

COMPARATIVE ANALYSES OF ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS LEXICAL CONTENT (CASE OF STUDY TEXTBOOKS “UPSTREAM” SERIES)

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Summary

Considering the significant role of textbooks as core information storage in the process of language acquisition, this study is focused on the comparative analysis of vocabulary content at levels B2 Intermediate, B2+ UpperIntermediate and C1 Advanced in “Upstream” series of English textbooks. The main purpose of this research is to analyze changes in the qualitative composition of the vocabulary for the topic “Travelling” from B2 Intermediate to C1 Advanced. Specifically, we aim to draw a parallel between the lexical content of the same topic at different levels of the “Upstream” textbook series in terms of morphology, semantics and structure of lexical units. Each level of English proficiency assumes certain qualitative and quantitative stock of words to be implemented by students. We examine such vocabulary components as idioms, fixed phrases, phrasal verbs, and thematic collocations at each level. Comparative analyses of idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs display the absence of synonymy and at first glance low compliance with the subject, but it should be considered that context plays a big role. Topic “Travelling” is fully expressed in lots of words, terms, collocations which are presented to increase the students’ vocabulary. During the study we conclude that B2 consists of the main basic lexical units, the study of which cover the level requirements. Thematic content makes the B2+ level an extended version of the B2 and is intended to strengthen vocabulary skills. Advanced level is distinguished by the great attention to detail and nuances in terms of expressing thoughts fluently.

Key word: English levels, Upstream, vocabulary, idioms, phrasal verbs, collocations.

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1. Introduction

Mastering a foreign language should incorporate a gradual increase in the level of complexity of the material to be assimilated, in particular, vocabulary. Numerous educational and methodological materials, e.g. series of Englishlanguage textbooks, are designed according to the basic principle of “buildingup” of the lexical component: from simple constructions to three or fourcomponent idioms, and word combinations; from a small number of lexical units on a topic to separate appendices with glossaries relating to each unit in the textbook. This principle can be adjusted to the degree of cognitive ability of students at different steps of language acquisition. The skills of memorizing and processing large numbers of words are acquired over time.

The main purpose of this research is to analyze the change in the qualitative composition of the vocabulary for one topic from the level of B2 Intermediate to C1 Advanced. Consequently, our **task** is to draw a parallel between the lexical content of the same topic at different levels of the “Upstream” textbook series, published by Express Publishing, in terms of morphology, semantics, structure of lexical units. Therefore, in this article we attempt to determine

the dynamics of learning vocabulary associated with the three levels studied. The “Upstream” series was chosen because, compared to other English textbooks series, it contains a large number of lexical units, as it is designed for an intensive English course at school or at university. Students have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with basic vocabulary, phrasal verbs, idioms, fixed phrases in the sections “Vocabulary Practice”, “Grammar in Use” and “Word list”.

For a comparative analysis we chose the topic “Traveling” – one of the most popular topics, which is presented at all levels: B2 Intermediate – Unit 3 “Travel Broadens the Mind”, B2+ UpperIntermediate – Unit 6 “Going Places”, C1 Advanced – Unit 2 “Escape Artists”. The abovementioned topics contain lexical units related to travel, leisure, free time activities, recreation, holidays, and other topics as well.

2. Levels criteria

In providing comparative analysis it is indispensable to be supported by basic requirements and standards accepted in the whole world. The Common European Framework of Reference for languages “describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively”, despite the fact that the descriptors for each language level proposed in there “are nevertheless presented as recommendations and are not in any way mandatory” (*Verhelst et al., 2009*). Regarding our research, we focus on standards in terms of the necessary extent of vocabulary needed for B2 Intermediate, B2+ UpperIntermediate and C1 Advanced. As lexical competence is an integral part of language mastery in general it would be reasonable to start with “Common Reference Levels: global scale”, according to which student at the B2 level in English:

- can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation.
- can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party.
- can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options (*Verhelst et al., 2009*).

Criteria for level C1 are presented as follows:

- can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning.
- can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions.
- can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes.
- can produce clear, wellstructured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices (*Verhelst et al., 2009*).

Considering all the above illustrated requirements we conclude that the vocabulary part in the chosen coursebooks must be rich, wellstructured, abundantly furnished with synonyms and present a wide variety of cultural, ideological, historical, and contemporary communicative aspects. Lexis should also engage students in the process of studying.

Acquisition of lexical competence occurs through the training following lexical elements presented at each level:

a) fixed expressions

- sentential formulae: *I don't really feel up to it. (Evans & Dooley, 2008), You'll never believe... (Evans & Obee, 2014), There's a bit of a problem. Alright for some. (Evans, Dooley & Edwards, 2014).*

- idioms: *to be on the ropes*, *to have a sweet tooth* (Evans & Dooley, 2008), *to hit the headlines*, *to lose touch with* (Evans & Obee, 2014), *to make ends meet*, *to be a wet blanket* (Evans, Dooley & Edwards, 2014).

