2 Words and their meanings

2.1 Conceptual meaning

If a group of language learners are shown three or four examples of a drinking vessel and told that each one is a 'cup', they will quickly establish some of the features that constitute a 'cup' in English. Indeed, for most learners this will simply involve attaching a new name to a familiar object for which there is an equivalent word in their own language, so recognising and naming other cups on subsequent occasions should not, in principle, be difficult. However, unlike a word such as 'sun' or 'moon', which refers to a single fixed entity, 'cup' is relatively indeterminate in meaning. Subtle differences in material, shape or function are all sufficient for the object to cease being a cup (in English). Languages rarely divide up the world in exactly the same way, and so we should not be surprised if we find students using the word 'cup' to describe an object which is in fact a 'glass', a 'mug' or even a 'bowl'. Even students whose mother tongue categorises this group of objects in the same way as English, cannot be sure that this is the case until they have learnt it. To understand a word fully, therefore, a student must know not only what it refers to, but also where the boundaries are that separate it from words of related meaning.

READER ACTIVITY

The words below can all be illustrated by ostensive definition (i.e. by pointing to the object itself), yet learned in isolation they could still be confused at a later date with words of related meaning. In each case, think of another word or words that are clearly similar to and yet distinct from the item given, and define the distinction:

e.g. sink *washbasin*
distinction: largely one of function and location i.e. sinks are found in kitchens and used for washing dishes and pans, while washbasins are found in bathrooms and used for personal hygiene.

suitcase T-shirt
brochure advertisement
dustbin

POLYSEMY

The importance of recognising the boundaries between lexical items is further illustrated by a brief look at polysemy. We use this term to describe a single word form with several different but closely related meanings. In English for example, we can talk about the 'head' of a person, the 'head' of a pin, or the 'head' of an organisation. Knowing that a single word denotes a particular set of things in one language is, however, no guarantee that it will denote the same set of things in another language. A Spanish student complaining of a problem on one of the fingers of his foot is probably neither a contortionist nor physically deformed, but simply guilty of the erroneous assumption that *dedos* (fingers) will denote the appendages to the hands and feet in English as it does in Spanish. Unfortunately for him we have two different words. An English student learning Portuguese might encounter the same problem in the assumption that the Portuguese word *janela* (window) can be used in the same contexts as it is in English. In Portuguese, however, a window in a house is called a *janela* but a window in a shop is called a *vitrine*.

READER ACTIVITY

Complete the following examples of polysemy in English. If you are a non-native speaker of English, note the degree to which they correspond with your own language. Native speakers might consider these examples in relation to a foreign language with which they are familiar.

e.g.	leg	*of a person/chair*
	mouth	*of a person/...*
	branch	*of a tree/...*
	top	
	tail	

HOMONYMY

When a single word form has several different meanings which are not closely related, we use the term homonymy e.g. a file /faɪl/ may be used for keeping papers in, or it may be a tool for cutting or smoothing hard substances. This absence of relatedness makes homonymy less of a problem, although at a receptive level misunderstanding can still arise as shown by the following exchange which we overheard:

Teacher: If you go to a football match in England it's better to buy a stand ticket.

Student: Yes, OK, but is it possible to sit as well?

Strictly speaking, this is an example of partial homonymy, as the confusion arises from the different meanings of a word when used in a different grammatical form i.e. 'stand' as a noun and verb. Nevertheless it is

perplexing to find that the noun denotes that part of a stadium that is usually covered and furnished with seats, in apparent contradiction to the meaning of the verb.

SYNONYMY

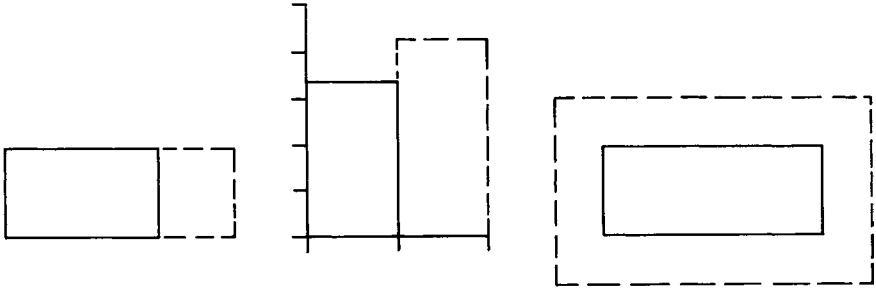
Another difficulty with meaning arises with groups of words that share a general sense and so may be interchangeable in a limited number of contexts, but which on closer inspection reveal conceptual differences. Consider the following sentence:

The company has decided to extend its range of products.

The general sense of 'extend' here is to enlarge or make bigger, and in this context the word could be replaced by 'increase' or 'expand'. Now look at the following examples:

We are going to	*extend* increase the kitchen by ten feet this year. expand
We want to	extend *increase* our sales by ten per cent next year. expand
The metal will	extend increase if we heat it. *expand*

In these examples only the italicised verb is correct, and diagrammatically we could illustrate a refinement to the general sense of enlargement in the following way:



extend increase expand

In practice these notions of enlargement are still variable and there remain overlapping areas, particularly in the case of 'extend' versus 'increase', and 'increase' versus 'expand'.

READER ACTIVITY

For each pair of words below, think of a context in which the items are interchangeable and a context in which only one of the words can be used:
e.g. refuse/reject

a) I'm afraid they | refused / rejected | our offer.

b) We reject goods that do not meet the required standard.

target/goal
shallow/superficial
fetch/bring
to rush/to hurry
think/believe

Words may also be ostensibly identical in meaning yet have a different reference. 'Umpires' and 'referees' perform identical tasks but whereas cricket and tennis have umpires, most other sports have referees. And why should lawn tennis be played on a court and football on a pitch?

One of the most exasperating examples of this for learners of English concerns the numeral '0', as can be seen from the following:

My phone number is six o/əʊ/ two seven.
Italy beat Spain two *nil* in the football match.
You must subtract *nought* point seven.
It was ten degrees below *zero* in Canada yesterday.
John McEnroe is leading forty *love* in this game. (tennis)

Teaching implications

The problems outlined in the preceding section may seem to present teachers with an extremely daunting task. If learners can only achieve a clear and comprehensive understanding of a lexical item through an exhaustive analysis of the conceptual boundaries that separate it from related items, teachers may be wondering when they will find the time to teach anything but vocabulary. In practice, there has to be a compromise, and before embarking on a lengthy analysis the teacher must first be convinced that the time will be well spent. For example: is the item of particular importance for the students? Is there a likelihood that a cursory explanation will lead to immediate or later confusion? Is the item required for productive purposes? Are the surrounding items that may be drawn into the teaching point also useful? If the teacher is satisfied that none of these questions will yield a positive answer, he should not feel guilty about glossing over some of the features of the item that may be essential for effective productive use. Returning to an earlier

example, it does seem appropriate with beginners or elementary students to teach 'glass' alongside 'cup'. Both items are likely to be useful productive items, and their conceptual similarity makes it imperative that the distinction between them is clearly drawn. 'Mug' on the other hand, is a lower frequency item and the meaning is quite adequately covered by a knowledge of 'cup'. Time spent refining the concepts and highlighting the differences is therefore unnecessary.

The position we have taken with regard to 'cup' and 'mug' reflects the widely held view that lower levels should be spared lexis that is superfluous to immediate need, or involves conceptual difficulties that may not easily be conveyed without using language of comparable complexity. Translation is obviously one way round the problem of explaining difficult concepts, although a suitable mother-tongue equivalent is not always available and the teacher may be forced into lengthy mother-tongue explanations to clarify a concept. For important items this is justifiable, but there is the danger of the lessons being dominated by the mother tongue; in the long term this may not be a desirable development. We will be returning to this subject in more detail in part B.

Without translation at their disposal, teachers would certainly be wise to give careful consideration to abstract items before entering into lengthy and possibly futile explanations. Unfortunately it is unrealistic to try and extend this protection to a point where elementary students are only exposed to concrete unambiguous items. Learners will almost certainly require conceptually difficult vocabulary to meet their own language needs, regardless of whether they are beginners or extremely advanced. Items such as 'training' and 'experience' are potentially very difficult for certain nationalities but may well be essential lexis at a very low level, particularly with business students. When these situations occur, teachers should not be worried about giving an item the detailed attention it deserves, and neither should they feel guilty about making the best possible use of bilingual dictionaries.

If you decide that an item does not warrant serious attention your teaching should still be informed by an awareness of the potential problems. The students may be quite satisfied with a quick mime to illustrate 'shiver', but you should not be surprised if they then 'shiver' with 'fear' or 'excitement' in their compositions. Had the possible confusion with 'tremble' and 'shake' been anticipated, these student errors could have been avoided by the briefest of explanations. Anticipating the problems though, is not easy, and there is no substitute for the classroom experience that enables teachers to know when and where problems are likely to occur. Dictionaries offer some guidance, although a more effective reference source is often the *Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English*, as it groups items within semantic fields and so brings together words that may well have conceptual similarities. First Certificate and Profi-

ciency course books are another useful source, not because they necessarily solve the problems for you, but they do at least draw attention to many areas of common confusion.

