

Implementing Lexical Approach to Teaching English Grammar to Korean L2 Learners

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Nam, Hyun-Jeong. "Implementing Lexical Approach to Teaching English Grammar to Korean L2 Learners." *Modern Studies in English Language & Literature* 57.3 (2013): 329-47. Recent studies in Korea have investigated various topics concerning Lexical Approach; however, little attention has been paid to teaching grammar though Lexical Approach. The present study adopted the principles of Lexical Approach to teaching grammar to Korean L2 learners. A total of 170 college students participated in the present study, and Lexical Approach was applied to the experimental group. The positive effect of Lexical Approach on Korean L2 learners' grammar learning was borne out by the results of the present study. It was evident in the tests where the particular pragmatic functions were used as the prime. The study suggests that since the subjects in the experimental group were taught various examples as a form of lexical chunks and practiced producing sentences for various situations that may require particular chunks, not only the grammar structures but also additional information such as pragmatic properties of the lexical chunks may be stored together in their lexicon. (Daegu Haany University)

Key Words: lexical Approach, teaching grammar, Korean L2 learners, lexical chunks, prime

I. Introduction

It has been two decades since the Lexical Approach introduced a new paradigm for second language education, claiming that "language consists of grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar" (Lewis 1993: 89). Despite concerns about its lack of detailed guidelines for

classroom teaching techniques (Thornbury, 1998: 10) and lack of validity for teaching materials available for classroom (Harwood, 2002: 148), the transition from the traditional discrete item grammar teaching to vocabulary teaching as the heart of English education has been steadily attempted (see also Kim, 2008; Yang, 2008). Examples of this transition can be seen even in the commercial English education market such as *Neungyule* education, *Noonnoppi* education, and multimedia software (*Chunk Player* and *Voca Trainer*) in Korea. For a number of Korean EFL learners who struggle to produce even a basic English sentence with the declarative knowledge of grammar rules and lexis that are separately stored in their mental lexicon, embracement of the grammatical knowledge in lexical knowledge within the realm of Lexical Approach may be meaningful.

Since the majority of the research concerning the Lexical Approach has shed light on the effect of the approach on vocabulary learning/teaching (Chang, 2010; Chung, 2005; Kim, 2005; Lee & Kim, 2008), the emphasis will be placed on the effect of Lexical Approach on grammar teaching/learning in the present study.

II. Theoretical Background

2.1 Grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar

The last two decades have seen changes in the view of language, departing from the traditional linguistics where the word and the other systems are considered separately as closed modular systems, towards the fuzziness of the boundary between lexicon and grammar (Cook, 1988; Ellis, 2001; Hoey, 2005). Sinclair (1991: 137) suggests that

chunking mechanism of words may embrace grammar and lexicon. Hoey (2005: 1) also claims that grammar comes from the patterns of lexis. Cook (1988: 11) further argues that syntax is now considered to be “idiosyncrasies of lexical items”. These arguments strengthen the position of “[l]earning grammar through lexis” (Robinson, 1989: 543) which will be explored in the present study.

2.2 Advantages of Lexical Approach

The efficiency of Lexical Approach both in fluency and accuracy as well as its effectiveness in L2 learning has been pointed out by many researchers (Lewis, 1993, 2000; Coady & Huckin, 1997; Nation, 2001). Their main arguments are that learning “prefabricated language units” (Schmitt, 2000; “lexical chunks” in Lewis, 2000) alleviates the learners’ burden to learn grammar rules and then to fit words in the grammar slots for each production. That is to say, the prefabricated lexical items guarantee grammatically accurate, culturally authentic, pragmatically acceptable and native-like fluent utterances. Lewis (1997: 51) illustrates this with an example of “Did you ...?”, suggesting that introducing it to L2 learners as a type of lexical chunks rather than treating it as a Do-question in the traditional structural analysis, may be more practical for beginner L2 learners. Not a few English teachers in Korea may have noticed, from their own class observations, that Korean L2 learners have difficulties starting an English sentence, and thus using the partly constructed sentence head (e.g., Do you mind if...?) would give them less psychological burden than retrieving the target grammar rules to create a completely new sentence on their own.

