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LEXICAL APPROACH TO TEACHING ENGLISH GRAMMAR TO THE STUDENTS OF MILITARY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT UNIVERSITIES

Abstract. The lexical approach identifies lexis as the basis of language and emphasizes the principle that language consists of grammaticalised lexis. Over the past decades, this approach has gained great interest within second language acquisition as an alternative to traditional grammar-based teaching techniques. The lexical approach is based on the capacity of understanding and producing phrases in a foreign language as lexical entities (chunks). The lexical approach to teaching grammar is understood as teaching grammatical phenomena such as word forms, word combinations, and language patterns, which is rather a vocabulary than grammar rules. To improve oral language performance, teaching should be focused on doing the whole range of practical grammatical actions, which involves understanding the correct sequence of grammatical operations. Mastering grammar means that the student not only knows the particular rule but also knows how to implement the specific grammar phenomenon and uses it correctly in the speech. The lexical approach to teaching English to military and law enforcement specialists should be based on dealing with communicatively essential grammar material and professionally-oriented lexis selected according to the requirements of the syllabus, considering the strategies and ways of learning. This calls for the need to find new ways to update and optimize the process of teaching a foreign language in a military university to ensure mastering a foreign language, the specifics of which are determined by the subsequent professional activities of military specialists. The paper offers an overview of the basic theoretical principles of the lexical approach





taking into account both the methodological foundations of the target issue in the context of teaching military specialists and its pedagogical implications for teaching grammar phenomena.

Keywords: lexical approach, lexical chunks, collocations, teaching grammar

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ЛЕКСИЧНИЙ ПІДХІД ДО ВИКЛАДАННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ ГРАМАТИКИ СТУДЕНТАМ ВІЙСЬКОВИХ ТА ПРАВООХОРОННИХ СПЕЦІАЛЬНОСТЕЙ

Анотація. Лексичний підхід визначає лексику як основу мови та підкреслює принцип, що мова складається з граматизованої лексики. Протягом останніх десятиліть цей підхід викликає велику зацікавленість у тих, хто вивчає іноземну мову, як альтернатива традиційним методам навчання, що засновані на вивченні граматичних правил. Лексичний підхід базується на здатності розуміти та створювати фрази іноземною мовою як лексичні одиниці (фрагменти). Лексичний підхід до навчання граматиці розуміється як навчання граматичним явищам, таким як словоформи, словосполучення та мовні моделі, що є скоріше лексикою, ніж граматичними правилами. Для підвищення ефективності усного мовлення навчання має бути зосереджене на виконанні цілого комплексу практичних граматичних дій, що передбачає розуміння правильної послідовності граматичних операцій. Оволодіння граматиною означає, що студент не тільки знає окреме правило, але й вміє реалізувати конкретне граматичне явище і правильно його вживає в мовленні. Лексичний підхід до навчання англійської мови для військових і правоохоронців має базуватися на роботі з комунікативно важливим





граматичним матеріалом та професійно-орієнтованою лексикою, підбраною відповідно до вимог навчальної програми, з урахуванням стратегій й способів навчання. Це зумовлює необхідність пошуку нових шляхів оновлення та оптимізації процесу навчання іноземної мови у навчальних закладах, що готують військових та правоохоронців, для забезпечення оволодіння іноземною мовою, специфіка якої визначається подальшою професійною діяльністю військових спеціалістів та фахівців внутрішніх справ. У статті пропонується огляд основних теоретичних засад лексичного підходу з урахуванням методологічного підґрунтя та педагогічних наслідків використання даного підходу в контексті навчання фахівців зазначених спеціальностей граматиці англійської мови.

