



Using a Literature-based Approach in the Acquisition of Compounds from Stevenson's novel *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

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Abstract

*The paper is focused on the significance of reading literature in English not only for understanding the storyline but, equally importantly, for acquiring its mostly formal vocabulary and enhancing students' lexical competence. However, what the paper moves centre-stage is the use of compounds in Stevenson's novel *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* – the novel which the third-year grammar school students have discussed in their regular classes. As part of an extra-curricular activity, the advanced students read Stevenson's novel focusing on its lexis: the compound nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. What is emphasized is the process of the students' vocabulary acquisition: the acquisition of compounds 'extracted' from the literary work and used in communication as a sign or an emblem of a cultured, well-educated individual. Thus, the paper not only stresses the paramount importance of using lexically diverse units in social and cultural terms but it also directly suggests and guides us into reading literature as a well-trodden path to linguistic self-improvement and self-enrichment.*

Keywords: language, lexis, teaching, learning, compounds, literature, activity

Apstrakt

Ovaj rad se fokusira na značaj čitanja književnih dela na engleskom jeziku, ne samo radi razumevanja same priče nego, što je još važnije, na usvajanje vokabulara karakterističnog za delo, i na unapređivanje leksičke kompetencije učenika. Ono što je u centru pažnje u ovom članku je korišćenje složenica u Stivensovom romanu "Doktor Džekil i Mister Hajd", koji su učenici trećeg razreda srednje škole obrađivali na redovnim časovima engleskog. Napredniji učenici su, kao deo ekstra-kurikularnih aktivnosti, čitali Stivensov roman, fokusirajući se na leksiku: složenice, prideve, glagole i priloge. Ono što je tu naglašeno je proces usvajanja vokabulara od strane učenika: usvajanje složenica koje su izdvojene iz ovog književnog dela i korišćene u komunikaciji kao obeležje visoko obrazovane individue. Na taj način u ovom članku se naglašava ne samo izvanredna važnost korišćenja leksički raznovrsnih jedinica u socijalnom i kulturološkom smislu, nego se takođe i direktno sugeriše i upućuje na čitanje književnih dela kao na dobro utaban put ka lingvističkom obogaćivanju i usavršavanju.

Ključne reči: jezik, leksika, podučavanje, učenje, složenice, književnost, aktivnost

1. Introduction: Reading literature is inseparable from learning English

Reading English literature is important for students in multiple ways as it involves reading comprehension, learning about

the social/cultural/historical milieu of a writer's time, acquiring new lexis and much more. However, my interest in this paper has been narrowed down and is based on the relationship between reading

literature and learning/teaching a language. I attempt to point out the interconnectedness between the two by illustrating only some “of the varied ways in which language and literature study are related and can be integrated” (Brumfit and Carter 1986: IX). Arguably, the teacher can make use of students’ reading a book in English (an engaging, stimulating and thought-provoking experience) and combine it with some literature-based activities on the road to the enhancement of students’ lexical competence. Though demanding, this combined strategy is certainly a great challenge and, hopefully, a rewarding experience of vocabulary acquisition: new words, naturally-sounding combinations of words (collocations), phrasal verbs, idioms and compounds. In this way, enriching one’s lexis is conducive to consolidating one’s knowledge of the English language on the whole. And, interestingly, by degrees words and phrases both in spoken and written English come to be used almost naturally and spontaneously – the most rewarding experience for an avid English language learner.

Metaphorically speaking, some linguists like George Lakoff & Mark Johnson (Metaphors We Live By 2008) argue that language can be likened to a building-block theory. This reinforces the argument that there is some intrinsic interconnectedness of the words, word

combinations and word patterns: “Linguistic expressions are objects that have properties in and of themselves and stand in fixed relationships to one another [...] Within a language the parts can stand in various relationships to one another, depending upon their building-block structure and their inherent properties” (Lakoff and Johnson 2008: 204) and, accordingly, it can be argued that compounds are a special segment of that multi-layered building-block linguistic theory – each compound is in itself a small building-block of at least two words. What is more, learning a language is “additive, like building blocks” (Aslam 1992: 7) and each new shade of meaning of a word is a new building-block in the ever-growing structure made up of words. Significantly, it always adds to our discovery of the colourfulness and richness of the language: “Languages work in large part because they don’t use needless duplication. Each conventional word differs from its neighbors [...] Language, and especially its vocabulary (the lexicon), is not static” (Clark 2009: 13).

