

The Treatment of Lexis in the Japanese University Classroom: Classroom Analysis

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Introduction

This study is the second part of an analysis of the current English teaching apparatus in Japan with regard to the teaching of lexis. The first study published in the March 2006 edition of the Fukuoka University Humanities Review highlighted the current trend of focusing on vocabulary and explored the rationale behind The Lexical Approach.

The initial analysis included a review of the Lexical Approach and assessed the benefits of presenting lexical items in 'chunks' in the classroom. It also looked at how vocabulary was retained and examined the area of consciousness raising activities in the classroom. It was suggested that this could improve students' ability to use the language. and a useful method of gauging the effectiveness of vocabulary teaching would be to examine the textbooks being used by teachers

Consequently, in this second study the Japanese classroom is analyzed through the inspection of popular textbooks with a particular focus on how

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lexis is taught. Secondly the dissertation considers the benefits of using the Lexical Approach in the classroom and analyzes its validity.

Chapter 1 Analysis of current materials

1.1 Aim of the analysis

As mentioned in the first part of the study many books seem to carry more of an interest factor in vocabulary rather than meaningfully addressing students' productive skills, an approach which was found to be ineffective. Maybe then we should be looking at how lexis is dealt with in the classroom. Too often it would seem that vocabulary teaching is impulsive in that lexical items appear irrespective of the chosen activity and then teachers only focus on the semantics of individual words, often satisfied with giving a limited definition which to their mind satisfies the students' needs but does not involve the wider aspects as emphasized by the Lexical Approach namely fixed expressions, lexical collocations and idiomatic set phrases. The methods used by teachers often tend to focus on teaching students vocabulary that will help them pass tough entrance exams for universities and later companies. Therefore the vocabulary is often learned as an unrelated set of items in a list, seldom used and probably soon forgotten. Consequently, teachers are often testing a student's ability to memorize and regurgitate rather than meaningfully communicate.

In recent years though, one of the directives issued by the Japanese Ministry of Education from junior high school through to university level is that students should be communicatively able. However meaningful guidance as to how this can be facilitated or ultimately achieved is not

really given. A good example would be Ando (1998) which is a text for all high school students. Although the introduction states that through the book students should be able to acquire basic communication skills, it does not really demonstrate how this can be achieved. Lexis is presented as a list to be memorized and not necessarily shown in context. Therefore it seems fair to say that teachers are being presented with the aim of making students fluent in English without being given the vehicle or method. From informal discussions with Japanese high school teachers, it would seem that the norm is often to read the written texts aloud with the students and then afterwards conduct the exercises presented at the end.

1.2 Textbook content and methods

To provide justification for the Lexical Approach one would need to analyze the current materials being used to see if they were fulfilling students' lexical needs. Inevitably no two teachers teach in an identical manner and the treatment of lexis will vary from teacher to teacher. Having said that publishers in Japan do have recommended texts published in Japan for use at the university level which they suggest using with students in the EFL classroom and many teachers, especially those who have little EFL training and a limited knowledge of EFL texts, do adhere to these recommended texts. By analyzing some of the texts I will attempt to ascertain the need for the Lexical Approach.

I have analyzed 3 textbooks recommended for first or second year non-English majors. These are books that according to Kinokuniya Bookstore, have high sales figures therefore they can offer a valuable insight into the learning practices and language difficulties that students have. I also chose

these books due to their popularity with Japanese English teachers that I have spoken to. I feel by choosing such texts they are more likely to be indicative of what is occurring in Japanese classrooms on a larger scale. Also they have different ways of treating lexis so there can be a useful element of contrast in the analysis.

In analyzing the treatment of lexis I have decided to classify the tasks in the books according to two main issues:

- 1) What type of knowledge does the student need to accomplish the task? i.e. before embarking on the task what knowledge needs to be already learned and also what can the students learn from accomplishing the task successfully.
- 2) How does the task treat the lexis? In other words how does the task benefit the students and to what extent is it effectively raising their consciousness.

Lewis in the Lexical Approach deems that certain types of lexical construction are important to the learning process and thus I have further categorized the exercises into the following five groups:

- 1) *Fixed expressions and idioms*. These are phrases which are structurally fixed and semantically opaque. Examples of these would be 'have a go' 'From my point of view' 'Despite the odds' 'As honest as the day is long'
- 2) *Lexical Collocations*. These are word associations or word partnerships which consist of content words like nouns adjectives and verbs.

