Speaking Skills
in the Academic Context

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Chapter 3: Lexical Resource (LR)

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

➢ Understand the marking criteria of Lexical Resource (LR) in IELTS Speaking test

➢ Distinguish positive features that lead to a higher band score

➢ Use idiomatic expressions, less common words and paraphrases appropriately

➢ Avoid inappropriate collocation and word choice

In the previous chapters, you have learnt the marking criteria of Fluency and Coherence. In this chapter, we will focus on the marking criteria of Lexical Resource (LR) by looking at the positive features and inappropriate features made by candidates of different bands.

Part I. What does Lexical Resource (LR) mean?

Lexical Resource in IELTS speaking test refers to the range of vocabulary used and the precision with which meanings and attitudes can be expressed. The key indicators are the variety of words used, the adequacy and appropriacy of the words used and the ability to circumlocute (get round a vocabulary gap by using other words) with or without noticeable hesitation (*IELTS Home of the IELTS English Language Test*, 2019).

Check out this IELTS official video to know more about LR: https://youtu.be/LQQE2hWrl98

How candidates perform in each Band? (*IELTS Home of the IELTS English Language Test*, 2019)

Band 4

- is able to talk about familiar topics but can only convey basic meaning on unfamiliar topics and makes frequent errors in word choice

- rarely attempts paraphrase

Band 5

- manages to talk about familiar and unfamiliar topics but uses vocabulary with limited flexibility

- attempts to use paraphrase but with mixed success

Band 6

- has a wide enough vocabulary to discuss topics at length and make meaning clear in spite of inappropriacies

- generally paraphrases successfully

Band 7

- uses vocabulary resource flexibly to discuss a variety of topics

- uses some less common and idiomatic vocabulary and shows some awareness of style and collocation, with some inappropriate choices

- uses paraphrase effectively

Band 8

- uses a wide vocabulary resource readily and flexibly to convey precise meaning

- uses less common and idiomatic vocabulary skilfully, with occasional inaccuracies

- uses paraphrase effectively as required

Band 9

- uses vocabulary with full flexibility and precision in all topics

- uses idiomatic language naturally and accurately

Here are the key indicators determining your marks in LR:

1. Range

    a. Less common words

    b. Idiomatic expressions

    c. Paraphrase

    d. Collocations

> This list has included **common words**. So, for words that are *not in the list*, they are considered as the **less common words**.

In IELTS speaking test, it is important to show your ability to use a range of less common words, idiomatic expressions and paraphrase appropriately. Less common words are defined as words which are not included in the BNC lemmatised word frequency list (such as *commercialised, perceive*). For idiomatic expressions, they are identified based on *The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms: American English Idiomatic Expressions & Phrases*. Examples are *my cup of tea*, *as well as* and *not at all*. For paraphrase, it is defined as repeating the idea using different words to make the original meaning clearer, for instant, *famous person*, *idols* and *movie star* are different words with similar meaning. For collocations in range, the combination of words is not limited to only verb + prepositions (*talk with, get along*), but also included other combinations such as adverbs + adjectives (*very easy*, *really bad*) and verbs + nouns (*reading books*, *watching movies*).

2. Appropriacy

    a. Word choice

    b. Collocations

According to the IELTS speaking band descriptors, a 7.0-peformance "shows some awareness of style and collocation, with some inappropriate choices" (*IELTS Home of the IELTS English Language Test*, 2019). Therefore, it is important to make appropriate word choice and collocations as far as possible. Appropriate word choice includes the proper part of speech, such as to use an adjective before a noun (*happy family*), but not an adverb before a noun (*happily* family*). For collocations in appropriacy, it is about whether you can combine words correctly, for instance, it should be '*spend time on work*' but not '*spend time at* work*'.

*Note: Words with * means that they are used inappropriately.*

Activity 1. Lexical Appropriacy

Go to the corpus and use the 'Browse' function. Take a look at the LR performance of Speaker 72 (Band 9.0). Can you find any inappropriate word choice and/or collocations?

Activity 2. Which is a better answer?

Tell me about the place you are living.

    A. It is not very spacious, only with a double bed, a dining table and an office chair.

    B. It is a small room with a bed, a table and a chair.

Answer:

A is better because there is a less common word, *spacious*.

Activity 3. Paraphrase and Appropriate collocations

Go to the corpus and take a look at the performance of any Band 5.0 speaker. Can you list at least one paraphrase and appropriate collocation?

Paraphrase:

Appropriate collocation:

Part II. What are the features of a high-band performance?

Activity 4. What are the positive features?

Go to the corpus and use the 'Search' function. After selecting the Band of speakers and 'Lexical Resource' as the criteria, how many types of positive features can you find? What are they?

