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Lexical Grammar

Activities for teaching chunks
and exploring patterns



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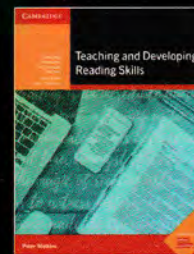
Lexical Grammar

Lexical Grammar is for anyone interested in the relationship between grammar and vocabulary, and who is looking for activities which focus on units of language, such as chunks and patterns.

The introduction draws on recent developments in corpus linguistics and second language acquisition research, focusing on the important role which chunks play in textual cohesion and in fluency, as well as in grammar acquisition.

The practical part of the book includes a large number of classroom suggestions and activities for making grammar teaching more lexical, and for making vocabulary practice more grammatical.

- The book contains over 95 practical activities, ranging from identifying, highlighting and recording chunks of language to enabling learners to use chunks in their active repertoire.
- Activities have clear rationales and procedures, and many contain variations and follow up suggestions.
- Activities can be used on their own or to supplement and enhance coursebook content.
- A glossary and list of tools and resources provides additional support for the reader.



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Introduction

Traditionally, language is viewed as consisting of words, on the one hand, and of grammatical structures, on the other. But what if we got rid of this dichotomy and focused on both at the same time? The activities in this book attempt to do just that: to focus on units of language, such as chunks and patterns, that straddle the border between vocabulary and grammar. The idea of merging vocabulary with grammar is not new in itself and has been convincingly argued by the likes of Dave Willis and Michael Lewis. Drawing on recent research in both corpus linguistics and second language acquisition, this book reinforces the important role that chunks play not only in textual cohesion and fluency, but also in forming the raw material for grammar acquisition. The practical part of the book includes classroom suggestions and activities for making grammar teaching more lexical, and for making vocabulary practice more grammatical.

1 Chunks in language

What is a 'chunk'?

A chunk is a group of words customarily found together. Some chunks are fixed expressions, for example *as a matter of fact*, while others are combinations of words that allow variation such as *see you later/soon/tomorrow*.

Is a chunk the same as collocation?

Some chunks can indeed be described as collocations. Collocation is a kind of chunk which consists of two lexical (content) words:

pursue a career (verb + noun)

a scenic route (adjective + noun)

a chance encounter (noun + noun)

ridiculously expensive (adverb + adjective)

examine carefully (verb + adverb)

However, many frequent multi-word combinations do not fall neatly into the above categories with two identifiable parts of speech (verb + noun, adjective + noun, etc.). Chunks also comprise other types of multi-word units such as:

see you later (speech formula)

come to think of it (discourse marker)

as the study suggests (linking phrase)

at all costs (prepositional phrase)

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Chunks can also be structures which have traditionally been associated with grammar. They can include stems that can be used to build various sentences in English:

If I were you

It's been a while since

It took me a long time to

Finally, some full sentences can also be considered chunks:

It's none of your business.

There's no doubt about it.

What are you gonna do?

Is everything chunks, then?

Yes, to a large extent. Evidence suggests that our mental lexicon does not consist of individual words but chunks. Chunks can vary greatly in length (some consist of two words while others, as seen above, can be full sentences) but what makes them chunks is the fact that they are stored in the brain as single units. Research shows that about 50–80% of native-speaker discourse consists of recurring multi-word combinations (Altenberg, 1987; Erman and Warren, 2000).

Is the idea of chunks new?

Linguists, second language acquisition (SLA) researchers and lexicographers have used different terms to describe multi-word units throughout the years: multi-word strings, prefabricated routines, ready-made expressions, lexicalized stems, and so on. However, the terms all mean essentially the same thing. Although their existence was pointed out a long time ago, chunks came to the fore with the advent of **corpus linguistics**. A corpus (from Latin: body; plural = corpora) is a searchable database containing samples of text. Text is referred to here in its broader sense and includes fiction, newspapers, magazines and academic journals, as well as transcripts of TV shows, radio interviews, business meetings and informal conversations. Once the domain of linguists, many corpora are now openly available on the internet, with the British National Corpus (BNC) and Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) being probably the most popular resources. For example, this is what random lines – known as concordances – taken from the BNC reveal about how the word *matter* is used:

em when whatever you in whatever you do, every you do, do **MATTER** how effective you are, that you're that when you leave
has to strongly speak to a new point or a new angle on this **MATTER** I'd really prefer to call on the convenor to sum up.
and that is my submission, it is not a matter of fact but a **MATTER** of fact a and practice. Thank you Mrs. At this stage
king union! Oh yes, I've at I was always on the union. As a **MATTER** of fact at year I, I, I looked at sixteen in the union
every day and so you was allowed to have a cup of tea. As a **MATTER** of fact, a lot of the time provided the cup of tea.
I got a minute. Our people need the work! I said that, as a **MATTER** of fact, absolutely so! Yeah. You say telling John to
a there, I le I left there starting to work on me then. As a **MATTER** of fact, there was about, I got four month in this so
when you These were started up! There were there here. As a **MATTER** of fact, when I'm talking about, let me see at fifty
to he sent instructions on what, who to write to and it's a **MATTER** of getting those out and am sending out letters to y
oided that we were going to go for quality because it was a **MATTER** of survival. The industry which we are part of is in
e matter out so many of us went into it convinced that the **MATTER** was already sorted out. Their minds made up, their st
ou. I've got Mr and Ms. Thank you Madam Chairman. Now, the **MATTER** was debated very clearly at the last meeting and s
eds for instance, applications remain entirely portable on **MATTER** what database you employ, and all of your putpremere
right clutter because it's the only way you can get them in **MATTER** what people are telling you em about the recession b
then you go down and make food do you? I go down, yeah. No **MATTER** what time it is? No and eat chips, two plates packed
lly help them and you feel dead sorry for them Yeah, but no **MATTER** what you say you still end up doing what they want Ye
buying, and am to reduce the costs, on which are there no **MATTER** who gets paid for what, the there are some costs. And
doesn't. From the dinner time to tea time. No. What's the **MATTER** with her? Well at least she's, he hadn't been doing a
very helpful boy, are you feeling happier now? What's the **MATTER** with him? He's, he's not very well, he's st, look no
you seen her hair yet? Mum! She's had it pinned What's the **MATTER** with you? she's had it out into box and pinned. Oh! W

Figure 0.1: Search result for *matter* from the British National Corpus

Studying these real-life text samples has helped corpus linguists to discover common patterns of use for particular words: *no matter how, what's the matter with*, etc.

Although the first corpus of authentic English texts was compiled in the 1960s, corpus linguistics didn't begin in earnest until computers had become powerful enough to hold vast amounts of data and to enable much more rigorous analysis, that is, the 1980s. That is when a joint venture between the University of Birmingham and Collins publishers, known as COBUILD (Collins Birmingham University Language Database) saw the creation of the Bank of English, at that time the largest electronic corpus of contemporary English texts. The project was founded and led by the renowned linguist John Sinclair (1933–2007). Corpus research, and particularly the COBUILD project, has provided some fascinating insights into how real language works and led Sinclair to conclude that language is largely formulaic, i.e. it consists of ready-made chunks. As Sinclair argued in his seminal work *Corpus Concordance Collocation*:

A language user has available to him a large number of semi-preconstructed phrases [chunks] that constitute single choices, even though they might appear to be analyzable into segments. (1991: 110)

If the language we use is comprised of ready-made lexico-grammatical units, the boundary between what we have traditionally called 'grammar' and 'vocabulary' is somewhat blurred.

How do chunks blur the boundary between vocabulary and grammar?

The blurred boundary between vocabulary and grammar refers to the tendency of certain words to occur with certain grammatical structures and vice versa. For example, the verb *to found* is likely to be used in the passive (e.g. *The company was founded in 1957*) and the verb *to mind* is normally used in questions and negative statements (e.g. *Do you mind if I, I don't mind*).

This close link between grammar and vocabulary means that while there may be many possible ways of correctly combining grammar with words to make sentences, we tend to go for conventionalized combinations. For example, all the sentences below are grammatically correct and some of them exhibit a very advanced control of English grammar:

Could I make a call using your phone?

Could I call from your phone?

May I place a call by means of your phone?

Could I use your phone?

Yet most competent speakers would choose the last example when talking to a friend. The other examples may sound awkward and unnatural, even though they are grammatically possible. This demonstrates how pieces of language are stored in the brain as whole units, i.e. chunks. Even if language learners possess full control of grammar and can produce correct sentences, they may not always opt for the most natural-sounding – and often, most concise – way of saying something. This is one of the reasons why chunks need to be taught explicitly – see more on this below.