- Examples would be 'heavy smoker', 'pass a test', 'light reading'.
- 3) *Lexically dependent patterns*. These are word associations which have very influential or grammatical words such as prepositions or grammatical structures such as verb +ing or which-clauses. Examples would be: 'wait for', 'enjoy +ing form of the verb' 'bad at'
 - 4) *Features of individual words*. This category focuses on the characteristics of particular words such as antonyms, synonyms, and variations, things that will associate that word with other words. Therefore examples are: panic-calm, honest-honesty, lack of food-famine
 - 5) *Grammatical rules*. This category deals with restrictions governing language like word order, tenses and use of articles. Examples of these are: 'Your license has been revoked' (*passive*) and 'If I had known you were coming I would have cooked dinner' (3rd conditional)

When Lewis emphasizes his idea of chunking he is primarily dealing with the first three categories. These are the three categories, which he deems to be paramount for achieving competence in the target language, and are the three areas that I too, often find have been ignored by teachers and therefore students have little awareness of.

As mentioned earlier Lewis does promote translation in the classroom and suggests that far from hindering the learning process effective and considered translation can draw students' attention to similarities in language between L1 and L2. However I have not focused in detail on the

issue of translation in the analysis since they tend to be somewhat omnipresent in Japanese English textbooks. That is to say that invariably texts and instructions are uniformly translated into Japanese and do not seem to be lexically focused in a way that would assist language learning.

1.3 Examples from the textbooks

Below are some examples from the textbooks, which fitted the various categories:

- 1) *Fixed Expressions including idioms.* In Allan (2004, 81) there was a gap fill exercise.
 - a) "He's looking _____ to going to Hawaii."
 - b) "When he met her, it was love at _____ sight."
- 2) *Lexical Collocations.* Uesugi, Itoh, and Godfrey, (2000, 33) had an exercise where students had to choose the correct word.
 - a) "I heard the /echo/ beat/ thump/ of my voice in the cave."
 - b) "She showed me her generosity/ happiness/ servitude by giving me the last piece of cake."
- 3) *Grammatical Collocations* In Papa et al. (2004, 107) there was an exercise requiring students to modify the verb.
 - a) "I remember (meet) him last year."
 - b) "I hope (move) to Greece next summer,"
- 4) *Features of Individual words.* Students have to give the antonyms of words such as *consent* and the verb forms of nouns such as *proposal*.
- 5) *Grammatical Rules.* Students have to choose the correct form.

"If I had seen her, I /say/ *would say/ would have said/* "Hello"

1.4 Analysis of the Categorization

Interestingly, on average lexis related items accounted for 73% of the activities in the books as opposed to 27% for grammar. On the surface it would seem that lexis is being given in-depth attention. However this becomes less true when one regards how lexis is being treated.

In Uesugi, Itoh, and Godfrey, (2000) 77% of the exercises analyzed grammar and required some kind of grammatical translation. Consequently only 23% of the book looked at lexical features of the language. This textbook is extremely popular and therefore could be deemed to be fairly representative of how English is traditionally treated in the classroom i.e. looking at a grammatical structure and translating it. The textbooks Papa et al. (2004) and Allan (2004) fared better with a respective 67% and 64% of exercises dealing with lexical features of English.

However all of the textbooks have shortcomings if one looks at the type of lexis they are dealing with. Allan (2004) looks at fixed expressions and lexically dependant patterns but ignores collocation completely. Papa, et al. (2004) is similar in that while it does not ignore collocation completely it has a very limited selection of collocations. While Uesugi, Itoh, and Godfrey (2000) only look at lexically dependent patterns and nothing else. In short all of the textbooks can be said to be failing the students in terms of giving sufficient and varied lexical input. The predominance of grammar related exercises also underlines the fact that in Japan the emphasis is still very much on citing grammar rules and explaining them with related exercises as a teaching method. Most of the exercises concern manipulating

grammar constructions to obtain different sentences and little attention is given to the lexical features of phrases. An example from Allan (2004, 58) is :

'He drinks wine. He eats dinner.'

Connect the above sentences and make one sentence

In the above example the student only needs to focus on using the correct linking phrase *when* which has just been heard in a listening comprehension and this task is repeated ten times. It is very much a grammatical focus. The activity does not require students to think about other variations or lexical features and is extremely repetitious and of limited effectiveness since once the pattern is identified the student does not even need to read the two sentences. The only requirement is to insert *when* in the middle of the sentence.