2.2 Affective meaning

We are using this term to cover the attitudinal and emotional factors which can be expressed in an item of vocabulary. These are often referred to as *connotation*. '... An apparent synonym may on examination prove to have a similar or identical *denotation* but a different *connotation*. That is to say, it may have reference to an identical object or action, but the emotional or other overtones attached to its use may differ.' (Palmer, 1976)

For instance, 'Joanna is *a single woman*' differs from 'Joanna is *a spinster*' in that 'spinster' has a series of evaluative and emotional associations for an English native speaker which would not be true of 'single woman'. These associations may include old, isolated, on the shelf, a sad figure, etc.; in other words, hardly complimentary. The conceptual meaning of both items is, however, identical i.e. an unmarried adult female.

When we examine lexical items from the learner's point of view, we can identify three main areas of connotation which are likely to be of interest.

Firstly, certain items intrinsically have a positive or negative connotation. 'Complacent' invariably carries a negative connotation, so the statement 'I find him very complacent' can really only be interpreted as a criticism. Being described as 'dogmatic' or 'naïve' is equally unflattering because of the negative connotations involved. Teachers will need to highlight this aspect of meaning, particularly in cases where the conceptual meaning alone does not make explicit the attitudinal force of a word.

The second area of connotation involves items which vary in affective meaning depending on the speaker's attitude or the situation. Our understanding of the same item used by different speakers or the same speaker in different contexts may change radically.

One area in which this form of personal expression is very common is in social groupings and political language. Look at the following sentences and compare the use of the word 'liberal'.

a) It's probably the most liberal régime in an area rife with dictatorships.
b) I find the Thatcher government's policy on immigration far too liberal.
c) He's a typical liberal – says he supports the pay claim, but he won't come out on strike with us.

The speaker in (a) is using 'liberal' in a positive sense, whereas in (b)

and (c) both speakers are using the word pejoratively, albeit from politically different points of view. In other words, the affective meaning of an item can vary according to the context and speaker.

Thirdly, *socio-cultural associations* of lexical items are a further area of difficulty for foreign learners. Native speakers of a language have a whole series of associations with certain items and these associations are common to the society as a whole. Ask a British native speaker what he associates with 'Friday the 13th' and he will almost certainly say bad luck, broken mirrors, walking under ladders and will list other such superstitions. These associations are extremely unlikely in many countries, though in some countries 'Tuesday the 13th' might trigger a similar series of associations. These are examples of socio-culturally specific concepts; parts of the way of life of a culture which may or may not be shared by foreigners.

Proper names and place names may well cause learners great problems (see 'Daphne's Diary' – ch. 1, activity 16) and food, drink, clothes and traditions have strong cultural associations. Within these areas, however, there are still likely to be variations of association from person to person. While nearly every British English speaker would associate Agatha Christie with Hercule Poirot and thrillers, some people's associations would also include 'a good read on a winter's evening', others would think of unsophisticated style or class prejudice.

Teaching implications

It is obvious that many items only have a conceptual meaning and in normal use have no emotional or evaluative associations attached to them. However, where an item has emotional or evaluative associations, we need to clarify this for learners. Since connotation is a feature common to every language, students will not find the process new, but will need to appreciate which items have added affective meaning over and above their conceptual meaning, and whether these are fixed or vary according to context.

Text work (i.e. reading and listening activities) is the most obvious vehicle for dealing with this aspect of vocabulary teaching, since a real context is essential. Even then, the information provided in the text may not be fully adequate.

At low levels, teachers and materials writers normally present items which are of immediate use to students. In the majority of cases, these items do not have strong emotional or evaluative associations. Students of a higher level will be expected to deal with a range of spoken and written language and this will demand an understanding of connotation. However, it may well be of interest or relevance to a low level student to appreciate the connotations of certain 'cognates' and to compare the

difference, for example, between an item such as 'radical' in their own culture with the same item in American or British culture. A contrastive approach and the use of the mother tongue may be very suitable in these circumstances.

While teachers are often able to make a conscious decision about the cultural content of their syllabus, there are many situations in which this is prescribed by either the course book or the circumstances. An awareness of the level of difficulty of cultural references in a piece of material will help a teacher to determine whether or not it is worth selecting; in many teaching contexts, culturally-bound materials and themes may be rejected. However, when learners are in an English-speaking environment or are intending to go to one, the teacher is obliged to deal with cultural associations to help the learner survive in the community. So while in his own country a learner's life will probably not be affected by not knowing who the Prime Minister of Great Britain is, the learner in Britain who does not know such things may fail to understand many everyday references around him.

If a teacher were to use material such as 'Daphne's Diary' (in ch. 1) – admittedly this is a very extreme example, and would not be appropriate in a lot of teaching situations – it would be possible to make the material more accessible and comprehensible by examining class attitudes and British humour with the group beforehand. Ultimately, the success of the handling of this whole area depends on the teacher's sensitivity to the group's level and needs as well as his awareness of the connotations and associations of target items.

2.3 Style, register and dialect

Some of the more amusing errors a learner can make in a foreign language arise from a lack of awareness of the appropriacy of items. We gave some examples of this type in chapter 1, and include a few here:

Teacher: Are you going out this evening, Giovanni?
Italian student: No, I have to wash my underlinen.

Female teacher (walking into class): Hello, everyone.
Students: Hello.
Male student: Hi, baby.

Student: The post office is yonder, I think.

We are using *style* in a very broad sense to include level of formality (i.e. slang, colloquial or informal, neutral, formal, frozen) as well as styles such as humorous, ironic, poetic, literary, etc. The following items are similar in conceptual meaning but differ in style:

children (neutral)
offspring (formal, sometimes humorous)
nippers (colloquial, often humorous)
kids (colloquial)
brats (colloquial, derogatory)

Registers are varieties of language defined by their topic and context of use; the language of medicine, education, law, computers, etc. come into this category:
e.g. 'minor' is the legal term for 'child'
'insolvent' is the banking term for 'penniless'
'cardiac arrest' is the medical term for 'heart attack'

Dialect is used to describe differences in geographical variation (e.g. American English, Scottish English, etc.) as well as variation according to social class. We need not concern ourselves greatly with the latter. Geographical dialectal variety, on the other hand, will produce contrasts such as
sidewalk (US) = pavement (GB)
wee (Scottish colloquial) = small (GB)
G'day (Australian) = Hello (GB)

READER ACTIVITY

With each of the following items, indicate any remarkable features of style, register or dialect:
e.g. faucet: *neutral, US*

1 emoluments
2 cosine
3 a shrink
4 hence
5 to fancy something
6 loo
7 communicative competence
8 bonkers
9 bairn

Teaching implications

Style, register and dialect strongly affect the impression we gain of a learner's competence in the language, and this is shown, amongst other things, in his choice of lexis. It is quite common for native speakers to be surprised at the level of apparent formality of foreign speakers, and there are particular problems for speakers of Romance languages through mother-tongue interference:
e.g. 'There isn't *sufficient* milk for breakfast', where the speaker simply means 'not enough'.

It can be equally surprising for native speakers to hear foreigners using colloquial language which is either inappropriate (as in 'hi, baby') or

which sounds distinctly odd unless the foreigner is an extremely competent speaker.

Although stylistic appropriacy is clearly important, low level general English learners have a particular need for vocabulary items with wide coverage; items which are not neutral are likely to be more specialised and perhaps of less immediate value to a beginner. At later levels, it may become necessary for learners to acquire a knowledge of a variety of styles, and a particular register or dialect appropriate to their present or future needs. The teacher's role here is to select language items carefully and highlight any special features for the learner. Some EFL dictionaries can be useful in this respect to both teachers and learners as they often indicate all three aspects. (We recommend that you proceed cautiously, however; 'brat' on p. 21 is listed in both the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (*LDCE*) and the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* (*OALDCE*) but no indication is given of the colloquial nature of this item.) Bilingual dictionaries are often a notorious source of deception in this area.

Style particularly will affect all learners, although the decision to teach certain stylistic values for productive use must be governed by students' needs. Colloquial language, slang or literary style, for instance, may be of value receptively to many learners; this would be particularly true in the case of colloquial language for students learning in an English-speaking country. They will need to be able to respond appropriately to such utterances as:

Do you fancy a drink?
Can I have a ciggy?

However, productively these items have very limited use for all but the most competent speakers. It is also worth remembering that many learners need English to converse with other foreigners, and in such cases, a more neutral style will be more useful.

There is a great deal of completely unjustified snobbery surrounding certain *dialects* of English. Whether a student should learn 'boot' of a car (GB), or 'trunk' of a car (US), or both, is governed by the people with whom he will wish to communicate. On the whole, though, dialect is not a major issue in vocabulary teaching. Students who are learning their English for specific purposes will, of course, need vocabulary of particular *registers* e.g. medical, banking, legal, etc.

2.4 Sense relations

The meaning of a word can only be understood and learnt in terms of its relationship with other words in the language. In our native lan-

guage, we can easily identify the relationships between words; we know that:

'Revolting' can be a synonym for 'disgusting' in certain contexts.

'Sharp' is the antonym for 'blunt' in certain contexts.

'Hatchet', 'pickaxe' and 'chopper' are all *types* of axe, and can be sharp or blunt.

If Bernard is Jeff's 'employee', then Jeff is Bernard's 'employer'.

In this section, we will explore these and other sense relations in greater depth.