Is there more to knowing a language than just reproducing chunks we have encountered?

Traditional language descriptions tend to treat grammar rules separately from vocabulary, giving the impression that any word can be inserted into any grammatical structure. For example, you could produce a sentence like this: *Colourless green ideas sleep furiously*. Although the sentence does not make sense, it conforms perfectly to the rules of English grammar.

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A new theory of language acquisition known as **lexical priming** (advanced by Professor Michael Hoey, University of Liverpool) poses a radical challenge to this 'words-and-rules' view of language. Hoey (2005) argues that as we acquire new words we take a subconscious note of words that occur alongside (collocation) and of any associated grammatical patterns (colligation). Through multiple encounters with a new word, we become primed to associate it with these recurring elements. According to Hoey's theory, our brain is like a giant corpus where each word is accompanied by mental usage notes. Language production is not a matter of simply combining words and rules but rather a retrieval of the language we are primed for, i.e. the patterns and combinations we have previously seen or heard. This accounts for why some sentences that are perfectly grammatical may not sound natural: the words in these awkward sentences do not conform to their primings.

The theory explains why, when producing language, our first port of call is our mental store of pre-fabricated chunks. However, this does not completely negate the role of generative grammar. Knowledge of grammar rules is still important to fine-tune chunks so that they fit new contexts. Because we are only primed to repeat language we have encountered in particular contexts, if we find ourselves in a new communicative situation, we might not have any ready-made language to draw on. This is when grammar knowledge can help us produce completely new sentences. Hoey argues, however, that even when we create completely new language we still follow general primings.

How do chunks promote fluency?

If by fluency we mean fast processing, knowledge of chunks is essential: it is much quicker to process a few larger units (chunks) than a lot of smaller ones (words). For example, without having the chunk *I haven't seen you for ages* at your disposal, you would have to go through a series of lexical and grammatical choices every time you bumped into an old friend. You would have to gather the right words, then apply the appropriate grammar rules. Instead, fluent speakers recall *I haven't seen you for ages* as a unit, rather than assembling the phrase word by word. Freeing up processing energy allows more time for speakers to plan what to say next.

Fluent speakers possess a large bank of memorized chunks ready to be used in various communicative situations and contexts. When it comes to receptive skills (reading or listening), recognizing frequently recurring strings of words allows us to process linguistic input more quickly. It has been shown that a listener recognizes a word more quickly when provided with a word that collocates with it. Likewise, it's quicker to read strings of words which consist of familiar chunks, as shown by studies tracking readers' eye-ball movements (Siyanova-Chanturia et al, 2011).

In summary, chunks are fundamental to language processing and production: they allow us to produce language naturally and fluently and they aid reading and listening comprehension. In recent years, however, there is growing evidence that chunks memorized as whole units of language can also actually drive the process of grammar acquisition. This is the topic of the next section.

2 Chunks in language acquisition

How can chunks promote grammar acquisition?

Memorized chunks can be used by learners to produce situationally appropriate and well-formed language, such as *I haven't seen you for ages*, when their own grammatical competence doesn't yet

allow them to generate new sentences in the present perfect. This boosts learners' motivation and allows them to be communicative in the earlier stages of learning a second language (L2). But the role of chunks doesn't end there. Holistically stored chunks gradually evolve into more productive patterns as learners begin to experiment with them, teasing them apart and using them as templates to create new sentences:

I haven't seen you for ages.

I haven't seen her for ages.

I haven't seen him since high school.

I haven't heard from her for ages.

Is it similar to how children acquire their first language?

Very much so. According to contemporary cognitive theories of language acquisition, children acquiring their first language (L1) start out by recording pieces of language encountered during their day-to-day interaction. Early language production starts with repetition of this previously heard language, i.e. words (e.g. *dog*) or multi-word phrases (e.g. *Let me do it*, *Where's the ball?*). Children then slightly modify the encountered language to suit various communicative needs:

Where's the ball?

Where's the dog?

Where's Daddy?

Only later do abstract categories and schemas, such as the subject–verb–object word order or inversion in interrogatives, begin to form from these specific instances of language use. Michael Tomasello, author of *Constructing a Language: A Usage-Based Theory of Language Acquisition*, is clear on this point:

... children's comprehension and production of relatively complex utterances are based on a simple retrieval of stored expressions, whereas in other cases they are based on the cutting and pasting together of stored linguistic schemas and constructions of various kinds and degrees of abstraction. This would seem to be the way that people master a variety of cognitive skills, and there is no reason to think that language is any different in this regard. (2005: 327–328)

This view, known as a **usage-based** approach to language acquisition, rests on the idea that language knowledge comes from actual language use – listening, reading, speaking and writing – with grammar being the result of the process of acquisition rather than a precondition for it.

Is there evidence that L2 learners go through the same process?

Evidence that L2 learners can extrapolate rules from naturally occurring language is less plentiful, yet fairly convincing. Second language acquisition (SLA) studies have shown that new grammatical structures are often learned initially as unanalysed wholes and later on broken down for analysis. For example, a study conducted at Southampton University (Myles, Hooper & Mitchell, 1998) showed that secondary school learners of French learned *Je m'appelle* (*My name is*) as a chunk and used it in early production without understanding all of its constituent parts. Gradually, as learners became

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aware of all the elements it consists of (*Je / m' / appelle*) they began to build new sentences using the chunk as a prototype:

Elle s'appelle
Il s'appelle

Or, to give an example from English, learners may learn the *going to* future form as a chunk, such as *I am going to write about* for writing essays (Bardovi-Harlig, 2002), before adapting the structure to include other verbs: *I am going to take/try/make*, etc.

Drawing on various SLA studies investigating the role of chunks in grammar acquisition, Rod Ellis (2006) advocates delaying the teaching of abstract grammar rules until learners have acquired a stock of ready-made chunks which they can use in various communicative situations. This also echoes an appeal made by one of the founding fathers of the communicative approach to language teaching, Henry Widdowson:

The more natural and more effective approach would be to [...] begin with lexical items and show how they need to be grammatically modified to be communicatively effective. (1990: 95)

Can learners acquire L2 from a rich diet of chunks alone?

Children effortlessly acquire their mother tongue from examples using their pattern-finding ability. So why is the process of L2 acquisition sometimes so laborious with many learners never reaching native-like performance? One of the main reasons is quite simply a lack of exposure. L1 proficiency comes as a result of thousands of hours of exposure to incredibly rich language input. The exposure L2 learners receive is often not sufficient to enable them to identify patterns from specific examples.

Even when there is plenty of input there are additional factors which may hinder the process of L2 acquisition. For example, although it is one of the most frequent words in English, the contracted form of the verb *have* – *'ve* – is not always easily identifiable in spoken phrases like these:

I've been busy.
I've finished.
How long've you been waiting?

Without hearing *'ve*, the learner may not consciously register its presence and therefore presume that these sentences do not contain *have/'ve* at all:

I been busy.
I finished.
How long you been waiting?

An item may appear frequently in the input but it will not be readily acquired by the L2 learner if it is not **salient**, i.e. if it is not noticeable and prominent in relation to its surrounding words. Salience – or the lack of it – may explain why certain grammatical forms are notoriously difficult for learners to acquire. Many grammatical cues in English (for example tense marking, the third person singular *-s* and articles) are not salient. Grammatical words tend to be unstressed in English, making them more difficult to perceive aurally. We stress *know* in *I don't know*, not *don't*, which results in something sounding like *I dunno* in spoken English. We stress *taken* in *You should have taken an umbrella*, which is reduced to *You should've taken an umbrella*, or even *You shoulda taken an umbrella*.

Studies show (see Bybee, 2002 for overview) that extremely frequent chunks, like *Lemme see, I wanna do it* or *Whatcha gonna do*, are subject to more articulatory reduction. For example, the first person pronoun *I* is the most common pronoun occurring with *don't* and reduction of *don't* to *dun* occurs almost exclusively when it is used in conjunction with *I* and followed by verbs that occur most frequently after *don't*, such as *know, think, have, want* and *care*. In a similar fashion, the sequences *did you, would you, that you, last year* are prone to palatalization because their high frequency makes them highly automatized.

So are chunks new grammar?