Lexical Approach suggests that knowledge of lexical chunks

encompasses the knowledge of syntactic structures and syntactic relationships the words may have. Particular words tend to have particular syntactic structures (Singleton, 2000: 19) and there are associations between the words based on grammatical necessity (ibid., 1999: 15). Colligation is a good example of inextricably interwoven relationship between lexicon and syntax (ibid., 2000: 17). It seems, however, that all the information about grammatical categorization and its usual complement is not stored together with the word in the Korean L2 learners' mental lexicon. For example, the rote memory of the list of verbs that take a gerund (e.g., *enjoy*, *avoid*, *consider*, *suggest*) and the list of verbs that take the subjective (e.g., *ask*, *insist*, *demand*, *advise*, *suggest*) is still a widely used learning method in Korea. Therefore, when a Korean L2 learner wants to use the word "suggest", it may prove to be challenging to retrieve the grammatical information for the word which is stored separately under different entry in the L2 learner's mental lexicon. Moreover, it may take the learner a lot of time and effort to choose the target grammar rules for a particular pragmatic function in a real-life situation and then create a new sentence by filling the slots of the memorized grammar rules.

As such, Lexical Approach promotes the transition from grammatical yet artificially contrived language to natural language that is widely accepted by the speech community. The examples "as a matter of fact" vs. "as a matter of opinion" (Wills, 2003: 44) and "I'm sorry I'm late" vs. "You're sorry you're late" (Lewis, 1997: 36), all of which are grammatically accepted but only the first utterances can be widely accepted by English speakers, lead us to consider teaching language which "ring[s] true' as used language" (Lewis, 1997: 212).

Research Questions

What are the effects of Lexical Approach on teaching/learning grammar?

1. Does Lexical Approach have a positive effect on teaching/learning grammar to Korean L2 learners at a beginner level of proficiency?
2. Is it effective in the test designed for communicative purposes including open-ended or situation-bound questions, far from the conventional test involving closed, slot-filling, or multiple-choice questions.

III. Methodology

3.1 Design

Recent studies in Korea have investigated various topics concerning Lexical Approach such as semantics of “will” (Kim, 2005), phrasal verb constructions (Chung, 2005), its effects on communicative competence (Lee & Kim, 2008), and analysis of reading behaviors (Lee & Rha, 2004). However, little attention has been paid to teaching grammar through Lexical Approach. The present study adopted the principles of Lexical Approach to teaching grammar to Korean L2 learners. The principles in focus are as follows.

Chunking mechanism is the most significant concept in Lexical Approach. As Ellis (2001) states, “[as] we analyse word sequence chunks, so we discover that they have characteristic structural types. Linguistics call these regularities grammar” (p. 49). Willis (2003) further suggests the effect of lexical chunks on efficient communication (p. 44). Given that the lexical chunks contain not only lexical properties but also syntactic information, various types of

lexical phrases were used so as to promote Korean L2 learners' grammar learning in the treatment of the present study, such as polywords (e.g., *according to, so to speak*), frames (e.g., *Whatever... are necessary*), sentences and sentence stems (e.g., *How do you do?, Would you like...?, Do you mind if I...?*), patterns (e.g., Noun (Relationship: love, rivalry, partnership) + *between*) (adopted from Wills, 2003: 144-45).

As Lewis (1997) emphasizes "the value of repetition" in his book "Implementing the Lexical Approach" (p. 51), the principle of recycling was carefully implemented "in an interesting and refreshing way" (Harwood, 2002: 146). The present study followed Boers and Lindstromberg's (2009) two principles in order for the repetition to promote efficient retrieval of the target lexical chunks for actual production.

Principle 1: [B]oth fluency in oral interaction (which is partly a matter of motor skill) and memory formation are promoted by repeating target language out loud.

Principle 2: [I]t is the establishment of consistent associative connections in long-term memory that provides an essential basis for automaticity. Oral repetition practice of short, well-contextualized, and thoroughly understood situational dialogues (repeated at growing intervals) is in accord with these principles. Substitution drills, transformation drills and other drills that endanger consistent mapping of form and meaning are not (pp. 144-45).

