A Critical Study of the Lexical Syllabus

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INTRODUCTION

With the availability of electronic tools which allow close examination of word use in a large amount of texts, recent years have seen a proliferation of corpus-based word studies (Aijmer & Altenberg 1991; Sinclair 1991; James et al. 1994) The particular behaviours of words can now be studied, and patterns of language use can be established with empirical support. Findings from these studies are challenging traditional beliefs derived from intuition and retrospection and are reshaping our understanding of language. The emergence of a lexical syllabus is closely related to this development. Proponents are often those who are also deeply involved in corpus linguistics, and the rationale behind a lexical syllabus is firmly rooted in this new perspective of looking at language.

There are several unresolved problems concerning the construction of a lexical syllabus. I will argue here that a lexical approach arises from a tenable view of the language system and facilitates the natural acquisition process. I will also suggest that much has to be known about lexis to support the full implementation of a lexical syllabus.

THE RATIONALE FOR A LEXICAL SYLLABUS

Lexis and grammar in the language system

As a document translating what we understand about language learning into practical action, a syllabus must have a "specifiable relationship with what we know of the nature of language, language acquisition, second language learning and language use" (Brumfit 1984:77).

Traditionally, syllabus specification of linguistic items takes the form of structures. Why is it that a word specification is preferred? One argument is that words are idiosyncratic. Not only that exact synonyms are hard to find, but they also fit in different structures and take different collocates. That a substantial syntactic knowledge about each word is essential for language proficiency has long been recognised in language teaching. Palmer (1938:iii) diagnosed that the main difficulty for an intermediate learner is not a knowledge of "grammatical categories (noun,
verb, subject, complement, interrogative)" but "the grammatical peculiarities pertaining to individual words". Added to this, the learner needs to know about a word's collocates, i.e. words which are likely to co-exist with it. For example, pledge is likely to occur with allegiance, slim with chance, and keen with competition. To have the right collocation is an essential condition for one to sound 'natural' or 'nativelike'; cf. Hanks (1987:121):

The words of English simply do not, typically, combine and re-combine freely and randomly ... The distinction between the possible and the typical is of the greatest importance.

Therefore, proponents of a lexical syllabus argue that syntactic and collocational information of words should occupy a central place in a syllabus; cf. Willis (1990:52):

If we are to attempt to list realistically the content of a syllabus, it seems to me to be necessary to go into at least this level of detail. It is not enough to offer a list of structure frames without indicating which words are likely to fill them and also how the words which fill the frames are likely to behave.

This argument for a lexical syllabus is reasonable but does not present a very strong case. If what a learner needs to know are properties of words in addition to structures, we may as well adopt a basically structural specification and supplement this with a heavier dosage of lexical input. However, recent corpus-based studies reveal that the relationship between sense, syntax and collocation is far closer than what is implied by a simple 'additive' view. Sinclair (1991:83) suggests that

... quite a few of the very common words in a language are so unlike the others that they should be considered as unique, one-member word classes ... The one-member class is the place where grammar and lexis join.

The word that Sinclair chose to analyse was of, but we can quite easily think of many more such as to, for, by and so on. These words characteristically enjoy high frequency on all occasions of language use and have low informational content. In fact, most of the time, they have very little independent meaning but rather meaning derived from the context: e.g. go to school (attend); to the lighthouse (direction); give something to somebody (receiver of action). We can hardly talk about their senses without referring to the structural and lexical environments in which they occur.
If these words were the only ones in question, we could of course argue that they are merely exceptions and that their existence does not warrant a change of our view about lexis and grammar. However, many other words, especially those in the high-frequency categories, have sense-sensitive patterns of use: e.g.

\[ \text{to do sth about a problem} / \ ?\text{doing sth about a problem} \]
\[ \text{Are you doing anything tonight?} / *\text{Do you do anything tonight?} \]

Furthermore, even words that are often thought of as having only a few, and rather fixed, meanings display a surprisingly close relationship between senses and syntactic patterns. The following are the three senses of *deny* listed in the COLLINS COBUILD ENGLISH LANGUAGE DICTIONARY (Sinclair 1987) with their corresponding patterns of use:

1. When you **deny** sth, you say that it is not true. ...
2. If you **deny** someone something that they need or want, you prevent them from having it. ...
3. If you **deny** someone or something, you say that they have no connection with you or do not belong to you; an old-fashioned use.

Just like syntax, collocation is far from a separate dimension. It has a role in determining the different senses of a word. That is why although many words have more than one meaning, it is seldom necessary for us to specify which sense is being used in discourse. The sense which is meant is usually clear from the words that occur around the item. In fact, some combinations of words have become so fixed that collocation and meaning converge. Numerous examples can be found in idiomatic expressions such as *of course, a case in point, as a matter of fact, and so on* and so on.

The foregoing discussion seems to lead to the conclusion that sense, structure and collocation are integral properties of words, which interrelate with each other. Not that we cannot talk about structures; but we must not detach them from the lexicon and handle them separately. Following this argument, a lexical syllabus should list words together with their customary patterns of use both in terms of syntax and collocation. A syllabus design must give due recognition to this feature of the language system.
Creativity and stability in language

Among the various linguistic levels of phonemes, morphemes, words and syntax, the last is the most powerful tool of creation as it allows the greatest generality. Brumfit (1978:82) maintains that with a grammatical system "a limited and describable number of rules enable the learner to generate an enormous range of utterances". We may query the extent of creativity that language users actually make use of, but it is unlikely that they do not internalise such a system. In fact, how a learner develops such a system has been, and is still, a central issue in second language acquisition studies. Furthermore, a tenet of interlanguage studies is that learners are making hypotheses about the language system and testing them against the language they are exposed to all the time, and that they make progress by means of a continual process of hypothesis renewal.