To be precise, chunks themselves are not grammar but it has been argued that they provide raw data for the development of grammatical competence. This insight is supported by converging evidence from two disciplines: corpus linguistics (discussed earlier) and psycholinguistics (discussed in this section). Each discipline uses different research methods, different thinking approaches and has its own object of enquiry: corpus linguistics investigates language use through the study of samples of real language while psycholinguistics examines the processes of the human mind responsible for language acquisition and proficiency. However, the latest insights from each field dovetail perfectly with each other and point to the experiential, data-driven nature of language learning. Both disciplines place more premium on holistic memory than on the ability to put words together using content-less grammar rules. They also reject the traditional grammar/vocabulary dichotomy.

More recently, the convergence of these two viewpoints has found support in what is called **complexity theory**, which views language as an emergent system. First proposed in the field of physics and mathematics, complexity (or 'chaos') theory studies complex systems that emerge as a result of the interactions of their components. This theory has been used to study, among other things, the weather, the human brain or consumer behaviour in a market. When applied to linguistics and language acquisition, complexity theory can explain why language evolves over time and how the learner's grammar develops and organizes itself from the bottom up. According to this view, complex grammar and grammatical systems arise from the learner's exposure to language data – specifically, frequently recurring chunks – in the course of social interaction and simple cognitive processes, such as pattern detection. In this sense, the grammar is said to be 'emergent'.

Keeping in mind the 'chunky' nature of language and the role chunks potentially play in language acquisition, we shall now turn to the practical implications of the theories we have discussed.

3 Chunks in language teaching

Why don't chunks feature more prominently in ELT methodology?

Coursebooks tend to separate grammar and vocabulary, with occasional pages devoted to functional language (suggesting, apologizing, inviting, etc.). It may seem that ELT methodology has not taken into account the corpus research findings outlined earlier – but this is not entirely true. There have been a few notable attempts to bridge the gap between vocabulary and grammar in recent ELT publications. The first major pedagogical development based on corpus research was the publication of the *Collins Cobuild English Course* in the late 1980s. Instead of focusing on a specific grammar structure (e.g. present simple or past continuous), each unit in the coursebook presented several frequent English words and highlighted common patterns associated with them. The decision to

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abandon a traditional grammar syllabus in favour of an entirely lexical syllabus was groundbreaking. One of the authors, Dave Willis, later wrote this in the introduction to *The Lexical Syllabus*:

Teachers and researchers have been aware for many years that 'input' does not equal 'intake', that what teachers claim to be teaching bears only a tenuous relationship to what learners are actually learning. But in spite of this, coursebook writers continue to act on the assumption that language can be broken down into a series of patterns [Willis means here grammatical structures] which can then be presented to learners and assimilated by them in a predictable sequence. It does not seem to worry people a great deal that this assumption flies in the face of our experience as teachers. (1990)

The next two developments in the field emerged in the early 1990s. On one side of the Atlantic, Nattinger and DeCarrico attempted to organize conventionalized lexical phrases (the term they used to describe chunks) according to the functions they perform and suggested ways of teaching them. On the other side of the Atlantic, Michael Lewis (probably the most influential figure in promoting the importance of chunks in language teaching) developed his Lexical Approach, which can be summarized by this key quote: 'Language consists of grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar' (Lewis, 1993). Lewis derived many of his ideas directly from the corpus linguistics insights outlined above, particularly John Sinclair's work.

While Lewis argued for a syllabus based on chunks, his detractors criticized the lack of clear specification of which chunks should be taught and in what order. Another shortcoming often pointed out in Lewis's approach is the sheer number of chunks – hundreds of thousands – which learners need to commit to memory. Opponents of the Lexical Approach argue that equipping learners with generic grammar rules requires less time and effort and therefore ensures faster progress. However, critics may be missing a crucial point in Lewis's work: Lewis convincingly argued for 'chunking' as a primary pedagogical activity, where students are explicitly taught to divide language into meaningful units, paying attention to which words occur with other words and their associated grammatical patterns. This aspect of language learning fosters independent learning, provided students are adequately trained to identify and record chunks. Regarding the cognitive load, learning complex grammatical structures, for example the third conditional (*if* + past perfect + *would have* + past participle), is arguably more demanding than memorizing a typical expression containing the target structure such as *If I'd had the time I would've helped you* (Jones, 2015). These principles were effectively put into practice in the *Innovations* series of coursebooks by Hugh Dellar and Andrew Walkley (Heinle-Cengage, 2004–8).

What is missing in current teaching practice?

Effective language teaching should reflect the nature of language and be the best possible match for the process of natural language acquisition. As we have seen, language acquisition is much more holistic than was traditionally believed: modern usage-based theories of language acquisition and corpus research convincingly argue that breaking language down into discrete grammar items is at odds with accounts of how language is stored, acquired and produced. Of course, some itemization of language is inevitable for teaching purposes but chunks seem to be the most likely candidates for items of learning, rather than individual words or discrete grammar rules.

The learning of new structures should ideally start off as gradual exposure to and accumulation of chunks containing the target structures. As the number of stored chunks grows, chunks exhibiting the same pattern will gradually feed into the grammar system. This is when grammatical competence with

a particular structure begins to emerge. For some learners this ‘tipping point’ will occur earlier, for others later. However, no amount of incidental exposure can come close to the amount of linguistic data that native speakers are exposed to – about 7,000 utterances per day (Sheffler, 2015). To speed up the process of chunk accumulation and pattern detection – and therefore create favourable conditions for the tipping point to occur sooner – chunks need to be taught explicitly.

Since chunks can provide raw material for grammar development, it may be worthwhile directing learners’ attention to chunks containing certain grammatical structures. Learners can practise and learn the chunks lexically before moving on to any kind of grammar explanation, i.e. they should be encouraged to memorize before they analyse. This does not suggest a return to behaviourist models of instruction (where no explicit analysis of grammar takes place at all) but rather that teachers use memorization as a useful additional tool before introducing any grammar analysis.

The teaching and learning of chunks can be approached in much the same way as the teaching of grammatical structures: clarifying meaning and form, checking understanding, practising in meaningful contexts (Jones, 2015). For example, we can explicitly teach a range of chunks (e.g. *I don’t know, I don’t believe it, I don’t care*) and only later focus on the role of *don’t* in the formation of negative sentences in the present simple.

Should single words be banished completely when teaching vocabulary?

Recently, vocabulary has gained greater significance in ELT, evidenced by the amount of research into L2 vocabulary acquisition which has been published in the last twenty years. Much of this research agrees that vocabulary learning is a daunting task: learners require knowledge of around 9,000 word families – not to mention tens of thousands of chunks – to understand texts. New items also need to be frequently re-encountered for learning to take place.

The sheer number of new words learners need has led L2 vocabulary acquisition researchers to reassess whether picking up words from input (e.g. from extensive reading) is sufficient for vocabulary learning. Learning vocabulary out of context – characteristic of earlier language-learning approaches – fell out of favour when more communicative teaching approaches became popular. However, in recent years many researchers concur that learning decontextualized lists of words can in fact be a useful strategy, particularly for learning the basic vocabulary of English. The problem is that basic vocabulary items – the 2,000 most frequent words of English, including *any, by, get, there, way*, etc. – also carry the most common grammatical patterns. There is clearly a contradiction here. On the one hand, learners quickly need to get to a level where they can engage in simple communication and comprehend texts – and any means will do to reach this threshold, including decontextualized vocabulary learning using flashcards or word lists. On the other hand, these basic words are essential for acquiring grammatical competence. So, quick gains in learning individual, decontextualized words may actually inhibit grammar development. This book takes the view that vocabulary should be taught in chunks because exposure to surrounding language (co-text) is of such great importance. This way learners can pick up not only collocations – essential for appropriate and natural use of vocabulary – but also the grammatical patterns those new words occur in. For example, when teaching *look for* it is worth pointing out that it often appears in the present continuous:

He’s looking for a job.

What are you looking for?

I’m looking for my glasses/keys. Have you seen them?

What are the central principles underlying this book?

This book aims to bridge the gap between vocabulary and grammar by teaching both elements alongside each other. It contains several chapters of practical activities for teachers of all levels of experience. Below are some general principles underlying the activities provided:

Learners need a lot of linguistically rich and meaningful input (reading and listening)

A lot of input doesn't mean that learners should only be given long texts. Intensive listening and reading of short texts (for example the ones on <http://tinytexts.wordpress.com/>) has a high pedagogical value. This is not to detract from the benefit of extensive listening and reading: graded readers, for example, provide exposure to new items in context and help learners to consolidate language learned in class.

