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1 Discourse and the lexical approach

Integrating sounds, words, and grammar learning in a holistic way

Pronunciation, words and grammar form the basis of the four language skills (→ ch. 5). In this chapter we will look at how these three sub-skills are related and how we can support young learners in developing them. According to the *Common European Framework* lexical competence consists of *"the knowledge of, and ability to use the vocabulary of a language"* which integrates *"lexical elements and grammatical elements"* (COUNCIL OF EUROPE 2001: 110). Discourse is made up of sounds, words and grammar. It has been defined as *"a general term for examples of language use, i.e. language which has been produced as a result of an act of communication. Whereas grammar refers to the rules a language uses to form grammatical units of language such as CLAUSE, PHRASE, and SENTENCE, discourse refers to larger units of language such as paragraphs, conversations, and interviews"* (RICHARDS ET AL 1992: 111). As the larger unit, discourse usually goes beyond the sentence level and includes all kinds of spoken and written texts. When young learners start learning a foreign language though, they first of all work with the concept of the word as *"a discrete unit. Children will ask what a particular word means, or how to say a word in a foreign language, and, in learning to read, the word is a key unit in building up skills and knowledge"* (CAMERON 2001: 73). While young learners only slowly begin to produce discourse, for example by participating in classroom discourse, they use both words and grammar to construct their first utterances and sentences. At first *"younger children, in particular, are not ready for or interested in thinking about the language system or manipulating the language so as to separate lexical items out of structures. They are interested in the meaning and function of new language more holistically, in order to play a game, sing a song, or act out a story"* (PINTER 2006a: 84). Consequently, as PINTER (2006a: 86) continues *"for younger children vocabulary and grammar should be learnt in a holistic way"*. The BIG circle (2004: 11; → ch. 1) supports this when they describe the basic language competences of young learners:

Wortschatz	Grammatik
Eine grundlegende Kommunikationsfähigkeit in der Fremdsprache verlangt einen Mindestwortschatz. Dieser ergibt sich durch die jeweilige Schüler-, Handlungs- und Themenorientierung.	Am Anfang des fremdsprachlichen Lernprozesses in der Schule steht der Aufbau des Sprachkönnens vor dem Erwerb von Sprachwissen. Den Lernenden wird durch eine sorgfältig strukturierte Präsentation und durch vielfältige Übungsformen ermöglicht, das vorhandene Regelsystem der Fremdsprache weitgehend unbewusst aufzubauen.

Learning words includes learning grammar

At the same time though, while focusing on meaning, children unconsciously pick up a lot of grammar. When children talk about their pets, they do not only want to use the English words for their pets (*rabbit, dog*), but want to say something about their color (*a brown rabbit, a black dog*), their size (*a small rabbit, a big dog*) and exchange other meaningful information (*my budgies have got blue feathers, I like/don't like cats, her favorite food is ...*). Instead of using single words, they want to use language chunks which already include a lot of grammatical features (adjectives, plural forms, negation, possessive case) even though they are not aware that these are aspects of grammar (see also → ch. 2). As CAMERON (2001: 72) puts it, *"vocabulary learning can serve as a stepping stone to learning and using grammar"*. And BATSTONE (1994: 8) supports this when he says, *"grammar does not exist on its own. It is inter-dependent with lexis"*. Since sounds and words form the basis of language learning, we can say with LEWIS (1993: 89) that *"language consists of grammaticalized lexis not lexicalised grammar"*. When using this concept of 'lexicogrammar' or a comparable lexical approach in language teaching, the focus is *"on the main carrier of meaning, vocabulary. The concept of a large vocabulary is extended from words to lexis, but the essential idea is that fluency is based on the acquisition of a large store of fixed and semi-fixed prefabricated items [...]. Grammatical knowledge permits the creative re-combination of lexis in novel and imaginative ways"* but only if *"the learner has a sufficiently large mental lexicon to which grammatical knowledge can be applied"* (LEWIS 1993: 15). In the primary classroom we do not focus on teaching cognitive grammatical knowledge, but on raising grammatical awareness (see below). Before we will show how to teach words and how to develop grammatical awareness, we need to decide which words our learners are supposed to learn, how they store them in their brain, and which competences are involved in mastering a lexical chunk.

