'What is a teacher?
A teacher is someone
who has what you need
and knows how to
give it to you.'
Christopher Ross,
2001

'By far the great
obstacle to good readi
insufficient number of w ds i
the learner's lexicon. [In earch
studies] lexis was fou t to
best predictor of su ess reading,
better than syn ger al
read g ac
Phati der.

'Word meanings
are like stretchy pullovers,
whose outline contour is
visible, but whose detailed
shape varies with use.'
Jean Aitchison,
1996

'The teacher's
main responsibility
is response-ability.'
Peter Wilberg,
1988

n most
utterance are
of habit men mo able,
rehears he same old platitudes
and the sa clichés in almost
everything we say. If it were not so,
nary language would become
u le. Humankind cannot
bea very much creativity.'
Patrick Hanks,
2013

'After Elementary level,
the largest part of a language
learner's task is to build up
an adequate stock of high-priority
words and lexicalised phrases, including
both knowledge of their forms and
an awareness of their more important
meanings, the major collocational
and syntactic constraints
on their use, and so on.'
Michael Swan,
1996

A

Teaching lexically

There have been many thousands of pag writ about how people learn languages, yet we would suggest they can all be neatly in a very small number of principles.

Principles of how e ple learn

Essentially, to learn any given em ge, people need to carry out the following steps:

1 Understand the meaning of m.
2 Hear/see an example of the item context.
3 Approximate the nds of the item.
4 Pay attention to d notice its features.
5 Do somethi wi the u – use it in some way.
6 Repeat th ps ov me, when encountering the item again in other contexts.

Prin es of why people learn

The d are principle that we think is uncontroversial, but that is worth spelling ou is w ple want to learn foreign languages. The Council of Europe, which ed th ommon European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR), le learn for the following reasons:

● w the business of everyday life in another country, and to help foreigners stay their own country to do so.

● exchange information and ideas with young people and adults who speak a different language, and to communicate thoughts and feelings to them.

● To achieve a wider and deeper understanding of the ways of life and forms of thought of other peoples, and of their cultural heritage.

One underlying assumption that the CEFR makes is that students will be taking classes, as part of their efforts to learn languages. It is perhaps worth questioning why this might be. After all, many people learn languages without ever participating in formal study. It seems to us that one of the fundamental reasons students take classes is that this allows them to set aside some time for study. A lot of people have neither the time nor the discipline to study on their own. While it is clearly true that the best language learners do a lot outside of class, we believe that teachers should recognise that, for what is probably the majority of learners, class time is basically all they may have spare for language study.

Bibliography
We cite other authors and
resources throughout
the book and the full
reference can be found
in the bibli hy on
pages 1 5-14.

Glossary
A glossary of
w them an be
fou n 7-150.
The ance of their
use in t ok is marked
with an as nsk *.

That has implications for the pace of progress and for level, but it also emphasises how vital it is that what happens in class meets the main linguistic wants and needs of learners; chiefly:

- To be able to do things with their language.
- To be able to chat to others.
- To learn to understand other cultures better.

Teaching and learning choices

Most of the principles outlined above are relatively undisputed, but the thousands of pages written about such limited principles are testament to the fact that debates do remain. In particular, there is much disagreement about the following:

- The very nature of language itself.
- What language to teach.
- Whether you can actually teach and learn languages or whether they are simply acquired.
- The order in which to teach the language you choose.
- Practical ways in which each principle of how to learn language is realised.
- The relative importance of each principle.

Debates often revolve around the speed of the learning process, and how easily the learner will be able to take in the items of language taught and use them effectively in the world outside the classroom. There is also much discussion about how the process can be made more – or less – motivating for learners.

The choices teachers make with regard to these issues may be informed by research and the consideration of evidence, but it is also fair to say that reliable research and evidence can be hard to come by. As such, teachers will inevitably base some – or all – of their decisions on beliefs, arising from previous experiences as both teachers and language learners.

Choices are also likely to be at least partially the product of the attitudes and beliefs of the time and place that teachers are living in, and, as such, may also perhaps be a reaction to whatever came before. For example, one might see the current argument against fun activities and games – and the move towards more correction and intervention (as exemplified in the recent emergence of the Demand High concept) – as being a reaction to the free-spending, debt-creating economy of the 1990s and 2000s! The move in language teaching towards such practices could be seen as a reflection of the contemporary discourse that claims that what people want now is something more controlled and austere.

