

Three Useful Features of Compleat Lexical Tutor (v.8) for Vocabulary Teaching

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It is difficult to argue against the significance of vocabulary in second language acquisition (SLA). Various empirical studies have proved the robust connection between vocabulary knowledge and second language (L2) learners' productive and receptive language skills (Schmitt, 2010). Lexical competence is not only considered as the heart of communicative competence but also the crucial foundation for academic success (Meara, 1996; Laufer & Ravenhorst-Kalovski, 2010). During the previous decades, research in vocabulary teaching and learning has been developing from focusing on contextualized and communicative instruction to arguing against learning from the contexts (Krashen, 1989; Folse, 2004). However, research-informed recommendations seem to be far from reaching practitioners' application in language classrooms. Language educators often feel the inadequacy of grasping and applying effective vocabulary teaching strategies in their classrooms. This

article provides three beneficial features of The Compleat Lexical Tutor, an online vocabulary researching/teaching/learning website, for English as a second language (ESL) educators to employ in their classrooms to provide effective vocabulary instruction, especially in an academic context.

The development of corpus linguistics has been providing effective tools and information for researching in vocabulary teaching and learning. A corpus consists of a databank of natural texts, including writing texts and/or transcription of recorded speeches (Krieger, 2003). Due to the empirical nature of corpus data, corpora offer the pool of intuitions from a great number of speakers, which makes linguistic analysis more objective. Compared to the language intuition of a single speaker, corpus-based information offers more authentic and accurate foundation for identifying linguistic patterns, structures and frequency of particular words according to real-world usages. Meanwhile, data-drive learning (DDL) and computer-based corpus research in linguistics have boosted a new era of SLA (John, 1991). With the development of computerized tools and software, L2 learners are assisted to access corpus data and have more exposure to the target language, thus DDL can be achieved.

Compleat Lexical Tutor (v.8) is developed by Tom Cobb of University of Quebec at Montreal (UQAM), aiming to provide useful resources for English and French language researchers, teachers, and learners. Due to the wide range of resources and functions, numerous scholars have employed Compleat Lexical Tutor to conduct empirical studies in different areas, such as concordance, lexical bundles, and word lists (Cobb, n.d.; Horse, 2005; Laufer, 2011). The results of the research have confirmed the validity of the website and its resources. However, the features that are created for language teachers are rarely used by classroom teachers. Next, I will be introducing three useful features of Compleat Lexical Tutor for classroom teachers, including List Learn, Group Lex, and Concord Writer.

List Learn – How Vocabulary Lists Work

Even though memorizing vocabulary lists has been usually considered as boring and ineffective for learning a L2, there is practically no empirical evidence suggests that learning new words in lists is detrimental (Folse, 2004). As a matter of fact, there have been numerous empirical studies advocate the effectiveness of providing vocabulary lists for L2 learners, especially for beginning learners (Nation, 1993). Folse (2004) suggests that

teachers should not hesitate to use vocabulary lists in teaching L2, however, other complements and approaches should also be involved in classroom teaching to enlarge students' exposure to the target vocabulary and achieve the best effect.

List Learn offers two major options for users, including choosing correct definitions from concordance lines (Defcon2) and interactive learning of three vocabulary lists. The first section is a new feature of the eighth version of Compleat Lexical Tutor. Teachers are able to type or upload the specific vocabulary lists and receive the corresponding number of definition choosing questions. Different from traditional multiple choice questions, there are concordance lines of the word under each question. Students are able to read through the concordance lines and determine the definition of the word. The concordance lines are retrieved from various corpora, which offers authentic real-world usages of the word. Furthermore, users can click on the keyword in the concordance lines and look for larger contexts. This feature combines vocabulary lists with concordance, which increases exposure of the word to learners. The second section provides three vocabulary lists for learners to study and interact with – the General Service List (GSL) (West, 1953), the University Word List (UWL) (Xue & Nation, 1984), and the Academic Word List (AWL) (Coxhead, 2000). These three word lists have been proved to be able to cover relatively high percentage of conversational and academic English speeches and texts (Nation & Waring, 1997; Schmitt, Schmitt & Clapham, 2001). Similar as the first section, concordance lines of the keywords are a critical feature here. Learners are not only provided with the definition of the word, but how native English speakers use the word in natural contexts. Moreover, the “save” function allows users to build their own dictionary with keywords, definitions, and concordances.

