

TEACHING AND LEARNING POLYWORDS THROUGH COMICS: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The paper's present interest mainly lies in an attempt to display how polywords can be taught through comics using The Lexical Approach. The objectives of the present paper are four fold: first, it provides an introduction to the Lexical Approach. Secondly, offers varied views on the concept of 'polywords', and underscores the importance of polywords in the teaching of English. Thirdly, it highlights the advantages of using comics as a tool to teach polywords to the learners of English. Fourthly, it includes a few exercises and activities for the polywords which have been identified in the comics to aid learners in reinforcing these chunks in their mental lexicon.

KEYWORDS: Language Learning, Polywords, *The Lexical Approach*

INTRODUCTION

Language learning is very important nowadays. There are many reasons why second language learners should improve their knowledge of English. The most important reason is the ability of communication. People need to be able to communicate in another language, to be successful and self-confident in their life today.

Many methods and approaches have been developed in the recent times how to teach languages. Some of the methods moved from the old fashion memorization of grammar rules and single words to more naturally acquired knowledge and ability to speak. One such method which concentrates on acquisition of language through phrases and unanalysed wholes or chunks is *The Lexical Approach*. This approach places communication of meaning at the centre of language learning.

The lexical approach to language teaching has been developed by the British applied linguist, Michael Lewis. He published a book in 1993 titled, *The Lexical Approach: The State of ELT and a Way forward*. In this book he opines that language teaching is based on the principle that language consists primarily not of grammatical structures/patterns but of lexical units. To quote Lewis, (1993:95) *this approach focusses on developing learner's proficiency with lexis, or word and word combinations*. In his new role of lexis, Lewis (1993:95) proposes the following major points:

- Lexis is the basis of language.
- Lexis is misunderstood in language teaching because of the assumption that grammar is the core of language and that the control over the structured system is a must for effective communication.
- The key principle of a lexical approach is that "a language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar".
- One of the central organizing principles of any-meaning centred syllabus should be lexis.

Lexical Approach

Lexical Approach to language teaching is based on the principles that language consists primarily not of

grammatical structures/patterns but of lexical units. To quote Lewis, *this approach focusses on developing learner's proficiency with lexis, or word and word combinations.* (1993:95).

He holds that native speakers store chunks in their mental lexicon to retrieve and use them in their language. Also, he states that the ability to chunk language successfully is central to an understanding of how language works. For this reason, Lewis suggests that language teaching should include the teaching of lexis or chunks. In fact, he advocates that lexis/ lexical phrases in any language offer more communicative and expressive power than grammatical structures.

Lexis

Though the terms *lexis* and *vocabulary* are often stated in the same context and mostly treated as synonyms, there exists a wide difference in meaning between these two terms and they are not one and the same. The distinction will be made clear by making a note of these definitions put forward by Michael Lewis:

Lexis is a more general word than common vocabulary. Vocabulary is often used to talk of the individual words of language; lexis covers single words and multi-word objects which have the same status in the language as simple words, the items we store in our mental lexicons ready for use.

(Lewis1997:217)

Although the lexical items are of different kinds, Lewis identifies them as falling into four types:

- **Words and Polywords:** Words include all the essential vocabulary for learners to memorize (*book, penetc.*) Polywords is a small group of lexical items which fall between words and major multi-word categories. For instance, *bread and butter.*
- **Collocations:** Word and word combinations (*take an exam, heavy rain etc.*)
- **Fixed Expressions:** The chunks which are comparatively rare and short and are mostly used in spoken language (Have a nice day and How do you do?)
- **Semi-Fixed Expressions:** The expressions that range from 'very short to very long' (Its/That's right, Looking forward to hearing from/seeing/ meeting you.)

