

# Lexical grammar: The GET-passive as a case in point

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## **Abstract**

*This paper presents a corpus-linguistic case study on the GET-passive in conversation. The aim is twofold: the first aim is to discuss register distribution, association patterns and discourse factors governing the use of the GET-passive as evidenced in the British National Corpus. The second aim is to portray the GET-passive as an illustration of 'lexical grammar' (Sinclair 2000), that is, of the intricate integration of two areas traditionally separated from one another, lexis and grammar. It is argued that the GET-passive construction is poorly represented if described solely as a grammatical structure. Rather, its position on the grammar-lexis cline can be shown to be strikingly volatile. In the concluding section, some consequences arising from the notion of lexical grammar are outlined.*

## **1 Introduction**

It seems safe to say that corpus analyses have facilitated fundamental changes in the way we look into and look at language, so fundamental indeed that Crystal (2003: 448) speaks of the 'corpus revolution'. This revolution has affected, first and foremost, lexicography: it is by now standard for virtually all large publishers to produce corpus-based dictionaries (Hunston 2002: 96). Another key area affected by the corpus revolution is the study of grammar. Here, evidence of the revolution is the recent publication of two, ground-breaking, corpus-based grammars, the *Longman grammar of spoken and written English* (Biber et al. 1999) and the *Cambridge grammar of English* (Carter and McCarthy 2006), following, to an extent, in the footsteps of the *Collins COBUILD English grammar* (Sinclair 1990). However, these grammars are not just ground-breaking in that they are corpus informed. They are ground-breaking because the notion of grammar underlying them is different from traditional notions of grammar.

In pre-corpus ‘grammatics’, descriptions of grammar tended to focus on morphology and syntax, while lexis – apart from being “useful, indeed indispensable, for the illustration of syntactic structures” (Francis 1993: 139) – was seen as outside the purview of grammar. Thus, traditionally, both in linguistics and in applied linguistics, grammar and lexis have been treated separately. Underlying this fundamental distinction is the ‘slot-and-filler’ model, according to which the syntactic structures form a series of slots which are filled with choices from the dictionary (Sinclair 1991: 109). This model builds on the assumption that within a given syntagmatic structure speakers can potentially choose from a total of paradigmatic choices. Recent corpus analyses have seriously questioned this strict separation of lexis and grammar. The lexis/grammar dichotomy is seen as out of touch with the reality of language as revealed in large corpora: instead of being neatly separable, grammar and lexis are seen to inform each other to such an extent that, for example, Sinclair (2000) calls for a re-conceptualization of grammar as ‘lexical grammar’ (cf. Hunston and Francis 2000). A good illustration of this lexical grammar, it appears, is the GET-passive.

This study sets out to describe the GET-passive as evidenced by the British National Corpus (BNC; World Edition) (cf. Burnard 2000). Special attention is given to discussing the construction in light of the traditional separation of grammar and lexis on the one hand and the notion of lexical grammar on the other.

The overall composition of the BNC is illustrated in Table 1 (adapted from Meyer 2002: 31):

*Table 1: Composition of the BNC*

| <b>Subcorpus</b>        | <b>Words</b> |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| Written                 | 89,740,544   |
| Spoken                  |              |
| Context-governed        | 6,154,248    |
| Demographically-sampled | 4,211,216    |
| Total                   | 100,106,008  |

As is shown in Table 1, the BNC is broadly defined by its two major subcorpora, the written subcorpus (90 million words) and the spoken subcorpus (10 million

words). This latter subcorpus can be broken down into two more subcorpora, the ‘context-governed’ subcorpus (6 million words) and the ‘demographically-sampled’ subcorpus (4 million words). While the former contains texts from a wide range of registers (Lee 2001), there is broad agreement that the latter contains texts that correspond to the register of conversation (e.g. Aston and Burnard 1998: 28; Biber et al. 1998: 14; Biber et al. 1999: 28). Following Rayson et al. (1997: 133), we will refer to this subcorpus as the ‘conversational subcorpus’, henceforward C.