2 Selecting and storing words

Choosing a vocabulary basis for young learners

Since the number of words young learners can learn is restricted, we have to carefully select lexical items. This selection is based on the frequency, age-appropriateness (which words do young learners need to express their experiences and ideas?) and accessibility of words (are the words easy to learn? This depends on word features such as difficulty of pronunciation, length of words, complexity of meaning; see also ZANGL & PELTZER-KARPF 1998: 14). The English language contains about 54.000 word families (SCHMITT 2000: 2–3). A word family consists of the base of a word, such as 'play' and all its inflected and derived forms, such as 'plays', 'playing', 'played', or 'playground'. The knowledge of the most frequent 2.000 word families facilitates the comprehension of about 80% of any text (NATION 2001). Child native speakers at the age of eight know about 7–8.000 word families, but a *"realistic target"* for young foreign language learners is about 500 words per year *"given good learning conditions"* (CAMERON 2001:

75). For German learners MINDT and SCHLÜTER (2007: 78–89) propose a basic vocabulary (*Mindestwortschatz*) of 121 words for grades 3 and 4, differentiated into 39 content words, such as nouns, verbs and adjectives, and 82 function words, such as personal and possessive pronouns or prepositions. They base their selection on a corpus analysis of English children's (aged 6–12) language use, *"unter gleichzeitiger Berücksichtigung des Wortschatzes Erwachsener"* (MINDT & SCHLÜTER 2007: 67). They add that a productive extension of this basic count should be possible, and KIEWEG (2005: 20) supports this when he says, *"eine radikale Beschränkung auf einen geringen Mindestwortschatz wäre nach meinen Beobachtungen von Fremdsprachenunterricht in der Grundschule unterfordernd"*. Also, it would be helpful to add to this list a corpus of classroom discourse in the primary school.

Storing lexical chunks in the mental lexicon

When children learn these new words or chunks, they store them in what has been called 'the mental lexicon', a term that describes *"the word-store in the human mind"* (AITCHINSON 1992: 59). SCHMITT (2000: 106) says that the mental lexicon establishes *"a spiderweb of grammatical and semantic relationships between a large number of words"*. But how is this web organised? SCHMITT (2000: 39–40) distinguishes between three kinds of associations: (a) clang associations (which are not related semantically, but in terms of sound), such as *ball – wall, mouse – house*; (b) paradigmatic associations, where words are related to other words of the same class such as synonyms (e.g. *large* and *big*) or antonyms (e.g. *hot* and *cold*) as well as derivations, such as prefixes and suffixes (e.g. *un/happy* or *help/ful*), and word combinations (e.g. *blackboard*); (c) syntagmatic associations that generally focus on different word classes such as adjective-noun pairs (e.g. *beautiful picture*) or verb-noun pairs (e.g. *play ball*). Consequently words are stored semantically by association, i.e. the stimulus of a certain word brings up other words. The word *guinea-pig*, for example, could trigger associations such as brown color, small, or cuddle. This depends on how the word was introduced and networked in the classroom, and it depends on the learner's personal preferences and knowledge. As we will show below we need to teach words in these lexical associations and in meaningful contexts, and help learners construct lexical networks because this eventually supports learners when they try to produce language. As NATTINGER (1988: 75) stresses, *"vocabulary is stored redundantly, not only as individual morphemes, but also as parts or phrases, or even as longer memorized chunks of speech, and that it is oftentimes retrieved from memory as these preassembled chunks"*. This will have consequences for how we best present new words. But before we move on to the teaching of words and grammar we need to have a look at the challenges young learners face when trying to learn words or lexical chunks.

3 Challenges when learning words

Knowing a word depends on different kinds of knowledge

Based on a number of suggestions, CAMERON (2001: 77) has come up with a list of different kinds of knowledge that is involved when you know a word.