Polywords in Detail

These are expressions which allow no variation. For example: *By the way, up to now.* According to Lewis (1997:22) these are *invariable, indivisible word- like units. They are words-with-spaces- in-them. These polywords have exactly the same status in the language as individual words. Speakers do not construct these items, but simply recall them, direct from the memory, as learned wholes.They are often, but by no means exclusively adverbial phrases of different kinds.*

Here are some examples:

- **Sentence Adverbs:** *On the other hand, In some ways*
- **Expressions of Time:** *The day after tomorrow, every now and then*
- **Prepositions of Place:** *On the either side of, upside down*

Lewis (1993: 92) treats phrasal verbs as *one kind of polywords* and this he feels *the only one to be featured prominently in conventional language teaching*. e.g.: *put off, look up, look up to*

Lexis in Language Teaching and Learning

In the lexical approach, lexis in its various types is thought to play a central role in language teaching and learning. Nattinger (1980: 341) *suggests that*

Teaching should be based on the idea that language production is the piecing together of ready-made units appropriate for a particular situation. Comprehension of such units is dependent on knowing the patterns to predict in different situations. Instruction, therefore, along with the ways they vary and the situations in which they occur.

The following are the activities a teacher should use to develop the learners' knowledge of lexical chains:

- Repetition and recycling of activities, such as summarizing a text orally one day and again a few days later to keep words and expressions that have been learned active.
- First and second language comparisons and translation-carried out chunk- for -chunk, rather than word- for- word- aimed at raising language awareness.
- Intensive and extensive listening and reading in the target language.

Implications of Learning Polywords

It is very important to learn polywords as they can aid the learners in many ways in communicating their message to others effectively. Nattinger (1992:38) opines that *"polywords are associated with a wide variety of functions, such as expressing speaker qualification of the topic at hand, relating one topic to another, summarizing, shifting topics, and so on."* Lewis (1997:23) substantiates that *polywords are of particular importance in ensuring fluency in speech and coherence in writing.*

Advantages of Teaching/Learning Lexical Phrases

- Learners can retrieve the chunks as wholes and express themselves with ease.
- They allay the inhibitions of the learners and promote motivation and fluency.
- New patterns can be constructed using the phrases as they help in understanding the syntactic rules to a great extent.
- They offer the learners the possibility of expressing themselves in the absence of linguistic resources.
- They are highly memorable as they are embedded in socially appropriate situations.

Advantages of Using Comics in Teaching Polywords

- Comics have proved to be a rich source of polywords.
- They contain natural and conversational English with many chunks of polywords which are useful for the learners during their interaction with others.
- Comics contain a variety of polywords which aid the learners to communicate effectively.
- Furthermore, comics provide us an excellent opportunity to gain exposure to authentic language.

Method of Research

For the present research, initially, 10 *Tinkle Magazines* and *Tinkle Digests* have been read. Thereafter, 10 stories have been selected for the study based on the presence of polywords. A total of 42 polywords were identified in these comics. These polywords have been categorized according to the classification propounded by Lewis. After categorizing them, exercises and activities have been devised to reinforce these chunks in the learners' mental lexicon.

The main objective of all the exercises and activities included in the paper is to raise the learners' awareness on polywords which is eventually expected to lead to their increased proficiency in English.

Polywords Identified in the Comics

Expressions of Time

- | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1) In no time | 4) After some time | 7) The next day |
| 2) After many days | 5) From today onwards | 8) The day after |
| 3) Within a few days | 6) For almost a week | 9) In course of time |

Sentence Adverbs

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| 1) In the first round | 4) In fact |
| 2) In all the commotion | 5) On no account |
| 3) As if in reply | |

Phrasal Verbs

- | | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 1) Starts off | 7) Came upon | 13) Leave for |
| 2) Scurried off | 8) Call upon | 14) Rolling in |
| 3) Give up | 9) Doze off | 15) Get away |
| 4) Gave away | 10) Going through | 16) Caught up |
| 5) Packed off | 11) Pass up | 17) Checked into |
| 6) Shinned down | 12) Take off | 18) Shove off |

Exercises and Activities

Expressions of Time

Exercise 1

Match the words in column A with words in column B to form expressions of time.

1. In no	a. days
2. After many	b. a week
3. For almost	c. time
4. The next	d. after
5. The day	e. day

Exercise 2

Write meaningful sentences using the polywords given below.

1. Within a few days
2. After some time
3. From today onwards
4. In course of time

Activity 1

Instruct the learners to sit in groups to discuss and write at least ten expressions of time they had encountered in the past. Ask a member from each group to read out their expressions to the whole class.

