INTRODUCTION

The present study “Teaching Lexis through Comics: An Exploratory Study” has been carried out with the main objective of exploring how lexis can be taught through comics. This proposition begs two questions:

1. What is lexis?

2. What have comics to do with the teaching /learning of lexis?

The term lexis is widely used by the advocates of the lexical approach. This approach emerged as a consequence of the corpus based language studies. It is based on the view that language is primarily lexis and grammar is secondary to lexis. As Michael Lewis puts it “Language consists of grammaticalized lexis, and not lexicalized grammar” (Lewis, 1993:vi). With the publication of the book The Lexical Approach: The State of ELT and a Way Forward in 1993, by the British applied linguist Michael Lewis, this approach became popular. The term lexis also gained currency since then. Lexis refers to the prefabricated chunks or multi-worded items present in a language. It is a more comprehensive term than vocabulary. While vocabulary refers to individual words in a language, lexis includes several types of formulaic chunks as well as individual words.

Although the lexical items are of different kinds, Lewis identifies them as falling into four types:

1. a) Words

   b) Polywords
2. Collocations

3. Fixed Expressions

4. Semi-Fixed Expressions

The first category is sub-divided into **Words** and **Polywords**. The former is a familiar category and it refers to what we traditionally call vocabulary. It constitutes the largest of all the four categories. The lexical approach also recognizes ‘individual words’ as a part of lexis but it holds that there are several types of lexical items of which individual words are only one type. Thus in the learning of a language it is not sufficient if one learns merely the vocabulary of that language, but one should also focus on the other equally important lexical items such as collocations, fixed expressions and semi-fixed expressions.

The next sub-category **Polywords** is a small group of lexical items which falls between words and major multi-word categories. These chunks are normally not reversible. For instance, *bread and butter*. Lewis states that phrasal verbs and adverbial phrases of different kinds also fall under this division. For example, *By the way, the day after tomorrow, turn off etc.*

The second major category of lexical items is **collocations**. Lewis defines collocation as a “*predictable combination of words*” (Lewis, 2000:52). These are chunks of lexical items that naturally co-occur by mutual expectancy. It is interesting to note that like polywords which are mostly irreversible in their usage, collocations too are not normally interchangeable. For example: *make a mistake and do the work*. Though ‘make’ and ‘do’ are considered near synonyms, they cannot be used interchangeably.
The third division of items is **Fixed Expressions** which is also known as **Institutionalized Expressions**. Lewis states that these are comparatively rare and short. These are chunks a speaker stores as units and uses in speech. e.g.: *Have a nice day* and *How do you do?*

The last category is **Semi-Fixed expressions**. This category according to Lewis is an important one ‘that contains a spectrum’. These expressions range ‘from very short to very long and from almost fixed to very free’ (Lewis, 1997:10). Unlike the fixed expressions which are used mostly in spoken language, the semi-fixed ones occur widely in both spoken and written language. These expressions allow a number of different words or phrases to be inserted into them. For example:

*It’s/That’s right*

*But despite his /humble behaviour/hard work/honesty…….*

*I would be grateful/thankful If you would bring/get/do me…….*

*We are really/very fortunate/lucky to have him/her as…….*

Having described what lexis is, it is apt now to answer the second question of the proposition about the relevance of comics to language teaching/learning. It is worth noting here that Lewis recommends the use of a text-based approach to teach lexis and there by language. A text-based approach uses authentic texts, either oral or written, for enabling learners to use the target language in different ways. As lexical approach forms the theoretical framework for the present research, the study has explored how authentic texts like comics can be incorporated into the teaching of lexis. Comics have proved to be a rich source of all the lexical categories identified in the lexical approach. Besides, there are several benefits in using them for language teaching and the advantages of using comics are out lined in section 1.10.1.
**Method of Research:**

For the present research, initially, 50 Tinkle *magazines* and *digests* have been read. Out of these fifty books, a total of thirty have been selected for the study. From these thirty books, only 30 stories have been chosen for the research based on the number of multi-worded items present in them. Secondly, the lexical chunks that have been identified from the stories have been categorized according to the classification advocated by Lewis. After categorizing them, exercises and activities have been devised to reinforce these chunks in their mental lexicon.

The main objective of all the exercises and activities included in the thesis is to raise the lexical awareness of the learners which is eventually expected to lead to their increased lexical competence.

The present thesis comprises five chapters:

Chapter I **THE LEXICAL APPROACH** provides a detailed introduction to the theoretical background of the approach and answers the following questions:

1. What is the lexical approach?
2. What is lexis?
3. What are the different types of lexical categories?
4. What is the importance of lexical approach in language teaching and learning?
5. What do comics have to do with the teaching/learning of lexis?

The study does not include the category of individual words for the reason that a lot of research has been carried out in teaching and
learning it. This category moreover is familiar to every learner of the language and does not need any emphasis. Lewis also substantiates this view:

“words are the largest and most familiar category, but it is the other categories which provide the novelty and pedagogic challenge. (Lewis, 1997:8)

The second chapter titled **POLYWORDS** includes all the multi-word categories of this kind traced in the thirty stories. The chunks categorised under polywords are further sub-divided based on their functions:

1) Expressions of time : e.g. *In no time*
2) Sentence Adverbs : e.g. *In the first round*
3) Phrasal Verbs : e.g. *Watch out*
4) Prepositions of Place : e.g. *Out of bed*

This chapter attempts a grammatical description of the items listed and also provides examples of their usage. Besides, the chapter also includes exercises and activities designed exclusively to teach/learn the lexical items (polywords) enumerated.

The third chapter **COLLOCATIONS** lists all the collocations selected from the comics and classifies them into twelve types based on their word-partnership. The following 12 grammatical combinations could be found in the chosen stories:

1) Adjective + Noun
   *magnificent bird*
2) Verb + Noun
   *take a chance*
3) Noun + Noun
   *talent show*
4) Verb + Adverb  
   \textit{recover immediately}

5) Verb + Adjective  
   \textit{look tired}

6) Adverb + Adjective  
   \textit{totally safe}

7) Adverb + Verb  
   \textit{well rewarded}

8) Adjective + Adverb  
   \textit{affected deeply}

9) Adjective + Preposition  
   \textit{strong of muscle}

10) Verb + Preposition  
    \textit{seething with anger}

11) Noun + verb  
    \textit{plan worked}

12) Noun + Preposition  
    \textit{token of respect}

Besides classifying them under different grammatical combinations, the chapter also illustrates the use of each collocation. It also presents the other possible combinations of the selected collocations. At the end of the chapter, exercises and activities are designed focusing on the collocations listed in the chapter.

The fourth chapter \textbf{FIXED EXPRESSIONS} deals with the multi-word items identified in the comics chosen. In this study, they are divided based on the number of words in an expression. They are categorised as follows:

- One worded  
  e.g. \textit{Well}

- Two worded  
  e.g. \textit{Great idea}

- Three worded  
  e.g. \textit{Is this true?}

- Four worded  
  e.g. \textit{Pleased to meet you}

- Five Worded  
  e.g. \textit{I ‘m sad to hear that}
The chapter gives the usage of each of the fixed expressions identified and also provides exercises and activities designed for the teaching / learning of these expressions.

The fifth chapter **SEMI- FIXED EXPRESSIONS** identifies and illustrates all the chunks that fit into this category. Lewis identifies five different types under this category. However, the present study identifies only two broad categories, namely: sentence heads and other semi-fixed expressions. The chapter concludes with a list of exercises and activities.

The **CONCLUSION** of the thesis includes a summary of the study, its findings and suggestions for further research.