Still, this seemingly never-ending process of learning might easily come to a standstill if it was not combined with teaching students “the richness and diversity of lexis” (Culpeper 2014: 188). Interestingly, working with grammar school students, especially the self-motivated advanced ones, is always an invaluable

benefit: the teacher usually starts from the simplest and most accessible definitions of words and moves towards more and more complex ones. Being selective in the choice of the definition of a word for a particular age (appropriateness), putting a word in the right, easy-to-understand context (contextualization) and having her/his students respond understandingly (positive feedback) are the three obliging requirements for every teacher on her/his road to success. In this paper, however, my objective is not the definition of a word as a single unit. Conversely, my emphasis is on a compound word as a combination of at least two words as well as on the meaning arising out of the combination of two or more words. What follows is a practical, in-class example of encouraging third-year grammar school students to acquire new words (in this case, compound words) while reading a book in English. Toward that end, I have chosen Stevenson's novel *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and it serves my purpose well because these third-year grammar school students are already acquainted with the basic narrative of the novel: they have engagingly read and discussed some excerpts from the novel in class.

2. The Form and Use of Compound Words from a Late-Nineteen-Century Novel as Applied in the Contemporary Context

Before the third-year grammar school students start reading the unabridged edition of Stevenson's novel in English, the teacher advises them to approach compounds as words whose meaning is not always transparent, predictable or easily decipherable. In fact, the teacher attempts to raise her/his students' linguistic awareness that the meaning of a compound "is more or less idiosyncratic and unpredictable" (Carstairs-McCarthy 2002: 60). For that reason, students are pre-taught not to look at compound words in isolation. Rather, they are expected to look at the surrounding words of the given compounds and attempt to grasp the meanings of the new words – the compounds – from the context. In this way, the teacher reminds her/his students that "[t]o understand new word(s), you should look around at the context clues – those words, phrases, and clauses surrounding the questionable word(s)" (Medaille 2007: 8).

And here is the example: after reading an extract from Stevenson's book in class and after covering the compound words as lexical units of different kinds (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs), the advanced third-year students are encouraged to do what has always been my twofold objective in reading a novel in English. Arguably, the basic task is a two-stage process: it means reading i.e.

understanding, grasping, analyzing, and anatomizing the narrative of the whole book and, at the same time, acquiring plenty of new words, in this case the compounds. Put differently, the students are supposed to read the plot thoughtfully and learn some new lexis understandingly.

adjectives, verbs, adverbs and their meaning from the given context.

What is shifted centre-stage and prioritized is the extraction of the compound words from *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and this task has been designed as an extracurricular activity for advanced students; as such, it is carried out on the voluntary basis. A list of the compound words, once selected from the novel, is approached both structurally and semantically. My focal point of interest at this point is clearly defined: the identification of the compound words, their classification into compound nouns,

3. Compounds

(COMPOUND NOUNS, ADJECTIVES, VERBS AND ADVERBS)

COMPOUND NOUNS	COMPOUND ADJECTIVES	COMPOUND VERBS	COMPOUND ADVERBS
After-dinner	Down-going	Undertake	Good-naturedly
Good-nature	Well-known		Headlong
Week-day	Well-polished		Light-headedly
Kinsman	Cut-and-dry		

Cross-street	Extraordinary-looking		
Gentleman	Lamp-lighted		
Bagpipe	Low-roofed		
Reading-desk	Light-hearted		
Ball-room	Loose-tongued		
Self-love	Well-made		
Jack-in-the-Box	Smooth-faced		
Old-world	Ill-contained		
Self-content	Wicked-looking		
Bed-clothes	Chocolate-coloured		
Roadway	Ivory-faced		
Back-end	Silvery-haired		
Eating-house	Self-reliant		
Dissecting-room	Deep-seated		
Cheval-glass	Unlooked-for		
Dining-room	Commonplace		
Postmark	Blood-red		
Handwriting	Self-denying		
Whereabouts			
Sunset			
Fellow-creature			
Pocket-handkerchief			
Knife-boy			
Bible-word			

Lamp-light			
Self-destroyer			
School-companion			
Consulting-room			
Self-defense			
Fellow-man			
Double-dealer			
Shipwreck			
In-mate			
House-keeper			

Once the students have read the book and filled in the chart with the compounds, their understanding of the given compounds is checked through an activity in which students take turns making up a story of logically and chronologically related events using one compound per sentence. Here are a couple of the introductory sentences which the teacher sets as an example and to help her/his students get started:

- a. My **fellow-men** and I were sitting in the dining room.
- b. It was an **after-dinner** sit-together.
- c. Unexpectedly, an old **school-companion** of ours entered the room and excused himself for being late.
- d. He was an **ivory-faced** and **loose-tongued** man with a mouthful of personal anecdotes.