In the following sections, the GET-passive construction is explored from three angles: (i) its distribution across registers, (ii) its association patterns, and (iii) the discourse factors governing its use. Note in advance that, given the lack of syntactic annotation in the BNC, discussion of the register distribution of the GET-passive is not based on quantitative methods. At first, however, it may be useful to define the GET-passive.

## 2 Definition

Delimiting the class of GET-passives is not a straightforward task. Collins observes that GET-passives form a ‘fuzzy set’ (Collins 1996: 44) and Carter and McCarthy (1999: 46) note that the phenomenon “is in fact difficult to pin down to any one structural configuration”. It is therefore useful initially to focus on what Collins terms ‘central’ GET-passives. These are identifiable “on the basis of their potential relatedness to a propositionally equivalent active clause” (Collins 1996: 45). This class of central GET-passives overlaps to a great extent with the type of GET-passive that Carter and McCarthy (1999) term ‘type (a) construction’; their distinguishing feature is that they are “close to the unmarked passive with *be*” (1999: 47). A preliminary definition would thus include (i) that central GET-passives are propositionally equivalent to active clauses and (ii) that, from a purely structural point of view, they can be replaced by BE-passives. Compare (1) and (2):

- (1) It’s probably because I was **getting looked at** by erm ... a ginger haired boy
- (2) I’d better go and **get** some work **done** Joyce!

In (1), both the active version *a boy was looking at me* and the BE-passive version *I was being looked at by ...* would be acceptable as well as equivalent in propositional terms. (1) thus exemplifies a central GET-passive. In (2), by contrast, it is possible to transform *get some work done* into an active clause (*I’d*

*better go and do some work*); but it is hard to see how *get* could be substituted for by a form of BE (*\*I'd better go and am some work done*). (2) would hence have to be rejected from the class of central GET-passives. I propose to term these and related forms of the GET-passive 'peripheral' GET-passives.

Although the ability to alternate with the BE-passive is part of the definition of central GET-passives, we will see below that the GET-passive is by no means just a structural variant of the BE-passive but that it carries something extra that is significant in terms of relation management: the speaker's attitude towards the proposition.

### 3 Register distribution

Various register-sensitive corpus studies have shown GET-passives to be considerably more common in informal conversation than in written registers. Biber et al. (1999: 476) note that the GET-passive "occurs only in conversation, except for an occasional example in colloquial fiction". This finding is supported by Mindt (2000), who notes that "Get-passives are most frequent in spoken conversation (c. 0.28 cases per 1,000 words)" (2000: 208). Similar to Biber et al., Mindt observes that the GET-passive is "less frequent in fictional texts (c. 0,24 cases per 1,000 words) and least frequent in expository prose (c. 0,09 cases per 1,000 words)" (ibid.). (See Collins 1996: 54 for a similar distribution across registers.) Interestingly, as Mukherjee (2002: 49) reports, there are no occurrences of the GET-passive in the London-Lund Corpus (LLC), an early corpus containing spoken data of limited size (500,000 words) (cf. Svartvik 1990). This finding may reflect the fact that the LLC "is based mainly on tape-recorded formal English conversations between, for example, university dons in a University of London common room in the 1960s" (Carter 1999: 166); the English used is "a quite restricted code" (ibid.). Thus, it seems clear that the GET-passive is a distinguishing feature of informal conversational English.

### 4 Association patterns

Both Biber et al. (1999) and Mindt (2000) provide lists of the verbs most frequently co-selected with the GET-passive. These lists only partially map on to each other.