Draw learners' attention to lexical and grammatical patterns

Many classroom activities should focus on highlighting chunks in reading and listening input. Such receptive, awareness-raising activities can be gradually combined with more productive ones, where learners manipulate the chunks they have encountered to fit different communicative situations and scenarios. However, before learners are expected to produce correct grammar, they should be trained to recognize new grammatical structures in their input. A lot of priming needs to take place before learners can produce more abstract forms like the present perfect continuous (*have + been + v + -ing*), for example.

Chunks before grammar

Ease learners into new grammar areas through chunks. For example, *Have you ever been to* can be presented in the context of travel or holidays, without delving into a grammatical analysis of the present perfect. Similarly, *Have you seen* can be presented when discussing films in class. Start by getting learners to practise and memorize chunks containing a new grammatical structure, resisting the temptation to move too quickly into any grammar explanation. Remember, grammar rules are best learned when learners can already draw on a stock of accumulated samples: memorized chunks can guide the learners into the grammar.

Learners need opportunities to produce language in meaningful contexts

Getting learners to produce new language – as opposed to just encountering it in input and recording it – is an essential pedagogical activity. Using new grammatical structures, however partially or provisionally understood, promotes fluency and acquisition of these structures. It also allows learners to produce language which is structurally beyond their present level of competence. It is, therefore, the teacher's role to encourage learners to incorporate new structures in their output and 'push' them beyond their comfort zone.

Chunks help activate passive vocabulary

Coursebook exercises such as matching words and definitions, matching parts of collocations, gapfills and clozes are all important in helping learners understand various aspects of new vocabulary. However, they are not enough to activate passive knowledge. Although coursebooks help students practise new lexical items, it is still up to the teacher to create opportunities for meaningful output and push learners towards integrating new items into their active lexicons.

Chunks play a crucial role in helping learners to activate new and partially learned vocabulary. For example, learners don't need to fully understand the meaning of *stiff* in *I was scared stiff*. It's enough

for them to
means can
Time coul
in scared
some exte
successful
expressio

Grammar
As the res
this does
effective b
is one way
to notice
not imme
future enc
receive e'
worlds' (A

How can
Unlike lea
to the targ
important
and over
speed up
book aim

The pri
from a tra
don't rush
your lean
promotes
teaching
confiden

In the f

- identi
- drawi
- drawi
- 'unpa
- semit
- pushi
- patter
- review

for them to know that that the expression means to be very scared. Lengthy explanations of what *stiff* means can actually divert learners' attention and mental resources from remembering the new form. Time could be better spent by drawing learners' attention, for example, to the alliterative pattern in *scared stiff*, helping learners to remember and use the expression. Similarly, the chunk *I agree to some extent* can be used in writing without fully understanding the meaning of *extent*. Indeed, many successful language learners report that they often know how and when to use a certain phrase or expression but may not know exactly what it means or understand all its elements.

Grammar rules as priming

As the research this book draws on suggests, learning grammar is primarily an implicit process – but this does not completely invalidate the role of explicit grammar instruction. Grammar teaching is still effective because it directs learners' attention to specific structures and points out salient features. This is one way of compensating for lack of exposure to the L2. Providing grammar rules may help learners to notice new and partially learned structures and aid pattern-registration. Learning the rules might not immediately lead to correct production but it has a priming effect because it prepares learners for future encounters with input containing the new structure. Indeed, research shows that students who receive explicit grammar instruction alongside exposure to rich input 'seem to have the best of both worlds' (MacWhinney, 1997, as cited in Scheffler, 2015:95).

How can this book help me?

Unlike learning a first language, learners of second languages usually need more than simple exposure to the target language to become competent speakers. Since classroom time is often very limited, it is important to manipulate exposure so that learners meet new pieces of language – or chunks – over and over again. Helping learners to notice underlying patterns in the chunks they encounter may speed up the process of accumulation, which L1 acquirers are lucky to get from exposure alone. This book aims to help with this process of noticing patterns to aid accumulation of chunks.

The principles of language description and acquisition that underpin this book may be different from a traditional grammar syllabus but the activities presented are still compatible with one – so don't rush to throw out your coursebook! By using the activities in this book, you will be providing your learners with a rich diet of language chunks, helping them with pattern-recognition which promotes implicit grammar learning. Your coursebook may still be useful for more explicit grammar teaching – particularly for more analytical learners who find that learning grammar rules boosts confidence and provides the safety of the familiar.

In the following chapters, you will find activities and ideas for:

- identifying, highlighting and recording chunks of language
- drawing attention to vocabulary which frequently occurs with certain grammar structures
- drawing attention to grammar structures that attract certain items of vocabulary
- 'unpacking' texts
- sensitizing learners to formulaic features in language
- pushing learners to incorporate chunks into their active repertoire
- pattern drills
- reviewing and recycling language.

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1 Defining and identifying chunks

As Hanna Kryszewska noted in her article 'Why I won't say goodbye to the lexical approach', a chunk is what it is: a bit of language. As seen in the Introduction, this book takes a broad view of chunks, i.e. that they can be big (e.g. *There's no getting away from the fact that ...*) or small (e.g. *At first*) but they always make sense. So how can teachers identify what constitutes a chunk and what does not? And how are chunks different to collocations, patterns or any other terms proposed by different authors? This section contains practical activities which aim to help identify and define chunks, as well as make sense of the terminological minefield associated with this area of language learning.

Defining a chunk

Many different terms are associated with the area of formulaic language: lexical phrases, lexicalized routines, pre-fabs, formulae and ready-made utterances, to name just a few! In her book *Formulaic Language and the Lexicon*, Alison Wray counted at least 40 different terms referring to the same phenomenon. Given the terminological profusion, I have chosen 'chunk' as the all-purpose term to be used throughout the book. Not only do I feel that it is important to use existing, teacher-friendly terminology, but 'chunk' has also become a catch-all term for all kinds of multi-word units in ELT. Nevertheless, I wasn't happy with existing definitions of either 'chunk' or 'formulaic language' – the term normally used by applied linguists. Most available definitions refer to chunks as holistic units stored in the brain. This is certainly true as far as native speakers are concerned, but a bit premature for L2 learners. They do not have any chunks stored (yet!), so a different pedagogical definition is needed. To capture all the different features of chunks and the view taken in this book, I propose the following definition:

A chunk is a frequently recurring, meaningful string of two or more words – either fixed or with variable slots – which can be learned as a single unit, without the need to analyse its elements. Once committed to (long-term) memory, a chunk can be retrieved and used 'as is' or with modifications, if necessary, bypassing the need to generate it from individual words and grammatical rules.

A 'string of two or more words' covers all manner of multi-word units such as collocations (*do homework*), discourse markers (*to begin with*), social formulae (*Nice to meet you*), sentence frames (*As far as ___ is concerned*) and idioms (*No news is good news*). 'Frequently recurring' implies that a string can be searched for in a corpus and results will show that it is indeed common in the English language. However, a corpus-based estimate of frequency cannot be the sole criterion in the identification of a chunk, especially since different researchers propose different thresholds of frequency. The string also has to be 'meaningful', i.e. have a clearly identifiable meaning or perform a distinct function in communication. Lastly, my proposed definition refers to chunks of varying degrees of fixedness. Some chunks are 'frozen', such as idioms (*There's no smoke without fire*) or fixed

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expressions (*as a matter of fact*). However, some chunks allow variation in a particular slot, for example *as far as I know*, in which *know* can be replaced by *understand* or *remember*.

Some chunks allow variability in more than one slot, for example:

	30 minutes		to work
It takes me	one hour	to get	to school
	ages		home

Chunks and chunking

Lexical grammar is not only about chunks of language but also about chunking language – grouping individual words into meaningful wholes. Many frequent strings of words can be brought to learners' attention as whole chunks. Take, for example, *I didn't have time to do it*. It can be generated from the individual words *have*, *time* and *do* and pieced together with the rules of grammar (past simple negative). On the other hand, it can be presented, practised and memorized as a chunk without analysing its individual elements. So, why would teachers want to do that? Learners' grammatical competence may not yet be at the level where they can create a sentence using the past simple – let alone produce it fluently – but if the phrase is taught and practised as a chunk, learners can use it in their speaking, for example when answering the question *Have you done your homework?*. Knowing the chunk gives them a sense of being able to produce language which is beyond their level of grammatical competence and, arguably, provides raw data for grammar acquisition (see more on this in the Introduction).

Most teachers already present a lot of grammar as chunks, for example *Let's go*, *How are you?* and *I was born*. Phrases like these are taught as chunks in early lessons, long before learners understand contractions, inversion or passives.