2.4.1 SYNONYMY

Earlier in the chapter we discussed several examples of conceptual synonymy, or rather, partial conceptual synonymy e.g. umpire/referee, and increase/extend/expand. It is rarely the case that two words will be synonymous on every occasion – if they were, there would be little need to have both words in the language. So, when we use the term synonymy we are actually talking about partial synonymy, and the following examples illustrate how synonymy may differ:

flat = apartment	different dialect i.e. GB versus US
kid = child	different style i.e. colloquial versus neutral
skinny = thin	different connotation i.e. 'skinny' is more pejorative
conceal = hide	as transitive verbs, but 'hide' may also be intransitive, thus different grammar

As long as these differences are highlighted, the use of synonyms is often a quick and efficient way of explaining unknown words. A more complex classroom example than the ones above involves synonyms with collocational restrictions. The verb 'commit' may be defined as 'do' or 'make' in the examples to 'commit a crime' or 'commit an error', but it would need to be pointed out that 'commit' only collocates with certain nouns and is not generally synonymous with 'do' or 'make'. This area is dealt with more fully on page 37.

READER ACTIVITY

For each of the italicised words in the text we have suggested two synonyms. Choose the best one in each case and decide if the synonym needs to be qualified in any way.

A recent *poll* (1) revealed that many parents felt there was too much violence on TV. Interestingly enough, only eight per cent felt that sex was more *harmful* (2) than violence.

What emerged most clearly from the mass of figures was that parents exercise little control over their childrens' viewing, even when it worries

them. They put the *onus* (3) on the programme makers which is both irresponsible and unfair. Although I am against censorship, the survey convinces me that there should be some sort of indication given to parents as to the suitability of programmes. Even if children cannot be prevented from watching television, at least there could be a warning before the programme starts if it includes scenes likely to upset *minors* (4). This already happens in America.

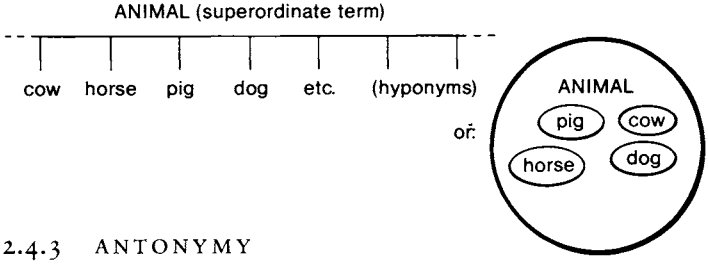
Personally I would like to attach a warning to all those *nasty* (5), *smutty* (6) comedy shows. However, when I suggested that to a number of TV programme producers I was accused of being *biased* (7) – such are the problems of setting oneself up as a censor.

(adapted from *Themes*)

1 survey/investigation
2 damaging/noxious
3 responsibility/blame
4 children/youngsters
5 unpleasant/vicious
6 dirty/filthy
7 prejudiced/subjective

2.4.2 HYPONYMY

It would not be accurate to say that 'fruit' equals 'orange', but we can say that the meaning of 'fruit' is included in the meaning of 'orange', as it is in the meaning of 'apple', 'pear' and 'plum'. We express this sense relation by saying that 'fruit' is a superordinate and that 'orange', 'apple', 'pear' and 'plum' are all hyponyms of 'fruit'. In the same way, 'cow', 'horse', 'pig' and 'dog' are all hyponyms of the superordinate 'animal'. Thus:

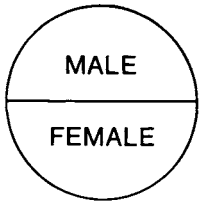


2.4.3 ANTONYMY

There are a variety of different forms of 'oppositeness' which are relevant to learners and teachers; these include *complementarity*, *converseness*, *multiple taxonomy* and *gradable antonymy*. We feel that it is worth examining these relations in greater depth as they may help to highlight the difficulties students sometimes experience if they are asked the ubiquitous question, 'What's the opposite of . . .?'

Note that not all linguists use the same terminology to describe the semantic relations which follow, and alternative terminology has therefore been included in brackets.

Complementaries (also 'binary antonyms' or 'binary taxonomy')
These are forms of antonyms which truly represent oppositeness of meaning. They cannot be graded (cf. *gradable antonyms* below) and if one of the pair is applicable, then the other cannot be. They are said to be mutually exclusive:
e.g. X is *male* Y is *female*



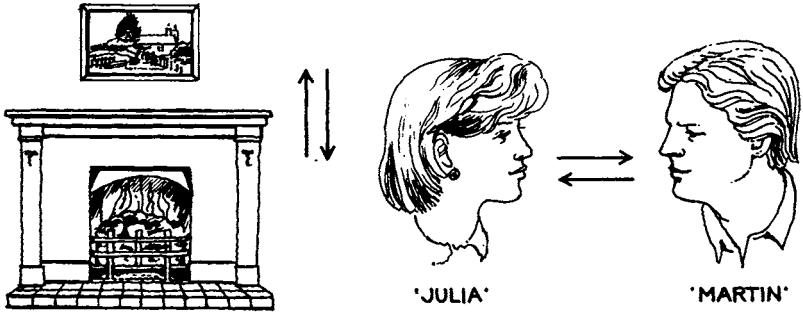
If a human being or animal is male, then clearly it cannot be female. This is a clear-cut area of opposition and a 'safe' one for the very common teacher's question, 'What's the opposite of . . .?'

READER ACTIVITY

What are the complementaries of the following?

1 dead 4 animate
2 true 5 imperfect
3 same

Converses
With certain pairs of lexical items, there is another form of 'oppositeness', called converseness, and two examples follow:
1 a) Julia is Martin's *wife*.
b) Martin is Julia's *husband*.
2 a) The picture is *above* the fireplace.
b) The fireplace is *below* the picture.



In the examples above, (a) and (b) paraphrase each other, and we can see the relationship between the pairs as being reciprocal. Family and social relations provide many examples of converses, as do space and time relations.

READER ACTIVITY

Transform the sentences below as in the examples above.

1 **Tom is Mary's brother.**
  Mary is . . .
2 **David is Margaret's nephew.**
  Margaret is . . .
3 **John is taller than Nigel.**
  Nigel is . . .
4 **John Walker is my doctor.**
  I'm . . .
5 **Bill sold Tom a tractor.**
  Tom . . .
6 **John owns that blue Toyota.**
  That blue Toyota . . .
7 **The geography lesson came after the film.**
  The film . . .

You will notice that in the above exercise, we were unable to ask you to give the *opposites*; had we done so, we would have been forced to accept 'doesn't own' as the opposite of 'own', for example. While there are many cases where the technique of asking for opposites would be clear and effective, there are obviously cases, especially where no context is given, when confusion can arise. A teacher who asks, 'What's the opposite of "children"?' might be given the answer 'adults' or 'parents' and both would be fully justifiable. With converses, therefore, it is safer to define clearly and the following technique is useful:

Sue and Jon are Charlotte and David's *parents* so David and Charlotte are . . .

Some of these converses may not transfer to other languages. Family relations are a notorious minefield where, for example, in Spanish, *hermanos* may mean 'brothers' or 'brothers and sisters', and 'cousin' has a masculine and feminine form. Another common problem occurs with 'borrow' and 'lend', and for a learner whose language does not have two lexical equivalents, there may be great difficulty in visualising this sense relationship.

Gradable antonyms (also 'gradable opposites', 'polar opposites' and 'antonyms')

Sue's house is *big*.
Mary's house is *small*.

Are 'big' and 'small' opposites? Most of us would use opposition to teach these two adjectives, but they are not opposites in the same way as 'male' and 'female' are. In the first place, Sue's house is 'relatively' big, compared with her old house, considering how many people live

with her, in relation to her income and status; Mary's house may be 'relatively' small in the light of the same factors. In fact, Sue and Mary might live in identical houses next door to each other, but the sentences are obviously subjective and depend on the speaker's opinion. Secondly, 'big' and 'small' form part of a scale of values which will include some of the following:

NORM/AVERAGE
huge/very big/BIG/quite big/medium-sized/ quite small/SMALL/tiny

Another feature of gradable antonyms is that with many examples, particularly to do with size and age, only one of the pair is commonly used as the 'unmarked' term e.g. 'How *long* is the room?' (not 'How short is it?') 'It's six metres *long*' (not 'six metres short'). This is the case with antonyms such as old/young, old/new, high/low, etc.

READER ACTIVITY

To each of the following gradable antonyms add the rest of the scale, as in the example above for 'big' and 'small'.

1 hot/cold (water)
2 love/hate
3 interesting/boring (a film)
4 good/bad (a book)

Multiple incompatibles (also 'multiple taxonomy')
These are sets of miniature semantic systems which are of interest to teachers and learners as they are easily memorable, and many (though not all) occur in other languages. Some of these are closed systems (i.e. having a strictly limited number) while others are open systems (i.e. covering a much wider field, often an indeterminate number). Here are some examples of 'closed' systems:

spring	summer
autumn	winter

Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday
Friday
Saturday
Sunday

Using one item from the set excludes all the others in the same system.

READER ACTIVITY

Add the rest of the system to the items below.

1 **liquid (system of three)**
2 **hearts (system of four)**
3 **indigo (system of seven)**
4 **Earth (system of nine)**
5 **earth (system of four)**
6 **breakfast (system of three or four?)**

Here are some examples of 'open-ended' systems. These are, of course, further examples of superordinates and hyponyms.

Vehicles: car, bus, lorry, van, etc.
Flowers: lily, daffodil, pansy, geranium, etc.
Tools: screwdriver, hammer, saw, chisel, etc.