On the other hand, languages also display some measure of stability. Learners of a language will soon realise that there is often a certain way of saying something and words simply do not combine freely or randomly. Collocation is just one way in which this stability manifests itself. At a syntactic level, words also combine in peculiar ways that cannot always easily be explained. Bolinger (1976) has pointed out the strange syntactic behaviour of the English verb bear, for example. While it is possible to say I bear them no love, it is not permissible to say *I bear them love. As if to defy logic further, the love that I bear them is considered acceptable. A little reflection will show that syntactic invariability characterises much of our daily use of language.

Creativity and stability, then: which represents a more realistic view of language? The conventional position has been that creativity prevails and the items which are stable are few in number. However, recent studies of language actually put to use are yielding more and more evidence to the contrary. For example, Sinclair (1991:110) suggests that two principles are at work in text interpretation. The open choice principle sees that "at each point where a unit (in a text) is completed ... a large range of choice opens up and the only restraint is grammaticality", whereas the idiom principle accounts for "the restraints that are not captured by the open-choice model". His exploration of the data from the COBUILD corpus reveals that "normal text ... appears to be formed by exercise of the idiom principle, with occasional switching to the open-choice principle" (ibid:113). Studies of word forms and phrases cannot demonstrate the relative importance of these two principles directly.

Kjellmer (1991) carried out an interesting study which aimed "to demonstrate the extent to which ordinary expository prose is dependent on ready-made phrases". A sample was taken from the prose writing of Jan Svartvik and compared to a cor-
pus of collocations based on the Brown Corpus (Kučera & Francis 1967). Kjellmer found that almost the whole text was made up of either "fixed combinations" or "groups [of words] whose form and order are likely to be conditioned in varying degrees by patterns of collocability" (op. cit.:120), a conclusion echoing Sinclair’s position and seeming to explain the feeling that instances of our day-to-day use of language sound similar in one way or another.

**Unit of learning and unit of use**

Linguistics has a tradition of analysing the composition of language from minimal units. Along the same line, "child language researchers have generally approached the description of first-language acquisition (FLA) using the traditional apparatus of adult language description" (Peters 1983:1). It was not until late 1970s and early 1980s that evidence began to emerge to suggest chunks rather than adult words as units of acquisition. Peters suggests that FLA falls into three stages: the child starts by remembering unanalysed chunks, then breaks down the chunks into more or less analysed units, and finally re-fuses the recurrent constructions to pre-assembled analysed chunks. It is important to point out that Peters is not implying the learning of chunks but learning by chunks. The gradual breaking down of memorised chunks opens the way to the building of the language system.

Chunk learning may not be as prominent in adults as in children. The more analytical learning style of adult learners, the influence of their first language and their previous contact with the written word all result in the early establishment of the analytical process. However, even with adults, it is unlikely that newly acquired strings of language are analysed completely and immediately. It is more plausible that they are only partly analysed and both the whole strings and the analysed parts will then be stored in the mental lexicon. It will be some time before similarities between structures are fully understood and the strings fully broken down and entered into the learner’s language system. At the same time, some of these strings will remain unanalysed or semi-analysed. It seems reasonable to expect adult learners, as in the case of children, will re-fuse analysed parts into ready-made units for use as an economy device to reduce the processing load. If a certain expression is needed again and again, there is no reason why it has to be generated anew each time. As the communication need of adults is considerably greater than that of a child, it follows that the need to fuse is even greater.

The continuous processes of memorisation, analysis and fusion thus result in a very fluid picture of the mental lexicon where lexical items are stored redundantly rather than parsimoniously. Bolinger (1976) has cited many examples to demonstrate the irregularities of English expressions. It is often the case that one
expression is susceptible to certain grammatical operations or morphemic modification but resists others. That is probably because expressions are more or less analysed and are used in the ways that they have been seen before.

Pawley & Syder (1983:191) point out that it is an essential ability of the native speaker "to convey his meaning by an expression that is not only grammatical but also nativelike". An expression that is nativelike may not be the shortest or the simplest grammatically. Nor does it follow any categorical rules. But as it is the way to say something, it is lexicalised and stored as such, contributing to a nativelike fluency in real-time communication. How can a learner acquire this nativelike ability? There seems to me no other way than experiencing the suitable expressions actually used and remembering them. Thus there is a reason for the importance of exposure in language learning. In language teaching, a stress must be placed on the presentation of words in their typical contexts. When they are not yet analysed, these strings represent an immediate tool of communication. Parts of these will also feed into the language system and contribute to that component of language ability that is creative, while parts will stay unanalysed or be re-fused for nativelike real-time communication.

How is the meaning of a lexical item learned? In a child's case, meaning is first perceived holistically from the context in which it occurs; the matching of a word to a scope of meaning similar to the adult's is a gradual process. Adult learners generally cannot tolerate vagueness in the meaning of words. Since adults are already very proficient users of another language and are cognitively mature, they can translate or gloss the words they meet. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon even for adults to misplace or only half understand meanings. They develop, modify and enrich the meaning(s) of a word as they experience it used many times in different contexts. Furthermore, as Carter (1987:22) observes:

Meaning is ... primarily relational and the meaning of a word can, in most cases, be best illustrated by reference to the network of meanings which exist between senses and sub-senses of lexemes.

