

Two Innovations in Pedagogical Dictionaries

Geoff Toister

GT-Lex: www.gt-lex.weebly.com

Email: gat178@012.net.il

1. Introduction

Before I begin to discuss the subject of this paper I should like to outline the trajectory of my professional career. I am a retired teacher of English as a foreign language, with 26 years of classroom experience. The major part of those years was spent in teaching intermediate and upper-intermediate students preparing for the Israeli matriculation exam, known as the *Bagrut*. Some years after retiring from teaching, I became a lexicographer. Since then I have compiled entries for a prominent dictionary publisher, disambiguated entries for another and published a hybrid dictionary and vocabulary development workbook entitled *Bagrut Lexicon*. I will have more to say about this later.

2. Rationale

My motivation for writing *Bagrut Lexicon* was that I always felt that I was giving my students less than what they needed to develop their vocabulary. My teaching career spanned the latter years of the audio-lingual method in ELT and the early years of the communicative method, but when it came to the teaching of vocabulary, I felt that the materials writers and coursebook publishers on whom I depended were always in two minds. Their products always seemed to alternate between favouring incidental acquisition of words embedded in reading texts and explicit instruction in discrete lexical items for use in a specific situational context.

These days, learning a foreign language is still popularly conceived as a matter of learning how to manipulate its grammar. Some smartphone apps recently released by reputable ELT publishers indulge this perception. However, I long ago decided that if English teachers are required to teach dictionary skills, they may reasonably expect lexicographers to assume some of the responsibility for vocabulary teaching. How might this be achieved today and what role might the lexicographer play? I have tried to provide two practical answers to these questions. The first of these is the hybrid that I have already mentioned.

3. Road Map

I would like now to review the various types of resource books for vocabulary development. I will then describe the method used for developing *Bagrut Lexicon* and detail some of its salient features. This first section of my presentation will be followed by a preview of a second lexicon-cum-vocabulary development workbook which is currently in the final stages of editing and which deals with multi-word expressions (MWEs) or so-called 'lexical chunks'.

4. Resources for Vocabulary Development

4.1 Many learner's dictionaries contain usage notes either within the entry or in marked off boxes. The notes usually focus on synonyms or the collocational idiosyncrasies of a particular

lemma. Thus they supply supplementary information about the headword, but not practice in its use.

4.2 *The Oxford Wordfinder* takes a different approach. It is a meaning-to-word dictionary whose purpose is to facilitate language production. The entries do not contain practice exercises, but the OUP website provides free photocopiable worksheets. It is a pity that these are not mentioned in the book's front matter because they somewhat compensate for the absence of practice exercises between its covers. The *Longman Language Activator* is said to be similar. While it is gratifying that these two major dictionary publishers have taken up the challenge of vocabulary development, it is unrealistic to expect impecunious students and high-school pupils to purchase both a dictionary and a meaning-to-word lexicon.

4.3 A more useful kind of learning tool can be found in various dictionary-skills manuals linked to specific dictionaries but published separately. One such handbook is Bloch's *Use Your Dictionary*, which was "tailored specifically to the special features, conventions and entry arrangements of the ADVANCED LEARNER'S DICTIONARY OF CURRENT ENGLISH, written by A.S. Hornby ..." (p.7.). It contains a wealth of drills delving into every aspect of the entry structure with examples drawn from the whole range of entries in the dictionary. While the purpose of the book is to explain how dictionaries work, the drills afford excellent opportunities for incidental learning and can be seen as prototypes of the type of exercise that promotes vocabulary acquisition. A drawback is the expense of purchasing the manual in addition to the dictionary it goes with.

4.4 From a teacher's point of view, none of the three foregoing types is entirely satisfactory. Teacher-designed exercises are an alternative. Their disadvantage is that they are extremely time-consuming to produce and the effort is only worthwhile if all members of a class possess the same dictionary.

4.5 A more deliberate approach to integrating lexicography with pedagogy can be found in Phillips' *Vocabulary Dictionary and Workbook*. It is a lexicon of 2,856 words for academic purposes together with sets of word games for vocabulary practice. The truly innovative feature of the book is its verso-recto page setup (see Figure i). The entries are divided into alphabetic groups, called 'chapters', consisting of 12 lemmas and each double-page spread is devoted to a single chapter, with the lexicon always on the verso and the word games always on the recto. There are two benefits to this setup. Firstly, it sends a clear message to the learner that merely looking up a word is not sufficient to guarantee retention of its meaning. Secondly, by juxtaposing the two entities on the same folio, it simplifies and encourages repeated look-ups during practice. However, the games themselves disappoint as there are only 12 test items for the 12 lemmas. This reduces the element of risk to the point that the games do not challenge the intellect.