3.2 Method

3.2.1 Participants

A total of 170 participants (114 subjects in the experimental group

and 56 subjects in the control group) were involved in the present study. The subjects were Korean male and female freshmen from different majors taking a general English course titled “Basic English Grammar” at a local university in Korea. From the preliminary group interviews, the majority of the participants responded that they had been taught English grammar for test preparation in a conventional way where rote-memorization of the particular grammar rules was encouraged. The class met once a week (on the different day for all the three participated classes) and lasted two hours. Since the course was designed for beginner English learners, relatively proficient students were screened out before the course drop/add period in the beginning of the semester. Based on their self-evaluation and the grammar test (adopted from their text book “Active English Grammar 1”) provided in the first class, most of them were at a beginner level¹, except for one learner from Monday class and another from Wednesday class were at a low-intermediate level.

3.2.2 Procedure

Lexical Approach was applied to the two classes (a total of 114 participants) for a semester (1 session of pre-test, 13 sessions of treatment, 1 session of post-test) while the control group consisting of 56 participants in the same program received conventional grammar teaching. The pre-test was provided to the experimental group before the treatment and then was compared with the post-test after the treatment. The same tests were given to the control group for the purpose of comparison with the results of the experimental group. The details of the treatment for the experimental group are as follows:

First, OHE (Observe-Hypothesis-Experiment), as Lewis (1997) suggests,

¹ The subjects at a beginner level hardly produced a complete English sentence.

was used in place of the conventional PPP (Presentation-Practice-Production). Second, inductive yet conscious-raising methodology was adopted. Third, since the prompts for practicing and producing were not the grammar rules but the situation or topic, the names of particular grammar rules were used to a minimum. Fourth, the exercise types were adopted from Lewis's (1997) book "Implementing the Lexical Approach" as in "sentence heads" (p.95), "probable expressions with slots" (p.98), "grammaticalisation" (p.102), "modalisation" (pp.102-103), "collocation" (pp.92-93), "similar stress patterns" (p.101; modified to similar structural patterns), and "double-gapping-modals and common verbs" (p.106). Some modifications were made to fit better grammar teaching as shown in the following example.

Direction: Match each sentence from Column 1 with the sentence from Column 2 with the similar structure of the verb.

Column 1	Column 2
I want some chocolate.	I need you to help me
I want to stay here.	I need to go to the toilet.
Do you want me to take it?	Babies need constant care.
Do you want this pie hot?	She needs her hair washed.

(*Similar structural patterns* modified from "Similar stress patterns", p. 101).

Last, the activities were adopted from his book (Chapter 7) as in "text search", "find the noun", "find the collocate" (modified to "find the verb, find the colligation"), "phrase matching", "happy families", "multi-word adverbial phrases", "fixed expressions", and "Soap follow-up". Some modification was also made to some activities as in a following example;

Direction: As you read the text quickly, first underline every verb you notice and then look through the text again to search for verbs with particular patterns. Call out when you find them.

Ms. Jones, the teacher, is new and inexperienced. She speaks very quickly, so students have a hard time following her. Because they have difficulty understanding her, they spend a lot of class time asking questions. In response, Ms. Jones gives long, wordy explanations and wastes a lot of class time trying to make herself understood. The students sit at their desks looking confused...

(*Find the verb, find the colligation* modified from “find the noun, find the collocate”, p. 109).

The pre-test and post-test utilized the same questions with the interval of 14 weeks. Both language receptive and productive questions were included. The grammar features evaluated in the tests were *Suggestions, Exclamations, Imperatives, Direct and indirect objects, First conditional statements, Reflexive pronouns, Information questions, and Subjunctive mood* (adopted and expanded from the class textbook “Active English Grammar 1”)

3.2.3 Data collection and analysis

The data were manually collected from the paper-and-pencil type of pre-and post-tests and were double-checked by a third person. The test evaluation focused on only the target grammar features, and thus other aspects such as punctuation and spelling were not included in the evaluation. The data were then fed to the statistics program SPSS 20. First, descriptive statistics were used for general information such as Mean and Std. Second, paired-samples t-test was used for the comparison of the mean score between pre-test and post-test of each group (both experimental and control groups). Third, independent-

samples t-test was used to compare the extent of improvement of grammar knowledge between the experimental group and the control group.