Example: Less common words

Now you know there are some key indicators in LR. How can these indicators be reflected in speakers' performance? Generally, speakers with higher Band (7.0 or above) can successfully employ a range of lexical resource such as less common words. Since they can manage to use less common words successfully, it is possible that they can demonstrate a greater flexibility to use different vocabulary items to discuss various topics in an appropriate way. The table below has summarised a comparison between speakers of different Bands in terms of lexical resource.

	Features from speakers of Band 7.0 or higher	Features from speakers of Band 7.0 below
Range	✓ Paraphrase ✓ Collocations ✓ Less common words ✓ Idiomatic expressions	✓ Paraphrase ❓ Collocations ❓ Less common words ❓ Idiomatic expressions
Appropriacy	✓ Collocations ✓ Word choice	❓ Collocations ❓ Word choice

Activity 5. What idiomatic expressions did they say?

Go to the corpus and use the 'Browse' function. Take a look at the LR performance of any speaker from Band 7.0 or higher. Can you identify the idiomatic expressions they have used? What might these idioms mean? (Hint: You can search the meaning on dictionary.)

20 common idiomatic expressions

(Reference: https://www.justlearn.com/blog/20-idioms-with-their-meanings-and-sentences-pdf)
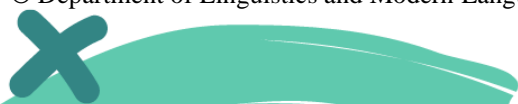
|	Meaning	Example
Adding insult to injury	Make things worse	I wore the wrong shirt and then spilled coffee on it. Talk about adding insult to injury.
Beat around the bush	Avoid saying something	They beat around the bush for a while before eventually telling me I didn't get the job.
Blessing in disguise	An unexpectedly good thing	It was a blessing in disguise that I missed the train, it broke down for two hours.
Birds of a feather flock together	People with a lot in common become good friends	They all went to the same high school, birds of a feather flock together.
Biting off more than you can chew	Be overwhelmed	Trying to memorize 100 idioms and their meanings with sentences in an hour was biting off more than I could chew.
Costs an arm and a leg	Expensive	It costs an arm and a leg to get the latest iPhone.
Devil's Advocate	Offer another point of view	I played devil's advocate and pointed out that online learning allows you to choose your own schedule.
Don't judge a book by its cover	Appearances can be deceiving	Don't judge a book by its cover, he may dress sloppy but he's a tech genius.
Don't count your chickens before they hatch	Don't make assumptions	Don't count your chickens before they hatch, make a follow-up call to the customer.
Give someone the cold shoulder	Ignore	They gave Karen the cold shoulder and ignored her invitation to lunch.
Hit the books	Go study	I have an exam tomorrow; I need to go hit the books.

Hit the sack	Go to sleep	I have a meeting early tomorrow; I need to hit the sack.
Jumped at the chance	Acted on an opportunity	She jumped at the chance to spend a summer learning Italian in Florence.
Lose your touch	No longer good	They used to be good with crying children, but they seem to have lost their touch.
Missed the boat	Lost an opportunity	I missed the boat and didn't enrol while there was a discount.
Through thick and thin	Loyal	You deserve that promotion for staying with the company through thick and thin.
Twist someone's arm	Convince	I had to twist his arm to get him to agree to sell.
Sit tight	Just wait	I am looking into the issue. Sit tight and wait for my e-mail.
Stab someone in the back	Betray someone	Rob and Ben were best friends until Rob stabbed Ben in the back and stole his girlfriend.
Under the weather	Sick	I need to postpone our tutoring session; I'm feeling under the weather.

Activity 6. Searching the corpus

Question 1: In Speaker 9, how many less common words have been identified? What are they?

Question 2: In Speaker 71, how many less common words have been identified? What are they?
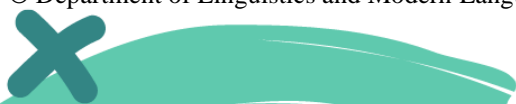
Reflection: What can you tell from the less common words used by the two speakers?

Activity 7. Searching the corpus

Question 1: In Speaker 9, are there any idiomatic expressions?

Question 2: In Speaker 60, are there any idiomatic expressions?

Part III. How to avoid inappropriate word choice and collocations?

Activity 7. What are the common inappropriacy?

Go to the corpus and use the 'Search' function. After selecting the Band of speakers and 'Lexical Resource' as the criteria, how many types of inappropriacy can you find? What are they?

Example: Collocations (inappropriate)

After learning the ways to demonstrate lexical range in terms of less common words, idiomatic expressions and paraphrases, it is time to tackle the issue of appropriacy. While you do not need

to be 100% appropriate to get a Band 7.0, bear in mind the following common types of collocations is a key to differentiate a Band-6.0 and Band-7.0 performance.

