Lexical Approach Classroom Activities
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In our first THINK article – Lexical Approach 1
(www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/methodology/lexical_approach1.shtml) - we explained a theory
of language from a Lexical Approach perspective.

Before reading our second article – Lexical Approach 2
(www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/methodology/lexical_approach2.shtml) - we would like you to
look at two TRY activities. **Lexical Approach Classroom Activity 1** and **Lexical Approach
Classroom Activity 2**

Lexical Approach Classroom Activity 2

Below we describe a sequence of lessons arising from one text. The idea is to show how the
lexical approach can be integrated with other sound pedagogical ideas and how it can involve
different skills. It should be easy to replicate this sequence of lessons, though it will be more vivid
if you compose your own initial text.

We outline different activity or question types that you could use on other texts. We provide
comments on these activities, focussing on their rationale or effectiveness.

TASK 1

*1: Read through this unit of classroom materials prepared for learners at an intermediate and
above level of proficiency. Think about the following questions:*
-   How do these materials differ from the Lexical Approach Classroom Activity 1 materials?
-   What are the goals and objectives of these materials?
-   How would I adapt these materials for my classroom?

Memorable Occasions

Step 1

Students read a text written by the teacher.

A MEMORABLE OCCASION[1]
I'd just got married and my husband had just got a job as a Civil Engineer in Tanzania.
We went out there together and my idea was to get a job shortly after getting there. As
you can imagine, I was very excited, even rather apprehensive, as I'd never been abroad
before. My first priority was to get settled in this small town called Dodoma in the middle
of Tanzania. As we got off the train, however, at 6 in the morning a lady came rushing
along the platform towards us. Completely out of breath, she gasped, "We desperately
need a headmistress for our Middle School – please say you'll help us." I felt tired and in
need of a bath or shower, and after a two day journey from Dar es Salaam I was taken
aback by her request. However, for some reason or other, I agreed to do it! I washed,
changed, had a quick bite to eat and was ready to be introduced to the two Indian
teachers and my pupils at 8 o'clock. Talk about 'being thrown in at the deep end' as my
teaching timetable started with the senior students at 8.30! Although I'd hardly had time
to get my breath, I never regretted my snap decision. I spent several happy years
teaching those delightfully happy youngsters.

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[1] This text was actually written by a colleague, Hilary Maltman. It was substituted for the original
text as it is more interesting than the one written for this sequence of lessons.

Step 2

Ask students to turn the text over and then ask them a few questions e.g.

When did Hilary go out there?
How did she feel before she went?
What was her first priority?
What did the lady say to her?

Comment on steps 1 and 2

This procedure violates the training course orthodoxy of 'task before text', but for short texts this recall activity works well in practice and encourages students to reprocess the language of the text. The questions can be loaded to draw out particular language from the text e.g.

What was her first priority?
This question is aimed at drawing out the collocation 'desperately need'

Step 3

Read the text to the students, but gap certain words, especially those which are part of a collocation e.g. 'I never regretted my…………………….decision (students shout out 'snap'!).

Comment

The immediacy of this type of oral gap fill and the challenge to memory it offers seem to create good motivation, and it can be a very effective way of revising collocations.

Step 4

Students prepare a response to the story, using the lexical chunk '….. must have been………………..'
 e.g. 'it must have been awful/exciting/wonderful' etc.
'you must have been exhausted/shocked' etc

Students also prepare follow-up questions to get more information from the teacher about the story.

Comment

These steps are consistent, with Mike McCarthy's ideas on 'good listenership' expressed at IATEFL 2002/2003.

Step 5

Introduce the idea of lexical chunks by writing on the board:

'Of course, I get on well with my close friends'

Then, ask students to divide the sentence into 3 chunks

Step 6

Ask students to identify other chunks in the text.

Comment

We are sure that you will be surprised by how good students are at doing this once the idea is implanted. Michael Lewis has pointed out, however, that if students are not directed to do this, there is a danger they will 'see through the text'.

Step 7

Ask students to write their own short text about a memorable occasion.

Comment

As students are writing their texts, you will probably see some of them looking back at the original text for particular items of language – using the text as 'scaffolding'.

Step 8

Ask students to write down 5 important words or phrases from the texts they had written.

Step 9

Using these words as prompts, students tell the story to a partner.

Step 10

Students then reduce their list to 3 words and tell the story to another partner.

Comment

This repetition technique is consistent with Martin Bygate's ideas on task repetition. Teachers are often struck by the increased confidence and fluency in the second retelling of student stories.

Step 11

You can collect your students' stories and rewrite them with a particular emphasis on improving lexical chunking. You can highlight the chunks for your students in the rewritten text. See examples below.

Comment

This idea of reformulating student output to promote 'noticing' is expanded upon in Scott Thornbury article 'Reformulation and reconstruction: tasks that promote 'noticing'.' (see Further Reading section in our first THINK article)

Examples of reformulated student work

Bungee jumping

I think the most **memorable experience** I have ever had was when I went **bungee jumping** *a few years ago*. **At the time** bungee jumping was **a bit of** a craze in China, and as I have always liked **adventurous sports**, I decided to **have a go**.

It was a really exhilarating and memorable experience. **Imagine** dropp**ing** from a point 60 metres high almost to the ground. How would you feel? I can still *remember* that experience *clearly* – **as if it was yesterday**. When I stood **on the edge of** the board, I could see the crowd below who had come to watch me……………….

A political demonstration

I think that the most memorable crowd atmosphere I have ever experienced was the students' strike in Sofia in 1997. A lot of young people gathered in the city centre, the traffic came to a standstill, and thousands jeered, protesting against the government. At midnight, someone set fire to the communist party headquarters. The atmosphere was hostile and things were beginning to get out of control. The police became violent. It was an unbelievable scene: people running everywhere, people injured, blood on the streets, angry policeman waving batons. No one knew what to do. Nobody knew how to escape. It's an experience that I will never forget.

Step 12

Students read each other stories to decide if they were happy or sad stories. Or to vote which is the most memorable story.

Step 13

Students prepare comments with the 'must have been' lexical chunk. They also prepare follow-up questions to ask the author of the story.

Comment

This usually leads to some quite rich whole class discussion. Chinese students might want to know, for example, whether the Bulgarian political demonstration had had any lasting consequences.

Step 14

Students look at the texts with the lexical chunks highlighted, and then highlight the chunks in the remaining texts.

Comment

*This visual presentation of lexical chunks can be highly effective. Michael Lewis said at TESOL 2001, Salt Lake City that when he presented the material this way, a teacher said 'Now I **see** what you mean [about lexical chunks]'.*