

THE EFFECT OF THE LEXICAL APPROACH

THE EFFECT OF THE LEXICAL APPROACH ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF ORAL
PROFICIENCY

By

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NOTA DE RESPONSABILIDAD

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THE EFFECT OF THE LEXICAL APPROACH

Abstract

This research paper brings forward a general overview of the Lexical Approach proposed by Michael Lewis (1993) as an alternative to grammar based methods. Moreover, it also includes some theories associated with second language acquisition, communicative competence and more specifically some notions aimed at phrasal verbs idiomatic expression and collocations. This approach has also put an emphasis on the significance of lexis and its components (e. g., words, collocations, phrasal verbs, and chunks) which cast light on the relevance of those components as they are connected with oral language proficiency fluency and accuracy. Finally the Lexical Approach also comprises the role of materials and the importance of adjusting foreign language methodology and language content so as to promote learning from a lexical view of the language.

Keywords: lexical approach, collocations, communicative competence, phrasal verbs and idioms.

Resumen

Esta investigación presenta un resumen del Enfoque Léxico propuesto por Michael Lewis (1993) como una alternativa a los métodos cuyo énfasis se basa en la gramática. Además, también incluye algunas teorías relacionadas con la adquisición del lenguaje, competencia comunicativa, y más específicamente algunas nociones sobre verbos compuestos, expresiones idiomáticas y colocaciones. El enfoque léxico también ha puesto énfasis en la relevancia del léxico y sus componentes (e. g., palabras, colocaciones, verbos compuestos y cadenas de palabras) que están relacionados con la aptitud en el idioma para comunicarse de manera oral, la exactitud y la fluidez. Finalmente, en el enfoque léxico también comprende el rol de los materiales, la importancia de adaptar la metodología de un idioma extranjero, el contenido de un idioma para promover el aprendizaje de un idioma de un punto de vista léxico

Palabras clave: enfoque léxico, colocaciones, competencia comunicativa, verbos compuestos y expresiones idiomáticas.

The Effect of the Lexical Approach on the Development of Oral Proficiency

This research paper presents a general overview of the effect of the Lexical Approach on oral proficiency in second language teaching. One of the main reasons of a vital significance to dedicate a whole study to this subject is the fact related to the role of vocabulary in the acquisition/learning process; indeed, it can affect to some extent the student's oral proficiency, or speaker's language competence. Thus, Michael Lewis (1975) stated that vocabulary or lexis is the main component of a language, since it contains a large amount of words that have their own rules of combination, taxonomy, and specific functions in language. Finally, the bulk of this research paper will focus upon some basic issues in describing vocabulary, oral proficiency and some suggestions for its implementation in a foreign language setting like ours.

General Overview about Vocabulary

Language is a system consisted of a series of elements which create small systems and subsystems organizing those components. Indeed, it is plausible to state that vocabulary has been a subpart of language; however it has lost its predominance in second language learning and teaching. Nevertheless, in recent years there has been a renewed interest in vocabulary and studying the reasons why it was neglected.

The first reason why vocabulary has been overlooked one is related to the implementation of mechanistic language teaching methods in the past century. According to Seal (1991), there was once a period when vocabulary teaching and research was highly reputable since it involved a great deal of direct vocabulary in teaching and learning. Nonetheless, during a period of time described as the age of methods, foreign languages were taught through the implementation of the grammar translation method, the silent way method or commonly known as the total

immersion, Gouin's series techniques and ultimately the comparative method proposed by Becker in 1970. As a result of the application of those methods, language was taught in order to enable learners to know grammatical structures and read. By that time, vocabulary was taught without a real context through endless word lists with translation. In spite of knowing the systems, subsystems, and elements of the language; learners were unable to communicate fluently.

The second reason why vocabulary was neglected is the influence of contrastive analysis hypothesis from 1960 to 1970s. Lado (1957) claimed that "those elements which are similar will be the simplest to learn and those that are different will be difficult to learn and master" (Lado, 1957:2). Consequently, he suggested systematic sets of technical procedures for the contrastive study of the languages. This involved description, comparison, and knowledge of predictable patterns for a contrastive study. Subsequently, he stated that vocabulary had to be explained and taught with translation since it was the easiest way to learn and remember it. Thus, the knowledge of two different linguistic systems became a drawback since it was very difficult to match up words in the native language and in the target language as well.

The third reason is appertained to the fact that grammar became relevant in the teaching of a foreign language, as long as language was seen as a structure formed by a hierarchal systems and subsystems (Saussure, 1911). Each system had many units which shared some characteristics making an internal structure from simple to complex. The fourth reason for the oversight of vocabulary in L2 instruction was a period of time in which, there was a change in the methodology and application of new strategies which led to draw a significant conclusion, in this case that a huge/large amount of time had been devoted to teaching and learning vocabulary without obtaining significant results. In short, the best was not to teach vocabulary since it

caused some confusion and failure in communication. Besides, Richards and Renandya (2002) stated that vocabulary in language programmes has received almost no attention.

The fifth motive was the difficulty in the assessment of the learners' progress bearing in mind it was far more complex to trace and to test, the nature and progression of the learners' semantic network and internal cognitive systems, in other words interlanguage. Maiguashca (1984) noted that there were some weaknesses in the traditional methodology and practice of vocabulary teaching since there was insufficient research in lexical acquisition and retention. Hence, those factors contribute to think that grammar was easier since it only had a set of rules for combining elements. Again, there was not difficult to test grammar because its development had a linear process. On the other hand, it was believed that vocabulary had a complex structure of language features whose combination has no static procedures or rules of combination. Significantly, Marton (1976) opined that vocabulary had been absolutely ignored due to the problem of idioms which is the biggest obstacle in comprehension for learners.

