

THE LEXINYM- A BRAND-NEW CONCEPT FOR THE LANGUAGE TEACHER

By Jason B. Alter

The teacher of English as a Second language has long had an extensive list of "nyms" to work with and, especially, to work from. There are the ordinary nyms: synonyms, antonyms, and homonyms. Then, there are the somewhat more esoteric: acronyms, heteronyms, eponyms, etc. These help the student to see the inner workings of the English language; his linguistic appetite is whetted; he gains more control over the vagaries of the language.

The use of the various nyms constitutes a mind-expanding language experience, a pedagogically valid adjunct, at the very least, to the workaday curricular agenda. Vocabulary gains are one spin-off. For example, the word "rate" might very well come up in a lesson. The teacher might ask the student to rearrange the letters of "rate" to make some other word, and the student might say "tear". Well, "tear" is a heteronym. It can be pronounced two ways: (1) /tár/ (to rip) or (2) /tir/ (a drop of liquid); but the spellings are identical.

It so happens that both pronunciations of "tear" have homonyms, which is admittedly a much richer category than that of the heteronyms. Language activity proceeds apace, as students make sentences using the words engendered. Again, the students and the teacher should work *from* the nyms, into communicative language-aware activities. Memorizing lists of nyms is non-productive.

Another fringe benefit of the use of nyms is in spelling improvement. Thus, the acronym for the Agency for International Development is "AID" (cf. "aid"), and the homonym is "aide", not to mention the suffix "-ade". The student and the teacher can get a lot of mileage out of the nyms.

Now I'd like to define the LEXINYM, which I am alleging could (in a far-fetched

sense) be construed as an embodiment of the "deep lexicon." The lexinym encourages the student to read between the letters, as it were. The lexinym also represents a kind of communication activity whereby the student is challenged to search for a meaning connection between the two words involved. Class discussion will flow, as various students see farther or closer connections.

(1) For example, take the word "unclear." If we reverse the "u" and the "n", we have "nuclear". One could readily posit that the issue of nuclear energy is an unclear one. Is it a blessing or a curse? Discuss!

(2) There's a lot of interest these days in the martial arts. "Martial" is a lexinym for "marital". The alarming divorce statistics in the United States attest to the close lexical connection between these two words. One is also reminded of Thurber's "War Between the Sexes," which advanced-level students might be invited to peruse; here we see a reading tangent from the nym.

(3) "Sacred" is a lexinym for "scared". The more timid among us might be a bit scared to tread on sacred ground. Outlandish? Maybe so, but I see the lexinym as a device to get the student into the language.

I interject the comment that I am limiting, in the nine examples given herein, the lexinym to words that result from single letters that are juxtaposed. One might expand the notion of the lexinym to include words where letters are more disparate, which would open up a much larger category. One that comes to mind is "parental"; cf. "prenatal." Etc.

(4) Consider "perfect" and "prefect".

Especially in British-school environments, the prefect system prevails. Ideally, the prefect sets a perfect example for the students in his charge.

(5) How about "tired" and "tried"? After you tried doing something ad nauseam, you may well literally be sick and tired of doing so.

The goal is not to have the student use both lexinymy in the same sentence; I am doing this here merely for effect. All we want the student to do is to perceive lexical affinities. What can s/he reason out? Vocabulary enrichment is an attenuating benefit.

(6) Then we have "owe" and "woe." "Neither a borrower nor a lender be." To owe too much often results in woe.

(7) Next, "use" and "sued". The used car turned out to be a lemon so he sued the dealer. In a cross-cultural sense,

"lemon" has positive connotations in the language.

(8) And, "craving" and "carving". She developed a craving for that particular carving.

I respectfully suggest that lexinymy offer multifarious possibilities to add sparkle to the language class. (Cf. "add" and "dad"; lexinymy are all around us.) The resourceful language teacher can use lexinymy for spelling, vocabulary, language-awareness, class discussions, code-breaking, pronunciation, etc. Seek lexinymy, and ye shall find them; getting there is half the fun. The students will learn English and about English along the way.

(9) Finally, "diary" and "dairy". Students are invited to be on the lookout for lexinymy until the cows come home. Possibly, the dairy farmer does keep a diary.