2.4.4 OTHER TYPES OF RELATIONS

There are further sets of relations between items which are less easily definable but have to do with *cause and effect*. The reason for their importance in language learning is that these relationships may offer vital clues when learners are unfamiliar with items and need to guess from context. Also exploited here is the learner's knowledge of the world, and we would stress the need to acquire a good understanding of connectives (see p. 70).

In the two examples below, 'mop' and 'lawnmower' may not be familiar to the learner. Arrows have been drawn to show the notional relations he can exploit to help him deduce the meaning of the unknown word.

The floor's really dirty; can you give it a wash with the mop?

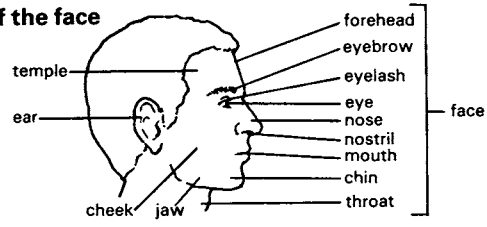
Can we borrow your lawnmower? Ours has broken and the grass has got terribly long.

In addition, there are paired sets which express *directional* opposition e.g. up/down, arrive/depart, come/go.

Part–whole relations

The following diagram is an example of a type of sense relation which is much used in language classrooms.

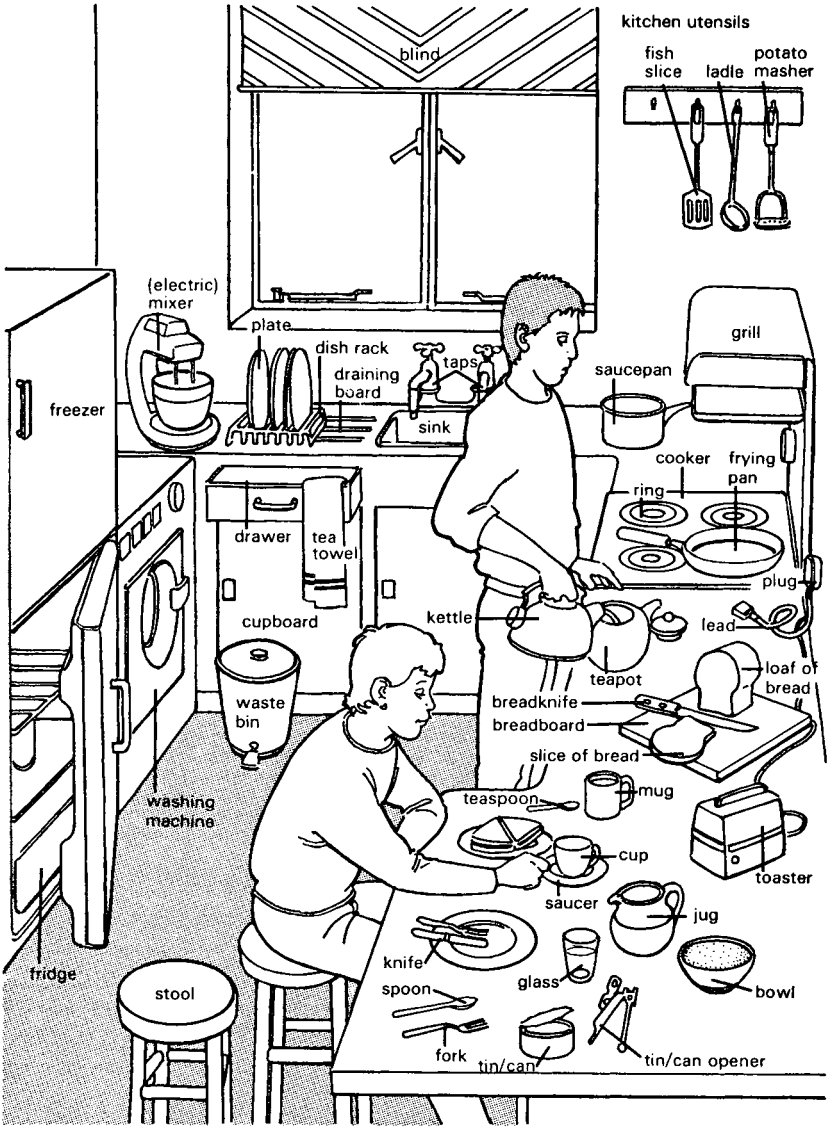
parts of the face



This differs from hyponomy in that while a cow is a kind of animal, an eyebrow is not a kind of face but *part* of the face.

Items commonly associated with . . .

With this type of relation we are drawing on our knowledge of the world. Ask a native speaker what items he commonly associates with 'kitchen' and he will probably list the appliances, gadgets and general



contents illustrated in the picture above. Although a certain amount of individual variation is inevitable, the lists compiled by native speakers of the same language are likely to be similar. There is, however, the possibility of sometimes quite dramatic discrepancies from culture to culture. Few British kitchens have waffle irons, and few Argentinian kitchens contain kettles.

2.4.5 TRANSLATION EQUIVALENTS

For language learners, there is a further type of sense relation, that is the relationship between a lexical item in English and the nearest mother-tongue equivalent. Most learners find it useful to make a conscious effort to link words between languages in this way and in the early stages of learning it is inevitable that they will do so. There are several types of translation equivalent, some of which may be a very straightforward form of literal translation (e.g. *L'encre* (French) = ink). However, many equivalents are only partially synonymous and teachers should be particularly sensitive to these differences if they are using translation in the classroom for vocabulary teaching. On the surface, some items appear to be similar, but there are often cultural differences. English 'bread' neither looks nor tastes like *pain* in France, *Brot* in Germany or *pão* in Portugal. It is also quite common to find that equivalents do not even exist; the 'cup', 'mug' and 'bowl' discussed at the beginning of the chapter do not translate into three separate words in Chinese, for instance. Sometimes languages will 'borrow' words from each other to help deal with this (as in the case of 'wok' in English) but it is equally common for this borrowing to take place for stylistic purposes (e.g. *le smoking* in French, 'chauffeur' in English). It is often the case that proverbs and sayings cannot be translated literally; the French equivalent of 'a bull in a china shop' is 'a dog in a game of skittles'.

A second type of problem occurs when the meaning of an item in one context is identical in both languages but where there are grammatical differences. The verb 'to depend (on something/somebody)' for instance, provokes errors of translation such as 'it depends of him'. Nouns such as 'luggage' which are uncountable in English but countable in some other languages also cause difficulty. A similar example of transposition would be *Défense de Fumer*, *Prohibido Fumar* and 'No Smoking' where syntactic preferences will dictate the equivalents.

READER ACTIVITY

Sense relations: a practical exercise.

When presenting, checking understanding or testing language items, it is common to use the questions below.

Box A

What's the opposite of . . .?

What's the | masculine form of . . .? / feminine

What's missing from this group?

What's another | word for . . .? / way of saying . . .?

Sentence completion e.g. Tom is Henry's uncle so John . . .?

What's the difference between . . .?

(e.g. What's the difference between 'to kill someone' and 'to do someone in'?
'To kill' is neutral, 'to do someone in' is very colloquial.)

Now look at the lexical items in box B:

Box B

a) waitress	g) a wide road
b) to pass an exam	h) to rent
c) a knife	i) army
d) to own	j) gasoline
e) to sell	k) cardiac arrest
f) in front of	l) awful

1 For each of the items above in box B, decide which other item(s) you might wish to check or teach against the known item:
e.g. (a) waitress *Answer:* waiter, or perhaps customer.

2 Now choose one of the questions or techniques suggested in box A which you feel would be most effective and appropriate to elicit the items in box B.
You may find more than one way of eliciting the item, though sometimes different questions will elicit different answers:

e.g. waiter–waitress
Q: What's the feminine form of 'waiter'?
e.g. waitress–customer
Q: In a restaurant, the customer is served by the waiter or . . .

Sense relations: teaching implications

In language learning and teaching, sense relations are of paramount importance. In the classroom, grouping items together by synonymy, hyponymy, antonymy and other types of relations will help to give coherence to the lesson. As a means of presentation and testing, these relationships are extremely valuable, and can provide a useful framework for

the learner to understand semantic boundaries: to see where meaning overlaps and learn the limits of use of an item. Their usefulness in terms of organisation clearly extends beyond the classroom; as a coherent record for the student they are very effective. A variety of forms of storage are suggested in part B.

One final but extremely important function of sense relations is that they help us to make deductions about unknown items. The examples below illustrate how vital sense relations are in contextual guesswork. In each case, the item in italics is assumed to be unknown to the learner.

The village had most of the usual *amenities*: a pub, a library, post office, village hall, medical centre and school.

You may wish to make explicit to the learner how, in this case, the superordinate term ('amenities') signals the examples of the type which follow. The punctuation is also an important clue here. The following examples could be used in a similar way:

Co-educational schools (i.e. mixed sex schools) are more common than they used to be. (synonym)

He was incredibly untidy; the bed was covered in a pile of trousers, shirts, ties, socks and *underwear*. (hyponym)

I expected him to be very hard-working but in fact he was very *idle*. (antonym)

He passed me a knife so that I could *carve* the meat. (notional relation)

Visual aids, diagrams and trees which make sense relations explicit are also a helpful teaching and learning device and examples of these are given earlier in this chapter (the kitchen vocabulary on page 29 and the parts of the face on page 28). Further examples are given in the section on written storage in chapter 6. With gradable antonyms, a line similar to the one on page 108 can be given to the learners. Some of the items can be listed at the bottom for the students to put in the appropriate place. This not only provides a useful framework but is a record for the students too. With text work, students can be asked to underline the items which have some kind of sense relationship, such as all the items associated with driving. They could also be asked to find antonyms in a text for a given list of adjectives. Another way of introducing items is to give students a list of co-hyponyms:

carve pare dice slice trim

and ask students to find out how they are related by using their dictionaries. (In the case above, the *OALDCE* includes the word 'cut' in all the definitions.)

