Incorporating the Lexical Approach into the Task-based Approach

Omar Ali Ilyas

Assistant Lecturer

University of Mosul / College of Education for Humanities /

Department of English

Abstract

The current paper aims at incorporating the Lexical Approach into the Task-Based Approach in order to formulate a Lexico-Task-Based method to be used in Iraqi EFL Classrooms. Comparative analysis of the theoretical and practical principles of the two approaches is conducted. After pointing out common principles and features, the possibility of incorporating the lexical Approach into the Task-Based-Approach is attempted. Lexical classrooms activates are reformed and shaped as tasks in terms of task designing criteria suggested by the Task-Based-approach. Finally, a general sample plan according to the Lexico-Task-Based method is presented.

Introduction:

In the field of language teaching, the search for the perfect approach/method is an endless quest. To find such a method is the ultimate goal of any methodologist, yet, it is impossible to fulfill, since every language learning context is definitely unique. So many variables interfere and overlap affecting the learning process, starting from the physical environment, teacher, learner(s), materials reaching to the approach adopted and the method implemented.

The shift from the tradition of teaching grammatical structure to teaching language more communicatively has resulted in so many communicative based approaches to language teaching. Recent researches have supported the efficiency of the Lexical and the Task-based approach in language teaching. Significant improvement in learners' performance has been statistically recorded in classrooms adopting both approaches.

Sharing the same communicative background made it feasible to attempt merging the two approaches in order to formulate a novel method that enjoys their best features, a Lexico-Task-based- Method.

Aim of The Study:

This paper aims at incorporating the Lexical Approach into the Task-Based Approach in order to formulate a Lexico-Task-Based method to be used in Iraqi EFL Classrooms.

The Theory of Learning in Task-Based Approach & The Lexical Approach:

All teaching approaches, methods, practices, techniques and activities should be, in some way, based on a linguistic theory. Although linguistics, as science, wouldn't offer teachers some detailed plans of what to do inside the classroom, it would certainly provide theoretical views and approaches to languages on which these plans

could be based. Shedding light on the theoretical bases of both approaches is definitely of crucial significance. Both approaches, as it is noticed, share some theoretical principles which would make it a lot easier to merge them on scientific bases.

Edwards and Willis (2005:3), in summarizing the basic " assumptions" of Task-Based approach(henceforth TBA), state that the basic elements of TBA are purposeful activities and tasks that emphasize communication rather than practicing a form of patterns. Accordingly, the Lexical Approach (henceforth LA) concentrates mainly on developing language learners' proficiency with lexis in the sense it is based on the idea that language acquisition depends on the learner's ability to comprehend and produce lexical phrases as unanalyzed wholes, and these lexical units become the raw data of the learner to perceive patterns of language, which is traditionally thought as grammar (Lewis, 1993: 95).

It is obvious, for an expert eye, that the main focus of the two approaches revolves around the major function of language (communication) rather than forms of grammatical patterns. That's to say that, both of them regard communicative competence as more important than the production of grammatically accurate sentences, whether in speech or writing.

Moreover, both approaches consider intensive, roughly-tuned language input as essential for language acquisition. The acquisition of language is considered far more important than language learning, according to Krashen (1982:10). This acquisition depends on comprehensible input. In other words, it is very important for a teacher to provide his students with comprehensible input for efficient language learning. Such input is represented by the form of what is called "the pre- task", for the TBA, and the form of the so-called "Chunks" as far as the LA is concerned.

Furthermore, both approaches share the same values regarding the role of lexical units in language use and learning as well as the relation between vocabulary and grammar. Traditionally, grammar was given priority; vocabulary is merely serving to illustrate the meaning and scope of the grammar. As Harwood (2002: 1) argues, nowadays, "lexis plays the dominant role in the EFL classroom or at least a more dominant role than it has traditionally, which has largely been one of subservience to grammar" .This is the sole view of the LA. Furthermore, Skehan (1996:1-2) argues, many Task-based proposals incorporate the same perceptive. So we can say that both approaches do not view grammar and vocabulary as completely separated systems, but as interdependent.