Type of knowledge	What is involved	Example
Receptive knowledge, aural/decoding	To understand it when it is spoken/written	*Clothes*, for example is more of a challenge than *house*
Memory	To recall it when needed	Her/his car instead of *teacher car* (→ ch. 2)
Conceptual knowledge	To use it with the correct meaning	To use *make* and *do* correctly, as in *making a cake* and *doing my homework*
Knowledge of the spoken form: phonological knowledge	To hear the word and to pronounce it acceptably, on its own, and in phrases and sentences	To hear and produce the voiced and voiceless sounds, such as in *zoo* (in opposition to the German *Zoo*)
Grammatical Knowledge	To use it in a grammatically correct way, to know grammatical connections with other words	*She sings very well* not *she sings very good*; to know that *is* and *be* are parts of the same verb
Collocational knowledge	To know which other words can be used with it	A *beautiful picture*, not a *good-looking picture*
Orthographic knowledge	To spell it correctly	To spell *house*, and not *haus*
Pragmatic knowledge: knowledge of style and register	To use it in the right situation	To know the difference between *Would you like a drink?* and *What do you want?*

While orthographic knowledge is becoming increasingly important in primary school (→ ch. 5) pragmatic knowledge will develop over time when learners get older and find out how to behave pragmatically correct in a different culture (for example, when taking leave, they would say *see you later* instead of *bye-bye*). When learners encounter a word for the first time they are first of all confronted with its pronunciation.

1 Providing ample practice opportunities for pronunciation

Even young learners have problems when pronouncing English sounds

English pronunciation is a challenge for German learners because the spoken form often does not match the written form and because many of the English sounds do not exist in German. As KIEWEG (2005: 20) relates, learners often have difficulties pronouncing words even though children basically are quite good at imitating sounds: *"So kann eine ganze Reihe an SchülerInnen die sog. prosodischen oder suprasegmentalen Elemente der englischen Sprache (Sprachmelodie oder die 'Farbe' einer Sprache) nicht mühelos imitieren. Sie zeigen darüber hinaus erhebliche Schwierigkeiten bei den rhythmischen Betonungs- und Dehnungsmustern und bei den Stimmhöhenkonturen"*. Learners also have problems because of the interferences with their L1 (voiced vs. voiceless as in 'zoo'/'Zoo'; see MCDERMOTT 2007 for other examples). Consequently when teaching new words, *"pupils need to hear a new word in isolation as well as in a discourse context, so that they can notice the sounds at the beginning and end, the stress pattern of the word, and the syllables that make up the word. They will need to hear the word spoken in isolation several times to catch all this information"* (CAMERON 2001: 86). In this example of teacher talk CAMERON provides a good example of how to present the word in an isolated form as well as in the discourse context:

> *An ambulance takes sick people to hospital.*
> *Ambulance*
> *Am-bu-lance*
> *Ambulance*
> *Can you see the ambulance in this picture? (child points to picture)*
> *Yes, there's the ambulance arriving at the hospital*
> (CAMERON 2001: 86).

Careful corrective feedback to support pronunciation

Learners need to become actively involved, especially through songs and stories which help them focus on pronunciation and intonation. At the same time, it is essential that we accept mistakes when learners try to pronounce new words and that we provide very careful corrective feedback. JACOBS describes what can happen when learners experiment with language. *"Dadurch kommt es zwangsläufig zu mehr Fehlleistungen [in der Aussprache]. Diese völlig neue Erfahrung führte zunächst zu gewissen Verunsicherungen sowohl bei den Lehrkräften als auch bei den betroffenen Schülern. Sofortige und häufige Korrekturen hatten zur Folge, dass sich diese Schüler [...] in ihren sprachlichen Äußerungen zurücknahmen, aus Angst, zu viele Fehler zu machen"* (JACOBS 2002: 69; see HUTZ & KOLB 2007 for suggestions of appropriate error correction; see MINDT & SCHLÜTER 2007: 68–77 for specific difficulties German learners have).