That is not to say that lexis is being completely ignored since Papa, M et al. (2004) and Allan (2004) both seem to put more emphasis on lexis with 67% of exercises in Papa, M et al. (2004) concerning lexis rather than grammar. However most of the exercises in the book dealing with lexis look at the meanings of individual words such as antonyms and synonyms. While these are useful they do not really give much of an insight into lexical patterns or how the language is constructed and consequently how to use the words in suitable phrases. Also they are not necessarily as memorable as phrases, which students can compare to their L1.

This seems to be a common feature of Japanese teaching with popular books like Kanai et al., (1995) giving the meanings of individual useful words that they recommend students learn. Collocation seems to receive

scant attention too with Papa et al. (2004) being the only one, which attempts to teach collocation. An example would be when they highlight the question "*Would you like some tea?*" in a listening comprehension. They also indicate to students how *some tea* can be used in similar phrases

Table 1

Would you like	some tea (?)
Let's have	
Come and have	
May I offer you	
How about having	
Why don't you have	

However although it does focus to an extent on a useful collocation, apart from being asked to repeat the phrases twice there is no effective means for instilling this collocation. Simply repeating the phrases is not a way that will effectively raise students' consciousness. Therefore I feel that these would not be collocation exercises of the type advocated by Lewis, however they are the closest that I could find in the book. To make such an activity useful for the learner it should look at combinations with alternative lexis and maybe ask students to decide which combinations were possible or probable.

A better example of an exercise that can assist students in becoming more aware of collocation can be found in Redman (1997, 79). The practice exercises with *make* and *do* show lots of vocabulary where students have to place nouns, for example: *homework, research, noise, a success of something, the shopping, a plan* .into the correct categories depending on

whether they are preceded by *do* or *make* or both. Such an exercise actually makes students think about the language and what they may have heard before or what may sound like natural English.

An area which does seem to receive broad attention is that of fixed expressions. All of the textbooks examine this area in some depth therefore it might seem rather strange that although Japanese learners are often able to understand them if I use them in classroom conversations, they are unable to implement these in their own speech.

However on further analysis of the textbooks there seems to be ambiguity on the part of the writers as to what exactly they are presenting. So in a gap fill the focus seems to be on filling gaps and the points to be practiced lexically could randomly be fixed expressions, individual words or grammatical collocation. This lack of coherence may cause confusion for learners too and may be why they are unable to transform a passive knowledge of fixed expressions into an active one. This seems to emphasize Gairns point that what to teach is not the only consideration but how to teach too. Simply devoting time to lexis and including it in the classroom does not automatically mean that students will be able to have a more active knowledge of lexis. This knowledge needs to be implemented effectively and triggered into being used.

1.5 How are the lexical elements analyzed in the activities?

As mentioned previously I posed two questions, the first looking at the kinds of knowledge required to complete the exercises in the textbooks, and secondly how the lexical elements are looked at in the exercises. This would seem to have major implications for language acquisition since as stated

earlier lexis is a vast subject, which makes it impossible for teachers to give students the complete 'picture' or the completed construction. Therefore we need to give students the framework or the building blocks, that is to say raise their consciousness as to the relevance of lexical elements so that they themselves can acquire the necessary language for everyday use.

As mentioned previously, the books by Papa et al. (2004) and Allan (2004) had more of an emphasis on teaching lexis so I have decided to focus on these two books. To analyze them in the context of achieving the goals of the lexical approach I have examined both the consciousness raising aspects and non-consciousness raising aspects to highlight how effective these may be for the students.

Traditional non-consciousness raising activities include practising taught structures, gapfills, transformation or choosing correct answers in highly contrived or set phrases modeled by the teacher with the hope that students will remember what they have practiced. With consciousness-raising activities the idea is that the targets are merely illustrated through classifying, hypothesizing and comparing L1 and L2 by the teacher and the ambiguity of lexis is not only explored but also accepted. The idea that there may not be a correct answer at the end is considered acceptable.