Finally, it may be worth saying that both of the LA and the TBA embrace the communicative views to language learning. That's to say, they both share speculation, the constant experimentation and hypothesizing about how the process of language learning works in order to achieve learning progress.

The Practical Aspects of TBA & LA:

Apart from theoretical views of language and language learning, it is obviously logical and practical that we move to a more concrete level of description related to how these theories are materialized into practical steps shaping the methodological form of both approaches. Syllabus design, the role of the teacher, the role of learner, procedures and learning activities will represent the core of this paper. Pointing out the common foundations, on which these practical aspects of both approaches are based, would make it useful and accessible to achieve the aim of formulating the Lexico-Task-Based method.

Wilkins (1976:1) categorizes syllabuses, generally speaking, into two main branches, Synthetic & Analytic. Without going deep into the detailed description of each, it would be sufficient to say that the first emphasizes the product of language learning, while the second emphasizes the process of learning. In other words, "What?" Vs. "How?". Analytic syllabus has received more attention recently as the methodology of language teaching has become more and more student-centered. A close look at the syllabus of both approaches (LA & TBA) would manifest, clearly, that they share the same rooted analytic design. Arguing that a " task" and " lexis" are the backbone of designing a syllabus, make it crystal clear that both designs are about " how?" rather than " what?".

When it comes to the role of the teacher, similarity, if not identicality, is noticed in a lexical-based classroom and in a task-based classroom. From a lexical perspective, Willis (1996: 131) views the teacher role as an environment creator so learners can operate effectively and manage their own learning. He helps the students in lexical analysis (such as observing, classification and generalizing). That involves teachers to "abandon the idea of a teacher as 'a knower' and concentrate on the idea of a learner as a 'discoverer' ". On   the other hand, Richards & Rogers (2001: 236) describe the role of the teacher as the selector and sequencer of the task, in charge of preparing the learner for the tasks and the consciousness-rising. So, teachers adopting TBA and LA can be described as guiders, facilitators and activity selectors letting their students to express themselves communicatively and learning at the same time.

Learners in a lexical based syllabus play a significant role in their own learning. It is true that the teacher, at the beginning, is responsible of making his students aware of the notion of lexical items, describing the features of collocation and grasp the meaning of the

concept of "words that tend to occur" yet, it is, mostly, the learners' job to recognize, classify, analyze and generalize. Woolard (2000:35) states:

> "The learning of collocations is one aspect of language development which is ideally suited to independent language learning. in a very real sense, we can teach students to teach themselves. Collocation is a matter of noticing and recording, and trained students should be able to explore texts for themselves. Not only should they notice common collocations in the texts they meet, but more importantly, they should select those collocations which are crucial to their needs".

Now let's take a look at the role of the learner in a task-based language classroom. As settled earlier, the teacher is the selector and sequencer of the task, but who is really doing the task? The answer is , the students. Achieving the goal of every task created by the teacher lays on the shoulder of the learners themselves with, of course, the guidance of their teacher. So again, a significant role in the process of learning is played by the same players in the lexical approach (the learners).

Richards & Rogers (2001: 235) summaries learners' role in a task-based syllabus into three major roles implied by task work: Group Participant (since a task will be done in pairs or small groups), Monitor (since the learner will have the opportunity to notice how language is used in communication) and Innovator (since many tasks will require

the learners to create and interpret messages for which they lack full linguistic experience and resources).

Laying on the same general foundations of communicative language teaching, the role of the learner in both approaches overlaps and shares the same general features.

In the way of finding out the common grounds between the TBA & LA, procedure and learning activities are considered of crucial significance in achieving the aim of the current paper. The procedural sequencing of learning activities inside the classroom in both approaches would shape the general frame-work of the Lexico-Task-Based method.

As far as a lexically based teaching is concerned, procedure heavily depends on the type of materials used in the syllabus. Material resources supporting the LA, according to Lewis (2000:211-213), are of four major types. Type 1: consists of complete course package including texts, tapes, teacher's manuals and so on such as the Collins COBUILD English course. Type 2: is presented by collocations of vocabulary teaching activities. Type 3: consists of " printout" versions of computer corpora collections packaged in text format, such as exercises based on corpora printouts. Finally, type 4: computer programmed materials data sets that allow the learners setup their own analysis, such as the CD of Oxford's Micro Concord.