Biber et al.'s list is headed by *married* with over 20 occurrences per million words and continued, with over five occurrences per million words, by *hit*, *left*, *stuck*, and *involved* (Biber et al. 1999: 481). Mindt's list, on the other hand, includes GET + *rid (of)*, *involved*, *married*, *started*, *dressed*, *stuck*, *lost*, *caught*,

*paid, done, killed, and mixed* (2000: 283). Thus, only *married, stuck, and involved* are included in both lists. Quirk et al. (1985: 161) reject the construction with *dressed* from the class of GET-passives on the grounds that in GET + *dressed* the participle is ‘stative’, that is, it expresses ‘a state of wearing clothes’. A similar line of reasoning might suggest an exclusion of GET + *married*, where the participle is used to convey ‘a state of marriage’. Thus, we are left with *stuck* and *involved* as included both in Biber et al.’s and Mindt’s list.

GET + *rid (of)*, which tops Mindt’s list, is also a questionable member of the class of GET-passives in that *rid* virtually occurs in association with GET only: the conversational subcorpus (C) records 352 occurrences of the verb RID and 346 occurrences of GET + *rid*; moreover, neither *rids* nor *ridding* is found in C at all. The combination is therefore best seen as a fixed phrase rather than a structural alternative to the BE-passive.

Among the remaining GET-passives included in Mindt’s list, the participles *started, lost, done, and mixed* turn out to form peripheral GET-passives. GET-passives with *done* are particular in that where GET + *done* is used in the sense of being ‘caught and punished for doing sth illegal but not too serious’ (*Oxford advanced learners’ dictionary*, p. 453) it fulfils the criteria of the central GET-passive. Where it is used in the sense of ‘finish work’, GET + *done* is a peripheral GET-passive. These GET-passives are illustrated in (3) – (7):

- (3) PS09X >: He’ll be ... he’ll be fifty two this year.  
PS09W >: No no he’s that year older  
PS09Y >: Oh I **get mixed up** with their ages.  
PS09W >: Yeah he’s a year older than me isn’t he?
- (4) (...) I know, instead of taking one road I took another and I **got** completely **lost**!
- (5) [Speaker has reported a problem with the car]  
But we **got it started** again.
- (6) Yeah, well it’s like this fellow that **got done** for speeding.
- (7) That was a good morning’s work really. **Got** the shopping **done** for the next fortnight.

How frequent are the GET-passives discussed above in the BNC? Queries for these GET-passives were conducted in the following way: the utterances contained in C were selected as the scope within which the queries were to be conducted. The utterances were then searched for any form of GET followed (at any

distance) by the respective participle. The results were manually checked; occurrences in which GET and the succeeding participle did not form a GET-passive were discarded. The corrected results, sorted by frequency and type of GET-passive, are presented in Table 2:

Table 2: Frequencies of central and peripheral GET-passives in C

|                   | Participle                  | Frequencies |                                    |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|------------------------------------|
|                   |                             | Raw counts  | Normed counts<br>per million words |
| <b>Central</b>    | <i>paid</i>                 | 138         | 35                                 |
|                   | <i>stuck</i>                | 76          | 19                                 |
|                   | <i>caught</i>               | 53          | 13                                 |
|                   | <i>killed</i>               | 51          | 13                                 |
|                   | <i>involved</i>             | 42          | 11                                 |
|                   | <i>done</i> ('punish')      | 24          | 6                                  |
|                   | <i>hit</i>                  | 11          | 3                                  |
|                   | <i>left</i>                 | 7           | 2                                  |
| subtotal          |                             | 402         | 102                                |
| <b>Peripheral</b> | <i>done</i> ('finish work') | 341         | 85                                 |
|                   | <i>lost</i>                 | 42          | 11                                 |
|                   | <i>mixed up</i>             | 24          | 6                                  |
|                   | <i>started</i>              | 23          | 6                                  |
| subtotal          |                             | 430         | 108                                |
| Total             |                             | 832         | 210                                |

As is shown in Table 2, by far the most frequent GET-passive is GET + *done* (341 occurrences as a peripheral, and 24 occurrences as a central GET-passive). It is followed at some distance by the central GET-passive involving *paid* (138 occurrences). Clearly less frequent is *stuck* (76 occurrences), followed by a cluster of participles including *caught*, *killed*, *involved*, and *lost* (42–53 occur-

rences). While the peripheral GET-passives with *mixed up* and *started* reach minor frequencies (23 and 24 occurrences respectively), the central formations with *left* and *hit* display marginal frequencies (7 and 11 occurrences respectively).

