

7. Lexical approaches now: the role of syntax and grammar

Abstract

The lexical view of language has generated great excitement, and it has changed language teaching for ever. In this article, however, I want to challenge the domination of lexis in the lexical approach, and hope to show the indispensability of both grammar (structures) and syntax (sentence formation), not as processes which 'emerge' (Thornbury 2001), but as definable 'bits' of language which can be presented by the teacher and noticed by the student. I try to show how a student who has very little grammar, can, by being taught aspects of it explicitly, dramatically improve her language proficiency in a very short time.

Introduction

Before Michael Lewis' influential writings (1994), the 'lexical' view of language had a long and respectable pedigree. Even St Augustine realised that it was essentially vocabulary that carried the key meanings of a foreign language in day-to-day communications. Michael West's 'Basic English' in the 30s was an attempt to get to the essentials. But it wasn't until Bolinger (1976) and then Nattinger (1980), that vocabulary became 'lexis'. Lexis comprised words *and* expressions, and these expressions ranged from sayings, to idioms, to phrasal verbs, to fixed everyday communicative utterances, to phrasal adverbs, to phrasal adjectives, and so on, and so on. Then, in the mid-80s, Pawley and Syder (1983), realised something deeper – that much of spoken conversation (in every language) was 'pre-fabricated chunks', not grammatically formulated sentences. Their list is famous, based around expressions using 'think' (*come to think of it, I haven't had time to think, I thought you'd never ask, who would have thought it, think again, I don't think + affirmative statement, it doesn't bear thinking about, etc*) because it is the first time we see countless expressions which would never normally come into the category of lexis being accepted as psycholinguistically authentic – that is, they are clearly expressions that are unconsciously memorised by us all, and then deployed readily in our conversation as 'prefabs'.

So lexical teaching is a very important development in our evolution. My own teaching, from the early nineties, did change significantly as a result. I do not see it as a panacea, however. Nor do I only follow Michael Lewis's teaching suggestions, in which he posits three basic exercise-types (matching, discriminating, and gapfilling), because his ideas don't seem to me to be very wide in scope. However, for a practical and up-to-date article on implementing the lexical approach in the Michael Lewis way, do look at Nick Hamilton's excellent *Weaving some Lexical Threads* (2001).

An interesting case

I had a Chinese student recently. Her objective was to achieve an appropriate pass in the IELTS exam, in the hope of attending a Masters course in International Finance. When I had first met her in a three-hour substitute class six months earlier, her level was lower-intermediate in terms of her communicative command of English (about IELTS 3.5). But she had learnt a range of fixed expressions, and showed an ability to learn new ones at a fast rate. Someone had clearly told her that she only needed to learn fixed expressions and then string them all together to form reasonable sentences, and she would pass the exam.

What she lacked, however, was two basic elements of language as communication – syntax (let's also include what I call 'textax' here) and grammar. That is to say: sentence and paragraph formation principles, and small-scale structural paradigms.

It is a truism to point out that Chinese (along with Korean and Japanese) is exotic to the European language-culture substructure, which means that there is a massive linguistic distance between English and Chinese compared to English and French. Her task was thus made that much more challenging. At least for French learners, English syntax would be less fundamentally problematic, and grammar structures such as tenses would be conceptually more close and accessible.

I met her again six months later, by which time she had attempted the IELTS twice. Here is an example of her written English. At this point, she had been in the school for 9 months since she first arrived, in the classroom for approximately 9 hours a week, and studying with some very good teachers. In her two IELTS exams, she had gained 4.5 and 5.0 respectively. She now came to me as her official teacher. I had three weeks and about 30 hours of classroom time left to help her to turn that 5.0 into a 6.5 so that she could enter the Masters. Her first text for me ran as follows [sic]:

A mount of disabled people in the world. and every country has those who have some problems, of their physical and mental. Even they can not devote on the society yet they still a part of people in our seocity. We should pay more attention to those people because they need more assist and respect.