However, all designers, almost, assume that the learner should take on the role of discourse analyst, no matter what kind of materials is used in the classroom. Thus the procedure must involve activities that draw the learners' attention to lexical collocations and enhance their preserving and use. Moreover, these activities should be designed and selected in a way that enables the learners to discover collocations themselves.

A plan of four general outlines is suggested by Hill(2000:20ff). It involves (a) teaching individual collocations,(b) making students aware of collocations, (c) extending what learners already know by adding knowledge of collocation restrictions to known vocabulary, and (d) storing collocations through encouraging the learners to keep a lexical notebook.

In a TBA classroom, procedure, in general, depends on the preparing and the execution of the task itself. Before going into the detailed designing of a task, one has to know the components that formulate it. Williams & Burden (1997:169-71) argue that a task consists of five elements: (a) goals,(b) Input, which is the material on which the learners work whether verbal or non-verbal,(c) activities,(d) roles and (e) settings, in which a task is carried out.

Moreover, the execution of a task goes into three phases according to Ellis (2006:20), A. pre-task, B. during task and C. post-task. The first phase includes activities undertaken by both the teachers and learners before getting involved in the task itself. The sole purpose of the pre-task phase is to " prepare the students to perform the task in a way that will promote acquisition" (Skehan, 1996:25). Asking the learners to observe a model, giving some simple explanation, introducing a brief introduction or even performing a similar task, is an example of the activities that could be used in this phase. The second phase revolves around the task itself including the requirements, instruction and restrictions of carrying it out, such as timing or how to access the input data…,etc., where the leaners perform a role play and work in pairs or groups on the task at hand. The final phase represents the following-up of learners' performance. Again, depending on the kind of the input materials, performing a task may vary from one task to another. Materials that can be exploited for instruction in TBA are "

limited by the imagination of the task designer" Richards & Rogers (2001: 236). It may include texts in the form of textbooks, multimedia based, task cards or realia such as newspaper, television and internet.

Task & Lexis:

For the purpose of outlining a comprehensive frame-work for the Lexico-Task-based method, that is applicable in Iraqi EFL classrooms, getting a better idea about the notion of the " task" and" lexis" is thought to be of a major importance.

So, what is a task? Willis (1996: 95) defines tasks as activities where the target language is used by learners for a communicative purpose (goal) to achieve an outcome. Tasks are activities which require, according to Branden (2006:4), learners to engage in order to attain an objective and which necessitates the use of language. So, in general, a task can be viewed as a learning activity created and designed by teachers to fulfill a communicative rather than structural (grammatical) goal.

There are some characteristics that every task should have to be effective and reliable. We can summarize these characteristics, suggested by Ellis (2003:9ff) ,as follows:

- A task is a work plan, i.e. it should have a carefully designed plan.
- A task involves a primary focus on meaning.
- A task involves real-world processes of language use.
- A task can involve any of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.
- A task should engage cognitive processes, such as selecting, classification, ordering, reasoning and evaluation.

) A task should have a clearly defined communicative outcome.

To conclude our exploration of the concept of the " task" in TBA methodology in addition to its components discussed earlier, a brief classification of task types is required. Based on the type of interaction that occurs during task execution, Courtney (1998: 31) classify tasks as follows:

) Jigsaw tasks: require learners to combine pieces to form a whole.

) Information-gap tasks: involve transferring a given information from one student to another.

) Problem-solving tasks: require learners to come up with a resolution of a given problem.

) Decision-making tasks: require choosing from a number possible outcomes by means of negotiation.

) Opinion exchange tasks: involve discussion and ideas exchange, no necessity for total agreement.

However, some methodologists would classify tasks according to the cognitive processes or other dimensions that take place during the execution. Yet, the above classification is thought to be sufficient to ensure a general comprehension of the notion of the "task".