Table 2 also notes the frequencies per million words. These normed counts enable us to compare the frequencies in the BNC with the frequencies noted by Biber et al. (1999). As mentioned above, the grammarians found a frequency of over five occurrences per million words for *hit*, *left*, *stuck*, and *involved*. The respective counts per million words in the BNC differ substantially: the GET-passives with *stuck* and *hit* are clearly more frequent (19 and 11 occurrences per million) while the GET-passives with *hit* and *left* are clearly less frequent (3 and 2 occurrences per million) than claimed by Biber and his colleagues.

## 5 Discourse factors

There is broad agreement that the GET-passive is typically used “without an expressed agent” (Quirk et al. 1985: 161). In Collin’s (1996) corpus, 92 percent of the central GET-passives were agentless. In Carter and McCarthy (1999: 51), the corresponding figure is almost identical with 93 percent, while Mindt (2000: 282) observes that “in c. 82% of all cases the effector remains unexpressed” (cf. also Biber et al. 1999: 481).

The tendency of GET-passives to occur without *by*-agents is reflected in the BNC. In order to establish the number of GET-passives with an expressed agent, all utterances in C were searched for co-occurrences of GET and (at any distance) *by*. The resulting 570 utterances were manually checked. All utterances in which GET was used other than in combination with a participle were discarded. By the same token, all uses of *by* other than as a preposition introducing noun phrases expressing the agent of the preceding GET-passive were discarded. Table 3 presents the results:

Table 3: Frequencies of utterances containing GET-passives and *by*-agents

| Raw count | Normed count<br>per million words | Normed count<br>per 1,000 utterances |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 40        | 10                                | 0.076                                |

Just 40 utterances (out of a total of 526,112 utterances) in C contain both a GET-passive and a *by*-agent. If we divide 40 by 526,112 times 1,000, we obtain a fre-

quency of 0.076 as the normed count per 1,000 utterances. This frequency is clearly low. If we take into consideration that, as shown in Table 2 above, a selection of some of the most frequent GET-passives totals 832 occurrences, and, further, that this total does not count in the number of less frequent GET-passive constructions, it becomes obvious that the GET-passive is indeed typically used without an expressed agent.

It is nonetheless interesting to investigate those cases in which the agent is stated. Some typical examples follow:

- (8) What if you just [ ... ] got raped **by a man with aids**.
- (9) (...) They don't, they can also get paid early direct **by the D S S**(...)
- (10) Thirteen, thirteen supposedly are innocent Irish [ ... ] got killed **by para's by militaries** included in the crowd (...)
- (11) Yeah, that's where he got, he got struck **by lightning**.
- (12) No, it got attacked **by some crows**, they bit it

Carter and McCarthy (1999: 51) characterize the stated agents in their examples as “somewhat impersonal or (...) nonhuman”. This description is fully matched by the examples in the BNC, as illustrated by (8) – (12). The agents in these examples – *a man with aids*, *the DSS*, *para's / militaries* – denote groups of people rather than specific individuals; the agent *lightening* in (11) is inanimate and the non-humanness of the agent *some crows* in (12) is obvious.

Thus, apart from a few utterances in which the GET-passive is followed by a stated agent, which is typically impersonal or nonhuman, the GET-passive is essentially agentless. It has been argued that “the role of the subject-referent in the process may be greater than that of the agent” (Collins 1996: 46). Similarly, Carter and McCarthy (1999: 52) conclude that the “lack of focus on agency reinforces focus on the event and on its effect on the patient”. This observation is significant in terms of the place of GET on the lexical/grammatical cline in that it is reminiscent of the use of GET as a monotransitive verb, as in *Next day it's the only way to get a ticket*. This use, which is according to Johansson and Oksefjell (1996: 62) the primary use of GET, has a clear lexical sense, synonymous to ‘obtain’ or ‘receive’ (Johansson and Oksefjell 1996: 63f.; Sinclair 1992: 270). Thus it seems admissible to interpret this focus on the effect on the patient as a far echo of the ‘receptive’ meanings expressed by monotransitive GET. If this interpretation is correct, the word GET as used in the GET-passive

would see a first shift from the grammatical toward the lexical end of the grammar-lexis cline.