Even as simple a word as white cannot be easily demonstrated.

What has been stressed so far is that the learning process is a gradual one and it is impossible to say in a clear-cut manner that certain structures or certain meanings have been learned at any point in time. The implication for a lexical syllabus is that words are not to be learned one by one, completely and clearly. A lexical approach should stress the keeping of words with their right company and presenting them through exposure in various contexts.
SOME PRACTICAL ISSUES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF A LEXICAL SYLLABUS

Unit of specification

The foregoing discussion seems to support the hypothesis that lexis is an appropriate level of specification. Yet this is not to say that we can immediately adopt the ‘word’ as the unit. The common-sense ‘word’ is little more than an orthographic convention that refers to “any sequence of letters bounded on either side by a space or punctuation mark” (Carter 1987:4). It is not always matched by the other qualities subsumed under its name. Problems often cited include word-forms which have more than one meaning and different forms which belong to the same ‘word’. Other terms have been devised to avoid these confusions. For example, Bloomfield (1933) defines ‘word’ as a “minimal meaningful unit”. This solves the problem posed by multi-word units but does not seem to apply, for example, to the grammatical words in English. The concept of ‘lexeme’ as an abstraction brings the inflected forms of the same word together but corpus-based word studies are starting to show that these forms have unique frequency and patterns of occurrence. We can anticipate that as more and more data in this area are gathered, the concept of lexeme may become hard to maintain.

Indeed, when considering the unit of specification for a lexical syllabus, we are in search of a unit of linguistic data either as input, for use or for storage. There is no need to be bound by orthographic convention. The phrasal verbs of English are a case in point. As they are typically made up of a verb and one or more particles, the verb is traditionally made the head of the whole set. This is the way that they are usually handled in teaching materials and dictionaries. Phrasal verbs are notoriously difficult for most learners, who are often advised to resort to rote memorisation to learn them. What kind of representation should they have in a lexical syllabus? Are *make* and *make up* one item with two usage patterns, or two separate items? Evidence from corpora seems to favour the latter. Of the phrasal verbs with *set*, Sinclair (1991:78) argues:

If *set in train* always occurs together in this sequence when it has the obvious meaning, then the three words constitute one choice. As soon as learners have appreciated that each phrase operates as a whole, more or less as a single word, then the difficulty disappears and they have a new word *set in train*.

Orthographic words and phrasal verbs are still rather clearly defined entities. The many set structures with variable slots pose a further problem. These set structures display a range of variability. At the productive end, the choice for the slot could
be fairly free except that certain lexical conditions have to be met. For example, it is on this ground that Kjellmer (1991) regards will thwart in his data from Svartvik's writing as a variable collocation as it falls into the same lexical set as will prevent, will reduce and will stop, all of which are found in the Brown Corpus.

Most of these considerations are derived from studies of language in use. It seems to me instructive to explore whether the argument over a lexical item is supported by its representation in the mental lexicon. In our discussion of the learning process, it has been suggested that words might not be stored individually. The unit of storage and the unit in which items are deployed for use in communication have important bearings for determining the unit in which words should be taught. This is a particularly elusive area as, if Peters' theory of the learning process is tenable, the representation of lexical items in the mental lexicon, shaped by the on-going processes of analysis and fusion, varies from person to person and from time to time. Kjellmer (1991:121) also brings an individual dimension to his collocational studies:

At the productive end of the scale the distinction between collocational and non-collocational sequences of words will be blurred from the point of view of the language system although perhaps clear from the point of the view of the individual speaker—different speakers will have different intuitions here depending on their linguistic experience, their professional training, reading habits, social life, etc.

This raises several issues which, disappointingly, seem to take us further and further away from an absolute answer. This might not be a situation to lament, though. These issues should at least serve to warn us of the vagueness of a word-list as a syllabus, and to remind us of the many possibilities that could be more valid than the orthographic word or word-form. Even if the word-list is just for the purpose of grading developmental readers, for which there is a long tradition, practitioners have expressed a general dissatisfaction with most word-lists:

At worst, syllabus devisers give the impression that they believe once a word-form is known—by the student readership—all meanings and uses of that form will be known; either that, or when they establish their list of undefined word-forms they assume everyone will automatically understand what they have in mind without there being any need to say so. (Foulks 1993:51)

In our case, where a lexical syllabus is meant for a general language course, the demand placed on the precision of specification must be even greater.
Selection and organisation

To select a manageable number of items from the entire vocabulary for inclusion in a learner's course is no simple task. This section examines some of the most widely used criteria of selection and discusses their validity.

Among all the criteria, the frequency count is the most objective means of item selection. As a statistical measurement, a frequency count's validity depends heavily on the establishment of an updated, balanced and representative corpus. The use of frequency counts for word selection is not new. The most notable example can be found in West's General Service List of English Words (1953), originally designed for grading readers, which has had a significant influence on English language teaching and is still informing the grading of readers and the design of syllabus today (Foulds 1993). In the absence of any other objective guide to vocabulary selection, frequency information remains an important tool and is employed in much vocabulary research as an objective measurement of learner proficiency.