We have seen how a clear understanding of sense relations can provide greater precision in guiding students towards meaning, and in helping them to define the boundaries that separate lexical items. It should also be evident that the ubiquitous classroom practice of saying 'it's the same as', or 'it's the opposite of', is not always an adequate explanation.

Carried to extremes this can erode credibility; if subsequent lessons constantly undermine the validity of previous explanations, the students may lose faith in their teacher. For this reason it is advisable to warn your students if you are using synonymy or antonymy loosely, and give your reasons. Telling the students that an 'excruciating' film means a 'terrible' film is perfectly acceptable if your aim is simply to convey a general understanding without causing an unnecessary digression in the lesson; it will probably allay their fears over the new item and allow you to pass over a low frequency item swiftly and conveniently.

2.5 Multi-word verbs

We are using this term to describe the large number of English verbs consisting of two, or sometimes three parts:

a) A 'base' verb + preposition e.g. look into (investigate), get over (recover from).
b) A 'base' verb + adverbial particle (phrasal verb) e.g. break down (collapse), call off (cancel).
c) A 'base' verb + adverbial particle + preposition e.g. put up with (tolerate).

As our examples illustrate, there are verb + preposition combinations which share with many phrasal verbs the fact that the meaning is not clear from the individual parts; this probably explains why certain grammar books and course writers include semantically opaque prepositional verbs in their treatment of phrasal verbs. In our experience the distinction does not pose a significant teaching problem, but if you wish to pursue the difference we would refer you to one of the grammar books listed in the bibliography. For our purposes we will use the term 'phrasal verb' when referring specifically to verb + adverbial particle, and multi-word verb to include semantically opaque prepositional verbs as well.

In some cases phrasal verbs retain the meaning of their individual verb and particle e.g. sit down, while in others the meaning cannot be deduced from an understanding of the constituent parts e.g. take in (deceive/cheat somebody). It is this latter category which creates most difficulty and contributes to the mystique which surrounds multi-word verbs for many foreign learners. Also contributing to the mystique is the fact that many phrasal verbs have multiple meaning e.g. pick up can mean lift, acquire, collect, etc.

Grammatically, students need to know whether a transitive multi-word verb is phrasal or prepositional. This is because phrasal verbs are separable:

e.g.	take off your hat	take it off
	take your hat off	(but not 'take off it')

while prepositional verbs are not:
e.g. look after the children
look after them
(but not 'look the children after', 'look them after')
Finally, there is the question of style. Some common phrasal verbs are informal, and have one-word equivalents which are preferred in more formal contexts (e.g. put off / postpone; get along / manage). Students will need to be made aware of restrictions of this kind.

Teaching implications

We have already mentioned the obsession with multi-word verbs which seems to grip many foreign learners, particularly as they pass through the intermediate level. Unwittingly teachers and materials writers have contributed more than anyone to this irrational obsession by often ignoring multi-word verbs in the early stages of learning, only to unleash them in massive doses on students preparing for the Cambridge First Certificate Examination. Students are suddenly confronted with ten or fifteen different particles or prepositions accompanying 'put', or 'get', or 'take', with a seemingly infinite variety of meanings; no wonder they are confused.

In the opening chapter we included an exercise which raised the question of how to group multi-word verbs for teaching purposes, which in turn raises the question as to whether they should be grouped at all. As stated in the key, we see little reason to start from the root verb since the items will be largely unrelated in meaning. From the learner's point of view this does not help to make them memorable, and for the teacher further practice will be more difficult to organise. With regard to the similarity of form, we believe it is more confusing than it is constructive.

With some phrasal verbs there is justification in starting with the adverbial particle, as there are instances where the particle performs a fairly consistent function with regard to the influence on the root verb. A good example of this is 'off' which often implies a general sense of separation, more accurately described with various verbs as:

becoming detached	e.g. to break off
being removed	e.g. to take off
being disconnected	e.g. to turn off
departing	e.g. to set off
disappearing	e.g. to wear off

Further examples include the particle 'up' which often serves to emphasise the root verb and express a sense of completion e.g. do up, drink up, grow up; and 'on' which sometimes adds a sense of continuation to the main verb e.g. go on, carry on, keep on, drive on. This last group

of phrasal verbs could easily be presented together to a class of students and then practised through a speaking activity in which the students give directions to each other about how to get to their house or some other destination.

Where the meaning of a multi-word verb cannot be deduced from the individual parts, it is sensible to treat the item as one would any other item of vocabulary and apply the same criteria in either selecting it or rejecting it for teaching purposes. A probable outcome of this approach is that certain multi-word verbs e.g. turn on / turn off, will be introduced at a very early stage and more will be added at regular intervals thereafter. Initially one need only teach grammatical features as they apply to individual items, and then, when the students have encountered a number of different types of verb, a more systematic analysis of the grammar can be undertaken.

There will be occasions when a number of multi-word verbs within a single semantic field form a coherent group for teaching purposes, but this is seldom practicable. The danger is that the teacher is forced to include some low frequency items in order to form a worthwhile lexical set. A similar danger applies to tackling a phrasal verb in all its senses – tidy and comprehensive though this approach may be, different meanings of a phrasal verb rarely have equal usefulness for the students. Occasionally though, this may be a viable approach for revision purposes with advanced students.

Our reluctance to treat multi-word verbs in the classroom as a separate and independent lexical area (unless there is a very clear semantic or grammatical reason for doing so) should not be construed as an attempt to minimise their value. Used appropriately and accurately these verbs certainly contribute to a colloquial ease and fluency which is clearly a great asset. Equally, it should not be forgotten that many foreign learners will not use their English with native speakers but with other foreign learners who may neither use nor understand a wide range of multi-word verbs. Even foreign learners who do use their English with native speakers may find that these verbs, while being essential at a receptive level, are not a prerequisite for effective spoken English. The place and purpose of study is therefore an important factor in deciding the priority given to this area of vocabulary.

2.6 Idioms

An idiom is a sequence of words which operates as a single semantic unit, and like many multi-word verbs the meaning of the whole cannot be deduced from an understanding of the parts e.g. never mind, hang on, under the weather, etc. The other feature of idioms is that they

are often syntactically restricted e.g. someone can have a 'chip on their shoulder', but not a 'shoulder with a chip'; and sometimes grammatically restricted e.g. you can have a 'white elephant', but the adjective cannot take the comparative form and become a 'whiter elephant'.

Although we have defined idioms as being semantically opaque we might also include in this section a wide range of expressions that are in fact deducible from the constituent parts. If, for example, we say that somebody is 'under pressure', our students should have no great difficulty in deducing the meaning, but they would be unlikely to generate the expression themselves from their prior knowledge of the individual words. The same could be said of 'first of all', 'to begin with', 'to make matters worse', and 'out of danger'. To this extent these expressions need to be consciously learned just as much as idioms that are semantically opaque.

Teaching implications

Many of the remarks we made about semantically opaque multi-word verbs will also be true of idioms. There is no sense in grouping them together on the basis of the individual words as they normally give little indication of the sense of the unit; and idioms rarely come in sufficient numbers at respective levels to warrant being a self-contained lexical set. In other words, they should be treated as individual items, taught as they arise, and emphasised according to their usefulness.

Some students develop an immense appetite and enthusiasm for idioms, but often for less useful types of idiom e.g. a wolf in sheep's clothing. When this happens teachers should try to channel this enthusiasm into learning idioms that are useful; and in deciding what is useful, it is worth considering whether an idiom can be incorporated into the students' productive vocabulary without seeming incongruous alongside the rest of their language. Certain native speakers might 'get the ball rolling', but few foreign learners could carry off this idiom without sounding faintly ridiculous.

The following activity is highly subjective but it might be interesting to compare your answers with your colleagues.

READER ACTIVITY

Which of the following items would you consider were worth teaching productively to a group of intermediate students? (*Note:* not all at the same time.)

tip of my tongue	sleep like a log
full of beans	it's up to you
fed up	get the sack

chip off the old block	pull somebody's leg
down in the dumps	make ends meet
raining cats and dogs	out of the blue

2.7 Collocation

When two items co-occur, or are used together frequently, they are said to collocate, and in chapter 1, activities 9 and 10, we gave examples of some of the collocational errors students are likely to commit. Items may co-occur simply because the combination reflects a common real world state of affairs. For instance, 'pass' and 'salt' collocate because people often want other people to pass them the salt. However, the collocations listed below have an added element of linguistic convention; English speakers have chosen to say, for example, that lions 'roar' rather than 'bellow'.