IV. Results

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Control Group

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std.
pre-test	56	1.00	21.00	7.50	3.35
post-test	56	9.00	40.00	26.18	5.60
Valid N (listwise)	56				

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for the Experimental Group

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std.
pre-tst	114	1.00	20.00	8.67	4.11
post-test	114	23.00	47.00	34.90	4.37
Valid N (listwise)	114				

Table 1 and Table 2 show the scores of pre- and post tests in the control group and the experimental group respectively. The mean of the scores was 7.50 (SD=3.35) in the pre-test and 26.18 (SD=5.60) in the post-test for the control group without treatment. The experimental group yielded a mean score of 8.67 (SD=4.11) in the pre-test before the treatment and of 34.90 (SD=4.37) in the post-test after the treatment of Lexical Approach.

Table 3. Paired Samples Statistics: Difference between the Pre-and Post Test Scores of the Control Group

		Mean	N	Std.Deviation	Std.Error Mean					
Pair 1	pre	7.50	56	3.35	.45					
	post	26.18	56	5.60	.75					
Paired Sample Test										
Paired Differences										
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std.Error Mean	95% Confidence interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	
					Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	pre-post	-18.68	4.37	.583	-19.85	-17.51	-32.02	55	.000	

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the conventional grammar teaching method on the control group's grammar knowledge. There was a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post test scores. A statistically significant increase in grammar test scores was found from pre-test (M=7.50, SD=3.35) to post-test [M=26.18, SD=5.60, t(55)=-32.02, p<.05]. The eta squared² statistic (1.05) indicated a large effect size.

Table 4. Paired Samples Statistics: Difference between the Pre-and Post Test Scores of the Experimental Group

		Mean	N	Std.Deviation	Std.Error Mean					
Pair 1	pre	8.67	114	4.11	.39					
	post	34.90	114	4.37	.41					
Paired Sample Test										
Paired Differences										
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std.Error Mean	95% Confidence interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	
					Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	pre-post	-26.23	4.30	.40	-27.03	-25.43	-65.08	113	.000	

$$^2 \text{ eta squared} = \frac{t^2}{t^2 + N - 1}$$

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the Lexical Approach on the experimental group's grammar knowledge. There was a statistically significant increase in grammar test scores from pre-test (M=8.67, SD=4.11) to post-test [M=34.90, SD=4.37, $t(113)=-65.08$, $p<.05$]. The eta squared³ statistic (1.02) indicated a large effect size.

Table 5: Group statistics: Improvement of Grammar Knowledge

	Group	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	Std.Error Mean
Improve- ment	1	56	18.68	4.37	.58
	2	114	26.23	4.30	.40

Independent Samples Test									
	Levene's test for equality of variances			t-test for Equality of Means					
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variance assumed	.01	.92	-10.70	168	.000	-7.55	.71	-8.94	-6.16
Equal variance not assumed			-10.65	108.04	.000	-7.55	.71	-8.95	-6.14

In Table 5, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the effect of the two different teaching method/approach on the subjects' grammar knowledge. There was a significant difference in scores for the control group (M=18.68, SD=4.37) and experimental group who were taught by Lexical Approach [M=26.23, SD=4.30;

³ eta squared= $\frac{t^2}{t^2 + N - 1}$

$t(168)=-10.70, p=.00]$. The magnitude of the differences in the means was very large ($\eta^2=.41$). This suggests that the improvement of the subjects' grammar knowledge was statistically significant more on the Lexical Approach than the conventional grammar teaching.

V. Discussion

The findings of the present study strengthen the position that Lexical Approach may also be beneficial for L2 grammar teaching/learning, in particular, for those who have long stayed at the low proficiency level. In recognition of a number of Korean L2 learners' learning strategy promoting the association of the name of particular grammar rules with the list of words in the category of the grammar rules, their knowledge of the target grammar seems inefficient for language production. This is evident for the case of English verbs that determine the sentence structure. If a word "mind" is stored in the list of the verbs that take gerunds in a subject's mental lexicon, and thus the prime of the memory is the given grammar rule, the following situation provided in the test will hardly trigger the target word and its structure.

Situation: You want your roommate to open the door for you. Because "Open the door" doesn't sound polite, you might want to say it using the word "mind" as in " _____?"

In addition, since the subjects in the experimental group were taught various examples as a form of lexical chunks and practiced producing

$$^4 \eta^2 = \frac{t^2}{t^2(N_1 + N_2 - 2)}$$

sentences for various situations that may require particular chunks, it seems probable that not only the grammar structures but also additional information such as pragmatic properties of the lexical chunks were stored together in their lexicon.