Nevertheless, it is important to be aware that "the relation between word frequency and word utility is by no means direct" (Richards 1974:72). For example, grammatical words are bound to have a higher representation because they are the words that build up the structure of English. Richards therefore concludes that frequency only reflects "a degree of generality or grammaticality", not a degree of utility. On the other hand, the representation of concrete nouns depends largely on the topic of texts in the corpus and tends to be unstable. Michea (cited in Richards 1970:88) is probably right to claim that this imbalance of representation is an inherent weakness of frequency counts, which cannot be redressed by better sampling.

Proponents of a lexical syllabus such as Sinclair & Renouf (1988) and Willis (1990) place much significance on the words of high frequency. As a relatively small number of words account for a very high proportion of text in English (the 700 most common words make up 70% of all texts and the 2,000 most common account for around 80%), they argue that teaching common words means that learners will only learn what is worth learning and therefore this represents the most efficient way to teach and to learn. What they claim is partially true. This principle of selection naturally leads to early teaching of grammatical words and other delexicalised items. These words, though having very little meaning themselves, make up the structure of English. The many contexts in which they can be used can be presented at different times of the course in a cyclical manner so that learners can internalise the patterns of use gradually. As these words appear fairly often, learners will have many chances of seeing them in use or actually using
them, thus enhancing the learning result. Nevertheless, the role of the most common words in English in language comprehension and production may not be as significant as the figures suggest. Knowing 70% or even 80% of the words in a text does not guarantee comprehension of it. Richards (1974) points out that words of high frequencies and probabilities of occurrence are usually low in information content and so it is very probable that we recognize 80% of the words in a text and yet totally fail to understand it since the crucial information may be contained in the ‘outsider’.

Delexicalised words constitute another case for consideration. They are common in texts because they contrast with many other different words to create meanings. It would be doubtful if make, for example, is as powerful to a beginning learner as it is to a proficient user who also knows decision, discoveries, arrangements as well as the many set and semi-set phrases that make plays a part in constructing.

Frequency counts are based on language which is actually used. To provide learners with the words they need, we should also include words which can be retrieved when their service is needed. Richards (1974) finds that psycholinguistic considerations are especially important for selecting concrete nouns that frequency counts slight. He proposes two more yardsticks: availability and familiarity. Available words are “known in the sense that they come to mind rapidly when the situation calls for them” (op. cit.:76). Having retrieval as the main concern, availability has more relevance for language production. However, as available words are tied to situations, the actual selection necessitates hypothesising “points of interest”, which are themselves subject to selection and evaluation. Familiarity is an impressionistic rating obtained from users and represents a composite function of the frequency of experiencing words, their meaningfulness and concreteness. Although restricted in application, availability and familiarity are useful supplements to frequency counts.

The final list of items for a lexical syllabus can thus only be arrived at after a considerable balancing effort and the same criteria may not be appropriate for compilation of items for all levels of learners. It is reasonable to expect that as learners proceed, it will be more and more difficult to agree on the words that are useful to them. The significance of frequency counts diminishes sharply after the first 2,000 or 3,000 words. General predictions about learners’ needs also tend to become impractical for the individual. At this stage, learners may wish to go beyond the core words to acquire those that will enable them to handle a greater range of fields, tenors and modes of discourse appropriately and to use words more effectively and accurately.

Obviously, a list of pre-set items derived mainly from frequency counts does not
offer much guidance for organisation. There is also no point in looking for, or establishing, systematicity among the items themselves as this may not be conducive to learning. As McCarthy (1990:91) points out, the challenge of ordering vocabulary items is to present them in a way that "can be perceived and understood by the learners". It is probably out of this concern that most teaching materials are organised by some kind of thematic focus. Topics offer useful frameworks as they "relate more readily to people's experience than, perhaps, semantic or formal categories may do" (ibid.).

The imposition of a pre-set list of words obviously has a restrictive effect on the choice of topics. Even the most enthusiastic supporters of the lexical syllabus seem to recognise this difficult match:

there will be a reasonable range of topics which can be covered, and
a chance that the work will be lively and interesting.

(Sinclair & Renouf 1988:150; my emphasis)

The restraining effect of a pre-set lexical list could be difficult to avoid if the course to be designed is a general one. Nevertheless, this problem should be much alleviated if the learners have very specialised interests as, in such cases, frequency counts can be made on the basis of texts in those areas (cf. James et al. 1994). The manipulation of an appropriate corpus for analysis can greatly enhance the usefulness of frequency count.

**SOME APPLICATIONS OF THE LEXICAL APPROACH**

The best documented attempt to apply a lexical approach in the preparation of a course is the Collins COBUILD English Course (CCEC) by Willis & Willis (1988), who worked in collaboration with the COBUILD project. Making use of the data in COBUILD corpus, Willis (1990) claims that they are in possession of full knowledge of behaviour of the several hundred words listed in the syllabus. Setting out with the belief that a syllabus should not be synthetic, i.e. linguistic items should not be presented to the learners one by one, they compiled a learners' corpus from authentic texts. The coverage of the words in the syllabus in the learners' corpus was then checked against that in the main COBUILD corpus. In principle, this corpus, limited as it is in size, provides learners with a learning experience comparable to the larger corpus, but in a more efficient way.