However, In fact that is a lot of public places which do not conserder for the disabled people who can not walk or can not see. For instance, some buildings not wheelchair's aisle and some of the streets no special marks for the bland people. These so unconveniece to those people, who can not walk on the steps, will give up to go anywhere they want to go, and also damange those people, who can not see, go across the road. Every year, there are high rates shows that lots of disabled people were killed by accidents.

Therefore, government should pay more close attentions on this problem, and they should spend more money to provide funding, and assistance which have special eqiments to help those disabled people, but not just rely on charities and voluntary organisations.

As you can see, her fundamental strength is that she knows some useful words and phrases, and can get a general lexical message across. Her fundamental weaknesses, however, are that she cannot form sentences, she seems to translate a fair bit, she cannot form paragraphs, and she does not know her grammar. She is also short on words – the vocabulary of the everyday world. So, here is a student who has been misled, possibly back in China and quite early on in her learning, into thinking that knowing words and phrases would get her through.

What we decided to do straightaway was to go back to the basics of grammar, and syntax, and unravel as many misconceptions as possible – in fact to rebuild her internal English language framework from the bottom up. We did not have long. Three weeks and thirty teaching hours, to be exact.

I told her what I felt her key areas of need were and what the priority list should be, and she added a few more items. She kept a checklist of what we covered each day, and little by little, we inched through the language areas.

Under basic grammar, we covered:

- stative and dynamic meaning
- auxiliary verbs (do, have, be)
- tenses
- special focus on present perfect and past simple
- modal meaning and modal auxiliary verbs
- adverbs (words, phrases and clauses - 5 categories)
- defining and non-defining adjective phrases and clauses

- prepositions (7 categories)
- question formation
- verb phrases + ‘to’
- verb phrases + ‘ing’
- ‘a’ vs ‘the’

Under syntax and ‘textax’, we covered:

- simple sentences (SVOAdv), noting varying position of adverbs depending on type
- compound sentences (SVOAdv + simple linkword + SVOAdv)
- complex sentences (S(Rel)VO(Rel)Adv + complex linkword + S(Rel)VO(Rel)Adv)
- paragraph construction, with attention also to (i) topic sentence and exploration, and (ii) context markers (e.g. In order to understand the background to this issue, . . .), beginning-sentence logical connectors (e.g. However, . . .), and lubricators (e.g. Indeed, . . . , Clearly, . . . , Unfortunately, . . . , Interestingly, . . .).

We did also spend some time on

(i) further useful expressions, such as:

- ‘It is |wrong/ridiculous/etc| for |parents/people/etc| to |smoke in front of their children/drink and drive’
- ‘it is’ vs ‘there is’
- ‘to be’ + adjective vs ‘to get’ + adjective
- ‘it is evident’ (+ ‘that’ clause as object), ‘we are certain’ (+ ‘that’ clause as object), ‘it is important to stress’ (+ ‘that’ clause as object), ‘the first key problem is’ (+ ‘that’ clause as object), etc,

(ii) key vocabulary, such as:

- ‘issue, topic, item, matter, point, problem, challenge, area, argument, subject’
- many other confusing lexical groups

Towards the end of these three weeks of lessons, she did some practice exam pieces, and this is an example of what she produced [sic]:

Recently, we can see a lot of paintings and sculptures in the cities and towns. The government spend much money on the artists projects and some people believe this is a worthless investment because they think the government should spend more money on the more important thing. In my viewpoint that I do not think it is wrong thing and there are several reasons.

First of all, artist projects are part of education because it is not only showing the artist but also present various history and different culture. It likes a big book which indicate a lot of knowledge in public place where have numerous people. Moreover, through this even very poor people also are educated by these artist projects.

Secondly, many artist can make the cities or towns more beautiful. A city certainly needs buildings wide roads and shops and so on. However, if the city has not any artist projects, it will so boring and we need livid paintings and sculptures to make our cities more beautiful.