2 Developing the meaning of words

At first young learners often lack the world knowledge to grasp the full

conceptual meaning of words. The word *head*, for example, can have different meanings, such as the body part, the head of a school or the head of a state. Children will only learn these different meanings over time when they develop their world knowledge. Younger children make syntagmatic associations when presented with a word, for example by connecting a noun with a verb on the thematic level (*ball – play*). Older children on the other hand produce words from the same word class (*ball – game*) which is a paradigmatic association or categorical association since at that stage of their cognitive development they already think more in categories and abstract connections. A ball would then trigger the connection of 'playing with a ball = a game'. Consequently, as CAMERON (2001: 78) points out, there is a shift from syntagmatic to paradigmatic associations in the course of children's cognitive development. This is important since the fully developed mental lexicon is organized into both of these levels of associations, plus the level of clang associations. In clang associations words that sound similar are stored together. (*ball – wall, mouse – house*; see SCHMITT 2000: 39–40). When beginning to think in categories, learners first use *"the middle of a general to specific hierarchy"*. Instead of using *furniture* (the general end of the hierarchy or superordinate) or *rocking chair* (the specific end of the hierarchy or subordinate) they use the middle word or basic level word *chair* because it is the most often used word (CAMERON 2001: 79). Consequently when teaching vocabulary we can start with these basic level words.

The cognitive development influences meaning construction

The way words are structured also has an influence on how easily learners understand their meaning and retain them. ZANGL and PELTZER-KARPF differentiate between the frequency of basic morphemes, the ease of a word's segmentation, and the transparency of a word:

Morphological support when creating meaning

> ***Auftretenshäufigkeit:*** *Je öfter ein Morphem in einer Sprache zur Ableitung von Wörtern herangezogen wird, desto früher verwenden es Lernende für die Bildung von Wörtern. Für die Bezeichnung von Opposition ist z.B. das englische Morphem {un} ('happy' – 'unhappy') viel häufiger einsetzbar als {in} ('expensive' – 'inexpensive') oder {dis} ('satisfying' – 'dissatisfying').*
> ***Gute Segmentierfähigkeit (Zerlegbarkeit):*** *Wörter, deren Sinneinheiten (Morpheme) deutlich abgrenzbar sind, wie z.B. 'paint' – 'painter' werden früher analysiert als komplexere Wörter wie z.B. 'strong' – 'strength'.*
> ***Wortdurchsichtigkeit:*** *Formen, deren Gesamtbedeutung aus den Einzelbedeutungen ablesbar ist, werden klar bevorzugt. So geht z.B. die Bedeutung des Wortes 'appletree' aus den Einzelbedeutungen von 'apple' und 'tree' hervor* (ZANGL & PELTZER-KARPF 1998: 14).

Cultural schemata influence meaning construction

A final aspect which is important when talking about meaning is the cultural meaning of words. The paradigmatic and syntagmatic connections in the mental network create certain schemata. Learners bring their own cul-

turally produced schemata from their L1 culture. This can lead to misconceptions, for example when introducing the word *breakfast*. If the cultural background to different forms of breakfast in England is not provided, then learners will connect it to their L1 schema of what a *Frühstück* is. By exploring the variety of breakfasts, learners will realize similarities and differences as to the cultural scripts this word triggers, which is also a first step to developing intercultural communicative competence (→ ch. 8). All of these challenges and the respective support need to be taken into consideration in the teaching of words.

4 Teaching vocabulary

A sequence to teaching words and lexical chunks

When teaching words or lexical chunks there is a certain sequence to be followed from encountering a word, to storing and finally retrieving it, as HATCH and BROWN (1995: 372) explain, based on their research of learners' strategies:

(1) having multiple sources for encountering new words
(2) getting a clear image, whether visual or auditory or both, for the forms of the new word
(3) learning the meaning of the words
(4) making a strong memory connection between the forms and meanings of the words
(5) using the words.