Ключові слова: лексичний підхід, лексичні фрагменти, словосполучення, навчання граматиці

Introduction. Developing grammatical skills is known to be one of the key issues in the modern methodology of teaching a foreign language. Due to a number of factors, dealing with grammar poses difficulties and challenges for students. Having more than 20 years of teaching experience, we consider as the most significant problems the following ones – high requirements for the level of foreign language proficiency higher school graduates are supposed to have and the insufficient level and quality of developing grammatical skills necessary for effective communication in the target language. Teaching a foreign language to military and law enforcement specialists (hereinafter referred to as military) features the insufficient development of issues related to the problem of forming a foreign language grammatical competence, taking into account the peculiarities of the language studied in the area of professional communication. This calls for the need to find new ways to update and optimize the process of teaching a foreign language in a military university to ensure mastering a foreign language, the specifics of which are determined by the subsequent professional activities of military specialists. This actualizes the necessity to revise the content of professionally oriented grammar teaching at a military university in order to form a foreign language grammatical competence essential for professional communication in the military sphere. An increasing number of students studying military technical specialties are aware of the fact that their successful professional activities largely depend on the ability to communicate with their colleagues from foreign countries in English. They believe that they lack the level of lexical and grammatical skills and abilities necessary for successful professional communication in a foreign language (about 79% of the surveyed students of Ivan Kozhedub Kharkiv National Air Force University and Kharkiv National University of Internal Affairs mentioned this as a challenge they experience in learning English). This accounts for the techniques of teaching a foreign language to the students of the military university that focus on topics combining the content of various text materials from different sources and numerous



types of exercises on the basis of textual materials as well as on certain vocabulary and grammar tools aimed at effective formation and development of language skills and speech competences.

The goal of the article is to offer general insight into the methodological foundations of the lexical approach and focuses on the advantages of using the lexical approach to teaching a foreign language grammar to military students and emphasize the potential of this approach to increase the level of grammatical skills.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The advocates of the lexical approach consider as its cornerstone the fact that people do not speak fluently by using their knowledge of grammar and then slotting in the appropriate words to make the sense they choose. What people do is select prefabricated chunks and use their knowledge of grammar as a subsidiary, managerial element to help the language along. Thus, the lexical approach to teaching a foreign language is based on the idea that the vocabulary – words and their combinations – is the main building block of a language (Boers & Lindstromberg 2009, Duraiswamy 2022, Sethi 2013, Selivan 2018, and others). A number of authors believe that the role of vocabulary in language learning is of primary importance (Richards & Rogers 2012). Many modern scholars emphasize the need to draw students' attention to lexical units and their combinations and the necessity to work with them consciously when studying grammar (Batstone & Ellis 2009; Willis 2004). Lexical approach supporters believe that this method focuses not only on words in isolation but also on the using together of lexical words, or lexical and grammatical words in teaching and most importantly, it includes the teaching of grammar in the teaching of vocabulary and vice versa (Fan 2009, Willis & Willis 2006). The focus on learning and teaching grammar can be a determining factor in emphasizing the role of the lexical approach in grammar learning. According to J. Bloch, "this approach has made grammar teaching more about making appropriate choices and less about learning prescriptive rules" (Bloch 2009:59).

Presentation of the main material. The key principle of the lexical approach lies in the distinction between the vocabulary (which is traditionally understood as a set of separate words with a fixed meaning) and the lexicon, which includes not only separate words but also combinations of words, and set grammatical constructions (Sethi 2013). To increase the level of foreign language proficiency as a whole, inter-related lexical and grammatical skills should be formed. Both skills always appear as a complex synthesis represented in the form of language samples (set phrases) (Dellar & Walkley 2016). N. Schmitt believes that the human mind stores and processes language chunks as individual wholes: "the mind makes use of a relatively abundant resource (long-term memory) to compensate for a relative lack in another (processing capacity) by storing a number of frequently-needed lexical chunks as individual whole units. These can be easily retrieved and used without the need to compose them on-line through word selection and grammatical sequencing" (Schmitt 2000:400).





Thus, the lexical approach to teaching grammar is understood as teaching grammatical phenomena as word forms, word combinations, language patterns, which is rather a vocabulary than grammar rules.

Having considered the nature of the relationship between lexical and grammatical material, the structure of lexical and grammatical skills, actions within the structure of these skills, and processes operating on the speech output we can conclude that:

- lexical and grammatical material have common components (morphology and syntax); without taking into account lexical meanings, the grammatical structure can hardly be studied;

- both types of skills have similar components (the ability to find the right word / choose the grammatical structure, the ability to combine words/form grammatical structures);

- both types of skills are formed under identical conditions (situation, spontaneity, correlation with the speaker's task).

