

Teaching Lexically

Day Two

Lexical perspectives on grammar

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Lexical Lab

You and your grammar teaching

Work in groups. Tell each other:

- what aspects of grammar you most / least like teaching – and why.
- what you most worry about with regard to teaching grammar.
- if the way you teach grammar has changed at all over the years.
- what are the most effective things you do to help students with grammar.
- how you feel grammar teaching is best approached in class.

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The limits of ELT grammar

- 1 Students learn to talk *about* English – rather than *in* English!
- 2 The system creates grammar anxiety and grammar dependency.
- 3 Focusing on structures in isolation distorts the reality of usage. It also means students don't get to see how conversations develop.
- 4 Once is never enough!
- 5 The separation of grammar and vocabulary makes life harder for students and asks too much of them!
- 6 **Colligation** is massively under-focused on.

Dealing with concepts

Look at the sentence below. Decide which of the ideas that follow form part of the core meaning for each one. Then decide the best order to put the ideas in.

I needn't have gone

- 1 I didn't go.
- 2 It was necessary for me to go
- 3 It wasn't necessary for me to go.
- 4 I didn't want to go.
- 5 I tried to go, but it wasn't possible.
- 6 I went.

Dealing with concepts

Look at the sentence below. Decide which of the ideas that follow form part of the core meaning for each one. Then decide the best order to put the ideas in.

I managed to do it.

- 1 I didn't try.
- 2 I didn't like it.
- 3 I tried.
- 4 It was fun.
- 5 I was told to do it.
- 6 It was difficult.
- 7 It was a responsibility.
- 8 I didn't succeed.
- 9 I succeeded.
- 10 I'm going to succeed.

Dealing with concepts

Look at the five terrible concept questions for the sentence *I managed to do it*. After each, decide which golden rule is being broken!

a Did I manage to do it?

Golden Rule:

b Did my attempts reach a satisfactory conclusion?

Golden Rule:

c Did I enjoy doing it?

Golden Rule:

d (as the ONLY concept question) Did I try to do it?

Golden Rule:

e Do you understand "managed to"?

Mega Golden Rule:

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Dealing with concepts

Work in pairs. Decide what concept questions you'd ask to make sure students have understood the meaning of the following sentences.

- 1 We've known each other for almost thirty years now.
- 2 I was going to call you yesterday.
- 3 If you hadn't said that, everything would've been fine.
- 4a I've read *Teaching Lexically*.
- 4b I've been reading *Teaching Lexically*.
- 5 I've got to work tonight.

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Dealing with concepts

Correct the errors below. Decide what you would tell students about the mistakes / corrections.

- 1 I've been shopping yesterday afternoon after class.
- 2 I'm living here since six months.
- 3 I've been knowing him for years.
- 4 I've sat here for two hours!
- 5 My car has been being fixed for ages.
- 6 A new branch of Starbucks has been opened near here.
- 7 I had lived in Japan for three years when I was younger.
- 8 I'll call you once I will have finished.

Dealing with exercises in coursebooks 1

From explanations to concept checking

When checking answers to grammar exercises, we need to elicit – or give – the correct answers. However, we need to do more than this. We need to make sure students who got the wrong answers understand why they were wrong – and we need to check and clarify key concepts for everyone.

To do this, we need to ask questions to check whether students know *why* an answer is right and whether they understand the underlying meanings of the structures. The questions we ask when checking may sometimes require a simple *Yes/No* response, but may also give options (*Is it X or Y?*).

For example, if the answer is:

*It said it **might** rain tomorrow.*

We could ask:

‘Is it *certain* to rain tomorrow?’

or

‘Is rain 100% sure or more like a 60% chance?’

The correct answers would be something like:

‘No. Only maybe.’ and ‘a 60% chance.’

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Dealing with exercises in coursebooks 1

Practising the principle

Look at the explanations from a coursebook below. Work in pairs. Decide which questions you would ask when going through the answers to any connected exercises. Your questions should check whether students understand the basic concepts behind each piece of grammar.