To enable learners to transfer new words and chunks from their short-term to their long-term memory (the mental lexicon), i.e. to allow for the deep processing of words, they have to encounter the word repeatedly (between 5–10 times) in different contexts. This is crucial because word learning is a long process. KIEWEG (2005: 21) talks about a phase of up to a year since the networks in the mental lexicon need time to develop. Consequently the question of how many words a young learner can acquire in one lesson is wrong, as KIEWEG (2005: 21) stresses: *„Die Antwort wäre eindeutig: 'Kein einziges!', denn mit der Semantisierung beginnt erst der Lernprozess"*. Generally one can say that *"the amount of mental work done by learners affects how well a new word is engraved in memory; the more learners have to think about a word and its meaning, the more likely they are to remember it"* (CAMERON 2001: 85). This leads us to the different ways learners need to encounter and deal with words. KIEWEG (2005: 21) sums up the possibilities: *„deswegen bietet man den Lernenden in thematisch attraktiven Lernepisoden eine möglichst große Menge Wortschatz an und benutzt dafür mehrere Lernkanäle, z.B. visuell (Auge), auditiv (Ohr), haptisch-taktil (Hand, Berührung), kinästhetisch (Körperbewegung), olfaktorisch (Nase) und gustatorisch (Geschmack)"*. Visual support is therefore important because writing has not been introduced yet, one important source of visual support that is therefore missing. At the same time it is important not to translate the new word, because this will take away the motivation of understanding it and will not support deep processing of the word.

Networking the meaning of words

To help learners store the words in different mental networks they need to explore the meaning of words, and practice and recycle the lexical chunks in meaningful ways. Take, for example, the topic things in my schoolbag. Learners realize that the word *schoolbag* is a compound of two words and they can individually describe what they find in their schoolbag, thus recycling all the words that belong to the topic web of 'schoolbag'. PINTER (2006a: 89–90) uses the example of the word *sandwich* when dealing with the theme parties, since it presents *"an excellent opportunity to recycle possible types of fillings the children might know, such as jam, or cucumber sandwich, honey, fish, or cheese sandwich, tomato or chicken sandwich, etc., or even silly ones such as frog, or snake sandwiches"*. Children can invent sandwiches and design individual menus, realizing in the process how sandwich *"can interact with language they already know"*. (PINTER 2006a: 90). Allowing learners to create silly sandwiches also supports word retention because it creates an emotional anchor where children laugh about their respective wild mixtures. Anything that is strange, funny or surprising will help learners strengthen the storage of words. Having successfully stored the words, learners will then be able to also retrieve the words for language use in meaningful tasks like the one just mentioned.

5 Creating grammatical awareness

The importance of grammar in language learning

As we have shown above grammatical knowledge develops mostly unconsciously when we pursue a lexical approach in the primary classroom. At the same time teachers can slowly guide their learners to the first stages of grammatical awareness. CAMERON lists the main points why grammar is relevant in communication:

- *Grammar is necessary to express precise meanings in discourse;*
- *Grammar ties closely into vocabulary in learning and using the foreign language;*
- *Grammar learning can evolve from the learning of chunks of language;*
- *Talking about something meaningful with the child can be a useful way to introduce new grammar;*
- *Grammar can be taught without technical labels (e.g. 'intensifiying adverb')* (CAMERON 2001: 98).

In the last few years, there have increasingly been calls for a more explicit teaching of grammatical awareness (see for example KUHN 2006, MINDT & SCHLÜTER 2007). The important difference to the traditional cognitive approach of grammar teaching is that now the focus is on language use and not language knowledge. TEUBNER sums up the reasons why such an approach is necessary for young learners (see also KIEWEG 2005):

- *Kinder im Grundschulalter verfügen über die für Bewusstmachung nötigen kognitiven Voraussetzungen.*
- *Ohne Bewusstmachung geht vielen Kindern vieles durcheinander.*
- *Bewusstmachung als Lernhilfe im Englischunterricht der Primarstufe ist vor allem für lernschwache Schüler unerlässlich.*

▶ *Viele Schüler haben ein Bedürfnis nach bewusstmachenden Hilfen und fordern diese auch* (Teubner 2006: 36; she also provides a good historical overview of the debate about strengthening the grammar focus).