- fixed phrases: *out and about*, *to vanish into thin air* (Evans & Dooley, 2008), *first impression*, *to be the centre of attention* (Evans & Obee, 2014), *ups and downs*, *in the long run* (Evans, Dooley & Edwards, 2014).

- phrasal verbs: *do away with*, *come round* (Evans & Dooley, 2008), *get across*, *take over* (Evans & Dooley, 2008), *wind down*, *use up*, *put across*, *check in* (Evans & Obee, 2014), *drag out of*, *wear sth out*, *put sb through*, *pick on* (Evans, Dooley & Edwards, 2014).

- preposition collocations: *cope with*, *increase in*, *obliged to sb for sth*, *thankful for*, *succeed in* (Evans & Dooley, 2008), *addicted to*, *bump into*, *dispose of*, *fight for sth/with sb*, *gossip about sth with sb* (Evans & Obee, 2014), *puzzle over sth*, *take pride in sth*, *blame sb for sth* (Evans, Dooley & Edwards, 2014).

- fixed collocations: *take the initiative* (Evans & Obee, 2014), *become short of sth* (Evans & Dooley, 2008), *make a deal*, *launch a product*, *take it easy* (Evans, Dooley & Edwards, 2014).

- thematic collocations: *semidetached house*, *fullyfurnished flat*, *travel sickness*, *global warming*, *green house gases*, *security systems*, *satellite dish* (Evans & Dooley, 2008), *guidance counsellor*, *local inhabitants*, *armed forces* (Evans & Obee, 2014), *space exploration*, *onthespot/outpatient treatment* (Evans, Dooley & Edwards, 2014).

- abbreviations: *CCTV*, *ATMs* (Evans & Dooley, 2008 : 84), *NFL*, *WBC*, *NBA* (Evans & Dooley, 2008 : 145), *GCSE*, *HND*, *NVQ* (Evans & Obee, 2014 : 139), *MTV* (Evans, Dooley & Edwards, 2014 : 220), *GPS* (Evans, Dooley & Edwards, 2014 : 217), *GM foods* (Evans, Dooley & Edwards, 2014 : 102), *AIDS* (Evans, Dooley & Edwards, 2014 : 99).

b) single word forms: this includes all the separately taken lexical units that are constituent parts of the collocations, sentences, texts, exercises.

According to the CEFRL illustrative scale for the range of vocabulary knowledge at the level B2 students are expected to have "...a good range of vocabulary for matters connected to his/her [student's] field and most general topics." Additionally, an ability to "...vary formulation to avoid frequent repetition" is also welcomed, "but lexical gaps can still cause hesitation and circumlocution" (Verhelst et al., 2009 : 112).

We anticipate an increase in the amount of lexical material and in its complexity at the level C1 due to the proposed requirements. By the end of the course students should possess "...a good command of a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome with circumlocutions; little obvious searching for expressions or avoidance strategies. Good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms" (Verhelst et al., 2009 : 112).

3. Results and discussions

Idiomatic expressions as well as phrasal verbs are definitely one of the most important constituent part of each language vocabulary in both written and spoken forms. Consequently, "it seems imperative for materials developers and teachers to identify and include the most relevant idioms in their SL/FL [Second/First language] materials and instruction (Alavi & Rajabpoor, 2014). At the same time in our opinion Vocabulary and Glossary sections in course-books should not be overwhelmed with a huge amount of lexical material.

At the level B2 in Unit 3 "Travel Broadens the Mind" there are presented such idioms: *live out of a suitcase*, *drop sb a line*, *put feet up*, *get a move on*, *feel a bit under the weather*, *in*

the nick of time, lend an ear, early days, cost the Fortune, on the edge of the seat, make ends meet (Evans & Dooley, 2008).

Surprisingly, at level B2+ in Unit 6 “Going Places” there are only 4 idioms relating to the same topic: *lose heart, broaden the mind, hit the road, make (our) way*. This fact leads us to the intermediate conclusion that B2+ level can be considered as complementary or rather enlarged version of the B2 coursebook. Almost all the Fixed Phrases and Idiomatic expressions at level C1 appear for the first time: *bring the house down, read somebody like a book, face the music, let one's hair down, off the beaten track, on a shoestring budget, on the house, on the edge of one's seat, paint the town red, read between the lines; at least, at large, at last, at present, at a loss, at times, at odds with, at a standstill, at a glance, at a loose end* (Evans, Dooley & Edwards, 2014). The idiom “*on the edge of one's seat*” is given for the students twice at levels B2 and C1.