Sentence Adverbs

Exercise 3

Choose the right expression of time from the two options in the brackets to make a meaningful sentence.

1. _____, we will have to take a written test. (On no account/ In the first round).
2. _____, our team leader is a generous man though he appears to be stingy. (In fact/ As if in reply)
3. _____, should you leave us. (In all the commotion/ On no account)
4. _____, she got a cheque from the bank. (As if in reply/ In all the commotion)
5. _____, she seems to be relatively happy. (In all the commotion/ On no account)

Activity 2

Provide the learners with a comic story to spot out the expressions of time and underline them and label as polywords. Also, ask any one learner in the class to read out what he has noticed.

Exercise 4

Fill in the blanks using a particle from the box.

Up down away upon for through

1. She gave _____ her decision to learn music.
2. The thief shinned _____ the drain pipe and ran off.
3. I gave _____ my old pans to a friend who's just set up home.
4. Mr Syam came _____ an amazing building on his way to his friends place.
5. She is going _____ a difficult situation.
6. She left _____ Delhi yesterday.

Activity 3

Refer to the phrasal verb dictionary to find out if the phrasal verbs formed above have multiple meanings other than the ones you are aware of.

Exercise 5

Choose the right phrasal verb from the options given to form acceptable sentences.

1. I now _____ Dr Collins to express his views on the topic.
 - a) Going through
 - 2) Call upon
 - 3) rolling in
 - 4) getting away

2. Please do not _____ this wonderful opportunity.
 - a) Shinned down b) give away c) came upon d) pass up
3. Offers of help are still _____.
 - a) Checked into b) rolling in c) give up d) going through
4. I _____ with him forever.
 - a) Gave away b) checked into c) got away d) came upon
5. I was _____ in the riots.
 - a) Caught up b) going through c) give up d) pass up
6. He _____ a hospital for minor operation.
 - a) Call upon b) rolling in c) checked into d) get away

Activity 4

Make the learners sit in a circle. Instruct them to play musical chairs. Ask one learner to go around the circle with one verb written on a slip of paper. Let him drop the paper at the back of one learner. The learner has to pick up the paper and frame at least three phrasal verbs to the word provided. On failing to do it, the learner will be excluded from the group.

Exercise 6

Match the phrasal verbs in column A with their meanings in column B.

1. Start off	a. to run with quick short steps
2. Scurried off	b. to send somebody somewhere
3. Packed off	c. to leave the ground and begin to fly
4. Doze off	d. to tell somebody rudely to go away
5. Take off	e. to go to sleep
6. Shove off	f. To begin to move

Activity 5

Let the learners sit in groups. Write the phrasal verbs above on pieces of papers and place them in a container. Ask one learner from each group to pick a slip of paper to frame a sentence using the phrasal verb on the slip. Make them write the sentences on the board.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

In conclusion, the study had observed that one of the best ways to teach polywords is through the lexical approach. The study has also observed that authentic texts like comics are a rich source of polywords. The study recommends that comics be incorporated into the curriculum of the young learners as they are highly effective in breaking the monotony that crops up during the process of teaching/learning a language. The study also underlines the importance of teaching polywords to the learners by introducing them to a few exercises and activities as it unburdens the pressure of the learning at least a little bit and broadens the communicative ability.

Key

Expressions of time

Exercise 1

- 1) c 2) a 3) b 4) e 5) d

Exercise 2

- 1) Within a few days, she received an appointment letter.
- 2) After some time, you should go the seminar hall to listen to the lecture.
- 3) From today onwards, you should never be late to the college.
- 4) In course of time, they became good friends.

Sentence Adverbs

Exercise 3

- 1) In the first round
- 2) In fact
- 3) On no account
- 4) As if in reply
- 5) In all the commotion

Exercise 4

- 1) Gave up
- 2) Shinned down
- 3) Gave away
- 4) Came over
- 5) Going through
- 6) Left for

Exercise 5

- 1) Call upon
- 2) Pass up
- 3) Rolling in
- 4) Got away
- 5) Caught up
- 6) Checked into

Exercise 6

- 1) f
- 2) a
- 3) b
- 4) e

5) c

6) d

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