Chunks and patterns

Knowledge of many grammatical structures may start out as exposure to fixed chunks. *What's your name?* may be first learned as a single unit, used when you start a conversation with a stranger. Later, learners may notice some variability after being exposed to sentences such as *What's your address?* and *What's your phone number?*. That is the process of segmentation: the learner becomes aware that *What's your name?* contains a variable slot which can be filled by other noun phrases (*address*, *phone number*) and the chunk becomes a pattern.

A similar route from a chunk to a pattern can occur with *as far as I know*. At first it can be represented as a holistic unit, and later 'unpacked' and used as a blueprint for creating similar phrases like *as far as I remember* and *as far as I can see*.

Identifying chunks

In pre-corpus approaches to phraseology, the main criteria for identifying and classifying multi-word units were 1) transparency – whether a phrase had a literal or non-literal meaning, and 2) restrictedness – whether or not one of its elements could be substituted by another word.

Literal meaning: *blow your nose*

Non-literal meaning: *blow your own trumpet*

Very restricted: *shrug your shoulders*

Less restricted: *bend (the) knees/elbows/arms/back*

In this view, chunks can be seen on a continuum ranging from free combinations (*pay money*) to collocations (*pay attention*) to figurative idioms (*pay an arm and a leg*). However, this approach overlooks frequent combinations which are not in any way restricted such as *research has shown that, it has been argued that* or *I didn't have time*. Many recent corpus studies have shown that the most frequent three-, four- and five-word strings are not idioms or restricted collocations, but perfectly transparent word combinations such as *in the middle of, I was wondering if* or *do you want me to*. However, frequency cannot be the sole determiner because a 'frequency-based' approach, which measures how frequently words co-occur in a corpus, has its own drawbacks and should be used with caution. Although generally reliable, this approach tends to favour statistically frequent combinations, which do not always meet the pedagogical criteria of being meaningful units, such as *and it was, a bit of a* or *one of the*. Conversely, idiomatic chunks that are not very frequent but are nevertheless important for learners (e.g. *would you be so kind*) might not be captured by corpus analysis software.

Today most experts on formulaic language, such as Alison Wray (2008) or David Wood (2016), agree that a blended approach is better than purely statistical measures of frequency. They do not rule out intuitive judgment either. Another important pedagogic consideration is relevance to the learner. For example, according to the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), the most common noun collocates of *reckless*, in order of frequency, are:

behaviour disregard endangerment driving

Secondary school teachers would be well advised to ignore *disregard* and *endangerment* and focus on *reckless behaviour* and *reckless driving*. Corpus data provides information about frequency but it should always be balanced by considerations of usefulness to the learner at a given level and teachability. This is where our role as the teacher comes into play.

To sum up, there are various criteria and procedures for identifying chunks. However, for pedagogical purposes the most valid approach seems to be a combination of intuition and consultation with a reference source, such as a corpus or a corpus-based tool. Start by identifying strings of words in a text that look familiar. Check the strings against reference corpora in order to establish whether they are indeed frequent. Even internet search engines such as Google can be used to validate your intuitive choices. The activities in this chapter can be used with learners but can also serve as useful practice for teachers preparing to teach lexical grammar.

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1.1 Identifying chunks

Outline This activity guides teachers through the process of identifying useful chunks in a short text.

Level Intermediate and above (B1+)

Time 10 minutes

Preparation None

Procedure

- 1 Look at the text in Figure 1.1 below. In the first paragraph, underline any verb + noun collocations. (Hint: There are four of them.)
- 2 In the second and third paragraphs, highlight a few chunks containing two nouns. (Hint: Some of them start with a preposition or an article.)
- 3 In the second paragraph, circle chunks containing these specific grammatical structures: present perfect, present continuous, passive.
- 4 Go through the whole text again and see if there are any other chunks worth focusing on, for example discourse markers (see *Glossary* on p. 223).
- 5 Compare your answers with the annotated text in Figure 1.2. (Other chunks worth noting are in **bold**.)

We can order cabs, reserve a table in restaurant or book a holiday through social media. But surely, some things are too important to seek online? Apparently not. These days, many parents are turning to the Internet to find a babysitter.

Word of mouth and noticeboards in community centres are being replaced by babysitting apps such as Bambino, UrbanSitter or RockMyBaby, and the industry is booming. The number of people using Sitters has grown by 65% in the last three years.

Bookings are becoming more flexible than ever and can be made at two hours' notice. Parents put in a request, the app notifies local babysitters and the booking can be confirmed in a matter of minutes.

Apps are particularly popular for late-night requests, but early morning sitters for parents who want to have a lie-in at the weekend are also on the rise.

Adapted from 'Babysitting apps boom as parents bid to reclaim free time' by Tess Reidy, the Guardian:

www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/feb/25/parents-babysitting-apps-boom-childcare

Figure 1.1: Babysitting apps text

We can order cabs, reserve a table in restaurant or book a holiday through social media. **But surely**, some things are too important to seek online? **Apparently not**. These days, many parents are turning to the Internet to find a babysitter.

Word of mouth and noticeboards in community centres are being replaced by babysitting apps such as Bambino, UrbanSitter or RockMyBaby, and the industry is booming. The number of people using Sitters has grown by 65% in the last three years.

Bookings are becoming more flexible than ever and can be made at two hours' notice. Parents put in a request, the app notifies local babysitters and the booking can be confirmed in a matter of minutes.

Apps are **particularly popular** for late-night requests, but early morning sitters for parents who want **to have a lie-in at the weekend** are also **on the rise**.

Figure 1.2: Annotated babysitting apps text

Note

Find a babysitter can also be considered a collocation but is not included in the answers because *find* is a very frequent verb which combines freely with a large number of nouns.

For more activities exploring and reviewing chunks in texts, see Chapter 3: *Exploring text*.

Rationale

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, chunks are a somewhat fuzzy concept and cannot always be clearly defined. However, when it comes to identifying chunks, the more the merrier. If you – or your learners – have found more chunks in this text than I intended, this activity has achieved its aim and successfully set you off chunking.

1.2 Collocation cards with Word Neighbors

Outline Learners record new and partially known vocabulary on word cards using Word Neighbors.

Level Elementary and above (A2+)

Time 10 minutes

Preparation Cut up several pieces of A4 card into postcard-sized pieces. These will be used as word cards during the activity. Make sure you have access to the internet and a projector during the session.

Procedure

- 1 Distribute a few word cards to each learner – see *Preparation*.
- 2 Navigate to wordneighbors.ust.hk in your browser and project the webpage so the class can see it. (Alternatively, ask learners to navigate to the website on their own devices.)
- 3 Type in the target word, e.g. *advice*. Select **Noun** from the drop-down menu under the search box. Select **Show 1 word(s) before** from the drop-down menu on the left.
- 4 Click **Find it!**, then **Show results for ADJ + NOUN**.

The screenshot shows the Word Neighbors website interface. At the top, the word 'advice' is entered in the search box. Below the search box, there are several options: 'Show 1 word(s) before', 'Noun' selected in a dropdown menu, 'Show all word forms' checked, and 'Show 0 word(s) after'. There is also a 'Find it!' button. Below this, there is a section for 'Patterns Words' with a frequency table. The table lists various patterns and their frequencies, such as 'ADJ - NOUN' with a frequency of 5091. Below the table, there are several 'Show results' buttons for different patterns.

Patterns	Words	Frequency
ADJ - NOUN	e.g. "legal advice"	5091 Sorted
ADJ - NOUN	legal advice	529
ADJ - NOUN	good advice	200
ADJ - NOUN	professional advice	158
ADJ - NOUN	medical advice	137
ADJ - NOUN	financial advisers	132
ADJ - NOUN	practical advice	123
ADJ - NOUN	best advice	112
ADJ - NOUN	professional advisers	112
ADJ - NOUN	independent advice	110
ADJ - NOUN	financial adviser	90
BET - NOUN	e.g. "the advice"	4460
NOUN - NOUN	e.g. "investment advisers"	3340
VERB - NOUN	e.g. "give advice"	1634
PREP - NOUN	e.g. "of advice"	1551
CONJ - NOUN	e.g. "and advice"	1023
PRON - NOUN	e.g. "you advice"	108
ADV - NOUN	e.g. "out advice"	66

Figure 1.3: Screenshot from wordneighbors.ust.hk

Defining and identifying chunks

- 5 Ask learners to record three or four adjectives that go with *advice* on the back of a word card, in the right-hand column – see the example in Figure 1.5 below.
- 6 Now select **Show 2 word(s) before**. Ask learners to scan the results and note down three or four common verbs that collocate with *advice*. They should write them in the left-hand column on the back of their word card. (The search span needs to be expanded to two words because there may be a determiner between the verb and the noun, e.g. *give some advice*, *take my advice*.)
- 7 Next, expand the search to three words before and three words after, using the drop-down menus. (You may want to untick/uncheck **Show all word forms** to eliminate derivative words like *adviser*.) Ask learners to study the patterns and record at least one chunk at the bottom of their word card.