Lexical approach as teaching inter-related lexical and grammatical aspects of a foreign language is understood as activities aimed at the simultaneous development of lexical and grammatical speaking mechanisms on the basis of a specific set of exercises, that take into account lexical and grammatical relations at different levels of organization of linguistic material. The lexical approach to developing grammatical skills is based on the study of lexical chunks or collocations and language patterns in the context and their active use when the vocabulary is not learned as an isolated corpus but framed into a certain grammatical context, into certain grammatical structures of different levels of complexity. L. Selivan outlines the important role which chunks play in textual cohesion and in fluency, as well as in grammar acquisition (Selivan 2018). M. Lewis, one of the founders of the lexical approach, defines collocation as “a pair of lexical content words commonly found together” (Lewis 2014: 223). Collocations are lexical patterns where emphasis is given to ‘strings of language’ that promote understanding of underlying grammatical structures. These lexical patterns, found in language use, are also known as “lexical phrases”, “lexical items”, “multi-word chunks” or just “chunks” of language (Duraismamy 2022). These are generally fixed expressions (*jet fighter, to release from military service, commander in chief, fight against, AWOL = “Away WithOut Leave”*), similes (*friendly fire, in the trenches*), idioms (*bite the bullet, caught off guard*), collocations, and phrasal verbs in other words they are such phrases or combinations as *verb + noun, adjective + noun, verb + preposition*, which can be either set phrases (e.g. phrasal verbs: *take down (a target), shut down (an operation)*, etc.) or a chunk of language (*military targets*).

The lexical approach supposes students' grammatical skills be built to communicate verbally. To improve oral language performance, teaching should focus on doing the whole range of practical grammatical actions, which involves understanding the correct sequence of grammatical operations. This understanding



determines the strategies on the basis of which grammatical phenomena are acquired holistically. The nature of a grammatical phenomenon, along with the students' study features as well as with the conditions for learning the language, enable determining the methods and techniques of acquiring grammar.

Generally, the lexical approach to teaching a foreign language grammar is grounded on:

- understanding vocabulary as the basis of speaking, since fluency is not always the result of knowledge of grammatical rules and lists of words, but the ability to use clichés and set expressions in speech, which are building blocks from which a statement can be quickly and easily built because it is vocabulary that plays a decisive role in conveying meaning while grammar plays an auxiliary role (Boers, Lindstromberg 2009);

- the interrelation of vocabulary and grammar, since, although knowing words is the most important prerequisite for speaking, within the productive types of speech activity it is not enough to know just the meaning of a word, it is equally important to manage the process of connecting words and building phrases based on them since the ability to use grammatical material in the form set phrases, collocations, language patterns in the process of language learning makes an utterance communicative, and close to authentic speech, therefore, the use of lexicalization in working on grammatical phenomena contributes to the rapid and lasting assimilation of grammatical material as a whole (Himmelmann 2009).

The advantages of the lexical approach when dealing with grammatical phenomena are the following: students are not overloaded with unnecessary grammar rules; students' oral production is enriched with set lexical patterns and grammatical forms; grammatical structures are the basis for the grammatical generalization at subsequent stages of language learning.

Mastering grammar means that the student not only knows the particular rule but also knows how to implement the specific grammar phenomenon and uses it correctly in the speech. The development of grammatical skills to enhance speaking on the basis of the lexical approach involves the functional organization of the studied material since special attention is paid to the meaning and function of the linguistic phenomenon, but not just to its form (Thornbury 2000).

Since any language skill is an automated, stereotyped performance of a speech act, it has the following features: automatism (spontaneity), cohesiveness, unity of form and meaning, situational and communicative grounding.

We consider a language skill being formed if:

- an utterance is correct and 'qualitative' (no serious errors);
- the speed of performing separate language acts or their sequence approaches to the speed of performing similar acts in the native language;
- a speech act is performed automatically and unconsciously;
- there is no tension and fatigue;
- intermediate operations are omitted, that is the process of framing a speech act is simplified and optimized.