The sixth justification why vocabulary was somehow overlooked is the number of studies intended to demonstrate that it cannot be tested, as long as the claim that in the bilingual speakers' minds had two different lexicons systems. Appropriately, Brown (1974), Martin (1976) and Ridout (1977) asserted that the research in vocabulary had largely been a theoretical and unsystematic. Evidently, Galisson (1970) added that the research field concerning to lexicon had avoided questions related to the methodology applied for teaching vocabulary since there was an unordered, random, haphazard manner in which students are exposed to words.

The previously mentioned arguments of the decline of vocabulary direct us to give an opinion of some relevant issues. Williams and Burden (1999) pointed out that the traditional curriculum designs have neglected the teaching of how to learn; instead it has been focused on

imparting knowledge and skills. Thus, it seems clear that these methods ignored the students' participation in their own learning and discovering process. Apparently, the period of time in which those methods were used creates some negative misconceptions about lexis. As a result, vocabulary was seen as a systematic and observable process rather than a non-observable cognitive one. Certainly, this stand point suggested that the knowledge of a language was a mere translation of words with their equivalents. Unfortunately, complex mental processes and patterns of meaning were completely ignored.

Nevertheless, there have been some changes in methodology concerning language and more specifically vocabulary. So, it is of a greater need to change the way in which vocabulary is introduced in the foreign language classes. Fortunately, the role of students has been changed since they are the ones who construct the language step by step. Moreover, the recognition of the nature of language as a cognitive process gradually developed rather than a linear-structural one. We can say that it is the major change regarding the role of language. This allows us to revise the fundamental way in which we see the constituent elements of language, moreover, we also view language as lexis with a radical re-appraisal of content, materials and methodology.

Taking into consideration Marton's ideas concerned to the difficulties assessing vocabulary, we can say that this is not a stronger justification to deny and overlook once again the notable role of vocabulary. Eventually, in a foreign language setting like ours, students can face some problems associated idioms due to these are typical features of the target language. However, language teachers are able other ways to tackle this problem, for instance they can devote more than a very small part to the teaching of lexical, and specially, they can present vocabulary inside a context; instead of isolation. Likewise, teachers can also introduce some activities and tasks helping to facilitate language awareness or noticing.

After having presented a number arguments why vocabulary was not a main subskill or component; it is likely to discuss why vocabulary has attracted some studies in recent years, why it has had a growing interest and its importance for language. The flourishing interest in vocabulary started due to the changes in the methodologies related to language teaching during 1970s and 1990s. New insights in a range of different research fields and studies have all added to our understanding of vocabulary development. Ergo, second language acquisition theories emphasized on the utmost importance of vocabulary as the first process showing us the way to look for further information and new findings about this essential subcomponent of language.

Hence, it is fundamental to pay attention to some theories such as: the input theory Krashen (1985) in which language is acquired through the recognition of its elements in the available input. Another relevant theory is the universal grammar theory Noam Chomsky (1975), in which, he declared that a human has the capacity to learn a language since there is an inner system in the brain which enables the speaker to learn any particular a language. One more remarkable theory is the lexical approach theory proposed by Lewis (1993); it emphasizes on the predominance of lexicon or words over grammar since the words can produce an infinite variety of messages in different situations. So, this allows us to affirm that vocabulary has a great value. Since it is deeply interconnected to mental processes that allows the acquisition of the small units of sounds, furthermore, it gradually develops inner connections linked to a concept of a word.

Particularly, some theories appertaining to vocabulary attempt to explain the average of vocabulary acquired over years, for instance Brown and Perry (1991) suggested that students learn an average of more than 3,000 words per year process by which they can communicate effectively. While other theories cast light upon the process by which it is acquired, about this Huckin and Haynes (1993) stated that the incidental acquisition of vocabulary takes place by reading or

listening to others speaking in the available input. Finally, the latest theories essay to relate the input theory to vocabulary acquisition. Corder (1967) opined that learners form hypothesis about the structural properties of the target language on the basis of the input. Likewise, Morgan (1986) added that in the available input children hear a range of sentence evidences from adults such as phonological clues, in this case, pauses, stress, intonation in order to distinguish the difference in the speaker's intention.

Based on this previously mentioned rationale; it is proper to talk about the significance of vocabulary in a foreign language setting like Pasto. It is a general truth that lexis has received a gradual attention owing to the influence of second language acquisition theories, again lexicology which is the study of vocabulary and its components. Thus, through the new discoveries and studies it can be said that vocabulary is now regarded as one of the crucial factors developing students 'communicative competence. Firstly, Nation (1990) stated that a certain amount of vocabulary is required in order to comprehend a discourse. For this reason, teachers have to include vocabulary as a part of their teaching lessons since it would offer the input containing certain useful words in a specific setting. In this sense, learners can begin to trigger the word presented in the spoken language; they would also be able to associate words with their sounds and the concepts.