Word*Neighbors

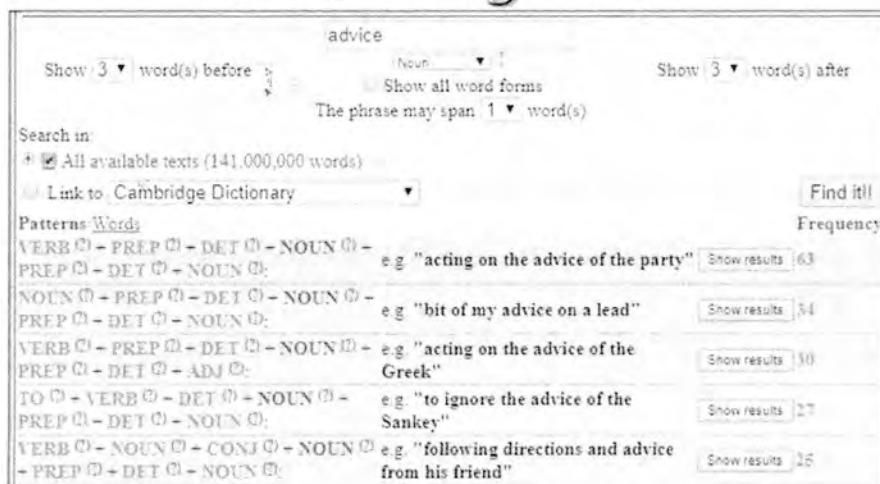


Figure 1.4: Screenshot from wordneighbors.ust.hk

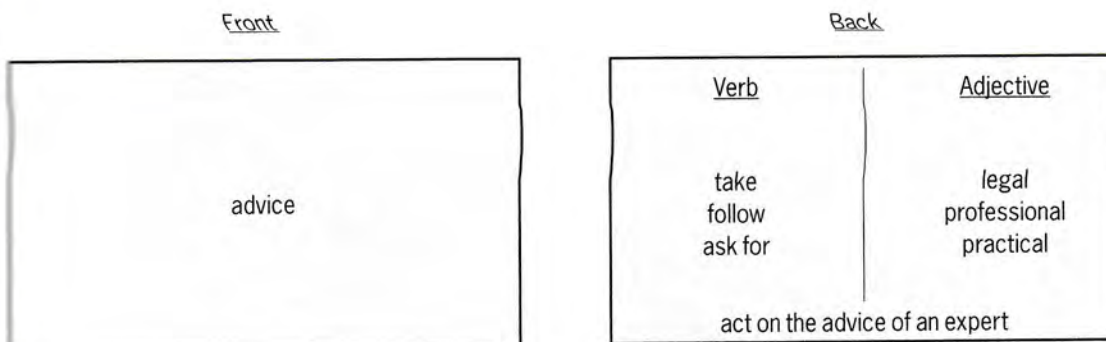


Figure 1.5: Example collocation card

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Note

Word Neighbors is a user-friendly corpus tool developed by the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology: <http://wordneighbors.ust.hk/help/index.html> There is a useful tutorial here: http://mws.ust.hk/mmw/full/Word_Neighbors.htm

Students can be encouraged to follow this activity to record vocabulary during the rest of their course, either individually or in small groups.

See also Activity 9.10: *From word box to chunk box*.

Follow-up

When learners have accumulated enough cards, organize them into groups of four. Each group should have 15–20 cards and each group member is dealt four or five cards. In turn, group members read the collocations on the back (adjectives and nouns), making sure to cover up the front of the card with their hand so that others cannot see the key word. Other students try to guess the key word. The correct guesser keeps the card. The group member with the most cards at the end of the round is the winner.

Rationale

Although learners may understand the importance of recording vocabulary, the idea of recording it with co-text (see *Glossary* on p. 223) may be new. Word Neighbors is a useful tool for learners who are less familiar with a lexical approach to learning language. While the concept of collocation or chunk might take a while to grasp, it is fairly easy to get across the idea that words 'live' in the vicinity of other words, as the name of the tool suggests – especially when teaching younger learners.

1.3 Expanding word knowledge

Outline Learners use an online dictionary of collocations to identify collocates for a key adjective.

Level Elementary and above (A2+) (the example is at B1/B2 level)

Time 10 minutes

Preparation Select five to seven adjectives learners have recently studied or seen in their coursebook.
Ensure learners have access to a device with internet connection (one per small group).

Procedure

- 1 Divide the class into small groups and assign each group one adjective. With smaller classes, each group can be assigned two or three adjectives.
- 2 Tell groups to navigate to www.just-the-word.com and type their target adjectives into the search box. They should then click **combinations**.



Figure 1.6: Screenshot from www.just-the-word.com

- 3 The frequency of each collocation is illustrated by a green bar – the longer the bar, the more frequent the collocation. Clicking on the chosen collocation brings up concordance lines (see *Glossary* on p. 223), showing how it is used in context.
- 4 Learners choose three or four of the most frequent collocations and come up to the board to record them as follows:



Figure 1.7: Collocation fork on the board

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Variation

If students don't have access to devices in class, the activity can be done at home. Students can present their findings in the next lesson or share them online using a tool like Google Docs. (Results can be presented in 'collocation forks', which are easy to create using the Table function in Google Docs.)

controversial		subtle	

Figure 1.8: Example collocation forks

Note

www.just-the-word.com is an online dictionary of collocations based on the British National Corpus (BNC).

Follow-up

In a subsequent lesson, provide the same forks (in a handout or displayed on the board) without their key adjectives. Students try to remember what the key adjectives are.

	village		scenery
	island		views
	part		firework display
	possibility		success
	history		award
	civilization		law school
	city		job
	monument		firm

Figure 1.9: Collocation forks for *remote*, *spectacular*, *ancient*, *prestigious*

If you are using the board, you can then erase the collocates (leaving the first letter of each one) and get students to try and recall them.

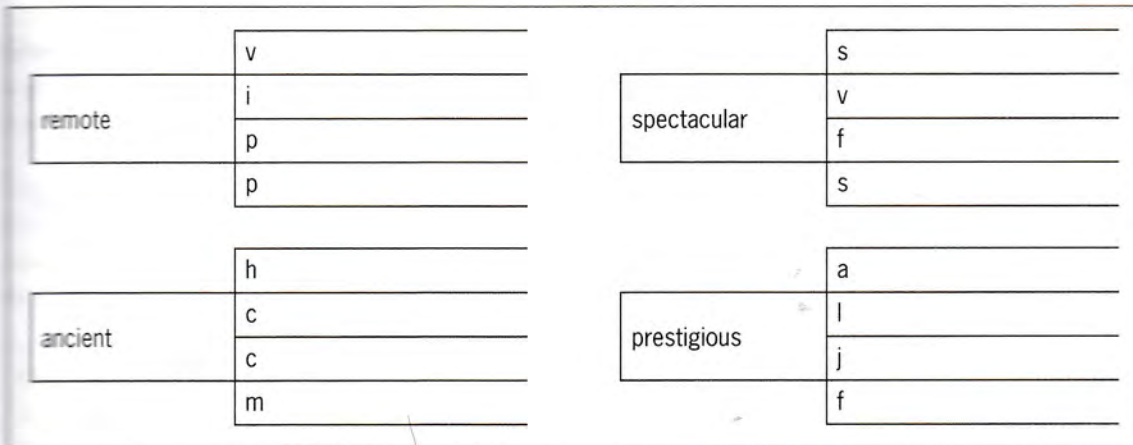


Figure 1.10: Collocation forks with partial collocates

Rationale

Collocation is a crucial aspect of word knowledge. Even when an English word has a direct equivalent in the learners' L1, the two words may differ in collocational behaviour. Therefore full mastery of a new word is not complete without knowledge of its collocational range: which words the target word collocates with and which words it avoids.

1.4 Making mini-stories with collocation forks

Outline Learners use pre-prepared collocation forks to create mini-stories.