Meanwhile, students are presented with the two partly synonymous idioms which occur in our comparative list at the level B2 and C1: *make ends meet* – to have just enough money to pay for the things that you need (*Make Ends Meet*, 2024) and *on a shoestring budget* which means with very little money to spend. (*On A Shoestring Budge*, 2024)

Most idiomatic expressions and fixed phrases are verbal constructions at the level B2 and B2+ and are not short ones. On the contrary students have a chance to add a set of fixed phrases with “at” to their vocabulary at advanced level. From our point of view, it would be a mistake to believe that level C1 must consist solely of long, complex, multicomponent lexical units.

The comparative analysis of idiomatic expressions gives us all grounds to state that the authors of the series do not aim to keep the synonymy or logical development of the idiomatic content. Moreover, some expressions are far from the thematic context of the unit. Learning new vocabulary under such circumstances could be less efficient. At the same time a big role is played by the context of the exercise sentences and plot of the given texts.

Introduction of the phrasal verbs to the students at level B2 is organized in an alphabetical order. Unit 3 provides for training and practicing phrasal verbs with “cut” and “do”, which do not offer usages with a consistent thematic correspondence to travel: *cut across* = (tr) take a shorter way; *cut back (on)/cut down on* = (tr) reduce (expenses, production); *cut in* = 1) (int) move suddenly in front of another car; 2) (int) interrupt; *cut into* = (tr) interrupt; *cut off* = 1) (tr) disconnect; 2) (tr) isolate (usually places); *cut out* = (tr) omit; *be cut out for/to be* = be suited for (a profession); *cut up* = (tr) cut into small pieces; *do away with* = (tr) abolish; *do down* = (tr) speak badly of sb; *do in* = (tr) kill; *do up* = (tr) fasten; tie; *do with* = (tr) want; *do without* = (tr) live or continue without having sth/sb (Evans & Dooley, 2008).

Phrasal verbs at UpperIntermediate (B2+) are more topic-oriented: *hold up* = 1) (tr) delay, *see off* = (tr) accompany a traveller to his/her plane, train, etc, *get off* = to leave a place, usually in order to start a journey (*Get Off*, 2024), *check in* = (int) arrive at a hotel, be given the room key and fill in any necessary forms, *set off* = (int) start a journey, *take off* = (int) (of planes) leave the ground; (tr) (of time) take time as a holiday, *break down* = 1) (int) (of machinery) stop working, *pick sb up* = (tr) go somewhere and take sb away (often in a car), *slow down* = (tr) move more slowly/reduce speed (Evans & Obee, 2014).

Phrasal verbs in terms of language acquisition are not the aspect of vocabulary that could be considered as easy for memorizing. Consequently, to our mind the implementation of phrasal verbs into language usage routine should be organized through the wide web of associations, thematic correspondence, imaginative spidergrams. We tend to assume that the set of phrasal verbs at B2+ serves these tasks successfully.

Analysing a range of phrasal verbs presented at the advanced level needs to be done with caution on the context they are used in. That is because in contrast with the previous level these

phrasal verbs are universal and are not fixed to any topic: *put aside* = save (money), *put back* = replace, *put down* = criticize, *put off* = postpone, *put sb through* = cause sb to endure (pain, hardship), *put up* = construct, assemble, *put up with* = tolerate, *set sb back* = cost, *set in* = continue, develop, *set off* = embark (on a journey) (Evans, Dooley & Edwards, 2014).

Students should be taught to express thoughts by implementing not just apparent thematic equivalents, but also all the variety of instruments and tools a language possesses. Investigation of the synonymy factor of phrasal verbs is not possible, since we do not see any features of it. Presumably the authors of the series did not set this as a goal as in the case of idioms.

Above it has been already mentioned that the “Upstream” coursebooks contain vast number of lexical units. Within the context of selected topic “Travel Broadens the Mind” all the new vocabulary at B2 level relates to:

- places/destinations: *secluded beach, trendy shop, luxury hotel, historical sites*;
- types of holiday: *adventure/cultural/package/island holiday*;
- vacation activities: *go scuba diving, take leisurely strolls, try delicious local cuisine see local wildlife*;
- weather condition: *rainy season, temperature below freezing, boiling hot, weather forecast*;
- travel essentials: *insect repellent, first aid kit, sunglasses, swimsuit, money belt, guidebook, raincoat, sandals, hairdryer*;
- holiday troubles: *travel sickness, flat tyre, noisy guests, flight delay, terrible food, power cut*;
- natural areas: *snowcapped mountain, desert island (p.41), The White Cliffs, The Rocky Mountains (Evans & Dooley, 2008)*.