The most common types of collocation are as follows:

a) *subject noun + verb* e.g. The *earth revolves* around the sun.
The *lion roared.*
If we want to describe the movement of the earth in relation to the sun, then '*earth*' + '*revolve*' is a likely combination. It would be less common, for example, to use 'circulate'.

b) *verb + object noun* e.g. She *bites* her *nails.*
On the whole, we would not use 'eat' here, though many other languages would.

c) *Adjective + noun* e.g. a *loud noise*, *heavy traffic*
Notice how a different collocation (e.g. for 'noise', 'a big noise') would give an entirely different meaning.

d) *adverb + past participle used adjectivally* e.g. *badly dressed*, *fully insured.*

Collocational grids are a useful way of clarifying the limits of items, and the grid on page 38 from *The Words You Need* (Rudska et al, 1981) relates to the componential analysis on page 41.

There are inevitably differences of opinion as to what represents an acceptable collocation in English. In the example below, we feel that 'a beautiful proposal', 'pretty furniture' and 'a lovely bird' are all possible collocations.

Teaching implications

Since there are no 'rules' of collocation, this aspect of vocabulary learning is often dealt with on an *ad hoc* basis; it is difficult to group items by their collocational properties, so teachers and learners are generally

	woman	man	child	dog	bird	flower	weather	landscape	view	day	village	house	furniture	bed	picture	dress	present	voice	proposal
beautiful	+		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	
lovely	+		+	(+)		+	+		+	+	+	+	+	(+)	+	+	+	+	
pretty	+		+		+	+			+		+	+		+	+	+			
charming	+	+	+								+	+						+	
attractive	+	+									+	+				+		+	+
good-looking	+	+	+	+															
handsome	+	+															+		

In speech, **beautiful, lovely, charming** and **attractive** are often used for situations in which their real meaning would be too strong, in order to express enthusiasm.

EXAMPLES

The walls were covered with a most { **beautiful** / **lovely** / **charming** / **attractive** } wall paper.

I'll come to see you about seven – will you be there? **Beautiful** – okay – see you later.

She does really **lovely** things for people like bringing them their favourite flowers on their birthday.

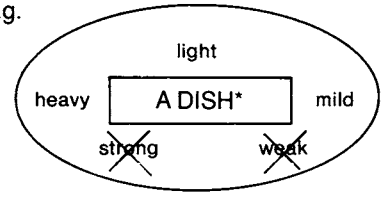
Bacon and eggs for breakfast! **Lovely!**

more successful when they deal with common collocational problems in isolation or as they arise. Nevertheless, collocation can provide a useful framework for revising items which are partially known and for expanding the learner's knowledge of them. Students at intermediate level commonly use the adjectives 'light', 'weak', 'strong', 'heavy' and possibly 'mild', although they very often use them inaccurately (e.g. 'light' coffee, where 'weak' or 'mild' was intended). The following testing activity can be used to highlight the collocations while at the same time revising the adjectives.

STUDENT ACTIVITY

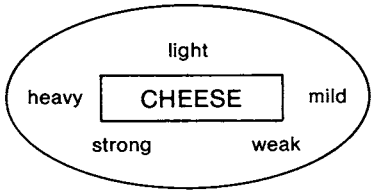
Look at the circles below. Do you know which adjectives you can use with the nouns in the boxes? Cross out the ones which you think are not correct:

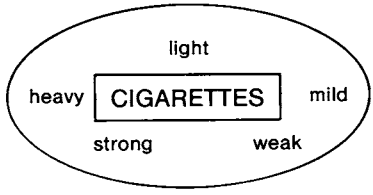
e.g.

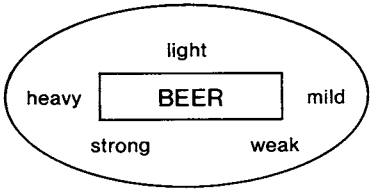


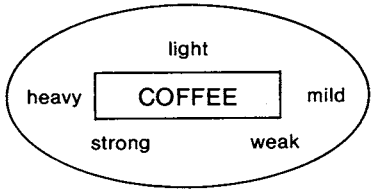
* in the sense of a plateful of cooked food e.g. 'Paella is a Spanish dish.'

Now do the same:









After this, students can work in pairs and ask each other what kind of cigarettes, beer, cheese and coffee they prefer.

By using this type of collocation exercise in class, teachers will be

sensitising learners to the general difficulties involved and this may help them to understand the principle in future. We need to be ready to teach the types of collocation with which the learners have the greatest difficulties; those which are a source of L1 interference, for instance, and those which have restricted collocations for the average learner e.g. to spend, to waste. An item such as 'to do' has an extremely wide range of collocations and it is therefore essential to limit the examples to those which are of most benefit to the learner.

READER ACTIVITY

Look at the following list of collocations of the verb 'to do'. Decide which would be useful to teach for *productive* use to:

a) elementary/lower-intermediate students
b) upper-intermediate students
c) advanced/post Cambridge First Certificate students.

to do the cooking	**to do right/wrong**
to do the housework	**to do homework/an exercise**
to do business	**to do somebody a favour**
to do your duty	**to do somebody harm/good**
to do your hair	**to do somebody the honour of...**
to do somebody an injustice	**to do well/badly**

2.8 Componential analysis

Componential analysis is a systematic means of examining sense relations. If we take items from the same semantic field (and which therefore have some features in common with each other) we can, by breaking them down into their constituent parts, examine the similarities and differences between them.

e.g. boy = + human + male + child
girl = + human − male + child

It is an area of semantics which is of interest and relevance to the language teacher as it represents an approach to the description of meaning of lexical items which differs from the dictionary approach. There have been recent moves to use this type of analysis to present meaning in the teaching of vocabulary to advanced levels, and we include an example here from *The Words You Need* (Rudska et al, 1981). Here, the writers have tabulated the conceptual information about the lexical items.

The grid aims to bring into focus the features which distinguish one item from another, and shows in detail how items are not truly synonymous. The principle involved here is of interest to teachers and may well allow us to aim for a more precise definition of meaning. However,

	making a pleasant impression on the senses	close to an ideal	worthy of being loved	suggest relative smallness	suggests feminity or delicacy	arousing interest	causing pleasure	suggests lightness and grace	may suggest having good manners	having well proportioned features	well made or of good quality	often suggests strength	often suggests dignity	result of great generosity
beautiful	+													+
lovely	+	+												
pretty	+		+	+										
charming	+				+	+	+							
attractive	+				+			+						
good looking	+								+					
handsome	+								+	+	+	+	+	

the idea that a word can be subjected to this type of clinical, accurate analysis is rather misleading; Leech (1983) suggests that words have 'fuzzy' meaning and that there is room for disagreement over the precise

defining features of a word. In the example from *The Words You Need*, for example, it is difficult to see why 'handsome' could not be 'close to an ideal' if 'beautiful' is so defined, and we feel that the words 'handsome' and 'beautiful' may both suggest sexual attraction.

From the teacher's point of view, this type of analysis may be extremely helpful for preparation and can provide him with a framework which will allow him to consider contrasts of meaning. Although this type of study may well be appropriate for very advanced learners, our experience of attempting to use this approach with lower levels has not been successful. Clearly, the scope and complexity involved is extraordinarily difficult to limit for lower levels.

Dictionaries take a different view of the definition of meaning, and lexicographers use various techniques for illustrating meaning such as synonymy, paraphrase, or at times quite lengthy encyclopedic explanations. It may be useful to compare the treatment of the items from *The Words You Need* with some of the same items as they appear in the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (*LDCE*). Notice particularly the cross-referencing:

beau·ti·ful /ˈbjuːtɪ̯fəl/ *adj* **1** having beauty —compare HANDSOME, PRETTY **2** *infml* very good: *a beautiful game*|*Your soup was really beautiful, Maude!* —**~ly** *adv*

hand·some /ˈhænsəm/ *adj* [Wa2] **1 a** (esp. of men) good-looking; of attractive appearance: **b** (esp. of women) strong-looking; attractive with a firm, large appearance rather than a delicate one **2** generous; plentiful **3** *AmE* clever; skilful **4 handsome is as handsome does** the people who really deserve respect are those whose actions are kind or generous —**~ly** *adv*

pret·ty[1] /ˈprɪti/ *adj* **1** [Wa1;B] (esp. of a woman, a child, or a small fine thing) pleasing or nice to look at, listen to, etc.; charming but not beautiful or grand: *She looks much prettier with long hair than with short hair.*|*What a pretty little garden!* —compare BEAUTIFUL, HANDSOME **2** [Wa1;B] *derog* (of a boy) charming and graceful but rather girlish **3** [Wa1;B] *apprec* (esp. of an action) causing admiration for neatness, cleverness, or skill: *He writes with a pretty turn of phrase* (=expresses himself in a delightful way) **4** [Wa5;A] *derog* not nice; displeasing: *It's a pretty state of affairs when I come home from work and you haven't even cooked my dinner!* **5** [Wa5;A] *infml* (of an amount of money) quite large: *He made a pretty fortune by selling all his land for building* —see also **a pretty** PASS[3], **a pretty** PENNY (5) **6 sitting pretty** (of a person) in a favourable position or condition (without much effort) —**-tiness** *n* [U]

The Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English marries the two approaches by providing well-exemplified definitions and by grouping

together items within the same semantic field, which in practical terms makes contrast more convenient:

e.g. **F39** *adjectives* : **good to look at** [B]

good-looking (of people) pleasant to look at: *He's a good-looking man, isn't he? She's a good-looking girl too. They make a good-looking pair/couple* [⇨ C77].