To recognise and acknowledge this is simply to state that, as teachers, trainers and materials writers ourselves, we are no different when it comes to our principles and our choice of exercises that we feel best realise the principles described earlier. As such, in the pages of Part A that follow, we would like to explore our beliefs and principles in more depth, so that you can see how they fit with the exercises and practices that will follow in Part B of *Teaching Lexically*.

One view of language

Grammar plus words plus skills

Traditionally, the most dominant view in English Language Teaching is probably:

grammar + words = productive language.

In other words, there has long been a belief that language can be reduced to a list of grammar structures that you can drop single words into. You may perhaps have seen this described as something along the lines of 'grammar providing the slots into which you slot words'.

This is a view of language that we disagree with.

There are a number of implications that follow from this more traditional view of language – some of which may sometimes be explicit to you as teachers, and some which may not. Firstly, grammar is seen as being the most important area of language. If words are there to slot into the spaces which grammar arranges, then it is grammar which must come first, and it is grammar which will help students do all the things that they want to do. It also follows that the examples used to illustrate grammar rules are relatively unimportant.

Seen from this perspective, these examples don't necessarily have to represent what is actually said because understanding the rule will enable students to create all the sentences they could ever possibly want in accordance with the rule. It therefore doesn't matter if an example used to illustrate a rule could not easily (or ever) be used in daily life.

Similarly, if words are to fit in the slots provided by grammar, it follows that learning lists of single words is all that is required, and that any word can effectively be used if it fits a particular slot. Seen from this point of view, *Dracula didn't/doesn't/couldn't/mustn't/won't live in Brazil/Spain/Britain* all equally possible and grammatically correct, as are *I'm studying English*, *I'm not studying English* and *Am I studying English?*

Naturalness, or the probable usage of vocabulary, is basically regarded as an irrelevance; students just need to grasp core meanings. At the same time, synonyms* – words that have similar meanings – such as *murder* and *assassinate* – are seen as being more or less interchangeable and, if on occasion they are not, then this is a choice based purely on a shade of difference in meaning rather than anything else.

Alongside this, an associated belief has developed: that grammar is acquired in a particular order – the so-called 'building blocks' approach that sees students start by attempting to master what are seen as more basic structures, before moving on to more advanced ones. When following this approach, students do not get to see, let alone use, a structure before they have been formally taught it. For this reason, beginner- and elementary-level coursebooks do not generally have any past or future forms in the first half of the book, and may exclude other common tenses and grammatical structures altogether.

Finally, over the last thirty years, another layer has been added to this view of learning. This looks to address skills – speaking, listening, reading and writing. If content is essentially catered for by the presentation of grammar rules plus words, then where there is a deficit in fluency or writing or reading, the claim is that this may be connected to a lack of appropriate skills.

These skills are seen as existing independently of language, and a lack of them is thought to result in such problems as not being sufficiently confident, not planning, not making

use of clues such as pictures to deduce meaning, not thinking about the context of a conversation, and so on.

As a result, many courses will claim to teach these skills, and you will typically coursebooks with sections on grammar, sections on vocabulary, and then secti... as speaking, listening, writing or reading. The prevailing formula might then 'grammar + words + skills = productive language'.

A lexical view of language

From words with words to g...

In some sectors, the 'grammar + words + skills = producti... language' view is presented as the only option, but in fact there are countries and institu... which organise their language syllabuses differently, and there is also an a... view of how language itself works that is supported by research, observation of ... ge ...d logical arguments.

This alternative view is one we both share.

If we return to the principle that learners wa... to do things with their language and to communicate, then communicati... almost a... s depends more on vocabulary than on grammar, even if we assume th... gr... nar + words' model. For example, take the sentence 'I've been wanting to see that ... or ...'. Saying *want see film* is more likely to achieve the intended communicati... ime... a conversation than only using what can be regarded as the grammar and ... tion words: 'I've been -ing to that for'.

From this point of view, we should see ... ds as more valuable. This does not entirely exclude the 'grammar + w...ds' model, but it does undermine it. Would the message be less clear if the order of ... s were changed? Not dramatically:

film want see ... w...d fil...
see film want ... nt film ...