Compared to the content of the previous level it is clear that B2+ is more detailed in terms of vocabulary. In the Unit “Going Places” following groups are presented:

- types of holiday: *beach holiday, safari, skiing holiday, camping holiday, cycling holiday, walking holiday*;
- aspect of holidays: *charter flight, departure lounge, seaside resort, tourist attraction*;
- holiday objects: *sunscreen, camera, alarm clock, insect repellent, camera*;
- types of roads: *dual carriageway, lane, flyover, track, motorway, bypass, ring road*;
- types of travelers: *sightseer, rambler, globetrotter, explorer, backpacker, pilgrim*;
- types of trips: *weekend break, flight, cruise, stopover, extended stay, flying visit, excursion, day trip (Evans & Obee, 2014)*.

Comparative analysis of two units at different levels demonstrates both some similarity and differences of vocabulary choice. Drawing a parallel between lexical components confirms the fact that level UpperIntermediate (B2+) serves as a perfect tool for enhancement and strengthening students’ language knowledge after completion of Intermediate level.

Both levels are provided with a subtopic “Types of holidays”, but B2+ has enlarged list that contributes to increase vocabulary. Travel essentials at B2 consists of a wide range of words, in contrast B2+ offers less options. Instead of this, according to the exercise (Evans & Obee, 2014) students are encouraged to think about the necessary things for travelling themselves based on previously studied material i.e. at B2 level. Terms relating to the types of roads, travelers, trips confirm the view that generally vocabulary at B2+ is more specific helping to increase the level of lexical competence.

It is traditionally considered that Advanced level (C1) class is intended to polish and bring to perfection language skills, so that in terms of vocabulary content coursebook might be more focused on synonymous variety, distinct terms, lessused phrases etc. Nevertheless in “Upstream” C1 there are the very new phrases as well as those from the previous levels:

- types of holiday: *backpacking, sightseeing, touring, ponytrekking, hiking, adventure, camping, sailing*;
- “escape” activities: *going on a fishing trip/on a cruise/to a fitness centre/on a picnic/to a rock concert/to the cinema/ to a museum/gallery/hiking*;
- weekend pleasures: *have/take time to relax, take it easy, do online crossword, have/take a soothing bath, have an extravagant dinner, have close friends over, book a table for two, take a weekend break*;
- pastimes: *racket, rolls of film, stirrup, saddle, big wheel, roller coaster, water slide, soap opera, chat show, documentary, colander*;
- other collocations: *pristine/littered coastline, temperate/extreme climate, delicate/fragrant blossoms, gnarled/blackened branches, sparkling/winding stream, heavy/slowmoving traffic, fanciful/literal interpretation, unjustified/strict regulations (Evans, Dooley & Edwards, 2014).*

It is worth noting that much attention is paid to adjectives in this section. Most adjectives have been grouped in order of increasing intensity, which enable students to express all the shades of emotions, to describe nuances thereby bring diversity to their speech:

- silent – audible – raucous – deafening;
- mild – chilly – wintry – freezing;
- agreeable – disconcerting – distressing – harrowing;
- undemanding – challenging – daunting – gruelling (Evans, Dooley & Edwards, 2014 : 31).

Much attention is given to other ways of making English speech more emphatic especially with the help of formula Adverb+Adjective: *absolutely fantastic, absolutely unparalleled, totally absurd, really/very intelligent, absolutely/really/very exhilarating, really/totally/very disappointing, absolutely brilliant, really commercialized, really/very intense, really/very soothing (Evans, Dooley & Edwards, 2014).*

4. Conclusions

From all the above, it can be concluded that the lexical content of the textbook plays an extremely important role in the process of developing and mastering language skills. According to our task we have drawn a parallel between the lexical content of the units at level B2, B2+ and C1 in terms of analysing morphology, semantics, and structure of lexical units. With numerous examples it becomes clear that the “Upstream” series of textbooks demonstrates wide variety of lexical units i.e. idioms, fixed phrases, phrasal verbs, thematic vocabulary that serves as a great material for language acquisition at levels B2C1. In relation to dynamics of learning vocabulary depending on the given levels it is shown that students can gain necessary pieces of information regarding the level complexity. Thus, B2 level consists of more basic words and collocations, on the contrary B2+ is more detailed in terms of vocabulary. When the basic vocabulary acquired at the levels has been previously mastered, then the stage of working on variety begins. Advanced level introduces nuances, shades, synonymity, gradation of English lexicon. The conducted research has revealed that it would be much productively and efficiently to keep the synonymity principle through the whole series of any future textbooks. This approach to creating a textbook would form a holistic view of the English studying process among students. An indepth study of the lexical content of the English textbooks at different levels as well as its comparative analyses will serve as the prospects for further research.

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