Teaching grammar, taking into account the provisions of the lexical approach, is based on general didactic principles (the principle of consciousness; the principle of visualization; the principle of activity) and methodological principles (the principle of communicativeness; the principle of individualization; the principle of functionality; the principle of situationality; the principle of novelty).

The lexical approach to teaching English to military specialists should be based on dealing with communicatively essential grammar material and professionally-oriented lexis selected according to the requirements of the syllabus, considering the strategies and ways of learning. To achieve these goals, sets of exercises should be developed.

The exercises act as a form of interrelation between the language material and the implementation of the set learning objectives, one of which is the ability of military specialists to communicate in English within professional topics. Teaching by the lexical approach is based on three main ideas: (1) grammar and vocabulary are both taught better in combination, (2) context is absolutely central, and (3) classrooms need to be input-rich, and input needs to be useful (Dellar & Walkley 2016).

In the context of the inter-related teaching of the lexical and grammatical aspects of speech, three main stages can be singled out (Hunston & Francis 2000):

- preparatory static (at the word level);
- preparatory dynamic (at the level of a language pattern and a phrase);
- pre-speaking (at the text level).

The first stage involves semantization of grammatical structures in micro- and macro-context; highlighting essential features (form and meaning) of a target grammatical structure; the formation of a visual representation of the essential features of a grammatical phenomenon.

The second stage outlines the formation of the skill to retrieve specific lexical units and their grammatical design from long-term memory automatically. The task of the teacher is to help the student to realize that each word in a phrase has a certain grammatical function (syntactic characteristic) but not only the meaning and morphological characteristic. This stage focuses on (a) teaching lexical and grammatical synonymy, which includes forming a cognitive image of a grammatical phenomenon and defining variable and non-variable components within the studied grammatical phenomenon; (b) “developing a practice-oriented commentary on the regularity of the use of a grammatical phenomenon studied on the basis of a lexical approach” (Strauss et al 2018).

The third stage involves the use of a grammatical phenomenon orally. At this stage, a studied grammatical phenomenon is used in speech in a limited context but in real communicative acts (monologic and dialogic speech).

When developing exercises in the context of the lexical approach, M. Lewis (2002), one of the founders of the approach, suggests focusing on such areas as word formation, word combinations, text.



Working with word formation at different stages of learning English for the military help students enrich their vocabulary. To help our students achieve this goal, we suggest the following exercises:

1. *filling in tables where various parts of speech are formed on the basis of the given one:*

e.g. **Complete the table below, transforming verbs into other parts of speech. Use a dictionary if necessary.**

Verb	Noun	Adjective	Adverb
coordinate	<i>coordination</i>	<i>coordinative</i>	<i>coordinately</i>
defend	<i>defence</i>	<i>defensive</i>	<i>defensively</i>
destruct	<i>destruction</i>	<i>destructive</i>	<i>destructively</i>
offend	<i>offence</i>	<i>offensive</i>	<i>offensive</i>

2. *tasks to use the correct word form in a given context:*

e.g. **Fill in the gaps with a noun. Use the words in italics as prompts.**

1. An ammunition lorry *exploded*. Two soldiers were killed and four civilian people were injured as a result of the _____.

2. The opposition *rebelled* against the government but the police put down the _____.

3. Nobody *survived* the fatal air crash but Cpt Smith. The _____ was taken to hospital.

4. The rescue helicopter *evacuated* all casualties, the _____ took three hours.

3. *recognizing word forms in context and building a certain part of speech using given suffixes or prefixes:*

e.g. **Find in the text and give their opposites. Use a dictionary if necessary:**

1. nouns from the verbs: *disarm, employ, combat*

2. adjectives from the verbs: *legalize, burst, stabilize*

3. adverbs from the words: *constant, regular, peace*

The second type of tasks is exercises to work with phrases:

1. *making phrases:*

e.g. **Group the words below so that they collocate with the verbs given in the table:**

advantage (of), aerial photos, assault course, briefing, fight, fire, peace, progress, push-ups, reconnaissance, responsibility for, risk, sound, time, turns, war, warning

do	give	have	make	take

Dealing with delexical verbs (get, have, make, do, put, take) is important when teaching collocation because although they may have a basic meaning (make =



create/manufacture, have = own/possess), they are more commonly used in combinations with nouns or other words as a chunk of meaning.