1.6 Results of the analysis

Papa et al. (2004) had 37 exercises, which dealt with lexical features, and Allan (2004) had 23 but none of them really addressed the issue of consciousness raising. The overwhelming majority of exercises were gap fills of one word or transformation. There was no activity which pushed students to think about the wider picture and how the same language could be used in

other contexts. For all intents and purposes the exercises instill in students the academic nature of language and aside from completing the exercises in question, the lexis does not really have a usefulness or real word validity. A typical example of an exercise from the book would be in Allan (2004, 53) where students have to complete fixed expressions by inserting the missing word for example,

"He's looking _____ to going to Hawaii."

In such an activity the only requirement on the part of the learner is to be able to use the expression in this one situation and it may soon be forgotten since there is no real test of a wider knowledge or an ability to link it to other contexts. Collocation is not addressed at all and students do not need to make any links with other phrases. Therefore the usefulness of the exercises can be considered to be somewhat limited.

After analyzing these books I began to realize why my students may often look at the meaning of individual words and not at whole phrase meanings. In the books each item of vocabulary is presented separately and no patterns are established. *Looking forward to* is presented in the same exercise as *flew into a rage* with no real connection between the expressions. The aim it would seem is to establish learners' ability to memorize expressions rather than aiding them to reflect on language and draw their own conclusions. The danger with this as highlighted by Lewis is that learners will not be able to transform the lexis they have learned in a limited scope to authentic dialogue. Whether subconsciously or consciously learners need to be able to analyze the language to expand their own lexical

knowledge.

So overall it would be fair to say that as far as achieving the goals of the Lexical Approach and teaching lexis efficiently is concerned, the current materials that are being used in many Japanese university classrooms are not sufficient for the purposes of enabling students to achieve the goal of engaging in meaningful communication. As has been highlighted, learners are not being supplied with an adequate breadth of lexis, and collocation a key feature of language production, is not being sufficiently addressed. Too much emphasis is placed upon an ability to memorize and imitate rather than an ability to analyze language and make conclusions. The idea of consciousness raising hardly features in the materials and therefore learners are not being encouraged to engage in further discovery outside the classroom.

It would seem to me that while the choice of topics may be changing to include more interesting and relevant ones, the methodology is essentially still rather archaic. Therefore in the next part I will suggest better materials and activities, which may be more useful in the classroom.

Chapter 2 Suggested Activities and Materials

2.1 Using existing materials

As mentioned earlier the current content, use and implementation of the textbooks that have been analyzed is inadequate for effective learning and learners' consciousness are not being raised to become aware of collocations, patterns and phrases thus the materials are failing to meet the students needs. There seems to be two possible solutions to this problem.

The first would be to modify the current materials and use them in a way which would be more useful for students. The second is to discard the current texts and adopt completely new materials such as those being published by many U.K based EFL publishers. I will address each of these solutions in turn and analyze their possible merits.

If one is to make use of the existing materials the issue of collocation is integral to the adaptation of the materials. As Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) say we do not know words in isolation but as prefabricated chunks and without addressing the issue of collocation students cannot become aware of the existence of these chunks. Lewis highlights the effectiveness of L1 comparisons in the classroom and an interesting aspect of English teaching in Japan is that from analyzing the textbooks and also from conversations with Japanese colleagues, it would seem that in many Japanese teachers' classrooms translation is practiced and encouraged.

However on closer scrutiny it would seem that they are being tested on individual words and not being made aware of effective cross language comparisons of phrases and patterns which could raise their consciousness. With most translation exercises the only requirement on the part of students is to translate individual items of vocabulary into Japanese. This is conducted without any guidance as to semantic limitations or phrasal construction. This method is particularly unhelpful when dealing with idioms since although idioms can have similar meanings often there are differing limitations as to the contexts they can be used in.

A more useful exercise would be to explain new idioms in the target language within the context of authentic dialogue and then give students the Japanese equivalents and ask them to translate them back into English.

Effective cross language comparison would also address the area of collocation. My students do sometimes try to translate collocations, however it seems to be in a haphazard fashion and without being aware of the restrictions of collocations i.e. what can be collocated and what cannot be said.

An example would be in Papa, et Al. (2004)

A girl says to her boyfriend "Thanks love" for helping her with a task. Directly translated into Japanese, this expression could only be used in the context of an intimate relationship, however in English it can also be used (and maybe more likely) between strangers such as an older female cashier speaking to a younger man.