Last but not least, elegant paintings and sculptures can attracte many tourists

. . . and so on]

Still a few areas of error – yes. And the subject is very dry (IELTS Academic Writing, Section 2). But I hope you’ll agree, a massive improvement. Here is a candidate who at last feels more in control of her grammatical structures and the sentence-construction process. I would also argue that the added

confidence releases her latent passive knowledge, which seems to come out more accurately – she seems to be less nervous about the fixed phrases she has learnt, and deploys them more accurately. In the IELTS exam she got a 6.0, and was subsequently accepted on to the Masters course.

A re-appraisal of ‘parsing’

The quaint Victorian pastime of parsing sentences, which actually survived into the 1970s in some secondary schools, is rarely pursued in school English syllabuses nowadays. It has been replaced by ‘process’ work, which values *creative language speaking/writing from which accuracy can be coached* through the medium of feedback. This is very similar to the modern philosophy of ELT, in which we are increasingly moving away from a formal approach to the language, and towards ‘*successive accuracisation*’ (I prefer this term, because the similar and more accepted term ‘*successive approximation*’ has the connotation of always remaining approximate) of learner-created text via feedback. In my teenage daughter’s case of learning to write English, it seems to have worked quite well, though spelling and complex syntax are occasionally challenging for her.

Parsing had two levels – (i) parts of speech (ii) the structure of sentences.

(i) In this short conversation you will find examples of most of the **parts of speech** of English.

Hilary: I am very tired and very wet. The train was late and it is raining
1 2 3 4 5 3 4 11 6 2 4 5 7 2
outside.
8

John: Oh dear. Never mind. Take off your coat, sit down, and I will bring
9 9 2 10 6 2 5 1 2
you a cup of tea.
1 11 6

1. ‘I’ and ‘you’ are **pronouns**.
2. ‘am’, ‘was’, ‘is raining’, ‘take off’, ‘sit down’, and ‘will bring’ are **verbs**.
3. ‘very’ is a **modifying adverb**.
4. ‘tired’, ‘wet’, ‘late’ are **normal adjectives**.
5. ‘and’ is a **linker**.
6. ‘train’, ‘coat’, ‘cup of tea’ are **nouns**.
‘train’, ‘coat’ and ‘cup’ are **countable nouns**.
‘tea’ is an **uncountable noun**.
7. ‘it’ is an **impersonal subject**.
8. ‘outside’ is an **adverb of place**.
9. ‘oh dear’ and ‘never mind’ are **fixed expressions**.
10. ‘your’ is a **possessive adjective**.
11. ‘the’ and ‘a’ are **determiners**.

(ii) Now for some identification of **sentence components**.

What I outline below is my own slimmed-down version of English syntax. Any similarities you see, or fail to see, between my version and those in the average grammar book for students, are coincidental. My version absolutely works in the second-language classroom.

The basic structure of English sentences is the word-order rule:

Subject + Verb + Object¹ + Adv.

e.g. John ate the biscuit slowly

Let us call this the **Simple Sentence**². The subject is a Noun Phrase. The verb is a Verb Phrase. The object is a Noun Phrase. The adverb is an Adverb Phrase.

A noun phrase can be: pronoun (e.g. *we, theirs*), article + single word noun (e.g. *a hippopotamus*), article + adjective + noun (e.g. *an angry hippopotamus*), numerator + adjective + noun (e.g. *several angry hippopotamuses*), noun + relative adjective phrase, (e.g. *several of the angry hippopotamuses living in the dried-up riverbed*), etc, etc.

A verb phrase can be: single word (e.g. *went*), auxiliary + main verb (e.g. *has written, may arrive*), verb + verb (e.g. *was trying to open, had intended to be able to control*), semi-fixed phrase (e.g. *to speed up, to make do with, to be on the verge of doing*).

An adverb³ phrase can be: single word or expression or clause, which answers the questions *where, when, how, how much, why, how certainly, with what purpose, because of what, with what result, in contrast to what, conceding what, on what condition*. Its position in the sentence depends on its function, and this position can sometimes vary. There are four categories of verb-qualifying adverb: (i) time, manner, movement, place, extent, certainty (e.g. *soon, without spilling a drop, towards the mountains, at the end of the corridor, up to a point, possibly*) (ii) special group always placed immediately adjacent to verb (e.g. *only, still, already, yet, even, also, etc*) (iii) purpose, reason and result (e.g. *to get a big round of applause, because of my concern for my friends, with unforeseen consequences*) (iv) condition, concession and contrast (e.g. *without her mother's agreement, despite my reservations, in contrast to the norms of our parents' generation*).