Secondly, the implementation of vocabulary and some tasks would allow teachers to discover some language vocabulary strategies used by learners, which have recently been understood (O'Malley and Chamot, 1996). Significantly, the teaching of vocabulary contributes to answer some questions related to the vocabulary learning strategies such as Key word (Presley, Levin and Delaney, 1982), contextual and semantic processing (Beck, McKeown, and Omanson, 1987), and the key word method (Raugh and Atkinson, 1975). This is an important

point; it not only provides teachers with new insights about the acquisition process, but also facilitates the application of some strategies in order to overcome some problems in certain situations. Furthermore, the implementation of lexis in foreign language classes would also facilitate the acquisition of incidental vocabulary (Huckin and Haynes, 1993). Moreover, it would also provide opportunities for vocabulary acquisition take place inside a foreign language setting like ours.

Equally important, according to Meara (1997), the use of vocabulary facilitates the development of lexical competence. This allows not only taking into consideration the depth of knowledge about the words, but it also allows differentiating them between the five aspects of lexicon which are vocabulary, phrasal verbs, expressions collocations and gambits. It can be noted that those differences make students aware of the singular functions of the words inside a discourse and how they can be associated in order to produce a variety of messages depending of the setting.

To summarize up, vocabulary was neglected in the past century owing to the standpoint of language as a system of interrelated items. However, in recent years this viewpoint has been changed due to the development of second language acquisition theories. Essentially, one of the most influential is the input theory. As a consequence, the growing concern has led to develop several hypothesis related to language its acquisition with its internal cognitive processes, and finally how recent findings would be applied in the teaching process in a foreign language context.

The Lexical Approach Theory

Now that we have a rather clear idea of the role of vocabulary in instruction and oral proficiency let us to describe the most important approach to be discussed in this paper; the lexical approach. The increasing interest in second language acquisition theories had led to

establish several theories; one of the most relevant is the lexical approach theory by Lewis (1993), it highlights the significance of vocabulary as the key element in the language acquisition. According to Lewis (1993), the lexical approach is an alternative to grammar based approaches to language teaching. The idea of the importance of lexis is brought into prominence in this theory, since it advocates that lexis is the most preponderant concept in language; he claimed that the lexis is the basis of the language, whereas grammar is a secondary element which reveals the combination of words through rules.

He also added that language consists of a series of grammatical features that are assembled together in order to produce message with meaning. The combination of those words is called lexical chunks. Lewis also said that the lexical chunks are not entire novel creations in the language due to the frequency of its connection. Furthermore, He asserted that these are pre-established sentences used for a communicative purpose in a context. Indeed, he stated that these phrases have an arbitrary relationship between the meaning and the words that form the sentence.

He also differentiated vocabulary from lexis; whereas vocabulary is the conception of traditional words with a fixed meaning; lexis includes the meaning of the words but also the word connections that are stored in the speakers 'minds. Alternatively, Lewis (1997) said that inside the lexicon there is a taxonomy of the words or commonly known as the lexical items; this taxonomy contains: (a) the words with a single meaning; (b) the words containing various meanings known as polywords, collocations or word partnership which are the union of words sharing some similar characteristics; (c) the institutionalized utterances that are the sentences addressed in a specific context; and (d) sentence frames or heads which allows following a sequence in the speech acts.

Lewis advocated (1997) that a collocation is “the readily observable phenomenon whereby certain words co-occur in natural text with greater than random frequency” (Lewis, 1997 p, 212). He also stated that these are a product of linguistic convention in the language. Likewise, he also made a distinction between collocations that are fully fixed and whose meaning is still clear (i.e., catch a cold), and the other types of collocations which have a less fixed relationship (i.e., severely hurt). Additionally, Nattinger (1980) suggested that the communication is a product of piecing together ready-made units for a particular situation. Thus, the lexical approach implies a decreased role for sentence grammar at least until post-intermediate levels. In contrast, it involves an increased role for word grammar (collocations and cognates). In addition, Zimmerman (1997) contributed to Michel Lewis and other’s theories. He argued that the revived attention to lexis and the significance of underlying that language production is not a syntactic rule-governed process; instead of this, it is the retrieval of larger phrasal units from memory.

Lewis theory provided us with a framework which emphasizes not only the importance of lexis but also the role of its components from the simplest one to the most complex one. He also claimed that some sentences commonly known as the lexical chunks can facilitate communication since these possess a fixed meaning which could be useful in a variety of contexts and communicative situations. The implementation of the lexical approach could aid us to change the traditional conceptions about language teaching; in other words, changing our traditional methodology whose emphasis is on grammar and vocabulary explanation rather than grammar and lexis exploration. By making some changes in language teaching we could develop a different process regarding learning, that is the grammatical and lexical acquisition through a process of observation, hypothesis and experiment whose main aim is learning and finally

developing speaking. Besides, it is also essential to bring up the significance of successful communication rather than grammatical mastery. This is mainly because of the emergency of communicative approaches whose main aim is at arising students' communicative competence, but in our case it can be said that it is likely to develop language competence through vocabulary; since it is one of the crucial factors in language acquisition.

Taking some of the main tenets of the lexical approach, it remains to be consistently demonstrated that it is of vital importance to promote opportunities for communication by giving our students essential language components and the chance to put them into practice. However, it is likely to state that students are exposed to a limited amount of language input. Their main source is the English textbook, whose content is often far removed from real life. Furthermore, in our country, the exam-oriented education system limits input since the only purpose of taking an English course is oriented towards vocabulary recognition, grammar, and reading comprehension. This factor also contributes to affirm that students are exposed to a limited amount of language output. Due to the exam-oriented education system, the students receive little practice in the productive use of English, doing mainly reading and listening. For those reasons, there are some problems encountered in a foreign language setting like ours, for example: the limited vocabulary, the problems connecting the ideas or words, and finally the difficulties mastering some complex language structures such as idioms and lexical chunks.