The question to ask about CCEC is whether it is truly based on a lexical syllabus. To me, a fundamental tenet of a lexical syllabus is the view of words in natural contexts of use, for which the orthographic word or a word-form may not always
be the most appropriate unit of specification. Although our early discussion on this issue has not led to a well-defined unit for adoption, quite a few forms seem to be plausible, e.g. fixed phrases, phrasal verbs, frames with variable slots etc. However, CCEC continues the traditional approach in having the word-form as the head of each entry. Each chapter ends with a list of word-forms that are supposed to have been covered and a complete list is provided at the end of each volume. Even though these lists are only for the learners’ or the instructors’ reference purposes and the complete syllabus is much more detailed, by equating a word-form and a lexical item, the specification assumes a misleading clarity and lacks precision of indication.

CCEC’s decision to adopt the word-form as a unit for the syllabus could be an indication of the limitation of our current knowledge concerning lexical items. Recent advances in the speed and capacity of concordancing technology have not been accompanied by a comparable improvement in flexibility. It is still much easier for one to concordance word-forms to study their behaviour than it is to concordance variable phrases. However, as Kjellmer observes, the inconspicuous combinations of English are a vital part of the lexicon, perhaps more so than their more conspicuous set counterparts. This is because they “help to lend structure to the lexicon, and are the ones that every learner of the language will need to learn before tackling the fossilized and semi-fossilized phrase” (op.cit.:114). Not unlike traditional teaching materials, CCEC manages to emphasise certain categories of words such as grammatical words, delexicalised verbs and set phrases, but has done little to address those much less conspicuous ones such as a number of, a touch of, brought about by, for a change, it appears that, it is obvious that etc. (ibid.) In this regard, CCEC has not lived up to its claim to be fully lexical in approach.

In CCEC, the creation of a learners’ corpus is an important methodological device to transform a potentially synthetic syllabus into an analytic one. One may readily imagine the difficulty of ensuring just the right coverage for all the several hundred words in the syllabus. Naturally, only some of these words will have the chance of appearing in various contexts of use, while most of the others can be included only incidentally. It is also reasonable to expect that when we move down the frequency list, this situation will aggravate as the course will then be including less frequent words in general. In other words, we cannot hope that the learner will receive very intensive experience of these less frequent words in the course. This limited exposure will enable them potentially to recognise these words passively but they may not be able to make use of them appropriately in terms of syntactic operation and collocation restrictions. Insofar as the learning of these words is concerned, the effectiveness of the learners’ corpus will not be much greater than that of general readers. Indeed, we cannot be sure that learners will learn all the words they come into contact with. We can only hope that:
... the reader's experience of new words in a text is rich enough for those words to become part of the reader's linguistic repertoire.

(Foulds 1993:57)

As CCEC is targeted at false beginners, some previous exposure to the language can be assumed and it is possible to present quite a large amount of language at the very beginning. Willis & Willis (1988) consider that it is important that the learner's language experience should not be stilted and simplified, and all the texts in CCEC are claimed to be authentic. It is doubtful if the same approach would work with real beginners, especially adults, who may desire a more structured approach with more emphasis on form. On the other hand, the validity of teaching the commonest words and their commonest uses gradually declines when the course moves to higher levels. We may imagine that at a certain point in the learning process, probably at the intermediate level, learners will feel they have developed a satisfactory grasp of most of the common words and patterns in the language. It seems that at that stage, other guiding principles will have to be called upon to provide a sense of progression.

CCEC is an attempt to use the COBUILD corpus as an informing source for the preparation of a general English course. It is also the only publicly available course that proclaims to be based completely on a lexical syllabus. Other course designers have found more help in the use of smaller but more specialised corpora. For example, Flowerdew (1991) reports his work in the preparation of an ESP course for Science students at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. He compiled a corpus of 104,483 tokens from Biology lectures and readings which first-year students were exposed to. A word count revealed that the syllabus needed only to include around 2,000 word types which form "a very realistic target for teaching" (ibid.: 33). Other than looking at the specialised corpus only, Flowerdew also compared this to the more general COBUILD corpus to establish the technical and sub-technical vocabulary that required special treatment. He further argued that careful examination of the frequency of certain words helps to identify patterns of use and functional and notional areas peculiar to the special kind of English in question. Flowerdew's course is not based on a lexical syllabus in the sense that CCEC is. Nevertheless, it demonstrates some of the ways that a lexical perspective can inform the design of a course. His suggestions are especially useful, as they indicate a way in which the application of a lexical approach can be extended to a specialised course at an advanced level.
DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The present state of our knowledge of lexis is not yet adequate to support a complete application of a lexical syllabus. Even though corpus-based word studies are becoming a principal trend in linguistic research, most of them focus on the collocation of very common words such as modals, delexicalised verbs or that class of words traditionally classified as ‘preposition’. Little progress has been made regarding less well-defined entities such as Kjellmer’s less conspicuous combinations. There is a good deal that we would still like to learn from these studies. In addition to looking out for any discoveries that challenge traditional beliefs, we would also like to confirm what is generally believed to be true. Furthermore, even though it is now relatively easy to concordance all instances of occurrence of any word-forms, in-depth analyses regarding their syntactic operation, collocational restrictions and the relations of these to discourse structure and appropriateness of use etc. still largely have to be accomplished manually. In view of the daunting size of the English lexicon, it will be some time before we can have a better grasp of how combinations of words behave in the language.