Level Elementary and above (A2+) (the example is at B1 level)

Time 10 minutes

Preparation Prepare collocation forks for eight to ten nouns using information from www.just-the-word.com (see Activity 1.3: *Expanding word knowledge*). Put the key nouns on the right and the collocates on the prongs on the left – see Figure 1.11 below.

Procedure

- 1 Write up eight to ten nouns that learners are familiar with on the board, e.g. *money, business, problem*. Ask learners to think of verbs that go with them (e.g. *solve a problem*).
- 2 Distribute or display your pre-prepared collocation forks – see *Preparation*. Check whether the learners' ideas match the collocations on the collocation forks.
- 3 Ask students to create mini-stories for each key noun, trying to incorporate all the verb collocates, for example:

The business was set up by his father who ran it for almost 35 years. He successfully did business with China and the USA. After he retired, his son took over the business and is now the boss.

make		set up	
save	money	do	(a) business
spend		run	
waste		take over	
cause			make
deal with	(a) problem	learn from	(a) mistake
solve		avoid	
ask for		give	
give	advice	do	homework
follow		hand in	
make		go to	
keep	(a) promise	escape from	jail
break		get out of	

Figure 1.11: Collocation forks for nouns

Defining and identifying chunks

Variation

Give students a handout with blank collocation forks and look up the collocates for the nouns together with the class, using www.just-the-word.com

Agree on the most important collocates and get students to enter them into the forks.

Follow-up

Collect in the learners' mini-stories. After the lesson, edit them by blanking out the key nouns. In a subsequent lesson, distribute the blanked-out mini-stories and ask learners to try and remember all of the missing key nouns.

Rationale

Research shows that the more learners engage with new words by manipulating and playing with them, the more likely they are to retain them. The same principle can be extended to collocations.

1.5 Revisiting delexicalized verbs with COCA

Outline The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) is a large, up-to-date corpus available online. Learners use COCA to revisit delexicalized verbs (see *Glossary* on p. 223).

Level Upper intermediate and above (B2+)

Time 15 minutes

Preparation Ensure learners have access to a device with internet connection (one per small group).

Procedure

- 1 Divide the class into small groups and assign each group one delexicalized verb such as *do*, *make*, *take*, *get*, *set*, *put*, etc.
- 2 Tell each group to navigate to corpus.byu.edu/coca, click on **Collocates** and type their target verb in the search field as shown in Figure 1.12 below. (Writing the target word in CAPITAL LETTERS ensures that all the forms of the word are included (*make*, *makes*, *making*, *made*) while *_v* limits the search to verbs only.)

The screenshot shows the COCA search interface. At the top, there are tabs for 'List', 'Chart', 'Collocates' (which is highlighted), and 'Compare KWIC'. Below the tabs is a search field containing 'MAKE_v' and a 'Word/phrase' label. Underneath the search field is a 'Collocates' dropdown menu set to 'noun.ALL'. Below the dropdown is a search span control with buttons '+', '4', '3', '2', '1', '0', '0', '1', '2', '3', '4', '+'. The '0' buttons are highlighted in green. Below the search span are 'Find collocates' and 'Reset' buttons. At the bottom, there are sections for 'Sections', 'Texts/Virtual', 'Sort/Limit', and 'Options'. The 'Options' section includes: '# HITS' set to '100', '# KWIC' set to '200', 'GROUP BY' set to 'LEMMAS', 'DISPLAY' set to 'RAW FREQ', and 'SAVE LISTS' set to 'NO'.

Figure 1.12: Screenshot from corpus.byu.edu/coca

- 3 From the **Collocates** drop-down menu, learners select **noun.ALL**.
- 4 Learners click **Options**. In the **GROUP BY** drop-down menu, they change **WORDS** (default setting) to **LEMMAS**. (The **WORDS** option will treat different word forms separately, e.g. *step* and *steps*; the **LEMMAS** option groups all forms containing *step* together.)
- 5 Learners change the search span to two words on either side of the node, i.e. two words before and after the key word (highlighted in green in Figure 1.12 above).

6 Learners click Find collocates. The results are displayed in order of frequency.

#	CONTEXT	FREQ.
1	[DECISION]	39471
2	[SENSE]	25629
3	[WAY]	23808
4	[PEOPLE]	20771
5	[MONEY]	17839
6	[DIFFERENCE]	17368
7	[MISTAKE]	15881
8	[TIME]	14414
9	[THING]	13980
10	[POINT]	13053
11	[CHOICE]	10921
12	[YEAR]	10578
13	[CHANGE]	10541
14	[EFFORT]	9423

Figure 1.13: Screenshot from corpus.byu.edu/coca

- 7 Students choose five verb + noun collocations and try to use them to write down questions for other groups – see Figure 1.14 below. (Not all the collocations will lend themselves to personal questions, therefore students should scroll down and choose the ones that do.)
- 8 When the questions are prepared, groups swap papers and have a discussion based on the questions they have received.
- 9 After the group discussions, conduct whole-class feedback. Ask groups to report on interesting things they learned about their classmates and find out which collocations were new for them.

Questions using collocations with SET

- Do you often **set goals** for yourself?
- Have you ever **set a record**?
- When did you last **set foot** in a gym?
- Do you like to watch the **sun set** over the ocean?
- Do you think celebrities should **set an example** for children?

Figure 1.14: Example questions using collocations with set

 **Classroom management tip**

For this activity, it is a good idea to group students of similar ability together – otherwise stronger ones may take charge of writing and discussing the questions, with weaker learners being more passive. Stronger groups can be asked to write extra questions if they finish quickly.

Note

After making around ten queries on the COCA website, you might be prompted to register. Registration is free and fairly straightforward – and advisable!

Have and *go* are also considered delexicalized verbs but searching for their collocates is trickier. It's best to avoid these verbs for the purpose of this activity.

Variation

Traditional learner dictionaries or the tools featured in Activities 1.2 and 1.3 can also be used to find common collocates of delexicalized verbs.

Rationale

Delexicalized verbs have a large number of meanings as evidenced by the long entries that accompany them in dictionaries. For instance, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org> lists 17 meaning senses for *get* and 23 for *do* (and that's excluding its use as an auxiliary verb)! Each of these senses is associated with different collocations, for example *get* = *RECEIVE a grade / a phone call (from) / some time off work*; *get* = *REACH home / to work / far*. Therefore, the only way to master delexicalised verbs is to learn them with their collocations.

On the whole, delexicalized verbs are a good way of introducing the concept of collocation to learners of any L1 background. I usually start with *make/do* and show how one goes with *homework* while the other goes with *mistake* (*I did my homework; I made a lot of mistakes*). Why is it this way and not the other way around? Because words have collocations – they prefer the company of certain other words.

For more ideas on teaching delexicalized verbs, see Activity 10.6: *Seemingly easy verbs*.

1.6 Using multiple sources to find chunks

Outline Learners look up the same items using different resources and pool their findings.

Level Elementary and above (A2+) (the example is at B1/B2 level)

Time Variable, depending on the number of items

Preparation Ensure learners have access to a device with internet connection (one per small group). Alternatively, provided groups with a range of paper learners' dictionaries, for example *Cambridge Learner's Dictionary*, *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* or *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*.

Procedure

- 1 Write up a list of words on the board. These can be words students already partially know (which came up earlier on in a reading text) or new words – see the following suggestions:



<u>A2/B1</u>	<u>B2</u>
rain (n.)	budge
accident	clinch
sumery	streak
bargain (n.)	courtesy
watch out	bleak
clarity	gloomy

Depending on their level, ESP students can be given some further items, as follows:

<u>Business English</u>	<u>EAP</u>
proceeds	basis
resources	unprecedented
domestic	perspective
recession	draw on
target	sufficient
impose	occupy

- 2 Divide the class into small groups. Provide each group with a copy of a paper dictionary or a link to an online dictionary such as <http://dictionary.cambridge.org> or <http://ldoceonline.com> – see *Useful resources* on p. 227. Different groups should access different dictionaries to look up the target words.
- 3 Encourage learners to look for interesting or unusual (not obvious) chunks. Very often useful chunks are in **bold**.
- 4 Pool the groups' findings. Write four or five chunks or whole sentences on the board. Encourage students to copy them into their notebooks or onto vocabulary cards (see Activity 1.2: *Collocation cards with Word Neighbors*).

charity

noun · UK  /ˈtʃær.ə.ti/ US  /ˈtʃer.ə.ti/



charity noun (GIVING)

B1 [C or U] a system of giving money, food, or help free to those who are in need because they are ill, poor, or have no home, or any organization that has the purpose of providing money or helping in this way:

She does a lot of work for charity.

