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Teaching Collocation: Further Developments in

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Teaching Collocation: Further Developments in the Lexical Approach

Michael Lewis (Ed.) (2000)

Hove, England: Language Teaching Publications

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Michael Lewis has compiled a fine collection of papers that enable us to better understand the role of vocabulary. The collection, written by teachers and researchers provides an accessible introduction for those new to the field and for those seeking to enhance their understanding and classroom implementation of the approach. The book shows the central role of vocabulary acquisition in language acquisition and this collection skillfully presents the classroom applications that realize this more important role.

During the 1990s interest in vocabulary teaching and research increased. Paul Nation's (1990) book, *Vocabulary Development*, at the beginning of the decade and proved influential in its inclusive review of research on vocabulary. It provided valuable guidance through interpreting the research in terms of classroom applications. John Sinclair's (1991) book, *Colllocation*, and subsequent concordance studies have revealed new understandings of how

the language. During this same time, Michael Lewis began describing an approach to language teaching that moved vocabulary to the forefront of language teaching in two books, *The Lexical Approach* (Lewis, 1997). [1] This book continues the development of this approach by focusing on collocations.

Collocations might be described as the words that are placed or found together in a predictable combination such as *problem child* to extended combinations such as *He's recovering from surgery*. Collocations comprise much of speech and writing. But there are many more collocations than words, and many more combinations. Consequently, the task of achieving proficiency in a second language is even more complex. Acquisition was thought of in terms of learning words. In addition, grammar rules are too complex. *Teaching Collocation* addresses these problems by providing rationales for teaching collocations and applications that complement the rationales. This book provides teachers with a guide to the importance of doing so.

This collection consists of eleven chapters divided into two sections: in the classroom and classroom applications. The classroom applications examine the basis for working from a theory, how to encourage learner independence, priorities, ways of integrating collocation into a reading and writing course, and numerous other topics. The section comprising background theory includes chapters by Michael Lewis on language teaching approach, materials and resources for teaching collocation, plus Peter Hargreaves's chapter on going beyond collocation concludes the collection by exploring new perspectives.

The classroom chapters present rationales and activities to incorporate teaching collocation in the classroom. The classroom section: teaching-learning dichotomy, learner independence, and noticing. These themes are discussed in the chapter "There is Nothing as Practical as a Good Theory," and included in some form in subsequent chapters. The teaching-learning dichotomy boils down to the fact that learners do not learn what teachers teach and in ways that may or may not match what the teacher does. Consequently, teachers must provide the learner needs to do. Learner independence is emphasized because of the vast amount of collocations. Noticing is the means by which teachers introduce and encourage learners to notice collocations in English. Through noticing learners can develop an appreciation for the range and patterns of collocations and subsequent collocations they encounter in their language studies.

George Woolard's chapter, "Collocation: Encouraging Learner Independence," provides a list of classroom activities to learner independence. He provides guidelines for teachers in what materials are available and what materials are available. Jane Conzett describes how she implemented a second language program that prepares second language learners for academic study. Jimmie Hill describes how using collocations better addresses learning needs while providing more guidelines for teaching collocations. Jimmie Hill, Morgan Lewis, and Michael Lewis, general strategies and specific activities for teaching collocations are described. These chapters help readers see what can be done in the classroom and the importance of using this approach.

Further explanation for the importance of using collocations is provided in the Background first three chapters of this section followed by a chapter on testing from Peter Hargreaves and beyond from Michael Hoey. These chapters reinforce the importance of word combination in teaching and learning a language. Lewis argues that collocations provide a more practical syllabus design than grammar, because grammar provides only the most general rules of some of the variability not captured in the rules, plus providing guidance for language use acceptable, the “we don’t say it that way” situations which arise in the classroom. Hoey reinforces this even further by discussing colligation (grammatical patterns) and semantic prosody (semantic information) to inform instruction. These chapters provide sufficient background to enable the reader to understand the Lexical Approach, plus reinforcing and explaining further the rationales given in the “In the”

While this book makes the approach very attractive, I have reservations about the basis of the book seems to rely on written texts and the majority of the activities are reading and writing, which is one part of learning vocabulary acquisition. It is possible that collocation is the quickest path to a word, such as syntactical, phonological, and form information, but it is not shown in these findings from descriptive linguistics. Lewis addresses criticism about the lack of a learning model, diverging in regards to the importance of noticing, that is, there is a role for explicit instruction. This position is through argument, not through support from second language acquisition, education, or research.

Teaching Collocation provides applicable classroom activities with practical advice for addressing this, including the theoretical discussions. The book not only encourages strategy training but also does this in chapter after chapter. Furthermore, the book gives a suitable option for moving from grammar to collocation; it presents a balanced approach to teaching language structure that will yield more accuracy than has been made against teaching grammar, but little is given to replace it. Communicative activities are provided with accuracy to follow, but little guidance is given in how to achieve this accuracy. The Lexical Approach since collocations can provide increased accuracy in language use, even more than using grammar. The teacher is that of provider, model, and guide: a comfortable role, somewhat like a coach, and the book helps the learners see when they have it right and when they need to adjust.

This book provides some exciting ideas for classroom implementation and does address collocation from both from the perspectives of instructional practices and materials development. It is written for a wide audience and fulfills that purpose well. The activities described, the rationales given, and the reasons to teach and why are very good. I feel comfortable with experimenting with the ideas presented. The activities are reasonable and practical, and I feel comfortable meeting the authors’ challenge of carrying out the Lexical Approach. The book challenges teachers to consider how we are teaching and how to make it better and how to improve. These challenges fulfill my criteria for a good book about teaching.

End Note

[1] *The Lexical Approach* (Lewis, 1993) was reviewed in *TESL-EJ* Vol. 1, No. 2, [R-3](#), August, 1997) was reviewed in *TESL-EJ* Volume 3, No. 1, [R-10](#), November, 1997.

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