Actually, the ... ion b... n vocabulary and grammar is rarely clear-cut; instead, it is rather ... v... is restricted by the words we use, and vice versa. In daily life, there are not m... variati...s of each and every structure, and we don't accept synonyms in all case... ot ... le, we may say *I've been wanting to see that for ages*, but not *I've been fanc... ing that for ages*. Similarly, we may say *it's a high/tall building*, but not a *high* ma... ll ...rature.

...there... , w... hen make use of phrases, or chunks* of language, which appear to be st... nd ... ied as wholes, rather than constructed from an underlying knowledge of gramm... r + single words. To put it another way, we consistently choose one particular way ... saying something grammatical, rather than any of the many other possibilities.

In their seminal 1983 article – 'Two puzzles for linguistic theory: native-like selection and native-like fluency' – Pawley and Syder cite the way we tell the time as an example of this. All of the following are grammatically possible, yet most are not chosen by fluent speakers:

It's six less twenty.   *It's two thirds past five.*
It's forty past five.   *It exceeds five by forty.*
It's a third to six.   *It's ten after half five.*

Most competent users of English – including you, almost certainly – tend to opt for either *It's twenty to six* or *It's five forty*. There are thousands of similar instances, and it was these

ideas, among others, that led Michael Lewis to declare in *The Lexical Approach* (1993) that language was 'grammaticalised lexis*' rather than 'lexicalised grammar'. As a result, he rejected the idea that we should continue with a syllabus based on n... ...dered grammar structures and, instead, advocated syllabuses, materials and teach... ...red around collocation* and chunks alongside large amounts of input from ...

From this input, a grasp of grammar 'rules' and correct usage would ... ally if the input were mediated by the guidance of teachers helping stude... ...tice forms and meanings.

More recently, Michael Hoey has given theoretical support for ... ap... ...n. In his book *Lexical Priming* (2005), he shows how words which are ap... ...nt... ...nonymous – such as *result* and *consequence* – typically function in quite diff... ...nt ... ...istically, one is more common than the other in most situations, and often ... e differences are very marked.

The way synonyms are used differs not only in te... of ... ...r words immediately around them that they collocate with, but also ... er ... of the words that co-occur in the wider surrounding text. Near-synonyms may a... ...ur ... different parts of sentences or in different genres*, or may be followed b... ...ffer... ...matical patterns.

Hoey argues that these statistical differe... ...me about because, when we first encounter these words the calls such en... ...lters ...imings*'), our brains somehow subconsciously record some or all ... ...nd of information about the way the words are used. Our next encounter may re... ...ssibly contradict – this initial priming, as will the next encounter, and t... ...ons... ...ar – and so on.

If this was not the case, then ... ...and *consequence* would be equally prevalent in all cases, or one would be used more cons... ...ly in all contexts. Hoey suggests that many of what we might think of as b... ...ing our grammatical choices are actually determined by the words themselves and by ... ...r ... ...ience of how they are used – and the patterns that attach themselves to the ... ...er rather than by any underlying knowledge of grammar rules and an ability t... ...slot in ... ...ds.

Hoey has also ci... ...nce from psycholinguistic studies to support his claims about ... ...h pr... ...and to help explain why language use works in this way. One experiment he ... ...ns s... ...how words are recognised quicker when they are related in use than when t... ...e not. So, for example, once a test subject has been given the word *cow*, the ... ...milk ... ...eld might then be recognised more quickly than, say, the word *airport*.

... ...ther ...eriment, unrelated pairs of words such as *scarlet onion* were taught. After a ... ...g ... ich the test subjects were exposed to a lot more language, participants were ... ...en te... ...n recognition of words based on prompt words. When the prompt word was ... ...r – the word *scarlet* was recalled more quickly than other words.

These experiments suggest, firstly, that we do indeed remember words in pairings and in groups, and that doing so allows for quicker and more accurate processing of the language we hear and want to produce. Quicker, that is, than constantly constructing new and creative sentences.

If you accept this, then it's not too great a leap to believe that spoken fluency, the speed at which we read and the ease and accuracy with which we listen may all develop as a result of language users being more familiar with groupings of words. This certainly seems to be a more likely source of development than relying on constructing sentences from the bottom up, using grammar and words.

Seen like this, problems connected to skills essentially come back to being more about