To conclude, the Michael Lewis' work and theory emphasizes on the importance of lexis over grammar, whereas, the Noam Chomsky's work puts an emphasis on the significance of grammar regarding lexis as a sub-component of language. Additionally, the use of the lexical approach offers a major shift with profound theoretical and practical implications. One of the most important contributions of the lexical approach is the influence of some fundamental

principles advanced by proponents of communicative approaches. Another important contribution is the grammar vocabulary dichotomy; the lexical approach sheds light on the components of language claiming that the vast majority of lexicon consists of nouns and multi-word chunks. The third concern is the standpoint related to vocabulary as a central element of language teaching; it raises students' awareness and develops their ability to chunk language successfully; moreover, it also contributes to make teachers aware of efforts that should be taken in order to enable students to progress gradually from receptive knowledge to productive knowledge, again from consciously knowing words to subconsciously and automatically using them.

Word Acquisition and Mental Lexicon Organization Theories

Let us now address some other theories related to the lexicon. Bearing in mind the above mentioned hypotheses concerning to the lexical approach, it is necessary to mention other theories that have a close relationship with this issue relating vocabulary acquisition and cognitive processes of word organization. Some theories stated that learners build mental lexicon and grammar of the L2; since they account for the performance in the same way as a native speaker constantly reconstructing and reinterpreting the target rules, the combination of certain words.

As a part of the new theories in second language acquisition; the universal grammar theory (Chomsky, 1975) is used as a framework that broaches general cognitive explanations and basis of the acquisition of a foreign or native language. Certainly, it is plausible to affirm that the utmost relevant mechanisms are: grammar which is the whole knowledge of a language containing phonetics, syntax, lexis and pragmatics. It is activated through the available input using a device called language acquisition device. Evidently, this mechanism stimulates a set of

elements called parameters (i, e., specific language features such as word order or the lack of an element), and principles (i, e., linguistic elements found in all the languages such as nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives).

Chomsky also put forward another relevant mechanism named computational system. This mechanism associates the available input found in speech with language concepts created in the speaker's mind. Additionally, in the core of this device there are two subparts such as: the phonetic form which means the sequence of the sounds or phonemes, whereas, the logical form makes allusion to the representations of certain aspects of meanings in the form of a mental concept; in other words, it links the phonological form of a word with the concept by using a system called the computational system. Ultimately, Chomsky also set forth another element correlated to the activation of grammar concepts; this apparatus is associated with the lexical entries. Subsequently, the lexical entries or items drive the syntax of the computational system by laying out the structures that are whether possible or not. In this sense, the lexical items form hypothesis about the universal principles, moreover, these create rules about language since they are a product of the interaction between principles and lexicon.

Additionally, Piaget (1975) proposed that there exists two complementary processes through which the awareness of the outside world is internalized. He designed two mechanisms commonly known as accommodation and assimilation. Whereas assimilation signifies the mental lexicon which is never static; it is constantly receiving new input containing not only the words, but also the information readjusting in order to establish new connections which are woven and the old ones strengthened. The term accommodation denotes to the difference made to one's mind or concepts and the process of assimilation.

In relation to Piaget's ideas, Brown (1994) affirmed that during the lexicon acquisition process is carried out, the first step is the word recognition; it means acknowledging the existence of the word in the language. Afterwards, the second step is the precise comprehension of the language feature or word, through the extensive development of its knowledge. Besides, Channel (1988) directed attention to the fact that not all the comprehension and production processes are set on the same mental basis. As a result, he made reference to one of the most highlighted processes by which language is learnt, in this case, the diverse types of perceptions in a stream of sounds found in the available data.

Consequently, Jiang (2000) asserted that the lexical entry is considered to have semantic syntactic morphological and formal information and also it consists of the lemma and lexeme. The lemma contains semantic and syntactic information about the words; whereas the lexeme takes in morphological information such as the variants of a word its pronunciation and spelling. These two kinds of information are integrated in the lexical entry. Accordingly, Morgan (1986) argued that children need bracketed input, that is to say sentences with clear signs of phrase boundaries, the mark of the pauses and vowel lengthening.

Thus, Cronbach (1942) recommended a multidimensional model of a word, in which there are two kinds of knowledge. The first one is the referential a clear understanding of the meaning of the word (i, e, . referent and the concept). Secondly, an extensional relationship which indicates a depth understanding of the word and its pragmatic relationships such as: hyponymy, synonymy, antonymy and gradation. Moreover, it also includes the intentional meanings of a word depending on the context. In contrast, Aitchison (1994) stressed the complexity of the process by which the words are connected in the speakers' minds have three main cognitive processes: labelling, packaging, and network building. The first process: labelling

or mapping is the sequence of sounds and their link with the concept or entity. The second process is packaging in which the discovery of one concept allows connecting it to another one, so, in this way, the learner finds a variety of meanings for a single word. The last process is network building which is the connection of words through semantic networks that are affected through the different exposures in a variety of contexts.

Alternatively, Stein and Trabasso (1982) created the schema theory which is the hypothetical mechanism by which the concepts are stored inside the speaker's minds. They claimed that this mechanism has the following features:

- Schemata are composed of abstract knowledge which organizes and encodes the information.
- Schemata reflect the properties of the experiences encountered by the individual.
- Once formed, schemata are thought to be relatively stable over time.