Yet a second, crucial, discourse factor can be observed, which tips the balance even more in favour of the lexical side: the GET-passive tends to appear in co-texts that are signalled by conversationalists as ‘adversative’. Reconsider the central GET-passives whose frequencies were investigated above: GET + *paid*, *stuck*, *caught*, *killed*, *involved*, *done* (‘punish’), *hit*, and *left*. They are exemplified in (13) – (19):

- (13) PS0EF >: How much do you **get paid** a year? Just to be nosy like, you know. ...  
PS0EG >: Six thousand.  
PS0EF >: Is that all? ...
- (14) PS029 >: You’ve gotta learn some songs. What did you learn today?  
PS02F >: Erm  
PS029 >: When Santa ... **got stuck** up the whatsit.  
PS02B >: Chimney.
- (15) Yeah well if he **gets caught** again he’ll be expelled (...)
- (16) [Speaker is talking about somebody’s pet]  
she wouldn’t chain it up, and it **got ... hit** and **killed** on the erm ... road just outside the Post Office wasn’t it?
- (17) PS0EB >: You know, I mean ... you, the problem with you and dad is, cos you never **got** particularly **involved** with it you don’t, you don’t know exactly what’s happening at school, you don’t know what we do.  
PS0ED >: Well I’ve never **got** particularly **involved** with this school, I **got involved** with the other schools
- (18) Laura **got done** for skiving yesterday, they all went to Pam’s house.
- (19) [Speakers are discussing the danger of space garbage]  
PS50T >: Why don’t they collect it together then?  
PS50X >: Well it’s just like the ends of space rockets you know. Mi you know the really old Russian ones, [ ... ] ... when they ... I remember ... when they shot the rockets up and then ... the bits of them just ... **get left** behind in space.  
PS50T >: This is crazy! It’s waiting for an accident to happen!

Examples (14) – (16), (18), and (19) show GET in clearly negative co-texts. The negativity is evidenced by the verbs that GET co-selects, including *stuck*, *caught*, *hit*, *killed*, *done*, and *left behind*. Since these combinations are among the most frequent GET-passive forms (see above), it seems plausible to conclude, as Biber et al. do, that the GET-passive typically co-selects verbs that have “negative connotations, conveying that the action of the verb is difficult or to the disadvantage of the subject” (1999: 481). That is, as far as these typical patterns are concerned, the past-participle paradigm following GET is characterized by what has been termed ‘semantic prosody’ (cf. Sinclair 1991; Stubbs 2001; Partington 2004), that is, in Louw’s (1993: 157) words, “a consistent aura of meaning with which a linguistic form is imbued by its collocates”. Hence, it would appear that the typical GET-passive can by no means be said to allow an open-choice participle paradigm. Rather, the typical GET-passive is semantically restricted in that it prefers a restricted set of verbs sharing an ‘adversative’ core meaning (Collins 1996; Carter and McCarthy 1999).

While the adversity of the co-texts in examples (14) – (16), (18), and (19) seems obvious, it is less clear to what extent GET + *involved* in (17) can be said to have negative prosody; similarly, it seems counter-intuitive to assume that GET + *paid* in (13) is used to signal that the state of affairs is perceived as unfortunate or problematic. However, as Carter and McCarthy (1999: 52) point out,

Payment, or lack of it, and how much people earn is, in most societies, a matter of interest, debate, and, not infrequently, of controversy, criticism, wonder, pleasure, and annoyance. It should not surprise us, therefore, that attitude is often strongly marked in utterances to do with money and payment, and upon the recipients of payment.