beautiful 1 (usu of women, places, and things) very good-looking or worth looking at: *What a beautiful girl she is, with such beautiful long hair. This is one of the most beautiful houses in the town.* **2** *infml* very good: *That was a beautiful game of tennis.*

lovely [Wa1] **1** pleasingly beautiful: *That's a lovely dress, isn't it? What a lovely smile she has. It's a really lovely day for a picnic.* **2** *infml* very good: *It's lovely to see you again! A present for me; how lovely!* **-liness** [U]

pretty [Wa1] **1** (esp of a woman, a child, or a small thing) pleasing or nice to look at, listen to, etc; charming but not beautiful or grand: *She looks much prettier with long hair than with short hair. She has quite a pretty singing voice. What a pretty little garden.* **2** *deprec* (of a boy) charming and graceful in a girlish way **3** *apprec* causing admiration for neatness, cleverness, or skill: *That was a pretty shot—well played! He writes with a pretty turn of phrase* (= expresses himself well). **4** *derog ironical* not nice; displeasing: *It's a pretty state of affairs when I come home from work and she hasn't even cooked my dinner.*

attractive (usu of females, now increasingly of males) having good looks; pretty: *She's an attractive girl and he's an attractive man.* **un-** [*neg*] **-ness** [U] **-ly** [adv]

comely [Wa1] *old use & lit* beautiful: *She was a most comely young woman.*

handsome [Wa2] **1** (esp of men) good-looking; of attractive appearance: *He's a handsome lad, the handsomest/most handsome in town.* **2** (esp of women) attractive but looking grand rather than delicate or pretty: *What a handsome girl she is and what a fine character she has.*

Dictionaries inevitably have to compromise in their treatment of meaning. One common problem for the learner is that the lexis used in the definition may be just as difficult to understand as the target word he is seeking to clarify: this is true of native-speaker dictionaries as well as EFL ones.

3 Words and their forms

3.1 The grammar of vocabulary

At a very basic level of survival in a foreign language, we can satisfy many of our needs with vocabulary and a bilingual dictionary. A student at a school reception who is querying his sudden increase in fees would be intelligible if he said, 'I ask informations yesterday, you say me £200, no £250.' However, one reason for paying this money is to improve his English, and quite apart from possible problems of phonology or choice of functional exponents, the student needs some guidance on how to use vocabulary more accurately. Notice his failure to use past tense forms, choice of the verb 'say' instead of 'tell' with its consequent verb pattern problem, lack of preposition after 'ask', and the use of the unacceptable plural form 'informations'.

In chapter 1, activities 6 to 8, we gave examples of some of the types of grammatical errors which are relevant to the teaching of vocabulary. Since this is a book which is primarily about teaching vocabulary rather than grammar, we have limited our coverage here without, we hope, minimising the importance of it. The checklist below contains the type of questions it is useful for a teacher to ask himself when preparing a vocabulary lesson in order to anticipate potential grammatical errors. The list is by no means exhaustive, and we have restricted it to the type of information which one could normally expect to find in a good EFL dictionary. Grammarians, lexicographers and course book writers have all dealt with these areas very comprehensively, so we have included a short list of useful source books at the end of the book.

Teaching implications

There are two main pedagogic issues involved here; one is the highlighting of regular and irregular forms, and the second is the role of source books in allowing learners to be self-sufficient.

In the classroom, teachers need to clarify regular forms and common irregular forms for their students. In some cases, these will merit considerable attention: irregular verbs, verb patterns, countable and uncountable nouns, adjective versus adverb are common examples here. However, there is a danger of the grammar point becoming the overriding focus,

CHECKLIST

	Yes	*No*
Verbs 1 Is the verb regular or irregular? 2 If irregular, do the learners need to know the past tense/ past participle at this stage? 3 Is the verb transitive, intransitive or bi-transitive? 4 What construction does the verb take? Is the verb followed by the infinitive, '+ing' form, a 'that' clause, a preposition, nothing at all? If a preposition, what is it? 5 If a multi-word verb, is it separable or not?		
Nouns 1 Is the noun countable, uncountable or both, according to the context? 2 Does it differ from the equivalent mother-tongue word in terms of countability or number? 3 Is the plural form regular or irregular? 4 Does it have any pronunciation or spelling difficulties when plural? 5 Is the noun associated with a preposition? If so, what? 6 Is it followed by a complement structure? (e.g. the need + infinitive, the idea of '+ing') If so, what?		
Adjectives 1 Is the adjective generally followed by a preposition? (e.g. interested in something) If so, what? 2 Is it followed by a complement structure? (e.g. important to do) If so, what? 3 Are there any irregularities when the adjective is used as a comparative or superlative?		
Adverbs 1 For adverbs of manner, is it easily distinguishable from the corresponding adjective? Does it have the same form as the adjective? (e.g. 'fast') 2 Are there any problems in the formation of the comparative or superlative form? 3 Does it have a characteristic position in the sentence?		

and of vocabulary being introduced simply to exemplify this point. As a result, low level learners sometimes learn items such as mouse/mice, wife/wives, bush/bushes, which are not very common in their plural form.

Clearly, grammar books are helpful for learners here and we have listed some useful ones at the end, but we would also like to stress the usefulness of the EFL dictionary as a source of information on the grammar of individual words. We strongly recommend making this source available to learners and training them in its use. We include here an exercise designed to illustrate the teaching of countable and uncountable nouns from *Use Your Dictionary* (Underhill, 1980).

Find these nouns in the dictionary and note whether they are [C], [U] or both. If they can be both, notice where (C) or (U) is given first.

e g improvement	[C], [U]	dependant	
e g importance	[U]	people	
e g horse	[C]	thought	
information		money	
cigarette		glass	
tobacco		luggage	
encouragement		furniture	
optimism		hope	
dictionary		advice	

Underline the correct form of the noun in these sentences.

e g How much (experience/experiences) have you got?
How many (chair/chairs) do we need?
There is too much (noise/noises).
We have only a little (tea/teas) left.
Several (student/students) have arrived.

3.2 Word building

There are three main forms of word building or word formation which are characteristic of English: affixation, compounding and conversion. *Affixation* is the process of adding prefixes and suffixes to the base item; in this way, items can be modified in meaning and/or changed from one part of speech to another. To the base form 'man', for instance, we can add prefixes and suffixes in the following way:

man
man + ly = manly
un + man + ly = unmanly
un + man + ly + ness = unmanliness

Sometimes the process of affixation produces changes in stress and sounds in an item:

e.g. democrat /ˈdeməkraet/
democratic /deməˈkrætɪk/
democracy/dɪˈmɒkrəsɪ/

and may also cause spelling difficulties as in the example above (i.e. manly–manliness). Suffixes may indicate parts of speech and have little semantic value, as in the noun ending '+tion' e.g. discrimination, or may indicate the part of speech and have an intrinsic meaning e.g. '+less', as in 'hairless', 'childless', which signifies an adjective ending and also contains the idea of 'without'.

READER ACTIVITY

The following activity contains some 'potential' words – words which do not exist but which could conceivably become part of the language.
Look at each of the 'potential' items below and
a) decide what you think they would mean
b) give an example of a real word which helped you make the decision.
e.g. a talkette
Answer: It would probably mean a short talk, by analogy with lecturette, kitchenette.

1 a readeress	3 a gaolee	5 a doglet
2 lunocracy	4 a toolery	6 woolette

READER ACTIVITY

Which of the following prefixes would you be able to use with the words on the right? What meaning can you assign to each of the prefixes?

pre+	sub+
ultra+	ex+

war	conservative
modern	human
revolutionary	

Compounding is the formation of words from two or more separate words which can stand independently in other circumstances. There are three different types of compound: adjective compounds (e.g. hard-working, time-consuming, short-sleeved, Anglo-French), verb compounds (e.g. to babysit, to sightsee), and noun compounds. For this last group, there are three main patterns: base noun + noun (e.g. a coffee jar, table tennis, horse race); possessive noun + noun (e.g. my girlfriend's brother) and prepositional structures (e.g. a look of fear, the end of the line).

Conversion, also known as zero affixation, is the process by which an item may be used in different parts of speech, yet does not change its form:

e.g. We've just had a lovely *swim*. (noun)
I can't *swim* very well. (verb)

This process is similar to suffixation in that syntactic and semantic changes may be involved, the difference being that no prefixes or suffixes are used. With certain examples of conversion, there may be phonological changes:

e.g. He works in the '*export* market.
We *ex'port* a lot of goods.

Other examples of shifting stress are 'conduct', 'conflict', 'import', 'insult', 'record', 'rebel', etc. Some may also involve sound and spelling changes:

e.g. to advise /z/ some advice /s/

Teaching implications

Focus on word building is likely to pay dividends for the learner both receptively and productively. With the receptive skills, an understanding of all three aspects of word building is essential if the learner is to make informed guesses about the meaning of unknown items. (Remember, for instance, how in the first Reader Activity in this section, you were able to deduce the meaning of items because of your understanding of suffixes.) In terms of productive skills, a knowledge of some basic principles of word building and specific examples will serve to widen a learner's range of expression.