The schema theory is also related to how each individual acquires the knowledge under different experiences. It has three processes that a learner has when the new information is encountered; these are: (a) accretation which is the procedure by which the new input is assimilated without changes in the previous knowledge; (b) tuning the mechanism by which learners realize that their existing knowledge has some inadequacies and needs to be modified; (c) restructuring which occurs over multiple domains in a continuous time frame.

It is therefore of greater significance to mention that there exists another theory germane to the organization of the words, the remarkable processes and mechanisms. The storage metaphor attempts to capture the essence of the organization in the mental lexicon; it illustrates how one item cross-refer to another one since this kind of connection is generally found when two components make part of a category; these features also share many characteristics such as:

the attachment to a syntactic class, a sound pattern, a spelling pattern, or some derivation clustering like cross references, synonyms andonyms. Then, the information is stored in the human brain in the form of a whole concept that associates systematically the words; these are united into larger bundles just like subdivisions and divisions. Hence, the lexicon is organized into three dimensional categories: phonological nets crossing, orthographic nets, and semantic nets. Finally, the three lexical categories are summarized in the form of a concept.

There are several theories whose ideas attempt to explain in a detailed way how the lexicon is organized inside the speakers 'minds. However, most importantly, it is necessary to highlight the elements of each one since these are extremely related to the acquisition process. Consistently, if foreign language teachers are aware of the theoretical background regarding the acquisition and learning processes, they could plan consciously the class providing some opportunities and chances for some exceptional elements like: input, noticing, assimilation, and accommodation. Thus, students would be exposed to a variety of written or spoken language from which they can perceive some remarkable language features. They could also assimilate and accommodate their existing knowledge of the target language, and finally if there is a chance they could test their hypothesis about the rules and patterns of the language.

The importance of these theories for this paper lies in the relevance of knowing some of the most highlighted mental theories and how through a good understanding of them, teachers would increase the chances of learning by using the most noteworthy elements. As a result of this, a better estimated of the long term effects might be resulting in the acquisition of the most frequent words which would be acquired from the simplest ones to the most complex ones. Moras (2001) pointed out that lexicon is highly efficiently organized and has a complex mechanism of interrelated items.

As an analogy, word connection theories can be thought to be similar to a chain of interconnected items, for instance: Chomsky (1975) and Jiang (2000) have introduced and presented the concept of the lexical entry which it is of paramount importance since it is the first step for acquisition. This mechanism allows learners to create a union between their internal and external knowledge of the language through the sounds and concepts. Afterwards, these two theories are joined to other highlighted theories such as: the input theory which claims that learners need to be exposed to language samples from which they can trigger some important elements in certain order of acquisition; again, it is plausible to say that sometimes some items would be acquired first than others. Hence, these theories are linked to another hypothesis which includes two significant processes: assimilation and accommodation which are basically the structuring and re-structuring of previous and new knowledge inside the speakers 'minds.

General Overview

After having briefly presented the lexical approach theory and some theories of the mental lexicon organization, it is time to present a general overview about speaking; specifically, some relevant theories which had had a significant influence in oral proficiency and communicative competence. One of the ultimate goals in each foreign language class is to accomplish the goal of proficiency, accuracy and finally fluency. In other words, the main purpose it is to enable students to communicate in a variety of settings using diverse structures to adjust their speech and maintain the flow of communication. For those reasons, in recent years two important theories have been highlighted since they have a great impact on the speaking ability/skill.

The firstly, the input theory asserts that language is triggered through the contact with the features present in the language samples. Gass (1992) structured a framework in which the input is perceived as the first stage of acquisition since it contains some salient features noticed during this process. Accordingly, Krashen (1985) argued that input is the greatest determiner and the sole influential factor for language acquisition. Although, we cannot conclusively say that it is the sole influential element since some theories throw light on the significance of output as well. Appropriately, Swain (1985) and Lapkin (1995) stated that L2 output may trigger certain cognitive processes necessary for second language learning or acquisition since it has some effects on the internal knowledge about language provided by external feedback (e.g., clarification requests, modeling, and overt correction). Alternatively, it also serves to internalize the linguistic forms; again, it increases the control over previous forms or language items.

Henceforth, Long (1980) said that learners acquire new linguistic resulting from an interaction between the learner's mental abilities and the linguistic input. The association between these processes is controlled by interaction. Thus, Genesee (1995) concurred and wrote that language is acquired most effectively when it is learned for communication in meaningful and significant social situations. Furthermore, there is another considerable process which has a relevant function in the language acquisition, this is named interlanguage; it is defined as the ability to modify and maintain the knowledge created by the speaker by retrieving L2 syntactic and semantic information from long-term memory. Moreover, it is also influenced by output and input. Conversely, Coder (1978) pinpointed that interlanguage is the process by which knowledge is gradually developed by moving from simple to complex systems which can create a third process using both previously mentioned systems operating altogether.

The importance of speaking and more specifically some theories germane to this issue in a foreign language lie in the fact that not only input is important, but also output since this is the process by which learners put into practice and externalize their cognitive structures previously acquired. In our context, learners are exposed to a large amount of input which can be whether spoken or written. However, one of the main drawbacks discovered in our context is the fact that they cannot externalize the structures or using them in communication. For this reason, it is necessary to take under consideration some relevant aspects. Firstly, the acquisition process needs to be emphasized since it gives as the basis for natural cognitive processes, thus, we can plan some activities that foster the discovery of some language items. In other words, it is to present a vast variety of simple words inside a context using realia and images to facilitate acquisition.