Folio	
Verso	Recto
Lexicon	Word Games

Figure i

5. Development of *Bagrut Lexicon*

5.1 Lack of appropriate materials Returning now to *Bagrut Lexicon*, this project was stimulated by the twin observations that learner's dictionaries do not contain vocabulary

practice exercises and that few ELT materials are explicitly devoted to vocabulary development. The majority are textbooks or books concentrating on grammar, reading comprehension, writing or listening. Of all the ELT books in a certain pedagogical library that I visited, only 2% were found to be expressly dedicated to the teaching of words. How then are learners expected to expand their vocabulary? And which words are to be taught?

5.2 Methodology To answer the latter question, a corpus was constructed using *TextSTAT*, a freely downloadable application. The corpus consisted of 58 homogeneous matriculation-level reading comprehension texts, and yielded 21,000 tokens and 5,000 types. In the process of constructing the corpus, a downward trend was noted in the incidence of novel types per additional text (see Figure ii). This seems to indicate that matriculation reading texts constitute a particular genre and that the vocabulary of the genre tends to be repetitive. The 5,000 types are therefore the most relevant candidates for a learner's lexicon.

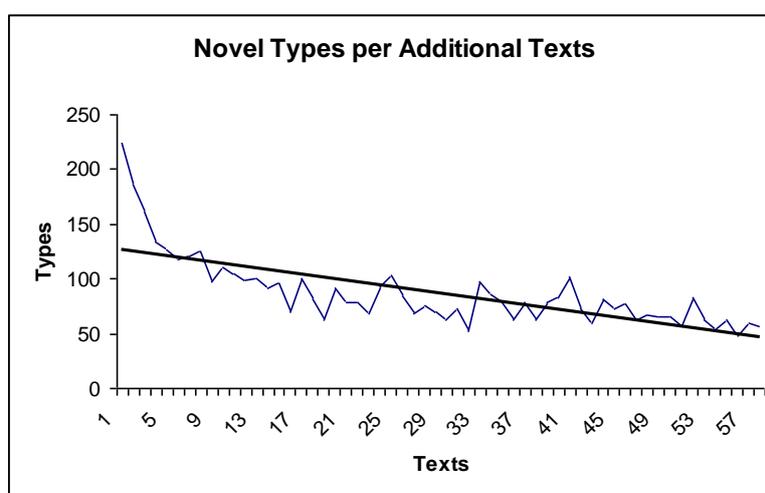


Figure ii

All function words, proper nouns and numbers were deleted from the list of 5,000 candidates. Poorly dispersed words and cognates were also removed. The remaining words were manually lemmatised and POS tagged. In the next stage of selection, words listed in the lexical syllabus for primary schools (State of Israel, 1988) were also discarded, thus leaving a final list of 2,000 words.

These 2,000 words became the headword list for the lexicon, which was compiled using *TLex Dictionary Compilation Software*. The lexicon was designed along the lines of a semi-bilingual learner's dictionary. Specifically, each entry consists of a headword, grammatical information, definition, usage example and a translation equivalent. The usage examples were adapted from the 58-text corpus or various corpora freely available on the Internet. Multiple senses were not provided unless they were evidenced in the original corpus. Other features include phonemic pronunciation guides, usage labels, phrasal verbs with separate headword status and alternative spellings. The result is a unidirectional specialised lexicon for decoding L2 that is fully integrated with a vocabulary acquisition workbook.

5.3 The innovation There is nothing novel in this well-established format. However, *Bagrut Lexicon* does break new ground by coupling the semi-bilingual lexicon with Phillips' verso-recto page setup and by providing practice exercises that genuinely challenge intermediate-

to-advanced learners. Meaningful practice is established by three means. Firstly, the lexicon divides entries into alphabetic groups of 20 lemmas and provides 30 practice items per group. This increases the risk of a false answer and thereby obliges the user to return to the lexicon. Secondly, the 30 practice items are sub-divided into six graded exercise types. The fifth type is particularly difficult as it requires 5 choices from 20 possibilities. In the editing stage, the exercises were confirmed to have unambiguous answers.

6. Literature review: vocabulary development

We come now to the second innovation that I am here to present, and I shall begin with a brief review of some of the relevant literature. I mentioned earlier that, in the past, materials writers and coursebook publishers were in two minds about how to teach vocabulary. Today there is wide agreement on the centrality of vocabulary development to language acquisition. This agreement has found expression in some coursebooks and in 2003 Ranalli gave Longman's *Cutting Edge* a three-star rating, the second-highest, (4.4, p.33) for actually including a 64-page mini-dictionary within its covers and for providing training in dictionary skills. He remarks that the mini-dictionary "is similar in format to the dictionaries produced by the Longman publishing house, but the headwords consist only of the items appearing somewhere in the students' book or the class cassette." To my mind, this is high praise as it highlights the publisher's commitment to actively promoting vocabulary development.