Use *Yes/No* questions or *Is it x or y?* questions.

Explanation 1

Use comparatives (*-er / more*) to compare two things.

- Add *-er* to one syllable adjectives.
- Change *-y* to *-ier* with two syllable adjectives end in *-y*.
- Use *more* before other adjectives of two syllables or more.

Explanation 2

Use the present continuous to show that an action, feeling or event:

- is temporary and unfinished.
- is arranged for the future.

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Dealing with exercises in coursebooks 2

Drawing attention to co-text

To ensure that only one answer to a particular grammar question is possible, materials writers often include phrases that restrict the possible options.

For example, the only thing in the following sentence that forces the use of the present perfect simple, rather than, say, the present continuous is the addition of the time adverbial *over recent months*.

Prices dramatically over recent months. (**rise**)

To take advantage of this, and to draw students' attention to the co-text that often goes with particular grammar structures, a good follow-up question to ask after you've asked basic concept-checking questions is:

Which words or phrases show ... (the concept / rule)?

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Dealing with exercises in coursebooks 2

Look at the examples below. They are taken from an exercise aimed at Pre-Intermediate / A2 level students. The exercise contains ten examples of the present continuous. Students decide which refer to the time around now and which refer to the future.

1 *I'm **working** really hard at the moment.*

So is this one temporary or is it a future arrangement?

(temporary)

Good. OK. And which phrase shows **working hard** is temporary here?

(at the moment)

*Sorry I can't come tomorrow. I'm **working**.*

And is this one temporary or a future arrangement?

(a future arrangement)

Which phrase shows **working** is in the future here?

(tomorrow)

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Dealing with exercises in coursebooks 2

Practising the principle

- 1 Match the questions you might ask when checking answers (1–5) with the words in **bold** in the correctly completed sentences from various grammar exercises (a-e).
 - 2 Decide what probable answers to questions 1–5 you'd expect.
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- 1 What words show it's a *rule* or *obligation*?
 - 2 What words show it's *an opinion*?
 - 3 What phrase shows there's *a present result*?
 - 4 What word shows it's *uncertain*?
 - 5 What phrase shows that it was *before* getting home?
-
- a I **might** go out later. It depends if I finish my essay.
 - b I don't think people **should** keep dogs in these flats.
 - c You're out of breath. **Have you been running**?
 - d You **mustn't** bring dogs into the flats. You can be fined, if you do.
 - e I don't know the final score. The match **had finished** by the time I got home.

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Getting more from exercises in coursebooks 1

Same grammar, different co-text

Many coursebook exercises use a range of words to show the form of a structure, and don't often use each of those words more than once. While this may be good in terms of showing how the form is constructed, it ignores the fact that some words are far more common with certain structures than others.

For instance, an exercise on superlatives may have only one example of **best**, despite it being more commonly used with this structure than other adjectives.

This is problematic because:

- basic patterns may well become established in the mind through repeated hearings of the most frequent combinations.
- once these patterns have been established, we are then able to both receptively understand new words we meet in the slots and add new items in them ourselves.

Getting more from exercises in coursebooks 1

Same grammar, different co-text

To tackle this issue, once you've checked the answers to an exercise, you could take one or two sentences and look at how the co-text around them could be changed. Let's say an exercise includes the sentence below:

I've known Ben for 20 years. We were at school together.

Possible variations include the following:

I've known Rebecca **for** 15 years. *We met when she started working here.*

I've known Karim **for** 25 years. *We were in the same class at university.*

He's **known** her **for** about 6 months now. *They met through a dating app.*

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Getting more from exercises in coursebooks 1

Practising the principle

- 1 Look at the exercise below. It's aimed at Intermediate / B1 level students and focuses on *should've* + past participle. The answers are in *italics*.
- 2 Decide which examples of the structure are most common and might be exploited best.
- 3 Think of some extra examples. Make sure your examples keep the same grammar, but add different co-text.