People tend to give to (= give money to) charity at Christmas time.

Proceeds from the sale of these cards will go to (= be given to) local charities.

UNICEF is an international charity.

They did a charity performance on the first night, to raise money for AIDS research.

Figure 1.15: Screenshot from Cambridge Dictionary Online

Rationale

Learners will be surprised at how examples are often similar across different dictionaries. Language is used in predictable patterns and modern corpus-based dictionaries are an excellent language-learning tool because they show how a word is most commonly used. Take, for example, the word *skyline* which appears in *Manhattan skyline* or *New York skyline* in at least five learners' dictionaries! Learners' dictionaries also expose learners to grammar commonly associated with the target words, therefore it's a good idea to encourage learners to copy out whole example sentences.

1. Outli
Le
Ti
Preparati

Procedur

- 1 Give le
(Note t
contain
- 2 Learn
write s
equiv
- 3 To che
or Wor

German
1 keine
2 eine k
3 eine T
4 den Z
5 den A
6 Schü
7 Es sa
8 ein tr
9 Aufm
10 Kann Flugh
11 er un mein
12 Wo s Nach

✓ = chunk
Figure 1.1

1.7 Using Contrastive Analysis

Outline Learners in monolingual classes compare chunks in L1 with English.

Level Intermediate and above (B1+)

Time 10–15 minutes

Preparation Ensure learners have access to a device with internet connection (one device per small group). Prepare a three-column handout. In the left-hand column, add around ten chunks in the learners' L1. The other columns are for word-for-word translations and English equivalents – see an example in Figure 1.16 below.

Procedure

- 1 Give learners the handout containing the list of chunks in their L1 – see *Preparation* and Figure 1.16. (Note that Figure 1.16 contains example answers in Columns 2 and 3, but your handout will only contain L1 chunks in Column 1.)
- 2 Learners work in pairs and decide if the chunks are directly translatable into English. They can write some word-for-word translations in the middle column of their handout and some English equivalents in the right-hand column.
- 3 To check their intuitions, learners use a dictionary or corpus tools such as COCA (see Activity 1.5) or Word Neighbors (see Activity 1.2).

German	Literal/word-for-word translation	English equivalent
1 keine Angst	no fear	don't worry
2 eine knappe Sache	a close/scant thing/matter	a near miss / a close call
3 eine Theorie vorschlagen	suggest/propose a theory	propose / put forward a theory ✓
4 den Zug verpassen	to miss the train	to miss the train ✓
5 den Anschluss verpassen	to miss the connection	to miss the bus/boat
6 Schlüss ziehen	to draw/pull conclusion	to draw conclusions ✓
7 Es sagt mir einfach nicht zu	It simply doesn't say to me	It just doesn't do anything for me
8 ein tropfen im Ozean	a drop in the ocean	a drop in the ocean ✓
9 Aufmerksamkeit schenken	give attention	pay attention
10 Kannst Du mich zum Flughafen bringen?	Can you bring me to the airport?	Can you give me a lift to the airport?
11 er unterbrach meinen Gedankengang	He interrupted my train of thought	He interrupted my train of thought ✓
12 Wo sich die Füchse gute Nacht sagen	where the foxes say goodnight	in the middle of nowhere

✓ = chunk is directly translatable from German

Figure 1.16: Examples of idiomatic chunks in German and English

Lexical Grammar

Note

For other activities drawing learners' attention to inter-lingual differences, see Activity 10.8: *Lost in translation*.

Rationale

Contrastive Analysis (CA) gained prominence in the 1950s. Its proponents recommended comparing structural patterns of L1 and the target language before creating materials for learners of the target language. In recent years, CA has made a comeback in the field of L2 vocabulary research. Many applied linguists, for example Batia Laufer and Nadja Nesselhauf, argue for a CA-driven approach to teaching collocations. They say it's essential to focus on collocations that have no direction L1 translation and pedagogical intervention is needed to clarify such collocations. For example, *ask a question* needs to be explicitly taught to Spanish speakers because the Spanish equivalent – *hacer una pregunta* – translates literally as *make a question*. Similarly, *deliver/make a speech* needs to be taught to French learners because the French equivalent – *prononcer un discours* – translates directly as *pronounce a speech*. Assuming you know your learners' L1, you can use CA to anticipate collocational errors.

However, even if English collocations are congruent with L1, it is still worthwhile focusing on them. For example, the English equivalent of the French expression *Tout est bien qui finit bien* is *All's well that ends well*, which is perfectly congruent. Nevertheless, you can still draw learners' attention to the use of *all* in *all's well* (and not *everything*), and point out that we say *ends well* and not *finishes well*.

1.8 Chunks everywhere

Outline Learners collect chunks containing a key word, compare them with a corpus and share them in class.

Level Intermediate and above (B1+)

Time Variable

Preparation Ensure learners have access to a device with internet connection (one per small group).

Procedure

1. Elicit some of the most frequent words in English and/or provide a list based on corpus data. For example, you could provide this list of the most frequent verbs in English:

be	<i>make</i>	<i>come</i>	<i>give</i>
have	<i>know</i>	<i>want</i>	<i>tell</i>
do	<i>think</i>	<i>look</i>	<i>work</i>
say	<i>see</i>	<i>use</i>	<i>call</i>
go	<i>take</i>	<i>find</i>	<i>try</i>

2. Assign each word to a learner.
3. Set a homework task asking learners to collect examples (e.g. from the coursebook, from texts they read or hear, from songs, films, signs, etc.) that include these words.
4. Learners bring their findings to the next class and check them against the SkELL (Sketch Engine for Language Learning) corpus tool: skell.sketchengine.co.uk
5. They type their target word into SkELL, click on **Word sketch** and turn the **Context** toggle on. Clicking on the collocations will bring up examples from the corpus.

The screenshot shows the SkELL interface with the word 'try' entered in the search box. The 'Word sketch' tab is selected, and the 'Context' toggle is turned on. The interface displays various categories of collocations for the word 'try':

- subject of try:** someone, anyone trying, people trying, time trying to, I tried, government tried, man, you're trying to, I'm trying to, company, I've tried, guy, years trying to, other, player
- object of try:** tried everything, to try something, recipe, approach, thing, experiment, case, method, to try anything, trick, tactic, diet, food, time, product
- phrasal:** to try out, to try on, tried over and over
- phrasal with object:** try it on, try out
- adjectives with try:** hard, tried several, Which should I try first? I also, tried many, to try next, tried most of the, not trying hard enough to, try new, to try other, much, try more
- modifiers of try:** desperately trying to, tried unsuccessfully to, tried hard to, try again, just trying to, always try to, even try to, constantly trying to, then try, still trying to, repeatedly tried to, ever tried to, actively trying to, simply trying to, frantically trying to

Figure 1.17: Screenshot from skell.sketchengine.co.uk

Lexical Grammar

Note

Learners might end up with different phrases containing the target verbs, not all of which would count as chunks. For example, they may come up with the following phrases containing the verb *try*:

I decided to try my luck

try your hand at

don't try my patience

'*We try harder*' (from a car rental advert)

Let's try a different tack

Try sleeping with the windows open.

Although the last one contains a useful pattern that learners need to know (*try* + verb + *-ing*), *try sleeping* is not a chunk as such because *try* can potentially take any verb in this pattern.

Rationale

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, a combination of a few corpus-based tools – together with intuitive judgment – is possibly the best way of identifying chunks. Therefore, even with generally reliable tools such as SkELL, it's a good idea to check the examples across multiple platforms, if possible. For example, a search on SkELL will confirm that *try your luck* and *try your hand at* are indeed frequent chunks but *try your patience* is inexplicably absent from the results. However, a quick check in a learners' dictionary will confirm that it is indeed a collocation.

2 Revising and recycling chunks

This chapter outlines a number of activities which can be used for revising and recycling chunks, in order to provide further practice and consolidation of the language learners have already encountered earlier. Most of the activities are kinaesthetic, i.e. they involve movement, and therefore are great for warmers at the beginning of a lesson or for filler activities in the middle. It's a good idea to start every lesson with some kind of language review, covering vocabulary from previous lessons as well as some grammar items presented as chunks, for example *I've never been to China* in Activity 2.3 or *We've known each other for years* in Activity 2.4.

The activities are presented in a cumulative order, with each subsequent activity containing a greater number of target items. This reflects the learners' process of accumulation of new vocabulary throughout their course. By continuously revisiting previously encountered items and integrating relatively new items, teachers can assess exactly what students have already mastered and find out which items require further review and practice.