Essentially, restrictions of collocations differ then between English and Japanese and students need to discover this for themselves. Maybe a way to make them more aware of this is to allow them to reflect upon collocations in their own language and the extent to which they can be translated into English. Kasuya (2000) in her analysis of English and Japanese lexis highlights the word *dream* and describes how she encourages students to look for collocations of the Japanese equivalent *yume* in Japanese-Japanese dictionaries and list their findings. This is very much in line with Lewis's theory of the relevance of L1 and that using dictionaries effectively makes students more responsible for their own learning.

After this she encourages learners to examine similarities between collocations of *dream* in English and *yume* in Japanese and then students once again are required to record the similarities and differences as seen below:

Table 2 A learners' list of collocations of "*yume (dream)*"

"<i>yume (dream)</i>" + particle + verb	Meaning in English
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • yume + wo + kanaeru (realize) • yume + wo + ou (chase) • yume + wo + miru (see) • yume + wo + egaku (draw) • yume + ga + kowareru (break) • yume + ga + sameru (sober up) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • realize a dream • chase a dream • have a dream • have a dream • lose a dream • come out of a dream

"<i>yume (dream)</i>" + noun	Meaning in English
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • yume + maboroshi (vision) • yume + utsutsu (reality) • yume + makura (pillow) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • something fragile or fleeting • a situation where someone cannot distinguish if it is a dream or reality • to be at the bedside of a sleeping person

As can be seen from the table above, some expressions such as *realize a dream* or *chase a dream* are similar in both languages. However there are many collocations in Japanese which do not transfer in an identical fashion to English. In English one says '*have a dream*' while Japanese say '*see a dream*' or '*draw a dream*'. Also Japanese has many fixed expressions where dream (*yume*) is followed by a single noun while we often use a much wordier phrase to describe the same situation.

She concluded that after this kind of activity, her students' consciousness of collocational restrictions had been raised and they started to pay more attention to other collocations in English. I feel that this method has many merits and could be effective. However I did notice that *dream* and *yume*

had many similar collocations, even though Kasuya cites the Japanese *break a dream* being very different from the English *lose a dream*, I still think it could be translated by *shatter a dream*.

The similarity between the two verbs could make students believe that most Japanese collocations translate into English quite succinctly which is not necessarily the case. Therefore I decided to use the words *look* and the Japanese equivalent *miru* which are used extremely frequently in their respective languages but are used in very different ways. When one sees the word *look* in the textbook it is an opportunity to highlight that its collocations in English are quite distinct from Japanese. Since many students now have electronic dictionaries, I first ask them to look at the Japanese-Japanese section and find the different collocations of *miru* and instinctively translate them into English then ask them to compare their findings and rank them from those that sound very likely to those that sound highly improbable. This leads them to realize that while *miru* can be used for most collocations involving the function of sight e.g. television, paintings, football matches etc, in English we use not only *look* but also *see* and *watch*. Although often already aware of these words the difference with analyzing them through the dictionaries is that learners also begin to realize that not only are the restrictions quite distinct in that we cannot often interchange *look* and *watch* but importantly they also start to understand the arbitrary nature of language and how sometimes ambiguity is something one has to accept. I have often heard teachers go into convoluted explanations about how *look* is for stationary objects like paintings while *watch* is for moving activities and *see* for involuntary activities. But ultimately I feel while we can give students examples of

tendencies, we can give no real satisfactory answer as to why we can say, "Did you see/watch that programme?" but not "Did you look that programme?" "Watch my stuff for me please" not "Look at my stuff for a while."

It's an area where students are often given a myriad of reasons for the different choices but ultimately it may be better for them to study examples and formulate their own understanding much like we do as native speakers.

2.2 Categorizing lexis according to meaning

Another useful activity which may serve to heighten learners' consciousness, is to classify words according to patterns. A typical way of doing this has been to classify verbs, which have a particular grammatical pattern, but another useful way is for students to classify them according to meaning so that they possess a range of verbs suitable for different situations.

A useful way of creating such activities can be found in Francis, Manning and Hunston, (1997, 130). In the *Collins Co-build Verbs*, verbs are categorized according to patterns and meanings. Thus verbs are divided into those which are followed by *of* + a noun or *of* + *ing*. Teachers can present students with a selection of verbs taking this pattern then ask them to further divide them according to their meaning. They can be given the meanings and then asked to compile a table something like this:

Table 3

Meaning	Example
1. verbs indicating that a person is engaged in speech	<i>boast, speak, tell, complain, talk, warn</i>
2. verbs indicating someone's thoughts or opinions	<i>approve, despair, dream, conceive, disapprove, think</i>
3. verbs indicating someone has knowledge of something	<i>hear, know, learn</i>
4. verbs indicating taste or smell	<i>smell, taste</i>
5. additional common verbs	<i>come, consist, die, dispose, tire</i>

Such activities make learners more aware of the fact that patterns often relate to meaning and in authentic situations when they are unable to comprehend lexis they may be able to make an educated guess from analyzing the pattern.

