. He was in Spain with the army.

(showing a mood)
He was shaking with anger. He was in bed with flu. She agreed with reluctance.

(an institution)
I'm with IBM now. He was in Spain with the army.

A separate treatment is required, according to Lewis, for the lexical items structuring spoken and written discourse. These are best visualised within larger stretches of text and therefore recording formats should take into account the wider linguistic context - the whole frames, in which such items are typically embedded, e.g. (Greeting visitors to your workplace)

Good morning. (Ladies and Gentlemen). On behalf ofmay I welcome you to It is a great pleasure to have you with us today. I hope you enjoy your visit/meeting/the conference. If there is anything we can do to

help, please do not hesitate to ask. Now, you don't want to listen to me all day, so I'll hand you over to my colleague (who will show you..... /take you to.....)

(Writing a formal essay/dissertation, etc.)

There is general agreement nowadays, that

Despite this, several objections can be raised. The most important of these is

(Lewis, 1993:126)

(Giving a presentation)

emphasise

point out

I should draw your attention to the fact that

remind

explain

(Lewis, 1997:85)

There should also be a separate place in students' resource books for expressions of pragmatic value - various institutionalised phrases, performing a variety of communicative functions, e.g. persuading, apologising, greeting, suggesting, etc., in the context of everyday spoken interaction. Such lexical items lend themselves most naturally to presentation through dialogues and they should be recorded as wholes, possibly in clusters of phrases of similar meaning and function, together with a short note or gloss on the situation of their use, connotations, formality level, and/or an equivalent expression(s) in the students' native language.

Lexical items can be also recorded together with formal patterns they generate which seems particularly justifiable in the case of verbs. Different verbs trigger different structures, i.e. they can be followed by an infinitive, an ing-form or an ing-form and a preposition and the research shows, that verbs with the same patterns share certain aspects of meaning. Hunston, Francis and Manning (1997) claim, that it seems worthwhile, having identified a pattern of a particular verb to highlight all the other verbs that follow that pattern with their senses and to record them together:

Patterns and their meaning(s)	Examples
V+by+ing	begin, close, end, open,
1. 'start' or 'finish'	atone, counter, react,
2. 'respond' or 'compensate for sth'	reply, respond, retaliate
V+at+n	bark, bellow, growl,
1. 'shout', 'make a noise'	yell, hiss, jeer, laugh,
	smile, frown, wave,
2. 'make a facial expression, gesture'	wink
	gaze, peep, peer, stare
3. 'look'	
V+n+as+n	announce, classify, describe,
say what sth is like	interpret, label, portray
V+n+into+ing	blackmail, bribe, talk
make sb do sth as result of persuasion,	flatter, deceive, fool
charm, tricky	

Presentation and recording of lexical items is usually followed by the practice stage at which students are given opportunities to interact with patterns of meaning in a variety of activities and exercises to ensure their transfer into the learners' short- and long-term memory. With respect to complex lexical items practice should be directed towards helping students collocate words and combine, manipulate and expand multi-word units at sub- and supra-sentential level, in and out of context. Lewis (1997) demonstrates a wide range of exercises and activities, which it is hoped, will help the learner build and consolidate his phrasal lexicon. The most striking feature which they share and at the same time their strongest asset is careful selection of the language, namely focus on real life speech and writing. The learner is invited to study and work on probable and naturally-

sounding utterances that can be found in everyday interaction, rather than artificially contrived and unlikely ones. The suggested types of exercises and activities include matching, gap-filling, deleting - odd-one-out, rearranging (parts of collocations, fixed expressions, lines of stereotypical dialogues), categorising with respect to the formality level or positive/negative connotations, sequencing, i.e. putting pragmatically specialised expressions typical of a particular social event in the most likely order, translation, lexical drills, cloze, to name but a few.

Here are some examples:

Exercise 1: *Polymorphs*

Some pairs of words are always used in a particular order; we say 'bread and butter', not *butter and bread. First make two-word phrases joined by 'and' using these words and then complete the expressions below using each of the phrases once:

- hither fro wide low down now thither here up to high far
1. I've searched but I can't find my wallet anywhere.
 2. I've been very busy recently because we've had to go to the hospital every day to see my grandmother.
 3. Sit down for a moment. There's no point in just running, that's not getting you anywhere. Stop and think for a moment.
 4. I do go to the cinema....., but not very often.
 5. I'm not waiting any longer. I want the matter sorted out
 6. People come from for help.

season price opinion spirits house time priority

Exercise 2: *Sentence heads*

The first part of each sentence in List 1 can be completed with all the examples in one of the groups of endings given in List 2. Match the beginnings with the endings.

List 1

1. I'm wondering

List 2

- a. to concentrate.
- b. to remember where I put them.
- c. quite pleased with myself.
- d. a bit off colour.
- e. more confident than I did.

2. I'm trying

3. I'm feeling.
 - a. what I can do about it.
 - b. nothing yet!
 - c. the best I can.
 - d. what we can do about it.
4. I'm doing
 - a. if it will make any difference.
 - b. if anyone knows yet.

Can you think of a situation where you would say each of the twelve sentences? Choose one of them and write a short dialogue so that one of the people in the dialogue says exactly the sentence you have chosen.