- 1 It rained. We *should've put up* a shelter over the barbecue.
- 2 You *should've seen* him. He looked ridiculous.
- 3 I *should've written* a shopping list. I'm sure there's something else we need.
- 4 You *should've told* me it was your birthday. I would've bought you a present.
- 5 They didn't do anything about him missing school. They *should've given* him a punishment.
- 6 It was really hot in there. They *should've opened* a window.
- 7 It's my own fault. I *should've listened* to you when you warned me about him.
- 8 I never learn! I *should've known* better after what happened last time!

Getting more from exercises in coursebooks 2

Reformulating students' ideas

A lot of grammar exercises focus on single sentences or short responses rather than longer stretches of discourse. One way we can tackle this is to ask students for their own ideas about how turns develop. Doing this also helps language development by:

- giving students the chance to integrate new grammar with what they already know.
- allowing the teacher to see how far students have understood the grammar and its contexts of use.

Obviously, when you ask students for ideas, they may:

- struggle to express their ideas and either use very broken English or else fall back on L1.
- try to express ideas which you understand, but which need to be rephrased using structures that aren't necessarily being looked at at the present time – or that haven't yet been formally studied.
- suggest ideas which are either wrong or rather bizarre and unlikely to be said about the given context.

Getting more from exercises in coursebooks 2

Reformulating students' ideas

This means that you may well need to:

- check you understand what students are trying to say. Use L1 if possible, or ask questions in L2 and paraphrase.
- say/write improved versions of students' ideas.
- use some structures/lexis that students have not yet formally studied, if they express students' ideas.
- make judgments about naturalness or probability.
- reject some suggestions.

If your reformulation does lead to you introducing 'difficult' grammar or vocabulary, it's really not a problem because the students themselves have already provided the meanings and can then learn the sentences / chunks you provide without having to analyse the underlying grammar structures.

Getting more from exercises in coursebooks 2

Practising the principle

Look at two sentences that teachers have decided to explore. In each case, you can also see students' responses. For each response, decide:

- if you'd accept it as it is, reformulate it, ask questions about it (if so, *which* questions?) or reject it.
- what – if anything – you'd write on the board as part of your reformulation.

1 The teacher says: "What could you say here after *No, I haven't*? Any ideas?"

A: Have you ever been to the USA?

B: No, I haven't.

Student 1: Have you been?

Student 2: It's great.

Student 3: How is it like?

Student 4: It's a place not my taste.

2 The teacher asks: "What else could you say here apart from *I'm going to Brighton*?"

I can't come on Thursday. I'm going to Brighton.

Student 1: I'm having an exam.

Student 2: I make appointment my friend.

Student 3: I'm sleeping.

Student 4: I must to work lately.

Grammar in other places 1

Asking about tense usage in example sentences

One problem with a grammar + words approach is that when words are presented, there's often little attention paid to contexts of use or typical co-text. As a result, students don't always get the chance to see how words *colligate*: they don't learn the typical grammar connected to words in texts.

Nevertheless, an increasing number of vocabulary exercises do feature whole sentences or even short dialogues. Where this is the case, you can ask questions about what tense particular sentences are in – and why. This helps to keep the basic meanings of structures fresh. It also ensures students still study grammar, even when the main focus is on vocabulary.

In some instances, there may only be one or two tenses featured in an exercise, but it's still worth asking about each of these at least once. When going through the answers to exercises, you can just ask *What tense is this here? Why?* Alternatively, you could ask concept-checking. This may work better with lower levels.