Inevitably the problem that I find with such activities is that they are rather academic in nature and require a slightly academic mind. It may be worth remembering that for many learners the activities could probably be made more meaningful if they were more kinesthetic or visual in nature.

2.3 Implementing new methods and materials

As mentioned at the beginning of this section there were two possibilities, the quick fix option to adapt the materials that are presently being used and the second option which maybe slightly more daunting or unrealistic, to use completely new materials. Personally, I much prefer the second option, which is to use a book like *Innovations* (Dellar and Hocking, 2000).

Without wanting to be culturally biased I find that too many of the books being used in Japanese classrooms contain task directions in Japanese, translations of whole texts and exercises that do not make the lexis meaningful. This seems to be accepted as almost inevitable with many educators deeming low-levels of ability and motivation as valid justification.

Hill (1999, 137) explains that most learners with "good vocabularies" have problems with fluency because their "collocational competence" is very limited. This is especially true in Japan where often students have a large receptive vocabulary but lack the ability to engage in the most basic communication. Therefore another task I try to accomplish with my students is to transform their receptive vocabulary items into productive ones. Furthermore in order to do that, I aim to refine their understanding of the items being taught, exploring boundaries between conceptual meaning, polysemy, synonymy, style, register, possible collocations, etc., so that students are able to use the item accurately.

One observation I have made in the classroom is that a lexical item is most likely to be learned when a learner feels a personal need to know it, or when there is a need to express something to accomplish the learner's own purposes. Therefore, the decision to incorporate a word in one's productive vocabulary is entirely personal and varies according to each student's motivation and needs.

Logically, production will depend on motivation, and this is what teachers should aim at promoting, based on their awareness of students needs and preferences. Task-based learning should help teachers to provide authentic,

meaningful tasks in which students engage to achieve a concrete output, using appropriate language for the context.

Teachers can also reflect upon the language themselves and create lessons, which they feel could be more interesting and meaningful for the students. Martinez in Lewis (1997, 147) highlights how *get* is an underused words by students and that dictionaries often give a vague definition of *get* which is not very helpful to students.

He therefore proposes a lesson using pictures and different *get* expressions to encourage students to become more aware of the verb and its various collocations and uses.

As mentioned earlier the issue of probable vs. improbable language awareness is integral to the learning process and often instead of *get* I have often heard students use alternatives, which although grammatically correct were improbable and did not quite fit the situation and were not equivalent to a native speakers expressions. Instead of *get told off*, I have heard students say, "He was scolded" While strictly speaking correct, it tends to convey the image of a public school master reprimanding an errant pupil. Instead of *get arrested* I have heard students say "He was taken away by the police last night". While one can understand the meaning, it conjures up images of authoritarian governments and people disappearing in a sinister round up.

I took this a step further and devised a picture story involving myself and other members of the class. Students were firstly required to take coloured cards (blue or red) depending on whether they knew the expression or not. So if the knew *get arrested* then they would select it from the blue cards, if they did not then they selected it from the red cards. They then had a few

minutes in which to explain to each other the various meanings or seek help for those they did not know. The third step involved them matching the verbs to different parts of the picture story and retelling the story using the *get* expressions. After practicing these in various ways, they undertook a milldrill (Kay, 2000) where they had a slip of paper saying for example "Last night I drank too much alcohol" To which someone had to reply with the correct *get* expression in a suitable sentence "Oh I see, you got drunk!"

A lesson like this I found helped the learners to identify and examine the lexis by themselves and become aware of the issues involved with language. I found that it also allowed them to become aware of the importance of 'lexical chunks' of language rather than individual words. *Get* was the overall focus of the lesson and students concentrated on this and noticeably did not ask why we used *up* in *get beaten up*, they began to simply accept the importance of phrases and the ambiguity. Ultimately such a lesson involving everyday language emphasizes to them that language is learned to be used and not simply for academic purposes. I feel that once their consciousness has been raised in this manner, it can form a basis for their own study. *Get* has a myriad of collocations, which students cannot learn by studying English once a week. They can be introduced to the language and have their consciousness raised by the teacher but the onus is then upon them to further their knowledge and understanding.