Another direction that has received much attention recently is the study of technical and sub-technical terms in a specialised corpus (e.g. Tong 1993; James et al. 1994). This will be of value to learners who have progressed beyond the intermediate level in general English and who have to be prepared for functioning in a special field. Again, findings can only come slowly and in a cumulative way. What is most encouraging is that at last, by paying due attention to the contexts in which words are used, we are moving away from the teaching of vocabulary, i.e. words taken individually, to the teaching of lexical items. Rather than aiming at a list of words for inclusion, we are now building up the foundation for a real lexical approach.
The Bilingualised Learner's Dictionary
(A Transcontinental Trialogue¹ on a Relatively New Genre)

Reinhard Hartmann

Lex: ... as you know, I've been interested in these dictionaries for some time. I've made a list of ten representative titles [see Appendix 1], and wonder what you think of them.

Dox: Well, it's a remarkable bunch. I can see some of the things they have in common, but ...

Fax: I recognise some of them because we've been involved in the production ...

Dox: I was going to say, for a start, that some have the word learner in the title. Is that why you're interested in them, Lex?

Lex: Not only because of that. I'm intrigued by the fact that they're all bilingualised ...

Fax: That's why we call them 'semi-bilingual', or 'glossed' dictionaries ...

Lex: ... the result of a translation, and also that they've so far been ignored by dictionary researchers.

Fax: I'd certainly agree with that. I've been to many of the lexicographic conferences in the last few years, and you're one of the few, Lex, who's paid attention to this genre recently.

Lex: Thank you for the flowers ...

Dox: Did you say that all these are translations or adaptations of existing dictionaries?

Lex: Yes.

Fax: Yes.

Dox: I can understand the motivation, as throughout the history of dictionary-
making translation has been an important means of crossing language barriers and promoting international understanding. Translation as a means of explanation ...

Fax: It was the close juxtaposition of many languages in Europe that led to the appearance of some of the early interlingual dictionaries, such as Calepinus' Latin-Italian dictionary published in 1502.

Lex: Translation can be a cultural force and a psychological force; it allows us to cross barriers between languages, but it's also powerful in individual language learning, as Henry Sweet [1899] pointed out nearly a hundred years ago. Even if you banned translation exercises from the classroom, learners would still make mental associations between words in the target language with equivalent words in their mother tongue.

Fax: Exactly.

Dox: Translational equivalents are the stuff that all interlingual dictionaries are made of. There's a requirement that such dictionaries should offer not explanatory paraphrases or definitions, but real lexical units of the target language which can be inserted into the context. Lexicographers have followed this requirement since time immemorial.

Lex: The question is, whether bilingualised dictionaries use translation equivalents in the same way as genuine bilingual dictionaries ...

Dox: Different authors probably use different approaches ...

Lex: The two extremes are to translate everything, the whole entry, as in the Spanish DICCIONARIO INGLÉS, which glosses definitions and examples, or only the headword and its main senses, as in the PASSWORD DICTIONARY FOR SPEAKERS OF FRENCH.

Fax: Our policy in the semi-bilingual series has been to add one-to-one equivalents in the user's mother tongue to each of the senses of the headword. This retains the advantages of the monolingual learner's dictionary and at the same time eliminates the disadvantages of both the mono- and the bilingual dictionary ...

Dox: How's this done?

Lex: Can you illustrate this?
Fax: Look at one of the entries from the HARRAP'S ENGLISH DICTIONARY FOR SPEAKERS OF CHINESE, say at roof [Appendix 2]. You'll see that each separate sense of the headword roof is translated by a single Chinese lexical equivalent, but the definitions and examples are left in the original, as in the English learner's dictionary on which the entries are based.

Dox: And compounds like sunshine roof and roof rack are also translated.

Lex: A compromise ...

Fax: A kind of hybrid in which the desirable characteristics are retained and the undesirable ones are subdued.

Lex: ... which can help to make the EFL dictionary more user-friendly.

Dox: But there are differences, surely, since the ten bilingualised dictionaries on the list are nearly all based on different monolingual dictionaries?

Lex: Yes, the ones for Chinese, German and Hebrew are adaptations of learners' dictionaries produced by publishers such as Oxford University Press and Longman . .

Fax: ... we've adapted dictionaries by Chambers and Harrap to French and Italian and commissioned others for many more languages, especially of Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa.

Dox: ... like the HARRAP'S ENGLISH DICTIONARY FOR SPEAKERS OF CHINESE we've just looked at.

Lex: But the difference between that dictionary and the bilingualised versions of the OXFORD ADVANCED LEARNER'S DICTIONARY OF CURRENT ENGLISH and the LONGMAN DICTIONARY OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH is worth stressing: in the entry roof from these two dictionaries you see that all the examples and even parts of the definitions are translated into Chinese.

Fax: None of us is sure yet what the right balance should be between the monolingual components of the entry—like the definition—and the translated components.

Lex: There are also more specialised dictionaries, like the LONGMAN LEXICON (a thesaurus for foreign learners of English), where all the components essential for meaning discrimination between partly synonymous members of
lexical sets, in this case the *roof* and other parts of houses, are translated into Chinese [Appendix 2]. There are also bilingualised dictionaries of idioms and collocations and a Chinese translation of the *Oxford-Duden Pictorial Dictionary*.

Dox: I'm bound to say that there's nothing drastically new in this. Throughout the history of lexicography, many dictionaries have been translated ...

Lex: I thought you might, Dox.

Fax: We know how keen you are on history.

Dox: Yes, dictionary history is surely one of the most interesting aspects or branches of dictionary research. Thanks to such authorities as Gabriele Stein [1985] and Tom McArthur [1986], we now have an almost unbroken account of the development of English lexicography in relation to other languages.