The above-mentioned activity serves as a warmer to the fundamental activity i.e. the activity based on the contextualized use of the compounds from Stevenson's novel. The activity is aimed at raising students' awareness of the social significance of literary language and the linguistic process of the compounding of words (in this case, the compound nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) because "[l]ike society, language is not monolithic" (Stork and Widdowson 2014: 155). The linguists Stork and Widdowson argue that "Language is part of a total system of human behaviour in society and to become an accepted member of human society the child has to learn the social implications of language: he must learn to use the appropriate language for each occasion" (Stork and Widdowson 2014:

155). The prime objective is thus to emphasize the striking beauty of the use of a spectrum of compounds and warn against the oversimplification of and reductionism in language, which is a characteristic of non-literary language. Overall, the activity is intended to point towards “the importance of language varieties” (Stork and Widdowson 2014: 156) and towards the possibility that “a speaker can vary his language along the scales [...] to suit the occasion” (Stork and Widdowson 2014: 161) – a formal occasion favouring the use of literary English or an informal one characterized by the use of non-literary language substitutes.

What follows is, accordingly, an in-class activity which illustrates the varieties of the English language and how “[l]anguage varies tremendously in [...] lexis not only from one social group to another but also in terms of intercommunication between social groups and the interaction of human relationships” (Stork and Widdowson 2014: 161). For the performance of this activity, the students are divided into two groups: the former group is at a formal reception, dinner or cocktail party whereas the latter group is at an unofficial, casual get-together like a teenagers’ party. While looking at the chart containing the compound words, the members of the first group make up sentences using the

compounds as a sign of literary English¹. The second group’s task might be a bit more challenging: for each sentence made in the literary style, the second group should think hard, consult dictionaries and provide a non-literary equivalent i.e. the lexically corresponding word/phrase to the given compound in the non-literary English. The poster with the concrete example sentences is offered to the students to serve as a model or a guide on the road to an engaging, thought-provoking and not-so-easy task:

¹ With reference to the terms such as literary English and non-literary English, I attempt to help my students understand that “it is productive to talk about literariness in language where some uses of language are more or less ‘literary’ than others” (Brumfit and Carter 1986: 10). In line with this, students are guided into approaching compounds as more or less ‘literary’ than other words and word combinations.

4. The Poster

LITERARY ENGLISH

My uncle is always **loose-tongued**.
My **school-companions** have paid me a visit.
His grandfather can sometimes be **light-hearted**.
Miss Johnson's sitting room is not **looked-after**.
Sarah has **deep-seated** hatred of her neighbours.
Jack looks like a **foul** man.
Tom has always been a **double-dealer**.
Jack is one of my closest **kinsmen**.
The new plan is not **cut-and-dry** by any means.
Mary is an **ivory-faced** brunette.

Of course, the students are assigned some time to work on their own within a group and to consult a dictionary of synonyms, a dictionary of informal/colloquial expressions and, most importantly, an online version of Samuel Johnson's 1775 dictionary². It is supposed to help them complete the task more successfully and to encourage cooperation within a group. Meanwhile, the teacher attends to both groups and acts encouragingly and supportively. They are not rushed into making up a sentence but are strongly advised to think everything over, to consult one another within their

² It is important for the students to consult Samuel Johnson's dictionary of 1755 as it must have been the dictionary Stevenson and his contemporaries relied upon while writing their novels.

NON-LITERARY ENGLISH

My uncle is always **chatty**.
My **school pals** have dropped by.
His grandpa can sometimes be **cheery**.
Miss Johnson's sitting room is **messy**.
Sarah **hates** her neighbours **like sin**.
Jack appears to be **wicked-looking**.
Tom has always been a **trickster**.
Jack is one of my closest **rellies**.
The new plan is **as clear as mud**.
Mary is a brunette who has a **pale** face.

own group and to check/double-check the meaning of a word in the dictionaries before providing the class with an answer. An interesting segment of this activity is the way the two groups communicate: whereas the first group of students pronounces their more literary words (compounds) with elegance and seriousness in tone, the second group of students pronounces their rather non-literary equivalents in a casual, relaxed fashion.