When Michael Lewis suggested the lexical approach, he emphasized the central role of multiword lexical units or " chunks " to language structure, second language learning and language use, such as collocations of vocabulary, binomials, trinomials, idioms and fixed and semi-fixed expressions. Lexical units have many types like:

1. Words: notebook, pencil, pen, ruler …,etc.
2. Phrases: by the way, from now on …,etc.
3. Collocations: clean and tidy, peace of mind …,etc.

4. Phrasal verbs: pick up, run away …,etc.

5. Idioms: red herring, once in a blue moon …,etc.

6. Sentence frames: would you mind if …?; if I were you…,etc.

7. Sentence starters: what I mean is …; the fact was …,etc.

8. Social formula: see you later; have a nice day; yours sincerely…,etc.

9. Discourse markers: frankly speaking; once upon a time …,etc.

Schmitt (2010: 1) states that the LA is mostly about collocations and fixed expressions. Collocation refers to the tendency amongst words to collocate, or 'co-locate' (appear close to) certain other words. Lewis (2000: 132) defines collocation as "the way in which words co-occur in natural text in statistically significant ways". The neo-Firthian approach to word meaning is regarded one of the most important developments in the study of vocabulary. It has been argued that the meaning of a word depends on how it combines with other words in actual use, i.e. its collocations, as it is of the meaning it possesses in itself (O'Keeffe et al, 2007: 59).

Based on what have been discussed so far, and the Scientific evidences which have been shown proving that the two approaches have so much in common, theoretically and practically, it is now logical and applicable to incorporate the LA into the TBA. Merging the practical principles of the two approaches would, definitely, formulate a more effective method that would enjoy the best of the two.

The Lexico-Task-Based Method:

Lackman (2012:2) states that teachers can use any methodology with a lexical approach from grammar translation to task-based learning; the only difference lies in the linguistic focus of the lesson. Further, he adds that " A good way to get students to notice lexical chunks in a text is to tell them that they will have to use those chunks later in a task" (ibid:15).

The Lexico-Task-Based Method attempted in this paper takes its shape from the ideas suggested by Lackman earlier (in the very preceding paragraph). Forming the activities used in the LA in the form of tasks as suggested by the TBA, is the framework of this method. The input of these tasks will be " chunks" as the central body of language learning, as assumed by the LA. Now let's start outlining the detailed aspects of the Lexico-Task-Based Method by forming the activities used in the LA on basis of the three phases of task execution, viz. A. pre-task, B. during task and C. post-task. The lexical chunks, in form of texts, would represent the "pre-task" phase (language input), the activity would represent the " during the task" phase, while language focus would represent the " post-task " phase.

As far as the first phase is concerned (pre-task), selected lexical chunks, mainly collocations of various syntactical structures, will be considered as language input for the task. Since both LA and TBA emphasize the importance of authentic materials, it is preferable that these collocations are selected from authentic texts. Frequency is the criteria on which the decision of selection is based. According to corpora studies, namely, Willis (1990: 4), the commonest and most important and most basic meanings in English are those meanings expressed by most frequent words. Therefore, the 700 most frequent which constitute 70% of English texts are preferable to be the input of for the tasks especially in beginners level. It may include texts in the form of textbooks, multimedia based, task cards or realia such as newspaper, television and the internet as suggested by the TBA. For the third phase (post-task), or the " follow-up" phase, performance evaluation, tests and measuring activities will take place according to the objectives and procedure adopted in the " during the task" phase.

Our main concern now is to shape the activities used in the lexical approach in the form of " during the task" phase. There are many lexical based activities used in an LA based classrooms. They may have various shapes and forms according to the goals stated and the topic taught. The following are some of these activities:

-) Find Someone Who.....: Appropriate for teaching conversation and vocabulary.
-) Songs: Appropriate for teaching vocabulary, listening and reading.
-) Lexical Chunks Dictation: Appropriate for teaching vocabulary and reading.
-) Corpora Searches: Appropriate for teaching grammer, vocabulary and reading.
-) Papers on Walls: Appropriate for teaching vocabulary and may serve as a warmer/ Icebreaker .
-) Slot-Filler: Appropriate for teaching grammar, vocabulary and writing.
-) Slot-Filler Search: Appropriate for teaching grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing.