Notice how many of these sentence components are lexical expressions.

We can duplicate the simple sentence structure if we join two of them with a simple link-word, such as 'and' or 'but'. So we then get the **Compound Sentence**:

SVOAdv + simple linkword + SVOAdv.

If we then move up a step in complexity, we arrive at the **Complex Sentence**. Complex sentences remain true to the SVOAdv structure, but instead of phrases in the role of adjectives we find *relative clauses*. Instead of simple adverb phrases we find *adverb clauses*, linked to the main sentence by *complex (i.e. subordinating) linkwords* (e.g. *because, with the result that, even though, in spite of the fact that, notwithstanding that*), and these lead to subordinate clauses. Something like this:

S(Rel)VO(Rel)AdvClause + complex linkword + S(Rel)VO(Rel)AdvClause

Here is an example of a complex sentence:

The Queen, who is not known for her openness to public scrutiny, has decided to submit
to a fly-on-the-wall documentary filmed by the journalist who covered Princess
Diana's confessions in 1996, although the rest of her family have tried to dissuade
her

¹ Which includes the 'complement' after verbs like *be, become, get, appear, be like, etc*

² Of course, sentences can be even simpler than this, by the use of (i) intransitive verbs (no object) (ii) no adverb

³ Note that a fifth category of adverb, the modifiers, modifies adjectives not verbs. E.g. *quite, absolutely, a good deal, very*

1 = subject noun phrase; 2 = non-defining adjective relative clause adding extra information about subject; 3 = verb phrase; 4 = object noun phrase including adjective; 5 and 6 = further adjective phrase qualifying the object ‘documentary’, and also including defining adjective relative clause qualifying ‘the journalist’; 7 = complex linkword (concession); 8 = subject noun phrase; 9 = verb phrase; 10 = object as pronoun. (Important note: these parsed sentence-components do not exactly parallel the ‘communicative chunks’ described in Article 9 on *The Music of English*, but do often parallel the lexical chunks we would identify if we were looking at the sentence lexically).

Phew. Got that? Yes, it seems trickier than it actually is⁴.

So what is the point of all this? *The point is that apparently complex sentences have simple underlying structures.* And if you get at that underlying structure, students, even quite low-level students, can be introduced to new realms of both expression and comprehension. This kind of exercise may be less useful to those from a European language background, because of the similarity of syntactic construction in those languages. But for, say, Chinese speakers, such information is both clarifying and liberating. This was starkly demonstrated by my intermediate-level Chinese learner, who, once she had comprehended the syntax work she did with my colleagues and myself, stepped dramatically onto a new plane of language capability.

Why the lexical view of language is not ‘the answer’

The lexical view of language is not ‘the answer’ – at least not the whole answer – because, even if we use Michael Lewis’ taxonomy of phrase-types (fixed expressions, semi-fixed expressions, phrases, collocations, and words), and even if these phrase-types incorporate the majority of the words of the language, this does not account for how we put these together into communicative strings. In other words it does not offer any kind of organising principle.

Many purist lexical aficionados believe that there is no such thing as grammar. They say that grammar is just lexical expression with a little more system.

However, Saussure’s paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations become explanatory at this point. If something appears repeated in the vertical (i.e. paradigmatic) plane, then we have no way of describing it other than that it is ‘grammatical’ i.e. systemic – it has system. The best examples of this would be (i) the inflection ‘-ed’ added to verb infinitives to denote past simple tense and past participles of regular verbs, (ii) the ‘has/ve’ inserted before past participle to denote the present perfect form (iii) the fact that a preposition is always followed by a noun (iv) that verbs decline in systematic ways (v) most adverbs are formed from adjectives adding ‘-ly’ (vi) ‘the’ has two specific uses in text (vii) the role of the infinitive (viii) uncountable and plural nouns do not normally have an article unless specified. Indeed, we could list approximately 50 such paradigmatic features of English. Other European languages, having vastly more inflections than English, both in nouns and verbs, could double or treble this.

