

## The lexical approach

### Part One

In order to help your learners, understand the lesson content you will need to break down texts into interactive manageable tasks and involve learners input in predicting, agreeing, disagreeing, asking questions, etc. and the best way for that is to provide functional phrases to help your learners.

Teaching chunks of language to help your learners complete a task follows the beliefs of the lexical approach.

*Read the following text and reflect how much of the lexical approach you use in class to help learners learn vocabulary or information.*

#### **Lexical Approach 1 - What does the lexical approach look like?**

In recent years it has been recognized that native speakers have a large store of lexical chunks (ready-made phrases of 3 - 5 words that are used together) and these help fluency more than having a set of grammar rules and a separate list of vocabulary.

"It is our ability to use lexical phrases that helps us to speak with fluency. This prefabricated speech has both **the advantages of** more efficient retrieval and of allowing speakers (and learners) to direct their attention to the larger structure of the conversation, rather than keeping it narrowly focused on individual words as they are produced" (Nattinger & DeCarrico 1992).

**The basic principle of** the lexical approach, then, is: "Language is grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar" (Lewis 1993). **In other words**, lexis is central in creating meaning, grammar plays a managerial role, telling us what order to put the words and phrases in. **If you accept this** principle then the logical suggestion is that we should spend more time helping learners develop their collection of phrases, and less time on grammatical structures.

Schmitt (2000) adds that 'the mind stores and processes these [lexical] chunks as individual wholes.' The mind can store large amounts of information in long-term memory, so it is much more efficient for the brain to recall a chunk of language as if it were one piece of information. 'Raining cats and dogs' is, therefore, recalled as one piece of information rather than four separate words.

In our view it is not desirable, to attempt to 'teach' an unlimited number of lexical chunks. But, it is beneficial for language learners to gain exposure to lexical chunks and to gain experience in analyzing those chunks to begin the process of internalization. We believe, like Lewis, that encouraging learners to notice language, specifically lexical chunks and collocations, **is vital to** help them acquire English more efficiently.

Adapted from: <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/articles/lexical-approach-1-what-does-lexical-approach-look>