Secondly, the role of output need to be highlighted since this is the way by which the students 'hypothesis can be tested and provided with a meaningful feedback. In this sense, students 'output allows us to know the difficulties found in the management of a structure or a language item since these make us aware of the development of the acquisition as a gradual process, yet using some teaching strategies or changing and adjusting the way that vocabulary or language is presented.

In summary; the acquisition processes of a foreign language have been widely influenced by input and output and their contact with the context, interaction and finally the cognitive processes carried out inside the speakers 'minds. Nevertheless, it can be said that these two processes are equally important. Whereas input activates the cognitive processes; output allows putting into practice the speakers 'knowledge, testing the hypothesis and providing feedback.

Communicative Competence

Based on the previous theories associated with speaking, it is necessary to continue with a different topic. The concept of language competence has been a significant issue for vocabulary, and especially for oral proficiency since it has a wide variety of proponents, concepts and elements significant for language teaching and learning. Coherently, Jablin and Sias (2001) pointed out that communicative competence lacks definitional consensus in spite of the vast literature. So, first of all, it is important to reach a consensus about its definition; in general terms, it is the speaker's ability to put into practice the previously acquired knowledge in a specific setting affected by external factors regarding environment and speech community.

One of the first scholars who opened the path for a deeper discussion was Saussure. He contrasted two concepts, the language as a system and what he called the act of speaking (i, e., usage). Afterwards, Chomsky (1965) presented a similar competence model; but he also made a differentiated these two terms separately. Thus, in this model, competence is the ideal speaker/listener's tacit knowledge of language structure which enables him/her to generate and understand the sentences of any given language. Performance is the actual use and the knowledge put into practice by the speaker. However, Chomsky' competence theory has some limitations, firstly, there is not an ideal language community; therefore there is not an ideal speaker-hearer member. Another important limitation is that this model remains unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions and shifts of attention, interests and errors during the language in actual performance. Finally, the most relevant limitation is his claim that linguistic competence is completed by a certain period of time since it is acquired unconsciously, and once it happens in childhood, shows almost no change throughout the life of an individual.

As a result, Hymes (1971) created a different model in order to contrast Chomsky's model. Firstly, what he refuted is the fact that there is an ideal community with ideal members which remained unaffected by the environment. He also argued that Chomsky had somehow neglected the social aspect of language inside the language community. Secondly, Hymes decided to include some features inside his model introducing the social component; these are:

- Appropriacy which means the speaker's knowledge taking under consideration some factors such as the audience, the channel and the importance of the message.
- Systematic potential which is the choice of selecting a wide variety of elements to deliver a message.
- Occurrence related to the frequency of words and its use which are sometimes a deviation of the correct use of grammar structures.
- Feasibility referring to the possible use of some constructions to modify the meaning of a sentence for instance: nobody uses ten adjectives to modify a noun.

Even though both Chomsky and Hymes contribute to the understanding of competence, their early definitions of the concept lack detailed explanations to be useful as a theoretical concept of competence (Cooley & Roach, 1984). Moving away from the two first theories above showed, some theorists had underlined some salient features for communicative competence which includes the connection between knowledge and behavior in a given situation (Larson, Backlund, Redmond & Barbour, 1978, p.16). Furthermore, McCroskey & Beatty (1998, p. 227) claimed that the communicative situation aid speakers to understand the appropriateness of a specific linguistic behavior. Conveniently, Cooley & Roach (1984, p.25) argued that the knowledge of appropriate patterns of a situation would induce us to use the knowledge correctly.

Other models in communicative competence are the model proposed by Canale & Swain (1980). It is consisted of four components which are the grammatical competence; it makes reference to the mastery of the language systems and its elements; whereas the discourse competence is concerned with how those elements form meanings; while the sociolinguistic competence appeals to which extend those utterances are understood in different settings. Ultimately, the strategic competence brings up the mastery of verbal and non-verbal strategies applied in order to enhance effective communication.

Savignon (1983) coined a different term for communicative competence and its elements: (a) expression; (b) interpretation; (c) negotiation of meaning involving interaction. He also made a parallel model whose main statements are related to the nature of language: the first one is the dynamic which is the interpersonal nature of communicative competence depending on interaction and negotiation of meaning. The second one is associated with the connection of both spoken and written language. The third one makes allusion to the importance of context and its role in a wide range of settings, moreover, it is also linked to the individual's perceptions and understanding. Finally, it is the concept of communicative competence containing a noteworthy variety of degrees.

Conclusively, Bachman (1990) took a broad definition of the term competence and add some pertinent terms which are syntax or cohesion; he also divided the language competence in four systems. Firstly, it is plausible to find two broad categories: the organizational competence enclosing the grammatical competence and the textual competence; moreover, the pragmatic competence which contains the illocutionary competence and the sociolinguistic competence. The grammatical competence is similar to the one presented in the above -mentioned models. The main differences found in this model are the other categories since these take a distinctive

conception of competence for instance: the textual competence bears on the organization of the discourse since it incorporates cohesion and rhetorical organization; whereas the illocutionary competence bears upon the cognitive functions; while the sociolinguistic competence is pertinent to the speaker's attitude regarding the communicative situation and context.

After having introduced the illustrious standpoints of competence, it is likely to examine its importance for this study; its relationship with the lexical approach and finally its relevance for a foreign language setting like ours. Overall, the concept of competence is of vital importance, it is the middle point between two outstanding processes in language and how these are related. Besides, this concept ties the inner language knowledge and its use in a precise situation which depends on numerous factors.