Lex: There's always been a to-ing and fro-ing between the monolingual and the bilingual dictionary, so much so that some authorities have quarrelled about which came first. I remember Noel Osselton [1983:14] claiming that "bilingual and polyglot precede monolingual works", and a group of French metalexicographers [Boisson et al. 1991] recently arguing the opposite point of view.

Dox: We can indeed learn a lot from dictionary history, or, more accurately, the historiography of lexicography. It shows us how dependent dictionary makers are on their predecessors—as when Liddell and Scott translated Passow's Greek dictionary into English—sometimes to the point of plagiarism.

Fax: You're not suggesting that these bilingualised dictionaries have been illegally copied?

Dox: No; what I'm saying is that today's translated dictionaries are not the first and only bilingualisations ...

Lex: ... that there are pioneers and predecessors.

Dox: True.

Lex: That's what Willem Grootaers must've meant when he sent me a facsimile
dictionary, a French translation of one of the first bilingual Japanese
dictionaries, the VOCABULARIO of 1603, which was in turn an adaptation
of earlier Portuguese wordlists.

Fax: And Joseph Reif tells the story of the Anglo-Hindi version of an English
dictionary published in India [Pathak 1939].

Lex: So dictionary history teaches us not only that there've been forerunners
of certain dictionary genres, but also how many different ways there are
of adapting and modifying them.

Dox: Talking of dictionary genres, has anyone yet attempted a typology of
these bilingualised pedagogical dictionaries?

Lex: Not as far as I'm aware. Dictionary typology is of course another import-
ant area of dictionary research. The bilingualised learner's dictionary sits
awkwardly between the monolingual dictionary for native speakers, on
the one hand, and the traditional bilingual dictionary for translators and
foreign language learners, on the other. There are some attempts at
coming to grips with the terminology ...

Fax: ... we certainly could do with some agreed terms for these things ...

Lex: You yourself, Dox, have distinguished genuine bilingual dictionaries from
'quasi-bilinguals' which, if I understand you properly, are dictionaries of
archaic or exotic languages in which the definitions are given in a modern
or western language, like English.

Fax: ... quasi-bilingual dictionaries, I see.

Dox: That reminds me of the term 'semi-bilingual' as used in Bernard Que-
mada's [1967] book on the history of French dictionaries: the type of
dictionary in which Italian words are used to explain Latin words.

Lex: But there are other types, as well. Carla Marello, in her [1989] book on
bilingual dictionaries, mentions the case of the 'hybrid' bilingual Robert
& Signorelli French-Italian dictionary [1981], which is reminiscent of the
English-Spanish dictionary by Connelly & Higgins mentioned in a [1986]
paper by Roger Steiner. Both of these combine elements of the mono-
lingual and the bilingual dictionary in a single volume.

Dox: And there are examples of other bilingualisations, such as German or
French adaptations of Roget’s THESAURUS, or various translations of American and British dictionaries by Japanese authors...

Fax: May I remind both of you that we’re talking of learners’ dictionaries, so don’t get carried away by fancy speculations and far-fetched parallels.

Lex: OK. Point taken.

Dox: Can I get back to what Lex said earlier about the neglect of bilinguised learners’ dictionaries by lexicographical theory...

Fax: ... and lexicographic practice...

Dox: Well, I’m not sure that I’d agree with this. What about the book by John Battenburg [1991]? It’s basically about monolingual learners’ dictionaries, but he also contrasts them with bilingual dictionaries, and even has a section on the combination of features of both in about half a dozen bilinguised dictionaries he cites.

Lex: Yes, and there are a few stray references to this type in papers by Iannucci [1976], Tomaszczyk [1983] and Reif [1987], but that’s hardly made a dent in the dominating dogma of the monolingual EFL dictionary, has it?

Fax: At least they’d all agree with Mike Rundell [1988] when he says that the foreign learner’s dictionary “should move away from the native-speaker tradition”, and that’s exactly what these semi-bilingual dictionaries are doing. They encourage the user to read the English explanation while the precise translation provides assurance and reinforces understanding.

Lex: If they’re such a gift from heaven, why do they also attract their fair share of criticism? Ekkehard Zöfgen, in his contribution to the Encyclopedia of Lexicography [1991:2889], says that they’re “insufficient in regard to the standards which ought to be set for a true bilingual learner’s dictionary”.

Dox: We do need some standards...

Fax: What are these ‘standards’, then?

Lex: Well, I agree with Zöfgen when he quotes the famous sentence from the 1960 Indiana University Conference on Lexicography as a base-line: “Dictionaries should be designed with a special set of users in mind and for their specific needs” [Householder & Saporta 1962:279]...
Dox: ... that was a great meeting, with superb Proceedings ...

Lex: ... this doctrine has sparked off a whole generation of research into the 'user perspective'. Admittedly the quality of these studies of dictionary use still leaves a lot to be desired, but Zöfgen reminds us of the need to integrate the dictionary into the language learning process, of the need to provide more information for encoding rather than decoding, and of the need to take into account problems of L1/L2 interference.

Fax: These are laudable aims, but I'm not sure that they amount to generally agreed standards. We need proper criteria, both in dictionary criticism and in research into dictionary use, the sort of thing you, Lex, have been promoting ...

Lex: ... yes, two of our Master's degree students have shown how dictionaries can be evaluated by more objective criteria, and another has critically compared some of the dictionary workbooks that have been issued by dictionary publishers for the training of users' reference skills [Stark 1990].