Grammar in other places 1

Practising the principle

- 1 Look at the vocabulary exercise below. It's aimed at Upper-Intermediate / B2 level students and focuses on adverbs and adverbial phrases. The answers have been added in **bold**. Decide which sentences would be best to ask the questions *Which tense is used here? Why?* about.
 - 2 Think about the answers you'd expect from students – and any (brief) explanation you might give to explain why particular tenses are used.
-
- 1 As he was coming round the corner, he was hit by a car. I **immediately** ran over to see if he was OK.
 - 2 My friend Robert really loves Italian food and culture. **Surprisingly**, though, he has never been to Italy.
 - 3 I looked into my bag and realised I'd left my wallet at home. **Fortunately**, I had my cash card with me.
 - 4 Detectives searched the area for ages. **Eventually** they found the evidence they were looking for.
 - 5 I found out today that I didn't get that job I applied for. **Obviously**, it was a big disappointment.
 - 6 I was called into the boss's office and was told that I'd lost my job. **Weirdly enough**, I didn't feel that upset about it!

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Grammar in other places 2

Drawing attention to syntax

You can encourage students to pay more attention to aspects of grammar around words by asking closed, directed questions. For example:

What preposition follows X?

What verb form follows X? -ing or infinitive?

Why do we use *much* - not *many* - here?

Why do we use *were* here – not *was*?

Is X a noun or a verb here? How do you know?

As you ask questions like this, you can tell students not to look at their books. You can also read out sentences from an exercise, but leave out key grammatical words. These may be prepositions connected to particular adjectives or nouns, auxiliary verbs or modal verbs, or particular forms of certain words – noun forms, adjective forms, etc.

Grammar in other places 2

Drawing attention to syntax

Instead of saying the words you're leaving out, simply say MMMM – or say one MMM for each missing syllable.

For example, if two of the sentences are these:

We **go back** quite a long way.

They're **always there** for each other.

You can say:

We go back MMM a long way.

They're always there for MMM MMM-MMM.

See if the students can say the missing words.

Grammar in other places 2

Practising the principle

- 1 Look at the completed vocabulary exercise below. It's aimed at Upper-Intermediate / B2 level students and explores the meanings and uses of some words that have the same form in different word classes. The answers have been added in **bold**.
- 2 Decide which syntactical features you would ask about or replace with MMM – and what questions you'd ask about each one. **Don't** choose the words in bold.

- 1 I can't **bear** him! He never stops talking about football.
- 2 My daughter carries her teddy **bear** with her wherever she goes.
- 3 Ask her. I'm sure she won't **mind** if you leave a bit early.
- 4 You paid £300 for that? You must be out of your **mind**.
- 5 That shirt doesn't **fit** you very well. It's a bit too small for you.
- 6 She goes to the gym five times a week. She's really **fit**.
- 7 Of course I'll be there. I wouldn't **miss** it for the world.
- 8 I'd give it a **miss** if I were you. It's not very good.

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Translation and grammar: Overcoming the objections

Objections to translation in ELT

- students need to learn to ‘think in English’.
- ideas can be translated in too many different ways.
- it encourages word-for-word translation, which doesn’t work.
- it can’t be done if the teacher doesn’t speak the L1 of all the students in the class.

Translation and grammar: Overcoming the objections

In favour of translation

- All learners refer to L1 in their heads and it can be useful to make this process visible and to discuss it.
- A range of possible translations is often normal and may simply reflect personal choices. Teachers can usually tell whether or not meaning has been grasped.
- Translating word for word from English can help students appreciate how English sounds in their L1.
- Translation can make students more aware of the way grammar and words operate differently in L1 and L2.

Translation and grammar: Overcoming the objections

Practising the principle

Think about why you might do each of the following things:

1. Ask students to translate a grammaticalised chunk (e.g.: *How long've you been doing that?*) into their L1.
2. Ask students to translate sentences into L1 and to then translate back into English, possibly after a period of time. Students then compare their English sentences with the originals and discuss the reason for any differences.
3. Ask students to translate sentences word for word into L1. Tell them these translations will sound strange and that if there's no direct equivalent, they can simply use the English word.
4. In a monolingual group, where you speak the students' L1, put students in pairs and tell them to decide on the best translations of certain sentences. Then check ideas with the whole class.
5. Put students with others who share their L1 and get them to do a speaking task in L1 first and to then translate some of the things they were trying to say.