On the other hand, teacher trainers seem to be less committed, as can be seen from Philadelphia University's syllabus for a course in ELT methods (2013), which includes the audio-lingual and communicative approaches, amongst others, but omits the lexical approach. Given that the lexical approach predates that syllabus by at least fifteen years, one wonders whether its exclusion from the syllabus is due to a lack of ready-made teaching materials.

Traditionally, 'vocabulary' was understood as a set of "single and fully autonomous lexical units" (Criado, 2009). Today, however, it is recognised that "much of lexis consists of sequences of words which operate as single units" (Schmitt, 2000). This raises the practical problem of identifying those sequences. One solution was offered by Martinez and Schmitt in their 2012 journal article, *A Phrasal Expressions List*. The authors were able to produce "a list of the 505 most frequent non-transparent multiword expressions in English". Without implying anything as to the validity of their methodology, it must be noted that the list tends to lump¹ polysemous MWEs into a single lexical unit, and that more than a few of those items are restricted to British usage². Nevertheless, it does constitute a foundation for constructing a database of prefabricated MWE entries suitable for integration into pedagogical materials.

7. Status of the MWE Database

7.1 Entry structure Compilation of the entries for this database was recently completed. Unlike *Bagrut Lexicon*, the database was designed along the lines of a monolingual learner's dictionary. Specifically, each entry consists of a headword, grammatical information, a definition and three to six usage examples. Headwords with like senses are cross-referenced and the usage examples are adapted from or inspired by the British National Corpus. The database additionally provides full inflection information, guidance with syntax and

¹ For example, **each other**.

² For example, **fill in** ... e.g. a form, document, etc. (Br) vs **fill out** (Am).

synonyms wherever they apply. Frequency information is also available and the design language can be changed at will. Although translation equivalents are not provided, the *TLex* software allows for adding them in virtually any language, thus making the database fit for the needs of any source-language group. A typical entry appears in figure iii below:

<p>MIGHT AS WELL [Also: might just as well, may as well, may just as well] Grammatical function: adverbial How to use this word: This expression is always followed by a verb in the base form. Type of expression: phrasal idiom Sense 1 Definition: with equal convenience Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If I have to wait anyway, I might as well spend the time reading. • [<i>Said at a supermarket checkout</i>] You only have a few items. You might as well go ahead of me. I've got a trolley-full. <p>Sense 2 Definition: with equal truth; with equal validity Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Astrologers might just as well claim that the earth is flat. • The translation was so free that there might as well be no original text.

Figure iii

7.2 Searching It is envisaged that the database would be incorporated into an electronic dictionary and that students would look up MWEs in one of three ways. Firstly, straightforward look-ups can be performed on either the full canonical form of an MWE or on any one of its component words. In the latter case, several results are likely to be presented. Secondly, a search can be performed from a synonym to an MWE. The result of a synonym to MWE search for the word 'occur' appears in figure iv below.

<p>COME ABOUT [Also: comes about, coming about, came about] COMPARE TAKE PLACE In other words: occur; take place Grammatical function: verbal Type of expression: two-word verb Definition: happen in a series of unplanned stages Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rising sea levels have come about as a result of global warming. • It is important to recognize how fear comes about and how to cope with it. • Change will not come about by chance, but we can bring it about by our own efforts. <p>TAKE PLACE [Also: takes place, taking place, took place, taken place] COMPARE COME ABOUT In other words: occur; come about Grammatical function: verbal Type of expression: two-word verb Definition: happen Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since 1968 many changes have taken place. • The next meeting will take place on Monday, 9th April. • The festival takes place once a year, usually in October.

Figure iv

8. Future Work on the MWE Database

8.1 Two further developments are envisaged for this project. Firstly, as suggested by McAlpine (2001), it may be possible to look up MWEs using a synonym and a hypernym as nested search criteria. To facilitate this, an additional field to be populated from a hierarchy of superordinate topics can easily be added to the XML database. The difficulty with this suggestion is in determining at which level in the hierarchy a given MWE headword ought to be indexed. For example, is the appropriate hypernym for the headword **about to** ‘when?’ or the higher level ‘time and place’, as suggested by the *Oxford Wordfinder* (p.xix.). The benefit of implementing this suggestion is the assistance it might provide the learner in performing writing assignments.

8.2 The second possible development is to supplement the 505 headwords with sets of vocabulary development exercises, as in *Bagrut Lexicon*. Lewis (1997) provides thirteen examples of suitable exercise types arising from the lexical approach. Figure v below illustrates how the MWE database might be used to construct exercises on the pattern of Lewis’ Type Nine. All of the MWEs that the exercise calls for appear in the database. The difficulty with this suggestion is in ensuring that all the headwords are treated in at least one exercise.