The following table shows the tasks that can be formed according to the above activities.

Table (1)

Lexical Activities' Tasks

Activity	Description	Task(s)	E
Find Someone who....	This warmer is a standard activity adapted to focus on different lexical structures all involving the word "get"	It merely involves planting the lexical chunks into "find someone who…" instructions. This particular activity could work with many	Find someone ...likes to get ...takes a long people.

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		other lexical chunks.	...wants to get
Songs Gapping Songs	Songs are a rich source of lexical items, particularly commonly used semi-fixed expressions		
		Gap lyrics to get students to focus on useful lexical chunks rather than individual words	Who <u>knows</u> l you ……
Giving clues		Ask students to listen to certain constructions by supplying them with clues for each one. Or if you want to make it easier for them, give them a written copy of the lyrics along with the instructions.	Like question itself.
Lexical Chunks Dictation	This is a quick and easy way to guide students towards lexical chunks that you want them to find in a text. First you need your own copy of the text. Then on your text, underline some of the lexical chunks you want students to look for	Give students a copy of the text and have them work in pairs. Tell them that you are going to dictate a list of clues for structures in the text and they have to write down the clues you are going to give them about either the structure of the chunk or its meaning. Once	Skipping and misty morni hearts a thur brown eyed g eyed girl. Q: a colloc physical appe
Corpora	searching for items using	Students search corpus storages to	find colour c

Searches	concordance printouts from a corpus. Make sure they are focusing on just the words near the highlighted ones and keep the task simple	come up with the most lexical chunks meeting a certain criteria.	the following Food and drin Nature of peo Adj+ noun (yellow)…etc.
Slot-filler Relay	This is a great way to get the students to come up with slot-fillers for semi-fixed expressions. Once they have picked out some expressions from a text, elicit the expressions from them and make note of them either by underlining them in the text or listing them on a sheet of paper or on the side of the board.	Students work in pairs or groups to come up with as much fillers that fit as possible.	Who knows l you My teacher… Nobody ….. you. My friends …
Slot-filler Search	use a text that students have been working with, a reading or listening tape script, and pull out a few important semi-fixed expressions, e.g., 5 – 10.. Then write variations of them by changing the slot-fillers. Before starting the activity, write the semi-fixed expressions on the board.	This is similar to the previous activity in that students have to provide slot-fillers for semi-fixed expressions taken from texts. However, this activity gives them expressions that are variations of those in the text and they have to search the text to find the original expression then change the slot.	Schools have for students Schools lunchtime.

The above lexical tasked activities are only examples of how to incorporate lexical activities into task designing. It is up to the teacher (task designer) to form and shape tasks according to stated objectives and subjects.

A General Leixico-Task-Based Plan:

It is time to suggest a general outline for a lesson plan of the suggested Leixico-Task-Based Method. The plan shows the reasonable and effective possibility of the practical incorporation of LA and TBA.

A Lexico-Task-Based Lesson Method
Sample Plan

Objective: Student learn meanings and usage of the target lexis .

Sub objectives: reading comprehension, noticing lexical structure, speaking practice, writing practice …, etc.

Materials: Authentic text (a short story for example)

Stage	Focus	Procedure	Time
Warmer	S - S	Use any warmer which gets Ss thinking about the topic/content and introduces the text.	5-10
Core reading	S	Assign a gist question and students read or listen to the text to answer it. Give a time limit for a gist reading task. Elicit the answer.	5-10