In practice, the activity has sincerely been both challenging and thought-provoking for the students. Doing this classroom activity with the third-year students, I have been fascinated to see their curiosity to grapple with the new words, the compounds, in the

sense of working out their meaning and usage. The group work has been especially productive and to the point. Using the chart, the first group has been truly engaged in using the compounds from Stevenson's novel and in making up the sentences in literary English. On the other hand, the second group's task has proved a little more demanding because they have had to provide the non-literary equivalents for the given compounds: not having a chart like the former group, they have had to rely on various dictionaries, make maximum use of group work and provide the most approximate non-literary synonymous word/phrase under the teacher's supervision. Of special interest has been the way the two groups have pronounced the literary words and their rather non-literary equivalents respectively; the slightly amusing part of the activity itself is that at times the students of the first group seem to have had a kind of superior detachment in relation to the students from the second group in terms of the formality and seriousness of speech.

It is important that the teacher and the students discuss the easiness and/or difficulty of the activity once it has been done. The teacher should point towards the importance of language acquisition from reading a novel and to the beauty of using lexically diverse language. The teacher should help her/his students see

beauty, colourfulness and elegance embedded in the complexity of literary expression/self-expressions. Such elegance of speech is a sign of a well-educated person and, most importantly, it primarily stems from reading, reading and reading literary works thoughtfully, lovingly and understandingly.

5. Conclusion

It is through the compound-related and compound-based activities from Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* that the paper has illustrated the goals of my literature-based approach in language teaching: to point to the applicability and feasibility of a literature-based approach in vocabulary acquisition, to offer a practical example of the acquisition of compounds, and to reinforce the perception of language as beautiful in its complexity, formality and variety. Also, the activities have been successful in helping the advanced third-year students "describe things in close detail by bringing words together" (Saunders 2012: 56) through compounding. Importantly, the acquisition and subsequent usage of compounds from Stevenson's novel has given the students a good example of the kind of language/communication which should be encouraged and promoted: the diverse lexis of the literary works like Stevenson's must not be forgotten, neglected or left

behind. On the contrary, it should be increasingly revived and popularized by English teachers. One way of achieving this much-needed goal is the continuous promotion of a literature-based approach in the process of teaching vocabulary.

Undoubtedly, reading literary works in English is a proven way to improve oneself not only in the linguistic but also in the cultural and social terms. Using the literature-based approach in teaching lexis – the compounds from Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* – I have hopefully pointed towards a way of raising students’ awareness of the importance of reading literary works and uncovering the hidden chest of lexical richness. And, importantly, this so-called hidden chest of lexical treasure opens itself up most easily to a perceptive eye, an understanding heart and an insightful mind.

On the whole, the students’ lexical development has been encouraged and their lexical competence has been enhanced through a literature-based approach: they have managed to learn the compounds from *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and to use them understandingly. Once the teacher has created an engaging, thought-provoking learning ambience, a heightened awareness of the variety of word combinations, in this case compounds

from Stevenson’s novel, has been achieved. What is more, the vocabulary-boosting activities have justified my initial argument: the importance and desirability of the “use of literature as a language learning tool” (Martino and Sabato 2014: 5). Significantly, using a literature-based approach in teaching compounds has proven that “language study and literary study are more closely integrated and harmonized than is commonly the case at the present time” (Brumfit & Carter 1986: 10). On top of it all, the paper has pointed out that studying literature “can have an important contribution to make to language study and learning and can help students to appreciate more fully the nature of literature as literature” (Brumfit & Carter 1986: 14)

Ultimately, the paper based on the use of the compounds from Stevenson’s novel will hopefully encourage English language teachers to use a literature-based approach in teaching vocabulary and improving her/his students’ lexical competence. In addition, if applied, this approach will certainly prove motivational and innovative in comparison to the old-fashioned, stereotyped methodology in teaching compounds. For example, it might be challenging for teachers to experiment with this literature-based model in teaching collocations, phrasal verbs and idioms. Importantly, in the long run, her/his students will benefit from

literature-focused language learning:
“Becoming an engaged and motivated reader has social, emotional and cultural dimensions and involves the reader in seeing a purpose for reading” (Cremin et al. 2015: 54) and learning a language, too.

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