To illustrate how the particular pragmatic functions in the questions are used as the prime, more sample questions from the test are shown as follows (The following sample questions vary in their extent of productivity);

True: I'm sleepy now because I didn't sleep last night.

Conditional: If I had slept last night, I_____.

A: Our teacher gives us too much homework.

B: Yeah. If I _____.

A: I wish you were my teacher. Then I wouldn't have any homework.

Suppose you are at a party. A man starts talking to you, but he is speaking so fast that you can't catch what he is saying. What would you do?

To further discuss why the subjects who were taught in the Lexical Approach performed better in the tests, connectionist view of language in cognitive linguistics may be helpful in this regard. It is suggested that connection strengths between nodes are memorized (McClelland, Rumelhart & Hinton, 1986: 31) and the connection strengths, which constitute all knowledge, are achieved from learning (Rumelhart, Hinton & McClelland, 1986: 75). The subjects' repeated practice and encounter of the target word/chunks may have strengthened the connections; however, the connections seem to have been built between the grammar rules and the word in the case of control group, and between the lexical chunks and the pragmatic functions for those

taught in the Lexical Approach. As a consequence, the priming may have successfully occurred from the situations given in the test to the experimental group, but not to the control group.

Therefore, it may be possible to postulate that the subjects in the control group gained sufficient grammar knowledge from the instruction, and yet the knowledge is organized to be more efficient for any conventional slot-filling or multiple-choice type of questions. They could have better performed than the experimental group had they been given those conventional type of tests. However, the way that the knowledge is stored in their mental lexicon did not seem to promote the efficient retrieval for actual production primed by real-life situations in the test.

Furthermore, it must also be noted that implementation of Lexical Approach should be carefully managed in the classroom. First, Lexical Approach should not be interpreted as a mechanical memorization of lexical chunks in an unsystematic way. Bearing in mind how the lexical information is stored and retrieved as discussed above, it should not promote “inconsistent mapping” which is considered to be “a major flaw in the audiolingual method” (Segalowitz, 2000: 212). Second, it should not be limited to automatized manipulation of grammar structures similar to the audiolingual method (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009: 145) so that the prime of the learner’s memory for the actual production can be the particular situation or topic that requires particular pragmatic functions. Third, active investigation of the grammar structures from various examples of lexical chunks should be more effective if made by the learners (Ellis, 2001: 62). For the learners’ effective analysis of grammatical sequences, teachers should provide them with various “noticing” and “consciousness-raising” activities (Lewis, 1997). Last, it is critical that all the learning

and teaching activities be aimed at communicative purposes so that they can produce the target language in real-life situations(see also Jung, 2012 for writing class; Seo, 2007 for using movies).

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, the positive effect of Lexical Approach on Korean L2 learners' grammar learning was borne out by the results of the present study. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the data obtained from the study are suggestive and not conclusive due to the limitations the study has such as the lack of comparison with various learners at a different L2 proficiency level, coupled with a different degree of motivation. It may be, however, meaningful to consider adopting Lexical Approach for Korean L2 learners, in particular, who are stagnant at a beginner level with difficulties retrieving the target grammar knowledge for situation-bound productions.

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Appendix

Sample activities (adopted from Lewis 1997: 108-39)

Text search 1: Ask learners to underline chunks they can find in a text.

Text search 2: Students put the word in the appropriate column to indicate the type of collocation such as adjective-noun.

Find the noun, find the collocate: Learners read through a text quickly and underline every noun they notice. Then look through the text again to search for its collocate.

Phrase matching: After reading a text learners are given a set of incomplete phrases taken from the text and asked to complete them.

Happy families: Prepare several sets of cards; a set with a useful adjective on each card; a set with a useful verb on each card; a larger set with a noun on each card. Learners take turns to ask "Have you got a () that goes with/follows ()?" They collect matched pairs and play till the cards are exhausted.

Multi-word adverbial phrases : Give learners a set of multi-word adverbial and ask them to sort them into two or more groups, for example, phrases which answer different questions such as When? Where? Why?.

Fixed expressions: Give learners these questions: "Who said it?", "Where it was said?", "What had just happened?", "What was the response?".

Soap follow-up: Show an episode learners have seen. Pause it before important expressions and ask learners to recall exactly what was said.