⁴ I should emphasise that the story doesn’t quite end here, because at the next level up, we go into what I call ‘textax’, the construction of sequences of sentences, and the relationships between them – what linguists have called ‘cohesion’. In textax, we discover the role of words and phrases like: ‘However’, ‘Indeed’, ‘Presumably’, ‘Curiously’, and ‘Personally speaking’. We see how to use referents and signposts like: ‘the’, ‘this’, ‘it’, ‘the following’, ‘the above’, and so on. And we observe the function of ‘theme-and-rheme’ information-organisation principles in paragraphs and full texts.

But two things to notice. One, this paradigmatic factor does not address the *meaning* of the ‘structures’ so created. For instance, what does ‘have + past participle’ tell us about the meaning of that phrase, and does grammar in fact only refer to structure? Two, there are a large number of words which *apparently* have system but could be argued to *not* have system. Take the word ‘should’. Systemically (i.e. paradigmatically) it is always followed by an infinitive, so that is its grammar. But ‘should’ has a meaning only in relation to the other words it is connected to. For instance: *I should coco; I should jolly well think so; you should see a doctor; you should definitely see ‘Chicago’; they should get here very soon; and so on.* A lexical fan would argue that all these phrases were lexical in nature, and that the semi-fixed expression ‘should + infinitive’ had a number of different meanings used in various contexts, all of them lexical in nature.

OK. So the number of systemic ‘rules of construction’ (i.e. the paradigmatic features of it) is not vast. And they don’t account for meaning. So *is* there a role for ‘grammar’ as an aspect of the language syllabus?

Well, some post-modernists are arguing for a new way of teaching grammar, by not teaching it as such, but by letting it emerge. They argue for drawing the learners’ attention to grammar in text *wholistically*. One method is to use the double version text. The same text is prepared twice – in the first, the text is ‘denuded’ of grammar, in the second, the text contains all the original grammar. Here is an example:

*Couple spend ten year try have baby finally succeed after Feng Shui expert move bed.
Fiona and Darren Burke give up hope child when they hear about ancient China art
arrange thing give home good vibe.*

You try it – answer in the footnote⁵. The method is called ‘grammaticisation’, and is explored in depth in Thornbury (2001). How does the method work? The learners are encouraged, in stage one, to try to reconstruct the first text, and in stage two to compare the two. With the teacher’s guidance, they are helped to draw their own conclusions about the grammar in a holistic and process-oriented way. A repetition of this procedure, over many lessons, is meant to engender a better sense of personal responsibility in the learner, and a familiarity with the method and its intrinsic value.

But it begs two huge questions. If grammar is extracted from the text, to produce the ‘denuded’ text, then does not grammar surely exist? And just because this procedure is new and original, does it make it more efficient in learning terms than what went before, which was the pre-parcelling of grammar into learnable ‘grammar items’ or ‘grammar units’?

My answer is that we absolutely must use our common sense here. First, I accept that a great deal of what used to pass for grammar can be off-loaded into the lexical arena (e.g. used to do, need doing, present continuous, past continuous, etc). This would leave a slimmed-down systemic component consisting of core tenses, core modals, word-formation guidelines (e.g. comparatives), the noun system, the article system, and so on. Secondly, we need to draw a lexical component into the core grammar areas mentioned, such as modals (e.g. (not) be supposed to, (not) be allowed to, etc). Thirdly, we need to re-frame some of the ridiculous false contrasts of former times, just by relocating them (e.g. (i) ‘used to do’ vs ‘be used to doing’ is not intrinsically a confusion, as was so often indicated in textbooks . . . the latter phrase is *be + used to + gerund*, and goes with *be + keen on /*

⁵A couple who spent ten years trying to have a baby finally succeeded after a Feng Shui expert moved their bed. Fiona and Darren Burke had given up hope of a child when they heard about the ancient Chinese art of arranging things to give a home good vibes’.

interested in / etc; the reason for the confusion is *because* they have been taught together (ii) the comparative and the superlative are invariably taught together in textbooks, but actually have nothing to do with each other communicatively – so why not separate them!).