Exercise 3: *Expressions*

Which word in each group means something different from all the others?

1. You look a bit
 - a. worried
 - b. under pressure
 - c. stressed
 - d. anxious
 - e. off colour
2. I've just had a bit of very news.
 - a. exciting
 - b. disappointing
 - c. good
 - d. encouraging
 - e. welcome
3. I've it, but I haven't had a chance to read it properly yet.
 - a. looked through
 - b. examined
 - c. glanced at
 - d. flicked through
 - e. had a quick look at
4. Getting upset isn't going to help.
 - a. Calm down!
 - b. Take it easy!
 - c. Keep your hair on!
 - d. Pay attention!

Exercise 4: *De-lexicalised verbs*

- Complete each of these with 'point', 'a point', 'the point', 'points':
1. I don't see of waiting any longer.
 2. I'm sorry but you've completely missed of what I was saying.
 3. Can you make of checking the date with her, please?
 4. You've got there. I didn't think of that.
 5. Let me give an example to illustrate
 6. OK, it's expensive, but that is beside
 7. Spelling is not my strong

Exercise 5: *Fixed expressions in classroom discussion*

These fixed expressions show disagreements of different kinds. Match each expression in List 1 with a meaning in List 2:

List 1

1. That's not the point.
2. That's not what I said at all.
3. That's hardly my fault.

List 2

- a. I am annoyed because you're misrepresenting my ideas.
- b. I refuse to accept the responsibility for that.
- c. Don't argue with me about something

4. That's nothing to do with me. d. Don't introduce irrelevant arguments.
 5. That's a ridiculous suggestion. e. I'm so annoyed I can't think of a reasonable response, so I just reject what you say.

I'm not responsible for.

Activity 1: Text search

Underline in different colours the following kinds of chunks in the text:

- completely fixed expressions
- Adjective - Noun collocations
- expressions with a verb (e.g. get)
- expressions which show the discursal meaning of the next sentence/paragraph

Activity 2: Word dominoes

Learners make up domino chains, whose building blocks are cards with mixed up halves of adjective-noun or verb-noun collocations.

Activity 3: Fixed expressions

Learners try to answer the following set of questions:

- For each of the following expressions, can you guess:
 Who said it? - a man, a woman, a child, someone with a special job, etc.
 Where is was said? Why it was said?
 What had just happened or been said immediately before the expression?
 What was the response - the next thing someone else said or did?
 Don't worry - I'll pick you up; It's the sort of thing you think can never happen to you; Can I give you a hand?; Not tonight, I've got a headache.

Apart from the exercise specifically designed to provide lexical focus, some traditional techniques can also be adapted for lexical practice. Some contemporary writers (Nattinger, Lewis), for example, argue in favour of using drills in a slightly modified version in teaching lexis, claiming, that they do have value in teaching institutionalised utterances, formulaic expressions and routines. Such units are often quite long and complex and learners find it difficult to handle them comfortably in language use. Lexical phrase drills are to help learners segment longer chunks into smaller, more manageable bits, gradually recombine and produce them with appropriate pronunciation, stress and intonation patterns. Repeating an item a number of times, preferably in a variety of ways - aggressively,

confidently or doubtfully, etc., in meaningful contexts may contribute to students' fluency and confidence in using these items in more communicative tasks.

Another well-known activity that can be used for highlighting and practising multi-word combinations is that of a cloze procedure, i.e. completing a gapped text, from which every 'n'th word is missing. Lewis (1993) believes, that the utility of this kind of practice with respect to lexis, will be increased if the individual words deleted from a listening or reading passage, are not random, but are parts of fixed collocations, beginnings or endings of institutionalised expressions, lexical markers of discourse cohesion or whole sentences of identifiable pragmatic meaning. Slightly modified cloze can help the learners not only to test their memory and global knowledge of the language, but it also encourages 'noticing' of complex lexical units in texts.

Finally and most importantly, lexical practice is necessarily closely linked with listening, reading, speaking and writing activities and as such it will include tasks based on skill integration and genuine communication. Through co-operative or competitive activities focusing on fluency and involving students' personalities, such as games, quizzes, problem-solving tasks, jigsaws, sketches, simulations, role-plays, interviews, discussions or projects, learners are stimulated to make full use of their lexical resources in order to achieve specific non-linguistic aims - winning in a competition, gathering missing pieces of information, solving a mystery or arriving at a joint decision in a controversial case. Awareness raising receptive tasks are indispensable for the necessary analytical reflection upon the language, more or less controlled pen-and-paper exercises are important as they focus students' attention on a particular selected aspect of lexis, but it is through the actual execution of lexical choices in creative, spontaneous and purposeful use of language, that learners truly experience and readily appreciate the communicative power of complex lexical items.

The research into the lexical structure of language has by no means been yet completed and hopefully more information will soon be available to influence background theories assisting language learning. Further investigation is necessary into the characteristics of lexical items, their individual grammars, degrees of variability, functions in discourse and frequency of occurrence in different text-types in order to provide more accurate descriptions of items and devise more systematic and consistent categorisations within the phrasal lexicon. In practical terms, such inquiry is likely to help to define the criteria underlying the selection of lexical items for teaching and inform teachers' decisions about the most effective methods of teaching those items to different groups of students in different learning environments.

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