A better understanding about this broad issue conduct us to analyze how people become language users and what kind of knowledge enables them to use language appropriately. It is not only relevant to be aware of the speaker's knowledge, but also the appropriacy of use in a context bearing in mind the people to whom the message would be delivered, the proper use of words, and the language behavior used. Taking into account those issues; it is feasible to say that there is a connection between competence and the lexical approach since it is made through the association between knowledge and use. In other words, it can be said the not only the knowledge of vocabulary is important, but also it is of greater significance its use in communication that in some extent would depend on external and situational factors. Therefore, it seems clear that language competence puts an emphasis on the change from passive knowledge to active knowledge associated with language but more specifically to lexicon.

Through the implementation of the lexical approach in a foreign language setting like ours; teachers can supplement the course book by extending existing practices with natural

lexical alternatives. Essentially, in our foreign language setting, the class time could be directed towards developing language learning strategies for dealing with unknown items, situations, memory limitations, errors and repetition. Moreover, it is of greater significance to also take under consideration the term of communicative competence. It can also direct us to make some adjustments in teaching; through a better analysis about the content of the language taught in the classes, and its appropriacy related to how students use it in communication. Furthermore, and perhaps more significantly; it requires creating classrooms conditions which attempt to match those similar in real life that foster acquisition or to encourage learning.

If we ignore these aspects of communication in the foreign language classroom, we are not providing our students essential elements of human interaction which are presented inside a communicative context. Many activities in the traditional language classroom do not put the students in the position of using language; these activities may not necessarily contribute to the students' long term language ability. According to Brown (1994), the activities presented in the class should be designed to engage students in the pragmatic, authentic, and functional use of language for meaningful purposes, so students have to use their target language, productively and receptively.

In short, in order to conclude and to reach a consensus about the significance of competence in language especially in speaking and the lexical approach, it is relevant to claim that this term is the cornerstone between knowing a language and using it. Besides, it depends on several factors related to the speaker's knowledge; while other circumstances are extremely associated with the context and the variety of social and situational elements that affect communication and interaction.

Vocabulary and Lexis

Now, it is necessary to expand the concept of vocabulary and lexis previously presented in the lexical approach theory. According to Michael Lewis 'theory, there is a distinction between vocabulary and lexis. Vocabulary is defined as a stock of individual words with a fixed meaning; while lexis is the union of words and their chains that create mental connections and associations. Therefore, this approach claims that language is a system of elements which has been formed by series of chunks commonly used in a coherent daily speech; moreover, these phrases only have a minority of sentences which are entirely novel creations.

Analytically, Halliday (1984) divided lexis from vocabulary; moreover, he stated that lexis has a remarkable role in constructing and organizing regular patterns of a language. Furthermore, he also made reference to a notable mechanism commonly known as lexical cohesion which links the words and some of their discourse functions. This component has several functions which are: the classification of words putting an emphasis on the use of general categories named super-ordinates, the relexicalization of the words, in other words this is the process by which a word can be expressed in a discourse through the use of equivalents, and finally the negotiation of the word meaning depending the semantic or social framing. In this sense, it can be said that vocabulary is seen as a system formed by a general taxonomy of words. Moreover, Richards and Rogers (2001) stressed on the role of formulaic, word lexical units and the lexical units (e, g., the sort of elements that composed a language).

On the one hand, Cowie (1988) coined the term lexical units referring to single words seem as a freestanding language item, which internal structure consist of several morphemes divided into suffixes, prefixes and morphemes. Hence, there is also an emphasis on the word formation since the internal layout of the items contributes to generate some changes in the inner

structure of the word, for example: word morpheme spelling changes (i.e., reduction of a vowel sound, irregular verbs internal changes and sometimes change in the stress between verbs and adjectives). Similarly, Bauer (1983) claimed that recognizing the composition of the words; learners can go a long way towards deciphering new and familiar words; so this allows learners to combine and fossilize the internal connections and chunks stored in the mind. Then, the chains of words connected as a whole create a strong connection principle named fixeness which is the union of words that share some similarities or characteristics.

Equally important, Lewis (1997) extended the concept of lexicon as a system formed of a variety of various words classified into diverse categories, he ordered them into: words, words combined with other words and with a particular meaning (e, g., lexical chunks, collocations and idioms). Furthermore, Lewis (1993) and Cowie (1988) called direct attention to the primacy of the words and their mental chains since these create fixed combinations with a specific meaning (e, g, .lexical chunks). So, it is obvious that the relationship of collocation is fundamental in the study of language and teaching since this is a marriage contract between words. Indeed, this correspondence between grammar and lexis permits to examine any word from the point of view of grammar and lexis or vice versa.

There are two types of collocations: while the first sort of collocations has a clear meaning and are understandable for learners; the one another kind of collocations have an obscure meaning, in other words; their meaning is not evident and comprehensible since these are typical items that belong to a specific culture. Moreover, its elements cannot be separated because the whole meaning is altered, this is because the words are strongly linked by a principle commonly known as collocability; it means that if there is a particular change in the word union or collocation, the meaning is completely changed to a greater extent. So, the collocations are

also influenced by the universal constraints like parameters and principles which are typical of any language. Systematically, Halliday (1984-1985) established the notion of typicality which is the principle by which the associations of words are recognized and accepted by the language community and its members. The term of typicality also integrates the structure of the organization of the words with the frequent and the regular words and their use.