2.4 Using a different textbook

While such lessons are extremely beneficial for students, they are time consuming in preparation and a more suitable alternative may be to choose

a book, which adheres more closely to the Lexical Approach and presents the lexis meaningfully.

One such book is *Innovations* (Dellar and Hocking 2000), which in my opinion differs from many other textbooks since it provides a predominantly spoken model of English. Rather than trying to base each unit around a particular grammar structure, the main focus is on kinds of conversations one typically hears everyday and the focus of presentation is on the language students need to engage in those conversations.

In each chapter of the book, students are introduced to fixed expressions, collocation and idioms relating to a theme.

Example "The weekend"

"I had a really hectic weekend", "I got so bored last weekend" "What are you up to this weekend?"

Students also have to use semi fixed expressions and collocations in a freer way to talk about themselves or their own opinions. Grammar is taught but it is dealt with in the context of situations and dialogues. Rules are not given explicitly, rather students' consciousness is raised through inductive activities. Matching is a common activity where students have to match different parts of sentences thereby becoming more aware of chunks and not isolated words, which is often the case when students only have to insert one word into a sentence. After seeing examples, students often have to make their own examples for well thought out everyday situations.

Another effective technique in *Innovations* is the expression organizer whereby students record expressions and their equivalents in their language. Students are also encouraged to store new vocabulary in a

well-organized notebook with expressions divided into categories such as: *phrasal verbs, adjective + noun collocation, idioms involving the body etc.* This makes new vocabulary more meaningful as opposed to simply recording words in a random fashion.

Collocations are stressed and students are taught how to record and translate new expressions in chunks. The issue of ambiguity is also addressed and students are told how meanings change according to situation, as do so-called 'rules'.

There are also many opportunities to raise students' consciousness by highlighting the surrounding language. Even though an activity may focus on a particular structure or task, since the language is presented in a very natural context, teachers have many opportunities to point out surrounding common expressions and one can foster this habit in students too, rather than simply explaining meanings one can ask "*What's the opposite of....?*" "*What other things can be described as.....?*"

These kind of questions are often much more effective than simply explaining since they engage the students more. I also try to personalize the activity by asking them to work in groups and discuss questions such as "*Do you know anyone who has.....?*" "*When was the last time you.....? Where?*"

"Which of the new expressions seems the most/least useful?"

In brief one could say that a textbook such as *Innovations* is teaching the language in a more meaningful and personal way and through its use of authentic materials and advice provides a better learning model for students.

Chapter 3 Conclusion

This study aimed to fulfill two main objectives. Firstly it set out to examine the current state of English teaching in Japan with a particular focus on lexis and analyze the possible reasons for learners' inability to communicate effectively in English. The second objective was to suggest activities, which could remedy the situation and also examine whether the Lexical Approach could solve many of the problems. The ideas behind this dissertation very much hinged upon the theories of Lewis (1993), Willis (1990) and Sinclair (1991). A key feature of this dissertation was its basis upon a chief aspect of the Lexical Approach, the need to raise students' consciousnesses and make them more aware of lexis and take responsibility for their own learning.

To ascertain the current state of English teaching in Japan, exercises from government-authorized textbooks were examined. This was considered effective research, since these publications are currently used nationwide, and therefore most probably have a considerable influence on language teaching in Japanese educational establishments.

The results of the study highlighted some of the real problems with English teaching in Japan. Through analyzing these books it became clear that in many ways vocabulary teaching was not being taught in a very meaningful or memorable way. Items to be highlighted and the way in which the language is presented needs to be rethought if students are to improve their aptitude for communication. There was far too much emphasis on single words and not enough attention given to lexical collocations or other lexical elements. Even when elements which aid fluency such as fixed expressions and lexical patterns were addressed, the subsequent tasks were

generally focused on memorizing rather than consciousness-raising.

The textbooks need to improve in terms of the types of vocabulary they cover. They seem to place too much emphasis on single items of vocabulary and not enough on collocation. When they do cover useful lexical items such as fixed expressions and lexical patterns, they still do not seem to make learners think for themselves and raise their consciousness or encourage learners to discover further for themselves. Sinclair (1990, 83) suggests that by focusing on vocabulary teachers can demonstrate common uses, important meanings and patterns, however it seems that the textbooks in question tend to gloss over significant lexical elements.