The example of PAY highlights that the GET-passive does not only co-select verbs which refer to adversative circumstances. In some cases, apparently ‘neutral’ or even ‘positive’ verbs may occur with GET, such as, for example, *given* and *invited*, as illustrated by (20) and (21):

- (20) [Speakers are discussing problems with the tax system]  
 PS04Y >: I mean, deserving cases like Neil who as he says only want to be taught, get next to nothing, but it seems to me that people like your sister Jane and Trevor **get given** the earth.  
 PS04U >: Well it, well something’s wrong somewhere isn’t it?

- (21) PS1F3 >: and then er Vauxhall we **got invited** round fifty of us  
went round Vauxhall  
PS1F1 >: Oh that's good that's good, er

The hyperbole GET *given the earth*, it would appear, can potentially be used to mark beneficial and adversative events alike. Its use in (20), however, is clearly adversative given the stark contrast the speaker makes between people who get very much – undeservedly, by implication – while other people, who would deserve better, get little. Thus, the adversity in (20) is emergent in the larger context rather than inherent in the semantics of the verb. In (21), on the other hand, it is indeed hard to detect any linguistic clues in the co-text by which the speaker might be signalling that s/he perceived the invitation to Vauxhall as an unfortunate or adversative event. (Note, however, how the presence of stance is clearly evidenced in the interlocutor's response *Oh that's good that's good*). Here, it would rather appear, the GET-passive is simply used to mark the event as extraordinary and thus noteworthy.

Thus, beside the typical GET-passive, which is restricted to adversative verbs, the GET-passive can also be used with a wide range of verbs under the condition that the larger contexts reveal indices of 'stance', defined as "the overlay, on to the prepositional core of the clause, of meanings connected with speaker attitude, judgement and affective posture" (Carter and McCarthy 1999: 51; cf. Biber and Finegan 1989; Thompson and Hunston 2000). That is, the GET-passive is capable of marking events as affectively significant to the speaker, regardless of the events being adversative, beneficial, or simply noteworthy. In these cases, GET might be said to facilitate an open-choice participle slot and the grammar-lexis balance seems to swing back to the grammatical end. This is, however, not to say that this use was unrestricted. The restricting factor here resides in the speaker; that is, the restriction is not semantic, as with the typical GET-passive, but of a pragmatic nature.

In sum, we see that the GET-passive is poorly represented if just described as a grammatical structure. To be sure, it *is* a grammatical structure, but it is at least equally, if not more so, a lexical structure. Indeed, the GET-passive seems to collapse the two 'complementary perspectives' (Halliday 1991: 32) in such a way that the two labels 'grammatical' and 'lexical' seem of very little help. Rather, the position of the GET-passive on the grammar-lexis cline is strikingly volatile. It might even be argued that the GET-passive illustrates

the fundamental fact that syntax is driven by lexis: lexis is communicatively prior. As communicators we do not proceed by

selecting syntactic structures and independently choosing lexis to slot into them. Instead, we have concepts to convey and communicative choices to make which require central lexical items, and these choices find themselves syntactic structures in which they can be said comfortably and grammatically. (Francis 1993: 142).

Thus, the GET-passive construction is a prime example of the ‘co-selection of syntax and lexis’ (Francis 1993: 143) demonstrating the need *simultaneously* to draw on both resources in understanding and describing the phenomenon adequately.

## 6 Conclusion

It would appear that the GET-passive shows that and how the lexical/grammatical dichotomy as well as its conceptual basis, the fundamental separation of lexis and grammar, beg serious questions vis-à-vis the evidence uncovered by analysis of corpus data. Rather than simply providing slots and fillers respectively, grammar and lexis can be shown to a large extent to merge into one another. The consequences, it appears, are far-reaching. Two of them are outlined below.

