

Lesson Plan – Introduction to Lexical Phrases

Learning Objectives / Rational

Lexical phrases are sequences of words that collocate, are often idiomatic, have a high-frequency of occurrence, and perform specific rhetorical functions that can be applied across multiple disciplines and discourse types. Corpus studies have shown that lexical phrases appear in high frequency in published academic writing, but they appear in very low frequency in L2 student writing, and when they do appear, they are often used inaccurately. The result is that the L2 student writer does not achieve native-like fluency because she does not meet the expectations for usage of lexical phrases apparent in the common practice of published academic writing (Li and Schmitt, 2009).

Some examples of common lexical phrases (underlined):

All life needs iron in order to breathe.

USA Today covers national news. The Bay Guardian, on the other hand, mostly covers local news.

His poor grades may in part be due to the fact that he was sick for three weeks this semester.

Classroom Context

This is a first semester basic-level freshman course in integrated reading and writing taught at a Bay Area community college with a diverse student population. The course has the central theme of “Exploring Language Across Communities, Education, and Professions.” The underlying motivation is to provide sequenced acculturation into the language and practices of differing communities of discourse, including an introduction to various academic disciplines such as health, business, and technology. Teaching of form and content is inductive in that guided peer response and discussion provides much of the direction for the iterative revision process. Students respond in writing and in group discussions to published texts as well as to each other’s writing. They are asked alternately to write freely to develop content and to read texts closely to study form, along with their consideration of content.

This lesson is part of the third unit of a five unit course. Students have read at least five published essays centering on related themes of “Different Englishes” (to borrow a term from Amy Tan’s “Mother Tongue”). They have started a journal exploring ideas around identity, community, and the academy. They have drafted and revised a short personal essay about some significant experience of language in their life.

The students are now beginning reading and responding to essays that are more academic in nature. They will be continuing to analyze language for its effect and the strategies it employs.

Student Populations

The students come from a diverse set of cultural and language backgrounds. There is a mixture of early and late arriving immigrants from Asian, Hispanic, Middle Eastern countries, native born generation 1.5, and AAVE speakers.

Conceptual Objectives	Performance Objectives
Students will develop awareness of the reoccurring nature of a few representative high-frequency lexical phrases.	Students will scrutinize several examples of the same lexical phrase used in differing contexts .
Students will be able to interpret the meaning of a few representative high-frequency lexical phrases.	Students will be able to explain the meaning of a few representative high-frequency lexical phrases.
Students will grasp the idiomatic nature of a few representative high-frequency lexical phrases in.	Students will demonstrate ability to use a few representative idiomatic expressions across a variety of contexts .
Students will develop awareness that lexical phrases typically collocate .	Students will properly collocate a few representative lexical phrases by transferring the phrase to a new context. Conversely, students will recognize lexical structures that are not collocated properly .

Lesson Steps

1. T: Write an example of a sentence (from handout #1) that contains a target lexical phrase on the board. Ask Ss for translation or explanation of meaning. Check for correct understanding and invite further explanations or discussion if initial interpretations are incorrect.
Example: All life needs iron in order to breathe.
2. T: Give examples of improperly formed or applied lexical phrases (from the handout #1) and ask students if they are correct. Example: “Would we say: ‘The reason she got the job was from the fact that her cousin is the manager.’?” Have students give their opinions and discuss. Check for, and facilitate appropriate understanding.
3. T: Distribute copies of sample texts and have students identify and underline the lexical phrases used as examples in handout #1. Write down and discuss the sentences that the class identifies; interpret meanings and reconcile inappropriate understanding.
4. T: Write a lexical phrase on the board and check for understanding. Then extract the pattern and use blanks for words or phrases that can be translated to a different subject. Write a new sentence with a different subject that uses the same lexical pattern (template). Have the students create new sentences with different subjects using the same lexical pattern. Then have volunteers write their new sentences on the board; check and discuss.

Example:

All life needs iron in order to breathe.

All _____ needs _____ **in order to** _____.

All businesses need customers in order to stay in business.

5. Homework: Ss look for and identify (can use Internet search) a lexical phrase from handout #2 in a text and then write their own version of the pattern in which they transfer it to a different subject. Students will write their sentences on the board next class. Follow with brief class discussion/review of each sentence.
6. Students are assigned to keep a log of lexical phrases from handout #2 that they encounter (recognize and identify) from any source (fliers, newspapers, textbooks, literature, lyrics, advertising, etc). Students present and discuss in class.
7. For their essay, students are to comment in their cover letter when and how they have used any lexical phrases from handout #2.

Materials

White board to be used to write examples. Students will create sentences using lexical phrases and write them on the board for group review and discussion.

Handout sheets of examples of lexical phrases (both correct and incorrect) for students to identify.

Published texts. Students will routinely be required to identify and keep a log of lexical phrases.

Student writing. Students will practice using a number of newly familiar lexical phrases in their writing.

Follow-up

Pursuant to group feedback and review, students will revise their usage of lexical phrases that are improperly formed.

Conclusion

Lexical phrases are difficult for L2 learners to acquire because of their idiomatic nature, large number and variety, and high-risk associations. Acquisition is dependent upon, and supported by extensive reading to gain familiarity with common usage. The objective of the approach in this lesson is to stimulate an active awareness and perception of the prevalent usage of lexical phrases. The requirement for regular logging of recognized instances of lexical phrases helps to sustain developing awareness. The cover letter commentary motivates practice and experimentation with using new lexical phrases.

Lexical phrase handout #1

Correct collocations

in order to (3 word phrase)

All life needs iron in order to breathe.

In order to protect the data we can encrypt it.

NASA is cutting science programs in order to refocus funding on space exploration.

on the other hand (4 word phrase)

USA Today covers national news. The Bay Guardian, on the other hand, mostly covers local news.

Corporate profits pushed higher this year. But most workers, on the other hand, saw their wages stagnate or even decline.

Employees are obligated to show up on time and do their best work. The company, on the other hand, is responsible for providing safe, non-discriminatory working conditions.

due to the fact that (5 word phrase)

Due to the fact that the valves automatically shut off when the system overheats, a potential catastrophe was averted.

His poor grades may in part be due to the fact that he was sick for three weeks this semester.

I think they're success is due to the fact that they place such importance on innovation.

Incorrect collocations

On the order to earn high wages, you need to have skills or knowledge that is in demand.

The Dutch are not known for making great wines. Their beer, on the other, is world famous.

The reason she got the job was from the fact that her cousin is the manager.

Extracted patterns

1. All _____ needs _____ **in order to** _____.
2. _____ are obligated to _____. But _____, **on the other hand**, _____ is responsible for _____.
3. I think _____ is **due to the fact that** _____.

Lexical Phrase Handout #2

Table 1. Most frequent 3-word, 4-word and 5-word bundles in a 3.5 million word academic corpus

3-Word	4-Word	5-Word
in order to	on the other hand	on the other hand the
in terms of	at the same time	at the end of the
one of the	in the case of	it should be noted that
the use of	the end of the	it can be seen that
as well as	as well as the	due to the fact that

Source: Hyland, Ken. As can be seen: Lexical bundles and disciplinary variation. *English for Specific Purposes* 27 (2008) 4–21