Reading for comprehension	S	Assign comprehension questions. Students read or listen to the text and answer the questions. Elicit the answers (you can have students pair check before you do this.	5-15
Language analysis	S or S - S	Assign topic or task-related noticing task e.g., "Read the text and look for collocations and/or expressions that are used to talk about movies". Tell students to underline the lexical chunks on their copy of the text or tapescript. You can make the noticing task more effective by linking it to a productive task, e.g., "Read the text and look for collocations and/or expressions that you could use to write a movie review."	10-15
Clarification	T-Ss	Elicit the lexical chunks that the students found and write them on the board. Explain meaning where necessary and elicit and/or provide slot-fillers in semi-fixed expressions. Where appropriate, do pron practice, especially stress patterns.	10-20
Guided practice	S - S	Get students to practice using the lexical chunks in speaking. For example, they ask their partner a question which would elicit one of the lexical chunks in the	5-10

		answer (e.g., Q "How would you describe the acting in the film?" A "Brad Pitt delivered a good performance as …"	
Production	T-Ss	Assign a writing task and specify that students have to use the lexical chunks that they extracted from the text. You can specify how many you want them to use or just give a minimum number. The task can be related by genre to the original text, i.e., if it was a movie review, students write a movie review. To make it easier to mark, you can ask them to underline them. Then when you assess their writing, give them a mark based only on the use of the lexical chunks which means you only look at what is underlined and don't bother correcting the text. Or mark them solely on how many they use, making it really easy.	10-15
Homework		Homework: Tell students to listen to or read for lexical chunks when they are outside of class and assign them a number of chunks you want them to bring in to the next class (3 is a good number). You can ask for them to be related to the text or not (e.g.,more lexical chunks related to movies). This	

		encourages them to notice lexical structures whenever they encounter the language, thus encouraging autonomous learning and accelerated acquisition	

Conclusion:

The incorporation of both the LA and the TBA is based on scientific justifications. When it comes to practicing teaching, no realistic answer exists to which approach is best or which method is more applicable. It depends on so many intervening variables and it is up to teacher's intelligence to choose what is convenient to that particular learning situation.

Besides the many common features, practices and principles between the Lexical Approach and the Task-Based Approach, as discussed in this paper, the common shared learning theory, shows that the incorporation of the two approaches forming the so called " Lexico-Task-Based Method" is eligible, practical, effective and implacable. Based on the comparative analysis of theoretical and practical aspects conducted in the current paper, it can be clearly stated that the attempted method would enjoy the best of them. It is proved, beyond doubt, that lexical activities used in lexical based classrooms can be shaped in form of tasks suggested by the TBA.

Furthermore, since the input of both approaches depends on similar views to language learning, the teacher is free to choose the most suitable lexical activities to formulate tasks in order to achieve lesson objectives.

From an interactive point of view, the Lexico-Task-Based Method can be very useful in motivating students towards language

learning. The rigid boring corpus based date that is used as the raw materials in a lexical syllabus if formed as interactive task solving activities.

Suggestions:

It is suggested that further studies should take the Lexico-Task-Based method into consideration in the field of language teaching. For teaching staff in the Department of English, College of Education, University of Mosul, it is highly recommended to practically investigate the effeminacy of this method on enhancing our students' performance and achievement.

The new English course for primary, intermediate and secondary schools in Iraq is based on the communicative approach. The syllabus, materials and activities , all centered around the communicative views to language. That been said, it is highly recommended for school teachers in Iraq to adopt the Lexico-Task-Based method. Chunks as the rough input in the shape of tasks would be very effective in developing students' communication skills.

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دمج المنهج المعجمي في المنهج المستند إلى المهام

عمر علي إلياس

/   ية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية / قسم اللغة الإنكليزية

:

يهدف البحث الحالي الى   المنهج   لمنهج   الى المهام   طريقة

معجمي   الى المهام يتم استخدامه في صفوف تدريس اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية في العراق. تم اجراء تحليلٍ مقارن للمباديء النظرية والعملية لكلتا الطريقتين. وبعد تحديد والخصائص المشتركة بينهما، اجريت المحاولة للدمج بين الطريقتين. تمت اعادة صياغة وتشكيل الانشطة الصفية المتبعة ضمن الطريقة المعجمية بشكل مهام صفية على ضوء المعايير المتبعة في تصميم المهام ضمن الطريقة المستندة الى المهام. اخيرا، تمت صياغة خطة صفية عامة للطريقة المعجمية   الى المهام والمقترح من خلال البحث الحالي.