Classroom principles and practice

1 Grammar can be taught and learned as chunks

What's your name?

> Hugh

How long have you been doing that?

I've been meaning to for ages, but just haven't got round to it.

Think of a common example of the present continuous – and how it could easily be taught to Elementary-level learners

Classroom principles and practice

1 Grammar can be taught and learned as chunks

What're you doing tonight?

- I'm meeting some friends for a drink.
- I'm going out for dinner with my girlfriend.

- I'm just going to go home and take it easy.
- I'm going to have an early night. I'm exhausted.

Classroom principles and practice

2 Teach grammar with structures & lexis it's used with

Tsuyoshi & grammar robots!

Have you been there before?

- ☐ *No, never, but I've heard it's amazing.*
- ☐ *No, never, but I'd love to.*
- ☐ *No, never. Have you?*
- ☐ *No, but we're thinking of going this summer.*
- ☐ *Yeah, three or four times, actually.*
- ☐ *Yeah. I went there last year on a business trip.*

Think of what could be changed in – or added to - the following rather strange coursebook exchange.

Would you like a coffee?

- ☐ No, I wouldn't.

Classroom principles and practice

2 Teach grammar with structures & lexis it's used with

Would you like a coffee?

- ☐ No thanks. I've just had one.
- ☐ I'd rather have tea, if you've got any.
- ☐ No thanks. I won't be able to sleep if I drink any more.
- ☐ No thanks. I'm trying to cut down, actually.
- ☐ Yes please. I'd love one.

Students are likely to at least attempt to say exactly the same kind of things as you thought of – because that's what they'll say in these situations in L1.

Classroom principles and practice

3 Teach the probable – not just the possible

*I walk the dog – the dog **is walked** by me!*

***What John lost was** the keys!*

*We **were burgled** while we were away.*

*I **got stopped** by the police on my way home last night.*

*You've **had your hair cut**! It really suits you.*

*The dog **needs walking**!*

***What really upset me was that** it wasn't the first time!*

***What annoys me the most is** the hypocrisy of it all!*

Classroom principles and practice

4 Expand examples horizontally and vertically

Horizontal development means thinking about what a speaker says after – or before – an utterance.

The whole area's really run-down.

It's in dire need of investment.

There's quite a lot of dealing round there.

Vertical development means thinking about what the other speaker says in response.

What's it like round where you live?

□ It's alright. It's a bit run-down, but not as bad as it used to be.

How long have you been living there?

Classroom principles and practice

4 Expand examples horizontally and vertically

Think about how the phrase below could be expanded horizontally and / or vertically.

I'm in a bit of a rush.

Classroom principles and practice

4 Expand examples vertically and horizontally

It's great to see you again. It's been ages. Do you want to go and get a quick coffee somewhere?

> I'd love to, but I can't stop, I'm afraid. I'm in a bit of a rush.

I'd love to stop and talk, but I'm in a bit of a rush.

- My class starts in five minutes.
- I'm meeting my girlfriend in ten minutes.
- I'm late for work.

Classroom principles and practice

5 Noticing is difficult – but vital!

Many errors are colligational. They're to do with a failure to notice or be aware of micro-grammar – the way that the individual words which drive communication pattern grammatically. For example:

It's **depend** of my girlfriend.

I'm **agree** with you.

This is often rooted in L1 priming. To break this habit, students need to be encouraged to notice the gap between L1 patterns and L2.

How can teachers do this?

Classroom principles and practice

5 Noticing is difficult – but vital!

- 1 Two-way translation
- 2 Boardwork – and teacher talk – and the slow war of attrition
- 3 Correction that also includes extra input
- 4 (Pre- and) post-text exercises that encourage students to (predict and) check how words are actually used
- 5 Start from single words and build outwards

responsible

I'm responsible for hiring and firing.