Two alternatives were suggested, the first being a makeshift one whereby the current textbooks could be adapted to make their use more effective. Therefore teachers needed to emphasize to students the importance of good notebooks and also point out collocations in the texts and also manipulate the language not just to produce the correct answers but as an extension activity.

Secondly I also suggested creating new activities or using a different textbook such as *Innovations*. This had the advantage of presenting vocabulary in a more meaningful way and encouraging students to consider issues such as collocation and authentic language.

Whichever alternative one chooses the teacher's role is essentially the same and that is rather than the traditional activity of presenting vocabulary and then testing students' ability to retain new lexis, the teacher becomes more of a guide, helping students to discover their own way of learning and making the learning process more personal.

Undoubtedly this dissertation is somewhat limited in scope, the sample of

text books is small and to properly analyze the state of English teaching in Japan would not only require looking at a larger sample of textbooks but also observing teachers and interviewing them at different establishments. Also such books focus primarily on conversation and an analysis of reading and ESP books may have been useful too. Also the activities and textbook I have suggested have been tested solely by myself in my current teaching environment and I although I have garnered other instructors' opinions as to the usefulness of these activities and textbook, they have only been instructors from within my immediate teaching environs. It could therefore be that my regard for the activities and textbook is influenced to a certain extent by my personal preferences, experience and intuition.

Another point to remember is that the three books analyzed were designed for Japanese teachers with an inherent knowledge of Japanese culture. An interesting observation that I have made is how native speakers often have a bias for using textbooks published by native speakers and Japanese teachers tend to use those published by Japanese writers. Being a native speaker, and due to my limited knowledge of the Japanese culture, it may be the case that I view the books differently to how a Japanese teacher might do. However there may still be agreement between as to the merits and faults of a particular text. Also I do not feel being a native speaker prevents me from critically analyzing these books since ultimately they are not achieving their aims.

Also it could be said that the Lexical Approach does seem to have a certain complexity in the implementation that would scare of the novice teacher. A relatively inexperienced teacher may not feel overtly confident about teaching students how to collocate or conduct many of the exercises that

Lewis suggests since I feel they require some knowledge of language structure and classroom dynamics.

Translating into one's own language, idioms and complex expressions may well be beneficial but it could also prove to be too challenging for some less able students and there is no guarantee of accuracy or a failsafe way of cross checking unless the teacher has a solid command of both languages. I have tried a similar method in Japanese, only to be told later that I was not quite right. This was not a problem since as a more experienced teacher I am open to being proved wrong, exploring unknown territory and being subsequently corrected but such grounds of uncertainty could prove daunting for a newly qualified teacher who may need more clarity to build his/her confidence in the classroom.

Another issue is whether raising students' consciousness is solely the role of the teacher. Students have a great responsibility for their own learning. One might expect to a certain extent that motivated students will go beyond the realms of the exercises and aim to manipulate the language for themselves. Much of the Lexical Approach seems to assume that students are keen and motivated to learn. The fact that they are being encouraged to go beyond simple manipulations and identify collocations means that they are being required to think more. It does not seem to have considered the problems one might have with students learning in a compulsory context where they may not be so open to discovering new language. Regardless of however memorable new vocabulary may be, if they only think in English once a week for one hour their progress may still be negligible. Therefore I would say that as far as compulsory education is concerned much more specific research is required.

I also realized from my discussions with various teachers that there are some Japanese teachers who are doing their best to use quality materials in class and try to make vocabulary meaningful and useful. However the means by which they are doing this generally remain largely unsatisfactory. While the materials may be more authentic, simply asking students to memorize and manipulate vocabulary leads to a limited improvement in their communication skills.

It would seem that despite the Ministry of Education's proclamations that developing students' communicative competence should be the key focus in the classroom, without sufficient means or methods this is unlikely to happen. If one truly intends to develop learners' ability to use English, then there needs to be serious reflection on the methodologies that are being applied in the classroom, a frank assessment of the shortcomings and a genuine effort to find solutions. Activities should be more carefully tailored to developing learners' aptitude to examine and analyze the target-lexis as well as their own learning in order to obtain competence in English communication. The haphazard way of treating lexis in the classroom, which has been discussed in this dissertation, can be considered to be one of the major problems in English language classrooms.

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