In the classroom, the amount of time devoted to affixation and the emphasis placed on it will vary considerably according to the teaching situation. For speakers of Romance languages, certain prefixes and suffixes in English will be similar to those of the mother tongue and will cause little difficulty in terms of meaning. To dwell on the meaning of the prefix 'anti+', for example, would be as much an exercise in the knowledge of the mother tongue as in English. This does not imply that affixes similar to L1 should not be discussed; it is essential for the learner to know where similarities exist. The main priority, however,

for speakers of Romance languages is phonological; these learners often have considerable difficulty in pronouncing and stressing derivatives accurately. It is also true that while many affixes are similar, there are some which would be unfamiliar e.g. '+ship', as in 'friendship', 'hardship', 'censorship', is a fairly productive suffix which does not have a direct equivalent in Latin-based languages, and would thus merit attention. The similarities or dissimilarities of English with the learner's mother tongue will determine the amount of time which needs to be spent on this area.

While it may be feasible to teach your students some generative rules concerning the formation of words with affixes, there are far fewer practical rules of compounding and conversion. For lower level students therefore, the best policy is simply to treat the derivatives as individual items and teach those which are most important for their productive (or receptive) vocabulary.

However, you may wish to deal with certain areas grammatically. A good example here would be the constructions used in noun phrases (e.g. 'the leg of the table' and 'the table leg' are acceptable, but 'the table's leg' is incorrect). A full analysis of this can be found in Swan (1980). Attention to noun + noun combinations is also helpful; students whose L1 puts modifiers after nouns tend to confuse items such as 'horse race' (i.e. a race for horses) and 'racehorse' (a horse which races). In cases such as these, the second noun generally acts as the 'head' and the first noun is used adjectivally. Where the rules of all forms of word building are too complex for the level of your students, you simply need to assess the value of teaching the derivatives of individual items. In the case of 'industry' for instance, the basic derivatives are 'industrial', 'industrialist' and 'to industrialise'. At elementary level, the last two of these are probably less useful items. (Obviously with the example above, time will need to be spent on pronunciation.)

Equally important is the need to anticipate error. In the example below many students in our experience would say 'She's a good cooker' (+er being a common prefix denoting 'agent'). Dealing with the derivatives below will also provide students with a wider range of utterances and allow them greater flexibility in production:

e.g. She	is a good cook.			The chicken	was undercooked.
	cooks very well.				wasn't cooked enough.
	is good at	cooking.		The chicken	was overcooked.
		cookery.			was cooked too long.

3.3 Pronunciation

Sadly it is not uncommon for learners of a foreign language to find that their lexical knowledge is rendered almost useless by their inability to make themselves intelligible when they speak. Such painful experiences are not confined to production either, for it is equally true that unfamiliarity with correct pronunciation can result in the learner failing to understand words in connected speech that he understands clearly in written English. Careful attention to pronunciation is therefore an essential part of vocabulary teaching if new lexis is to be used effectively, or understood without difficulty, in spoken English.

SOUNDS AND SPELLING

To many students the complex relationship between sound and spelling in English seems nothing short of a conspiracy to make the language inexplicable to foreign learners. It is easy to sympathise with this view when one considers the number of homophones in English e.g. key/quay, draft/draught; and the number of similar forms which differ widely in their pronunciation e.g. foot, flood, food. Difficult though this may be – and there are many more examples to trouble the foreign learner – it should not deter teachers from seeking out regularities which will give the learner both confidence and some measure of autonomy in tackling the pronunciation of new vocabulary. At low levels, for example, students can be made aware that the letter 'r' is silent when preceding a consonant e.g. card, park, or when it occurs at the end of a word e.g. mother, weather. The exception to this rule is when the next word begins with a vowel in which case it is usually pronounced to link the words together e.g. mother and son. Students can also be shown how the addition of an 'e' to many single syllable words ending in a vowel and consonant, transforms the vowel sound into a diphthong:

bit/bɪt/ bite/baɪt/
rob/rɒb/ robe/rəʊb/
tap/tæp/ tape/teɪp/

The incidence of silent letters in pronunciation is also something that students can learn to predict from spelling patterns e.g. the silent 'k' in words beginning with 'kn' such as 'knee' or 'knife'; or the silent 'b' at the end of words preceded by an 'm' such as 'dumb' and 'bomb'. A fuller list of the rules concerning silent letters can be found in Swan (1980).

Alongside the formulation of fairly specific rules for English pronunciation you can also provide your students with certain general guidelines that will assist them in predicting the pronunciation of new lexis. There are letters and spelling patterns which usually conform to a particular

pronunciation e.g. 'au' /ɔː/, or 'igh' /aɪ/. These should be pointed out to the students wherever possible, not only for the obvious help it gives with pronunciation but also for the reassurance it provides in creating some order out of the apparent chaos.

For all the above remarks, though, it has to be admitted that the lack of consistency between spelling and pronunciation makes it exceedingly difficult if not impossible to base pronunciation on the written form. For this reason we believe that a rudimentary knowledge of phonemic symbols can greatly assist the learner by providing access to the pronunciation of new words i.e. through a dictionary, without the constant need of a teacher as intermediary. A knowledge of phonemics does not in itself mean that the learner will be able to produce accurate sounds, but the guidance it provides should enable him to approximate the sounds to a point where he is at least intelligible.

STRESS

One of the major difficulties with English pronunciation is that the position of the primary stress has such an influence on the individual vowels within a word. Thus the shift in stress from 'economist' /ɪˈkɒnəmɪst/ to 'economics' /iːkəˈnɒmɪks/ or /ekəˈnɒmɪks/ produces a different vowel quality in the first, second and third syllables. It is often this influence on surrounding syllables that makes correct stress such an important factor in being intelligible e.g. students who stress the first syllable on 'police'/pəˈliːs/ and end up producing /ˈpɒlɪs/ may find that they are not understood at all.

As with sound-spelling patterns, though, there are stress patterns which are sufficiently generative for the teacher to present as rules e.g. words with the following endings usually have the primary stress on the syllable preceding them:

+tion, +sion	education, confusion
+ic, +ical	enthusiastic, geographical
+ian	Indian, Italian

A fuller list can be found in Tench (1981).

Students can also be alerted to the regularity with which derivatives often conform to a particular shifting stress pattern e.g. verbs with three syllables or more, and ending in '+ate' usually have the main stress on the third syllable from the end and then take the '+ation' noun forming suffix to produce the following shift in stress:

cultivate	cultivation	consolidate	consolidation
dedicate	dedication	negotiate	negotiation
educate	education		

A fuller list of these shifting stress patterns can be found in Gimson and Ramsaran (1982).

Teaching implications

The degree of attention paid to the pronunciation of a lexical item will depend on the importance of the item in spoken English and the extent to which it poses problems for the students in question. For most nationalities the pronunciation of 'disaster' does not involve sound and stress difficulties that would seriously hinder intelligibility, whereas 'catastrophe' /kə'tæstrəfɪ/ would require attention to combat the natural tendency of many learners to say /'kætæstrɒf/ which would probably be understood in context but would stretch the tolerance of the listener. With items rarely used in spoken English e.g. 'henceforth', there may be a case for ignoring the pronunciation altogether. Few items, however, fall into this category so when new lexis is taught and written on the blackboard it is helpful to indicate the primary accent (assuming the item has more than one syllable) and follow the written form with a phonemic transcription if the students have previously been taught phonemics. One of the advantages of having a phonemic transcription on the board is that it acts as a reminder to the students not to be misled by the orthographic form. This can produce considerable mother-tongue interference, a very common example being the tendency of some students to revert back to strong forms for all written vowels, when in fact, their normal spoken English demonstrates an ability to produce weak forms quite naturally. If the students are used to using a particular dictionary in class it is also sensible to adopt the same symbols for marking accent, although the use of a box over the stressed symbol is easier to see e.g. al$\overset{\square}{\text{o}}$ne, as are circles denoting the number of syllables with a larger circle to indicate the main stress e.g. catastrophe o$\bigcirc$ooo. In either case we would recommend the use of different coloured chalk or boardmarkers to indicate both stress and phonemic symbols.

A further point in favour of phonemics and stress markers is that they provide valuable visual assistance. Not all language learners are blessed with a good ear for languages and can imitate or discriminate between English sounds orally from the model provided by their teacher or peer learners. For some students it is easier to grasp both sounds and stress patterns by seeing them represented graphically.

In spite of our own enthusiasm there will still be readers who are reluctant to tackle phonemics in the classroom and in some cases their fears will be quite valid. Phonemics can appear daunting and academic to some students, and if the effect of forcing phonemics upon the students is a drop in interest or motivation then it is clearly counterproductive. In our experience these fears are more apparent than real. Students derive a lot of fun and satisfaction from using phonemics and it can be incorporated into many different types of lesson in a very gentle and non-intimidating manner. The exercise below can be used to develop and

consolidate several sound symbol relationships by revising irregular past tenses.

STUDENT ACTIVITY

Write the past tense of the verbs below and put them into the columns below according to the pronunciation.

drive see bring read write keep leave speak choose sleep wear catch

/əʊ/	/ɔː/	/e/
e.g. spoke	e.g. saw	e.g. slept

Practice in word stress can easily be linked to word building activities as in the exercise below.

STUDENT ACTIVITY

Use a dictionary to complete the table below and mark the primary stress in each case.

Subject	*Person*
psychology	
history	
	engineer
economics	
politics	
	mathematician

An interesting way of revising this lexical set is to give the students the stress patterns and ask them to supply the right words. Thus:

Subject	*Person*
ooOo	oOoo
Oo	oOoo
ooOo	oooOo
oOoo	oOoo
ooOo	ooO
Ooo	ooOo