

From the authors

Hugh's story

The seeds for this book were planted in the early 1990s. I had qualified as a teacher and was living in Jakarta, Indonesia. When I started trying to teach myself Indonesian, I was unconsciously using a 'grammar + words' approach, memorising single words and studying grammar forms and rules. The results were mixed, to say the least!

It took me a while to realise that a sentence like *anjing itu menggonggong* – 'the dog is barking' – wasn't a good example of how the present continuous was generally used, nor was it representative of what is said about dogs or barking. In short, it was a sentence I'd learned to somehow get to grips with the language, yet which had no real utility. At the same time, what was helping me was learning repertoires of relatively fixed questions and answers (often featuring grammatical structures I'd not yet studied, but was able to use within limited contexts), common phrases I heard a lot, and so on. Of course, there was also lots of repetition and practice.

When I read *The Lexical Approach* (1993) by Michael Lewis, I found my language learning experiences had inadvertently brought me to a lexical view of language – and his book provided me with a clearer way of thinking about this. I later came to understand that Lewis was simply one writer working within a long tradition of lexically-oriented thinking.

However, while my initial reading of *The Lexical Approach* energised me, it also confounded me as I felt many of its ideas about putting this way of seeing language to practical use weren't as developed as they might have been. The activities suggested often seemed tokenistic, and didn't amount to a thorough reconstruction of practical pedagogy.

In the years that followed – through my classroom practice, my writing of classroom material, and my conversations with students, colleagues and other EFL professionals – I came to the ideas laid out in this book: our attempt to make lexical teaching more accessible and more widespread!

Hugh

Andrew's story

My route to a lexical way of teaching probably started with my failed attempts to learn French at school. It was only after I started teaching in Spain that I had any real success in speaking a foreign language – a success that stemmed far more from using the language than from studying grammar rules.

I started out with no training, but my main approach was to not do to others what my teachers had done to me! Instead, I mainly chatted to my students and told them some words when they asked about them. We listened to songs and watched videos.

Grammar finally came back into view when I did my CELTA course. I learnt how you could present grammar via dialogues, and how it could be related to real-life communication. I also discovered the *Collins Cobuild English Course* (1988), which based its syllabus around frequent words, and *Conversation Gambits*, from the same year, which contained chunks for conversation.

These experiences primed me to receive *The Lexical Approach* when I read it on my Diploma course. However, I was also taking on other (sometimes contradictory!) ideas – such as teaching skills, and teaching grammar through comparing sentences and discussing differences in meaning.

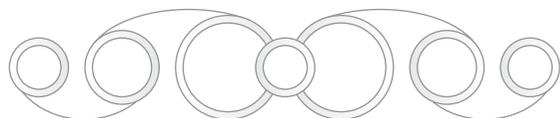
When I first met Hugh, we were both beginning to wonder about where a lexical approach might go: what would the syllabus be? What should materials and classes be like? We continued to be influenced by other writers, our classroom experience and discussions with colleagues. Getting involved in writing and teacher training brought this into focus, because, when you're paid to share materials and practice, you want to be clear about your own beliefs and principles.

So for me, this book is an outline of where we have both got to so far in determining our beliefs, how these inform our own practice and how we can explore and share that practice. It's *a* lexical approach, rather than *the* lexical approach, *a good way* of teaching, rather than *the only way* of teaching – and we hope it helps you on your own journey.

Andrew

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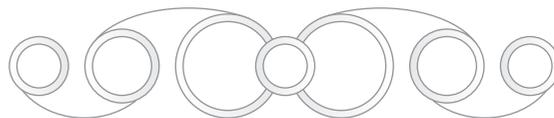
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