2. *matching collocations and their equivalents using a context:*

e.g. **Substitute the underlined phrases with appropriate expressions from the box.**

<i>join the army</i>	<i>take part</i>	<i>the war breaks out</i>	<i>suffer losses</i>
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1. If you want to be a military, go to a recruiting office.
2. All military personnel participate in joint exercises.
3. When hostilities begin, the civilian population is evacuated.
4. The enemy troops have many killed and injured following the airstrikes.

The third type of exercises focuses on synonyms, antonyms, and shades of meaning, for example, choosing a synonym according to the context, paraphrasing using a word with a similar/opposite meaning. Also, these are exercises to identify the features of official and colloquial styles, identify formal and informal equivalents of lexical units, use vocabulary according to the context, paraphrase with the change of lexical range. Such exercises can be the following:

1. *selecting vocabulary by to the context:*

e.g. **Group the words below under the ideas presented in the table:**
be conscripted into, be discharged from, be drafted into, serve in, desert from, enlist in, enter, go into, join, leave, be recruited into

join/be in the army	leave the army

2. *choosing a synonym according to the context:*

e.g. **Choose the alternative that better suits the formal speech.**

1. The CO briefing will *resume* / *start again* at 09.00.
2. The refugees *require* / *need* humanitarian assistance.
3. The police officer *apprehended* / *caught* a criminal outside the supermarket.
4. The Exlandia Government decided to *purchase* / *buy* 12 MI-8 helicopters.

3. *paraphrasing using a word with the opposite meaning:*

e.g. **Write words that mean the opposite.**

- | | | |
|---------------|-------------|---------------|
| 1. clear | 3. relevant | 5. resolvable |
| 2. acceptable | 4. capable | 6. definite |





M. Lewis emphasizes dealing with grammatical phenomena in context as much as possible, because in this case, firstly, language and speech are considered holistically but not as separate lexical and grammatical phenomena, and secondly, this allows linguistic phenomena to be analysed both inductively and deductively (Lewis 2008). In addition, the context is a source of additional language practice. G. Woolard claims that the message should be the central focus around which the learning of grammar and vocabulary takes place, which helps the learner to produce more actual language, and argues for a massive increase in memory-based learning activities that involve matching meaning directly with messages or chunks of language (Woolard 2013).

Taking the above into account, we offer our students exercises that focus on:

1. *recognizing discourse markers and their functions:*

e.g. **In the text below find the linking word and phrases that are used for:**
 giving an example / summarizing / sequencing / comparing ideas

2. *using discourse markers to connect ideas in the text logically:*

e.g. **Use the phrases from the table to connect the sentences in the text:**

actually	basically	however	in contrast	in other words
in the opposite way	in the same way	similarly	therefore	

3. *structuring vocabulary by topic, a keyword or a pattern:*

e.g. **Find in the text below language patterns according to the given schemata:**

Verb + Prep + N/Ving	Be + Adj + Prep + N
take down a target	be responsible for combat training
retire from military service	be in charge of the security operations
result in great losses	be fit for fight

For elementary students, fixing vocabulary by a keyword is more suitable, for example, compiling semantic grids, which include both correct collocations from the text and possible erroneous ones.

e.g. **Tick the correct collocations.**

(noun)	attend	carry out	do	make
course	✓			
reconnaissance				
assault				





Also, the multiple-choice tests where students can test their understanding of collocations do well. These are vocabulary exercises where each sentence contains an incomplete collocation. Students complete the collocation by supplying a suitable word. e.g. **Choose your answers from the options given below each question.**

Collocations Quiz: War

1. *declare war*

When a country declares war, it's announcing

- a. the end of a war
- b. the start of a war
- c. the threat of a war

2. *obey an order*

Soldiers who don't obey orders are usually

- a. severely punished
- b. immediately promoted
- c. greatly rewarded

3. *fight a war*

Countries fight wars against

- a. their enemies
- b. their citizens
- c. their allies

4. *open fire*

The soldiers opened fire because

- a. they were feeling very cold
- b. they were ordered to shoot
- c. they had to cook some food

5. *jet fighter*

What are jet fighters?