“Complete the following by adding one word. Only one word is possible in each case. Make sure you know the *equivalent expression* in your own language.” (Lewis, p.265)

1. She became a widow a month ago and is still finding it difficult to come to ... with her husband's death.
2. We managed to get under cover ... as it began to rain.
3. For the ... of greater safety, please keep your seatbelt fastened throughout the flight.
4. The bus shelter collapsed under the weight of the snow, but in any ... it was not designed to be permanent.
5. All the important branches of physics are now seen as engineering subjects in ... own right and are often taught without very much of the underlying physics.

Figure v

Figure vi below illustrates how the MWE database might be used to construct exercises on the pattern of Type D in *Bagrut Lexicon*. The advantage of this exercise type is that it is synchronised with the alphabetical order of the entries in the database, thus allowing the publisher to utilize a verso-recto setup.

D. Match the two parts of the sentence.

	PART I		PART II
1	Short of calling the doctor,	a	were shown to have structural defects.
2	There are many short term	b	I had started my PhD.
3	Many of the old buildings	c	and we just couldn't shut her up .
4	She kept talking and talking	d	advantages to be had.
5	I lost sight of the original reason	e	I didn't know what to do.

Figure vi

Finally, it would also be feasible to emulate the verso-recto setup of *Bagrut Lexicon* in an **electronic coursebook**. A simple and inexpensive method for doing so would be as follows:

- Compose the exercises
- Tag all of the MWEs that each exercise calls for
- Export each set of tagged MWE entries to separate RTF files
- Hyperlink each exercise to the set of MWE entries required for its completion

A more comprehensive method would be as follows:

- Compose the exercises
- Attach a monovalent code to each set of exercises
- Attach a monovalent code to each exercise item
- Attach a monovalent code to each lexicon entry
- Export the MWE lexicon to an ODBC database
- For each set of exercises – tag and export the relevant entries to an HTML file
- Build a relational database that links exercise sets, exercise items, and entries in the lexicon
- Build a search facility that enables the user to find all exercises for a given entry
- Build a search facility that enables the user to find all entries for a given exercise

9. Conclusion

This brings us back to our starting point. I wish I could conclude this presentation by saying “Our research revealed that materials writers and coursebook publishers continue to produce language programmes that do not adequately support vocabulary development.” But as you have already seen, I have simply presented two eclectic solutions to a concrete problem. I would rather leave you with the impression that you have just heard an appeal for combining the methods of lexicographers with the insights of teachers. I believe that such partnerships can contribute powerfully to the success of foreign language learners and enhance the status of both professions.

Thank you for your attention. I will be happy to answer any questions now.

References

Bloch, Menachem. 1974. *Use Your Dictionary*. Tel Aviv: Karni Publishers Ltd.

Criado, Raquel. 2009. The Distribution of the Lexical Component in ELT Coursebooks and its Suitability for Vocabulary Acquisition from a Cognitive Perspective. *International Journal of English Studies*. Special Issue: 39-60.

Hüning, Matthias. 2000. *TextSTAT 2.8g*. <http://neon.niederlandistik.fu-berlin.de/textstat/>. Accessed 1 February 2015.

Joffe, David and de Schryver, Gilles-Maurice. *Tlex Dictionary Compilation Software*. <http://tshwanedje.com/>. Accessed 1 February 2015

Lewis, Michael. 1997. *Pedagogical Implications of the lexical approach* In *Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition: A Rationale for Pedagogy*, eds James Coady James and Thomas Huckin, 255-270. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Martinez, Ron and Schmitt, Norbert. 2012. A Phrasal Expressions List. *Applied Linguistics*: 33/3: 299-320

McAlpine, Janice and Myles, Johanne. 2001. Capturing phraseology in an online dictionary for advanced users of English as a second language: a response to user needs. *System* 31 (2003): 71-84

Nofal, Khalil. 2013. *Course Syllabus, Method TFL*. Philadelphia University, Faculty of Arts, Department of English.

Phillips, Mark. 2006. *Vocabulary Dictionary and Workbook*. New York: A. J. Cornell Publications.

Ranalli, James M. 2003. The Treatment of Key Vocabulary Learning Strategies in Current ELT Coursebooks: Repetition, Resource Use, Recording, *M.A. Dissertation submitted to the School of Humanities of the University of Birmingham*.

Schmitt, Norbert. 2000. Key Concepts in ELT. *ELT Journal*. 54/4: 400

State of Israel. 1988. *The Lexicon*. In *English Syllabus for Schools*,72-129. Jerusalem: Ministry of Education and Culture

Toister, Geoff. 2012. *Bagrut Lexicon, An Interactive E-Module Lexicon for Vocabulary Building*. Kfar Monash: Ofarim Publishers.

Trappes-Lomax, Hugh. 1997. *Oxford Learner's Wordfinder Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press