All these changes come from insights derived from the lexical view of language.

But there are two crucial things which hold me back from being a lexical ‘nut’. First, I don’t believe fixed expressions are as wide-spread as we think. Here is an extract from Roy Jenkins’ *Churchill*:

The next day Churchill encountered a less than enthusiastic reception from a House of Commons which had been summoned by individual telegram to meet at 2.30 on the afternoon of Whitsun Bank Holiday Monday. Churchill made a very short statement, more a call to battle than a speech. It did, however, contain phrases which have reverberated down the decades

“I would say to the House, as I said to those who have joined this Government, that I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat. We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind You ask: What is our policy? I will say: it is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might, and with all the strength that God can give us: to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. . . .”

In this text, at most, I see a very few collocations, and a few fixed expressions. How about you? Listen to your colleagues. Try counting the fixed expressions you hear in the conversation around you and see if you think they make up most of it or not much of it.

And second, I still believe in a grammar core. And I believe in it because I think that is what the students want. A grammar rule is not a controlling device. Or a regulation to be adhered to. It is a reference point. It is rule of thumb. It is a hint. It is something to store as a data check – like someone’s telephone number in your mobile telephone. Nobody any longer argues that a grammar rule is what we expect students to extrapolate from, that it has psycholinguistic reality. It has *psychological* reality, as a learning tool, but not as a source from which is produced correct language.

So, my view is that we should let grammar rules be. As teacher, we should learn the few that really count. And learn how the syntax works too. Because the way everything fits together – through syntax and grammar – counts just as much as the deployment of choice lexical expressions.

I suggest too that we remember to separate out the expressions marked for being too native-speakerly. If it’s too idiomatic or colloquial or culturally specific, we may want to leave it out altogether.

A note on lexis and language learning psychology

The lexical view of language is a view which mainly affects our notions of *syllabus*, not *methodology*. Even the ‘grammaticisation’ procedure outlined above does not actually originate from lexical commentators, it merely happens to fit a notion of a downplayed grammar component in language teaching. But one psycholinguistic issue does raise itself in relation to a massively increased lexical load on the learner – the issue of memory. If there is all this extra stuff to learn as fixed expression, are we implying that **repetition** and **rote-learning** may regain a place in the pantheon of teachers’ tools? A question which I will leave for your hackles to conjure with.

It is clear that native speakers have a vast store of memorised chunks (‘prefabs’), and it is true that second language learners need to emulate this to a certain extent, so they too have a store they can use

<p>wherever you <u>like</u> (adverb clause of place) <u>upwardly mobile</u> (adv-adj collocation) <u>absolutely crucial</u> (adv-adj collocation) <u>market share</u> (compound noun collocation) <u>too old to sell</u> (adjective phrase) <u>out of bounds</u> (adjective phrase) <u>under the impression that</u> (adjective phrase) <u>in transition</u> (adjective phrase) <u>behind the times</u> (adjective phrase) <u>possible up to a point that</u> <u>about fifty</u> <u>let's do a test</u> before we <u>use</u> the <u>machine</u> with the <u>public</u> so we can <u>sort out</u> any <u>problems</u> in <u>advance</u></p>	<p>utterly critical</p> <p>well past its sell-by date</p> <p>got it into my head that</p> <p>not beyond the bounds of possibility that <u>fiftyish</u> let's do a dry run before we go live so we can iron out any glitches</p>
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Lexical expressions in the role of functional language