- a. pilots who fly war planes
- b. war planes with jet engines
- c. people who fight jets

6. *security forces*

A country's security forces are responsible for

- a. defending its people
- b. attacking its people
- c. forcing its people

7. *join the army*

I decided to join the army because

- a. I wanted to be a soldier
- b. I was tired of being a soldier
- c. I was wounded during the war

8. *take prisoner*

If a person is taken prisoner, he

- a. goes to see a prisoner
- b. gives a prison sentence
- c. gets captured and held by force

9. *missing in action*

If a soldier has been listed as "missing in action", he

- a. has been missing since military action
- b. has missed some military action
- c. misses military action

10. *win a war*

After we won the war, all our soldiers

- a. went to prison camps
- b. went back to fight
- c. went back home



G. Woolard states that students need to see techniques aimed at recognizing and memorizing collocations that they can use while working with texts on their own (Woolard 2000). But, in the context of teaching military specialists, the textbooks that students work with do not often suggest a sufficient number of exercises for dealing with vocabulary, so we offer additional tasks, for example:

- read/listen to the text and write down the words that match the given ones;
- complete the list of set phrases with the verb get using a dictionary;
- find in the text words derived from the words given in the table;
- complete the phrases with prepositions and check if they are correct using the text;
- find more formal equivalents of the given words in the text.

The above tasks can go along with productive exercises, such as:

- write / tell a paragraph using the given collocations;
- rewrite / retell the text in the official / unofficial style;
- suggest synonyms for the given words, then make up set phrases with each word.

The proposed tasks in the context of the lexical approach to teaching grammar allow our students to develop language skills at all stages, therefore they might become a valuable resource for a foreign language teacher and an integral part of teaching materials. In addition, the described exercises enable students to work with the language not only at the word level but also at the level of a phrase and even discourse, which contributes to the formation of all aspects of lexical competence.

To facilitate the acquisition of grammar material studied based on the principles of the lexical approach, we suggest following these stages while developing the system of exercises: selecting and organizing appropriate material; identifying potential problems the student might experience in dealing with a specific target-language word, in relation to his native language; explaining and modelling new patterns; helping students learn from examples; use of pre-production exercises; and student production.

Conclusions. In the process of working on this paper, we concluded that numerous scientific works of the lexical approach supporters show a significant theoretical and pedagogical change from teaching techniques that paid great emphasis on the explanation of grammar rules followed by intensive practice. Nowadays educators concentrate on the idea that the basic aims of teaching based on the principles of the lexical approach are not only to cover a certain number of words but to equip students with different learning techniques that enable them to perceive and use patterns of lexis and collocation and to acquire a more profound knowledge of how to use the lexical units learned in the speech ultimately. In this sense, language production is less a rule-memorized process but is instead the retrieval of larger phrasal units from memory.

We believe that using the lexical approach in teaching a foreign language does not lead to basic methodological changes. Language teaching activities in the



context of the lexical approach should be geared toward naturally occurring language and toward raising the learners' awareness and interest of the lexical nature of language. Moreover, we claim that teaching grammar should be based on the following grounds: the activity-based approach to learning the grammatical aspect of a foreign language; the differentiated nature of grammar material to be learned; appropriate ways, forms, and techniques of teaching and learning; the opportunities for students to choose an individual educational trajectory in the process of studying the grammatical material; systematic and consistent presentation and acquisition of grammatical material.

Using the elements of the lexical approach at the lessons of English at the military university helps students expand their language range, form all four language skills, get ready to work in an international professional environment, as well as provides students with strategies for independent work with lexical material, and prepare them for the STANAG 6001 exam, which is of primary importance for military university graduates.

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