Dox: However useful all these empirical research efforts and however important all these methods of improvement may be, they can hardly cope with all the idiosyncratic preferences of the single learner as dictionary user.

Fax: You mean we should try and cater for the individual reference needs of single learners?

Lex: Well, there's certainly a tension between individual preferences and the assumptions made by the compilers of the all-purpose dictionary.

Fax: You must do more research then on what these various needs are, so that lexicographers can come up with products that meet those demands.

Dox: I think the answer to these multifarious needs lies in the computer ...

Lex: What we need are 'multifunctional' dictionaries ...

Dox: Yes, a computerised modular dictionary with variable density of information ...

Fax: I wonder whether publishers have the means to invest in such projects?

Lex: But we must encourage flexibility and experimentation, and perhaps
higher levels of training, too. Let’s be open-minded and optimistic. Πάντα
δει.²

Fax: ‘Επί οὖνομα πόντον.³

Dox: Βάλε νερὸν. Πρόσθες δικρατον!⁴

Notes
1. For an example of a similarly ‘factitious’, transatlantic, dialogue on the subject of new dictionaries, see
three participants here are real people, and the text is based on their known or expressed views. One
of the three (Dox) is Ladislav Zgusta to whom this paper is dedicated with deep respect in his 70th
birthday year, which he coincidentally shares with Ma Tailai, for whom the present volume is being
produced.
2. “Everything is in flux” — Heraclitus (cf. Aristotle, De Cælo 3.1.18).
4. “Take the water away, bring on the wine” — Hermeneûmata (Corpus Glossarium Latinarum III.652).
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<th>Dictionary</th>
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<td>Cheung Fong-kit (ed.).</td>
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<td>Hong Kong: Tung Hua Book Co, in association with Oxford</td>
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<td>Hong Kong: Longman.</td>
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<td>Wang Renlong &amp; Rong Yumin (eds)</td>
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<td>G.J. Forgue (tr.).</td>
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<td>H. Hofkamp (tr.).</td>
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<td>Oxford University Press, in association with Cometsan.</td>
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Tel Aviv: Kahn, in association with OUP/Kemerman.

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It. tr. of senses of headwords; It.-Eng. index

384 panels of line drawings; Eng. and Ch. indices

2 columns; Sp. tr. of senses and examples

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W. Morris et al.
APPENDIX 2 Selected sample entries from modern bilingualised learners' dictionaries

Sample 1: Entry roof from HARRAP'S ENGLISH DICTIONARY FOR SPEAKERS OF CHINESE (1991); reproduced by courtesy of Kemerman Publishing Ltd, Tel Aviv

Sample 2: Entry roof from the OXFORD ADVANCED LEARNER'S ENGLISH–CHINESE DICTIONARY (1984); reproduced by courtesy of Oxford University Press (Hong Kong) Ltd
roof1 [ruf, ruf] n 1 the outside covering on top of a building：The rain’s coming in—the roof must need mending. 雨水灌進來了，這屋頂要修理一下。—compare 比較 ceiling 2 the top covering of a tent, a closed vehicle, etc.：帳篷；車輛之頂部。—see picture at 見 CAR 拆圖。3 house; home：屋。She and I can’t live under the same roof. 她跟我不能住在一起。4 a/no roof over one’s head somewhere/nearby to live. 住在附近。5 raise the roof to make a loud noise, esp. of angry or excited complaint: 大聲嘈囂。Father will raise the roof when he hears what you’ve done! 爸爸要聽到你幹了什麼會要大聲嘈囂的。6 the roof of the house; mouth the bony upper part of the inside of the mouth; palate 上顎。—see next page for picture 見下頁圖。roof2 [ruf] v [Wv; T1 (with)] to put a roof on, be a roof for：有屋頂：a house roofed with wood 木頭的屋頂。

roof garden /ˈɡɑr dungeon/ n a garden on the flat top of a building 屋頂花園。

roof in also 作 roof over — v adj [T1] to enclose by putting a roof on (an open place)：圍著：包圍 roof in the yard to make a garage 院子裏加個頂當作車庫。

roofing /ˈroʊfin/ n [U] material for making or covering roofs：屋頂的材料。

roofless /ˈroʊfləs/ adj [Wəs] 1 [B] (of a building) with no roof (建築物)沒有屋頂的。2 [F] (of a person) with no home (個人)沒有家的。

roof rack /ˈrɑrk/ n exp Br E a metal frame fixed on top of a car roof, for carrying things (車) 內用於載東西：tie it to the roof rack 把它綁在車頂的架子上。

roof-tree /ˈruf tr3/, -tr3 imperative; /ruftr3/ n lit (文) 1 the beam that runs along the highest point of a sloping roof: ridgepole 屋頂之大樑，屋脊樑。2 under one’s roof-tree in one’s home 在家裏。
Parts of houses

roof /ruːf/ 1 the top covering of a building, house, etc (見 655 頁杉圖) (建築物、房屋等的) 顶: The roofs of the local houses are red. 當地房屋的綠頂是紅色的。The roof of the car was hot in the sun. 車頂給太陽曬得發燙。2 [T1] to put a roof on 加頂於: They roofed the house with wood. 他們用木板蓋屋頂。

Sample 4: Entry Parts of houses from the LONGMAN LEXICON OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH (ENGLISH-CHINESE EDITION) (1992); reproduced by courtesy of Longman Hong Kong
A critical study of the lexical syllabus

Joyce Lee Yuen-vee

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