The greater categorization between lexis and vocabulary allow us to analyze the importance of the language elements or words since these would affect the student's performance while they are speaking. For this reason, it is of vital relevance to provide a large variety of language samples from which students trigger their elements and the kind of connection among the language items, and finally whether the connection is feasible or not. Henceforth, it is also necessary to put an emphasis on the nature of the activities in order to maintain a healthy balance between fluency-oriented-approach and accuracy-oriented approach. So, if the lexicon is implemented and used, it can direct our students to continue using certain language items in real life communication; likewise they would constantly recycle the language items by making them frequent in their speech. Moreover, they would gradually develop accuracy and fluency through the language awareness that the lexical approach offer. Additionally, the language activities require consistency with a lexical approach since they need to be directed towards naturally occurring language and towards raising learners' awareness of the lexical nature of language.

In summary, it is of great significance to conclude that the lexical approach theory makes a distinction between vocabulary and lexis. It also brings into prominence the function of lexis as an element which facilitates and encourages language acquisition. Essentially, the concept of lexis called direct attention to the creativity of the speakers' minds y using diverse mechanisms

and elements during the acquisition process; moreover, it also puts an emphasis on the inner structure of words and the marriage contract between them since these have fixed combinations and useful meanings for communication. As Bauer (1983) suggested that the recognition of the composition of words would enable learners to decipher them, understand the rules of combination and strengthen the old mental connections or create new ones.

Collocations

In order to analyze the role of the collocations broadly mentioned in the general overview of the lexical approach; it is time to go beyond the overall description in order to present some similar theories. The lexical approach acknowledges the astonishing relevance of lexis in language. Firstly, Benson and Ilson (1986) coined the term collocations as: fixed, identifiable, non-idiomatic phrases and constructions. Taking into account the occurrence of this item in every day speech, they ranked it into: recurrent combinations, fixed combinations, and collocations classifying and forming in different stages depending on the elements. Apparently, the separation of collocations shows diverse categories: grammatical collocations and lexical collocations. Whereas, the grammatical collocation consists of a noun, an adjective, or a verb plus a preposition or a grammatical structure, the lexical collocation is organized by various kinds of combinations such as nouns and nouns, nouns and adjectives, or adjectives and adjectives which can be joined to an infinitive or a clause.

Adequately, Rudzka, Channell, Putseys and Ostyn (1981) stressed that one of the vital aspect deserving special attention is the problem of word combination or defined as word combinability. Hence, Allerton (1984) affirmed that words do not co-occur freely; instead, there are diverse varying levels of co-occurrence and also restrictions, for instance some limitations in their formation such as: lexical collocations consist of noun, adverbs, adjectives and

prepositions; while idioms consist of free combinations of words with a particular meaning which is reflected in its constituent parts. Though, it is necessary to make a distinction between lexical collocations and idioms; moreover, Benson (1986) named idioms as frozen expressions whose meanings do not reflect the meanings of their component parts.

As we have previously suggested that it is necessary to reach a consensus about the kind of activities provided in our classes. Accordingly, Gairns (1986) stated that understanding how our memory works might help us create more effective ways to teach vocabulary; moreover it is also relevant to say that some activities need to include tasks containing not only fluency-oriented-approaches, but also accuracy-oriented-approaches. Through the use and implementation of those activities accuracy and fluency would be gradually through learner's speaking and use of vocabulary. In this sense, there would be a greater chance for students to practice their knowledge and to face some problematic situations in which they find some difficulties combining words.

Similarly, Hill (1999) argued that most learners with 'good vocabularies' have problems with fluency because their 'collocational competence' is very limited. Thus, it is necessary to suggest better teaching strategies to tackle with those drawbacks since speaking would be negatively affected. Oxford (1990) introduced some teaching vocabulary strategies which have several characteristics like: (a) creating mental linkages such as grouping, associating and finally placing words into context; (b) using different kinds of materials and strategies for associating words, more specifically, the use of images, maps and audio-visual aids; (c) employing various techniques for creating a long term link: using mechanical techniques.

In this way, if we give collocational clues to our students, they could be able to comprehend or at least, guess the meaning of an unknown word. Visser (1990) stressed the

importance of teaching the underlying conceptual meaning of a word. He suggested that “it is more efficient to teach the meaning together with the examples of collocations rather than treat each separate occurrence as a different meaning” (Viser, 1990:15). Correspondingly, Palmberg (1990) used the term associational link which broaches to the networks between words used in order to have native-like vocabulary skills.

The previously mentioned strategies for teaching vocabulary guide us to apply alternative ways to present lexicon in foreign classes; by changing the old-fashioned grammar translation method which is unfortunately still used. Particularly, if we have in mind the variant cognitive processes, we can make use of some strategies such as: realia, the presentation of the word or collocation inside a context, mnemonics and the use of diverse teaching materials such as flashcards, pictures, or drawings. So, as Viser suggested, it is more effective to teach the collocation as a whole word since it would allow storing the word connections inside the mind. Furthermore, it increases the chances of acquisition due to it creates strong mental connections and reinforces the old ones. Moreover, after having acquiring a whole word learners could disassemble its components for a better and deeper understanding.

In conclusion, so far we have established that the collocations are atypical element in a foreign language encountered in everyday speech. However, in a context like ours, the majority of times available input does not contain collocations; since this is a language feature which has had many difficulties in foreign language teaching. But, it can be suggested that it is time to introduce them little by little. Through the use of collocations, our students can develop oral proficiency and put into practice the language vocabulary strategies inside a conversation. In short, the use of collocations increases the possibilities to develop accuracy and fluency;

moreover it also allows expanding the speaker's knowledge about language and its elements by gradually triggering some important rules of each system.

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