Ways of developing grammatical awareness

When learning their mother tongue children receive extensive language input and sufficient time to implicitly develop grammatical awareness. Time and input are restricted in school, hence we need to support learners in discovering the grammatical functions of language. Based on a slightly changed model by Karmiloff-Smith, Mindt and Schlüter have suggested a four-phase model that helps learners to slowly move from implicit to a more explicit awareness about grammar. Here is an example:

Stufe	Beispiel	Stadium der Sprachbeherrschung
Implizit 1	T: *Hello* L: *Hello* T: *Good Morning* L: *Good morning*	imitatives Können
Implizit 2	*One of the mouses* *I bringed three dolls*	übertragbares Können
Explizit 1	*one dog* *two dogs* *a cat* *some cats* *the horse* *many horses* *one lion* ...	übertragbares Wissen
Explizit 2	*"Ist das immer so, dass in der Mehrzahl ein 's' steht?"*	formulierbares Wissen

(Mindt & Schlüter 2007: 33)

While learners only imitate the teacher at first (implicit 1), they soon generate their own hypotheses about how grammar functions (implicit 2). In this example they have noticed the regular past tense which they transfer to irregular forms. This is an example of over-generalization. The same thing happens with the plural form (*mouses – bringed*). On the next level (explicit 1), learners already show grammatical knowledge, by producing the correct plural form, and finally (explicit 2) they even identify and make assumptions about a possible rule. While this example is helpful to show the competences learners are capable of developing we need to be careful not to turn this into a formalized teaching approach by trying to cover all four phases whenever we deal with a grammatical aspect, as it is suggested in some of the literature (see Dudek 2006, Möglich 2006). It is much more important to create and use opportunities in the classroom to help learners discover or notice words in the lexical chunks and make them realize that these words can be substituted by other words, thus enabling them to use language creatively. Teachers need to look out for these chances to use spontaneous learner contributions (see the rule example above) to insert an awareness sequence rather than pre-planning it, i.e. follow the child when it is ready for it. Batstone (1994) has described the process of grammar learning in three phases, from (re)noticing to (re)structuring to proceduralizing. While the first two phases cover Mindt's and Schlüter's first three phases, it is proceduralizing which also needs to be integrated into the learning process. As Cameron (2001: 109) says, *"proceduralization is the stage of making the new grammar ready for instant and fluent use in communication and requires practice in choosing and using the form to express meaning"*. As a final step we would like to present some examples of how Batstone's three phases can be supported in the classroom through different tasks.

Language practice activities	Example
Noticing (help L. become aware of new structures): 1. Listen and notice	L. listen to a story that includes prepositions. They tick off the prepositions in an easy grid (that visualizes the grammar function) where they have to decide, for example, if the cat is under or on the table.
2. Using hand puppets (→ ch. 9)	L. listen to a story that describes daily activities (simple present). After having listened to the story twice the T. can use a calendar to ask L. to repeat the key events on their own without the story context, thus helping L. to notice the structure. L. can then repeat the routines by filling in an empty calendar.
Structuring (help L. internalise new structures): 1. Questionnaires, surveys, quizzes	L. interview each other about their food preferences, using the full question form. When presenting their findings to the class, L. will need to re-structure the pattern ('Do you like...?') to a new one: *Six people like pizza, Susanne only likes spaghetti.*
2. Information gap activities	Calendar task – finding a time and activity two L. want to do (the two calendars have different entries): *Shall we meet on Friday? No, sorry, on Fridays I...*
Proceduralizing (help L. automatize grammar use): 1. Describing fantasy animals	L. describe their own or a fantasy animal to the whole class. The public presentation (prepared for by rehearsing) will justify attention to correct form, allowing L. to use specific gram. forms.

(based on Cameron 2001: 114–20, Halliwell 1992: 44)