Useful for 'Standard International English'	?Too native-speakerly
<p><u>Absolutely</u> (agreeing) I agree <u>completely</u> (agreeing) In <u>my view</u>, (introducing your opinion) <u>As I understand</u> it(introducing your opinion tentatively) As <u>far as I know</u> (introducing your opinion citing third party info) <u>Right. Let's start</u> (calling a meeting to order) If you <u>don't mind</u>, we'll <u>leave questions</u> to the <u>end</u> (deferring questions) <u>Right, that's it.</u> If there are <u>any questions</u>, <u>please</u> <u>feel free</u> (closing, inviting questions) <u>Can I come in</u> here? (interrupting) <u>Whether you like</u> it or <u>not</u>, (challenging) <u>What we have in mind</u> is that (introducing a negotiating position) <u>Can I suggest</u> that (suggesting) It was <u>not as bad</u> as I <u>expected</u> (showing relief)</p>	<p>Hear hear (agreeing), You're dead right (agreeing) I couldn't agree more (agreeing)</p> <p>I've heard on the grapevine (introducing your opinion citing third party info)</p> <p><u>What d'you reckon</u> if we It could have been a lot worse (showing relief)</p>

Lexical expressions in the role of cohesive markers

Useful for 'Standard International English'	?Too native-speakerly
<p><u>first of all</u>, to be <u>honest</u>, to <u>come back</u> to the <u>point</u>, <u>however</u>, on the <u>one</u> hand, <u>not only</u>, but <u>also</u> <u>presumably</u>, <u>clearly</u>, <u>interestingly</u>, <u>curiously</u>,</p>	<p>in the first place,</p> <p>without a <u>shadow</u> of a <u>doubt</u>, interestingly enough, curiously enough,, <u>funnily</u> enough,</p>

in <u>contrast</u> , on the <u>contrary</u> , to be <u>exact</u> , provided that . . . / on condition that . . . given that . . .	rather, strictly speaking, with the proviso that . . . seeing as how . . .
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Lexical expressions in the role of other parts of speech

Useful for ‘Standard International English’	?Too native-speakerly
in <u>spite</u> of (preposition) a <u>small number</u> of (quantifiers) in the <u>region</u> of (approximator) not <u>nearly</u> as as (comparative) a <u>good deal</u> more than (comparative) as <u>long</u> as (conjunction) if . . . not (conjunction) <u>as a result</u> of (preposition) to a <u>certain extent</u> (adverb modifier phrase)	a <u>distinct lack</u> of in the <u>unlikely event</u> that (conjunction)

I think it needs to be admitted that such a division into ‘useful’ and ‘too native speakerly’ is merely a starting point for a discussion of the relative usefulness of any language being taught. If, for instance, we differentiate between ‘productive’ language and ‘receptive’ language, then the ‘useful’ list might apply to the needs of the first, while the second list might be appropriate for the second, even at intermediate level. And, perhaps more importantly, we have to separate out the first threshold from the second threshold, as I explore in Article 8, on ‘Standard International English’. If we accept the notion of the first SIE threshold (say, at about FCE), then the second threshold is perfect native-speaker competence itself. As such, this second target seems to me to be entirely legitimate for the post-FCE student, and so the selection principle then becomes, not ‘is it or isn’t it too native speakerly?’, but ‘is it or isn’t it useful?’

Conclusion

What I have tried to do in this article is to challenge what I think has become almost an unquestioned view, certainly one that is very widely held, that lexis should be the true basis for the next generation of second-language syllabuses. On the one hand, I have tried to show that grammar (albeit a slimmed-down version, but still in the form of structures and rules), and its sub-system syntax (sentence construction principles), should remain as central components of every syllabus. And on the other hand, I have proposed that the vastness of lexis is only accessible if it is grouped in rational ways (the ways I put forward are only tentative suggestions).

Despite continuing attempts to de-emphasise grammatical units (structures and rules) as a central part of the teaching endeavour, whether through the Lexical Approach propounded by Lewis, or through recent corpus-based literature on the nature of grammar such as Thornbury’s *Natural Grammar* (2004), it seems to me that there are sound and logical reasons for rejecting them. The weighting may have changed – towards more lexis and less grammar – but these two components, in my view, remain equally indispensable. And, fortunately, the key textbook authors, who provide us with 90% of our teaching materials, do not subscribe to the ‘no grammar’ view. I am glad to say that common sense prevails among publishers, and our textbooks continue to be founded on the only organising principle available – grammar.

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