First, grammar studies can no longer exclude consideration of lexis but need to emphasize ‘lexis in grammar’ and attempt “to build together a grammar and lexis on an equal basis” (Sinclair 2000: 191). This move presupposes that we acknowledge two principles: the ‘idiom principle’ and the principle of ‘co-selection’. The idiom principle describes the fact that “a language user has available to him or her a large number of semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute *single* choices” (Sinclair 1991: 110; added emphasis). There are two main contributing factors to idiom: phrases, such as *GET off with*, whose components cannot usefully be analyzed as individual words, and ‘collocation’, that is, the tendency of words to be chosen in pairs or groups which need not necessarily be adjacent (Sinclair 1991: 115). It goes without saying that the notion of idiom thus defined bridges the divide between lexical and grammatical words in that phrases and collocations may involve both types of word. That is, an acknowledgement of the idiom principle entails an acknowledgement of the principle of ‘co-selection’. This principle describes the fact that “syntactic structures and lexical items (or strings of lexical items) are co-selected, and that it is impossible to look at one independently of the other” (Francis 1993: 143). A pioneering work in implementing these principles is Sinclair’s (1990) *Collins COBUILD English grammar*. The principles also seem to inform, to some extent, the more recent

*Longman grammar of spoken and written English* (Biber et al. 1999) and *Cambridge grammar of English* (Carter and McCarthy 2006), in which lexical information is an integral part of the grammatical description. Probably the most radical implementation of the notion of lexical grammar is the ‘pattern grammar’ developed in Hunston and Francis (2000), which aims to specify all major lexical items in terms of their syntactic preferences, and all grammatical structures in terms of their key lexis and phraseology (Francis 1993: 155). So, in the field of grammar study, major advances towards a lexical grammar have already been made.

Second, taking the notion of lexical grammar on board would also be desirable for the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL). It seems that, here, the traditional prioritisation of grammar at the expense of lexis is still going strong. Basic notions such as collocation are alien to most textbooks, lexis is commonly reduced to lists of one-word ‘vocabulary’ items, and syllabi are overwhelmingly based on the principle of grammatical progression. As a result, the language taught to non-native learners is no doubt at variance with the language used by native speakers – a variance which is increasingly being pointed out (e.g. Mindt 1996; Mindt 1997; Römer 2004; Conrad 2004). Also, from the point of view of language acquisition, the insistence on the lexical/grammatical dichotomy seems to disfavour the acquisition of central competencies, most notably idiomaticity and fluency. As, for example, Wray (2002: 97) shows, idiomaticity and fluency in native speakers largely depend on mastery of what she calls ‘formulaic sequences’. Although there is evidence that the ease with which native speakers pick up multi-word items is not matched by adult non-native learners of English, and although the lack of exposure to the target language that is characteristic of foreign language learning seems ‘naturally’ to foster reliance on the ability to break large units down into small units (Wray 2005), there seems to be reason to argue that lexical grammar should be taught, *inter alia*, because prefabricated and semi-prefabricated phrases illustrate ‘a natural economy of effort’ (Sinclair 1991: 110), which aids, particularly in real-time conversation, both production and comprehension of native and non-native speakers and recipients alike (Wray 2002: 97; Mauranen 2004: 97).

In sum, taking the notion of lexical grammar on board seems a desirable move for the EFL classroom. We need to be aware though that this move will not make life in the classroom easier; rather, replacing the easy-to-handle division of grammar and vocabulary by an integration of lexis and grammar will necessarily entail a considerable increase in complexity. Whether, how, and to what extent, foreign language teaching can usefully implement lexical grammar will essentially depend on the ability of teachers, materials developers, curricu-

lum administrators, and applied linguists to come to terms with the fact that the “whole job of teaching and learning suddenly assumes new, enlarged dimensions, bewilderingly complex” (Sinclair 2004: 282). As with many of the fundamental insights gained from corpus linguistic analysis, much work for applied corpus linguistics lies ahead. Therefore, Conrad’s (2000) prediction that the teaching of grammar in the 21st century will be characterized, inter alia, by a shift in emphasis from grammar and lexis as two separate areas to an integrated view of lexis in grammar and vice versa, may be still a long way from being fulfilled.

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