Common types of collocations

1. adverbs + adjectives

    Examples: *very good*, *really amazing*, *quite bad*

2. adjectives + nouns

    Examples: *big smile*, *spacious room*, *friendly person*

3. nouns + nouns

    Examples: *contingency arrangements*, *evening class*

4. nouns + verbs

    Examples: *the plane takes off*, *birds sing*

5. verbs + verbs

    Examples: *help organize*, *let (sb) go*

6. verbs + prepositions

    Examples: *share with*, *spend on*, *get into*

7. verbs + adverbs

    Examples: *move quickly*, *drive safely*, *run fast*

8. nouns + prepositions

    Examples: *details on*, *proposals about*

9. adjectives + prepositions

    Examples: *valid for*, *applicable to*, *suitable for*

Activity 8. Spot the inappropriate words

Go to the corpus and use the 'Browse' function. Check the script of any speaker, try to identify and correct the inappropriate word choice, collocation and idiomatic expression for them.

Example: Speaker 11 (Band 5.0)

I think speaking and writing both very important because speaking is very useful. Because when you have a good… when you have a good job opportunity, maybe your boss could need you to <mark>speaking a foreigner… foreigner people</mark>. And writing is also important. You need to, you need to

<mark>Inappropriate collocation of 'speak to someone' 'speak to foreign people'</mark>

foreign

write some ar, articles or thesis and your personal, your personal experience.

After correcting the inappropriate words, check your corrections with the corpus annotations. Any differences?

Activity 9. Practice less common words and idiomatic expressions

Prepare a response to include less common words and idiomatic expressions from the question bank. Highlight the words and expressions that have been used in your script.

Part: 1 / 2 / 3 (~~delete~~ as appropriate)

Question:

Your response:

Example:

Part: 1 / ~~2 / 3~~

Question:

What do you usually do on weekends?

Your response:

I'm a ==bookworm==. *So, I always travel with a book. Whenever there's time, I'll, I'll literally spend every single possible second* ==glued to a book==, *reading.*

Less common words: bookworm

Idiomatic expressions: glued to a book

Follow-up task: Mock test with the corpus

Have a mock test with the videos here. You are recommended to record yourself, either in video or in audio, during the mock test. Evaluate yourself based on the following form:

Key indicators	Occurrences
Less common words	
Paraphrase	
Appropriate idiomatic expressions	

Appropriate collocations	
Inappropriate idiomatic expressions	
Inappropriate word choice	
Inappropriate collocations	

If you have produced any inappropriate word choice, collocations or idiomatic expressions, try to identify them as many as possible, and correct them based on the example in Activity 8.

Indicators:

Number of less common words, paraphrase, appropriate idiomatic expressions and appropriate collocations:

≤ 10: Below average

11 – 20: Average

21 – 30: Good

> 31: Excellent

Number of inappropriate word choice, idiomatic expressions and collocations:

> 16: Below average

11 – 15: Average

6 – 10: Good

≤ 5: Excellent

Share your performance with other learners and learn from each other at this link.

Activity 10. Self-reflection

Have you ever done any classroom presentation or delivered any free speech? How did you perform on Lexical Resource?

If you were given chances to re-do it again, how would you improve your performance with the skills you learnt in this chapter?

Teaching corner: Determine their levels

Read the scripts from Part 2 below. Which bands do you think these speakers have attained?

Speaker A

OK. Speaking of the intelligent person, I would like to say my cousin. I think she is very intelligent because she… she always get s, good scores at… at her elementary school and high school. And… and she… she enter, entence in the best universities of Chinese universities. And… and she… she is also an outgoing and easygoing person. And always I study… study hard and on the weekends, I stay at home to study and learn some th, mathematics and English. Sh… I can… I can see she play… play outside with… with his… with her friends. I was… I was curious about why… why she spent less time than me studying but she gets good scores in her study. And I think maybe her gene is very well, so, so this is a reason she does well than me. And I just think she is an intelligent person. Yes.

Speaker B

The most impressive building I saw is… I, I didn't literally saw it, but I saw like, the pictures and the model in a gallery, like, art gallery, in Sanlitun. The designer was called Michael or something, a f, a French guy. And it's a wine place, like, they have all kinds, all different kinds of wine in the building. And you know, the shape of the outside of the building is… They, they got the idea from when, when people pouring wine into a cup, so it's all like smooth streamline shape. And it's not like normal building that have, like, you know, straight, straight sides and edges. And it's kind of out of box of normal design. And beside that, you know, that exhibition of the architecture have like, all kinds of different buildings, you know. Like, say, they have a small center. It was a idea. And it shows the process of the designing, like, from the start, like, what I saw is just scratching randomly, but I can see from step to step, from the scratch to the actual design. And like, another thing is, you know, how they have this different shape, and that makes a engineering and architecture part really difficult. So like, one of his building is like inverse cone that have like, only four square meters attached the ground, and the top is like 50 square meter or something. I don't know. I'm just guessing, but it was really impressive.

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