For the first section of List Learn, teachers may find it beneficial for reviewing target words with the entire class. Alternatively, if there are enough device available, the teacher can divide the class into pairs or small groups to review or self-study the target words. Regarding the second section, teachers can ask students to use it as a

tool to accumulate their own vocabulary lists outside of class and check their progress individually.

Group Lex – Interactive Vocabulary Learning

The lack of vocabulary knowledge often hinders students' reading in L2. Some teachers ask students to avoid using dictionary and encourage them to guess the meaning out of the context. However, research suggests that even though guessing vocabulary from context is how native speakers deal with new words in reading, it does not work as effectively for L2 learners (Nassaji, 2003). In order to successfully guess the meaning from contexts, a large amount of vocabulary is required for L2 learners.

The Group Lex feature can serve as a vocabulary learning component for learners to study and review before and after reading the texts. Teachers can extract the target vocabulary from the readings first and compose a specialized vocabulary list. The definitions and examples are available from the embedded dictionary. The teacher can also assign the vocabulary to different students by adding students' names to individualize the vocabulary list. After building the vocabulary list, the teacher can present the quizzes to the class or individual students. There are two formats of quizzes available. Quiz 1 is a vocabulary cloze test, which requires the learners to complete sentences according to its parts of speech and definitions. After successfully completing Quiz 1, the second quiz will be available. Quiz 2 tests learners' understanding of the occurrence of the vocabulary by providing multiple concordance lines from multiple corpora. Testees can choose the corpus according to their vocabulary level. In addition, the quizzes are available in print format, which gives teachers more convenience if computers are not available for individual students. The empirical study conducted by Horst, Cobb, and Nicolae (2005) states that this interactive vocabulary learning tool offers rich authentic and comprehensible linguistic input for L2 learners, which is beneficial for mastering the vocabulary deeply and effectively.

Concord Writer – Using Vocabulary in an Authentic Way
One critical component of truly mastering a word is

knowing how to use it appropriately. Studies have shown that even with known words, L2 learners often face difficulties in applying them properly (Laufer, 2011). The Concord Writer feature allows users to input their own writing and evaluate whether the vocabulary usages are appropriate.

This tool can be employed by classroom teachers to encourage students' independent vocabulary learning skills. After students finish their writings, teachers can first mark the questionable words. Then, students can input their writing in the Concord Writer and search for the concordance information of the marked words. Again, all the concordance information is extracted from various corpora to ensure the comprehensible references. Additionally, besides English version, this tool also provides French, Chinese, and Turkish interfaces and corresponding dictionary explanations, which helps student users from different linguistic backgrounds to better navigate the functions.

Conclusion

Overall, the above three effective tools from Compleat Lexical Tutor can be utilized by ESL classroom teachers to facilitate learners' receptive and productive skills. However,

teachers should bear in mind that there is no single supreme strategy for teaching vocabulary; dynamic tools should be employed to promote students' exposure to the target vocabulary.

Through the huge online database that Compleat Lexical Tutor offers, students should be able to gradually achieve DDL and higher level of L2 proficiency under teachers' effective guidance.

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I am currently a second-year TESOL Ph.D. student at University of Central Florida. My research foci include corpus linguistics, vocabulary, grammar, writing instruction, and L1 influence on second language acquisition. I plan to move to Turkey after obtaining my Ph.D. and work in a university setting. In my spare time, I enjoy reading and travelling. My next big goal is to traverse Africa with my significant other.