Classroom principles and practice

5 Encourage re-grammaring

This can be done after dialogue builds, drills, grammar exercises, or even listenings. Here's a simple version:

What / you / do / tonight?

□ I / just / go home / relax. You?

I / to my Spanish class.

□ Oh. How long / you / do that?

Not / long. six.

Classroom principles and practice

5 Encourage re-grammaring

You are going to hear a conversation between Mel and Kenny. Below are some of the words they use. Look quickly at the words. Try to guess what they are talking about. Discuss your ideas with a partner. Now listen and see if you were right.

Mel: hungry?

Kenny: bit

Mel: get something?

Kenny: OK - you – anywhere - mind?

Mel: pizza place - corner.

Kenny: I - pizza last night - don't - another - anywhere else?

Mel: Thai place - Soho.

Kenny: spicy? - don't - like - food

Mel: not - bad - dishes to choose - nice food - like

Kenny: OK - try - once.

Mel: walk or - bus?

Kenny: you

What if students ask QUESTIONS? What if they get things WRONG?

- Don't be surprised! Students WILL get things wrong.
- Remember they're just asking about an item – **not** the whole grammar system!
- Use the example to explain and maybe one or two more. Use translation. Keep it simple.
- Just because students don't know something, it doesn't mean they have to practise it in detail *now*.
- Grammar is learned **over time**.
- Students can experience and understand examples of grammar without knowing the overall rule.
- Collecting and using those examples will make understanding the rule easier.
- Keep things simple and natural.

Getting more from grammar exercises in coursebooks

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- Look at the exercise on the handout. Discuss with a partner what stages you'd go through when planning how to handle this in class.
- The first thing is to *always* do the exercises yourself. That way, you notice:
 - multiple possible answers (1 and d, 1 and e, 1 and f!)
 - eccentric examples (3b!)

3 GRAMMAR conditional sentences

a Match the halves of the conditional sentences.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 If I'd had my mobile, | <input type="checkbox"/> A I wouldn't know what to do. |
| 2 If I wasn't a journalist, | <input type="checkbox"/> B I'd enjoy our conversations more. |
| 3 If I called my mother more on the landline, | <input type="checkbox"/> C I wouldn't do it. |
| 4 If I'd known exactly where my friend lived, | <input type="checkbox"/> D I'd have sent her a text. |
| 5 If I lost my phone, | <input type="checkbox"/> E I wouldn't have got lost. |
| 6 If I were asked to repeat this experiment, | <input type="checkbox"/> F I would never have done the experiment. |

Getting more from grammar exercises in the coursebook

- a Right (✓) or wrong (X)? Correct the mistakes in the highlighted phrases.

If you hadn't been here last night, I don't know what I would do. *what I would have done*

- 1 They wouldn't have made you Marketing Manager if they didn't think you were right for the job.
- 2 The government would accept more refugees if the camp isn't so crowded.
- 3 If you've done all your homework, you can go out this evening.
- 4 We wouldn't be living in Singapore now if my company hadn't been taken over by a multinational.
- 5 Hannah would be in the first team if she didn't get injured last month.
- 6 If you've ever been to New York, you will know exactly what I'm talking about.
- 7 They would get divorced ages ago if they didn't have young children.
- 8 If the storm wasn't at night, more people would have died.
- 9 If their flight hasn't been delayed, they will have arrived by now.

Getting more from grammar exercises in the coursebook

d In groups of three or four, discuss the questions.

- What gadgets do you use that you wouldn't be able to live without?
- Supposing the Internet hadn't been invented, to what extent would this affect the way you work / study / use your free time?
- If you could go back in time, is there anything you would change about your career / studies?
- Would you be prepared to go and work or study in another country even if you didn't speak the language at all?
- What language would you have chosen to study if you hadn't had to learn English?
- Would you be prepared to lend your car / motorbike to somebody provided that they were insured to drive it?