

# Can AI Force Traditional ELT Publications out of Their Comfort Zone?

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Traditional ELT publications such as learners' dictionaries and vocabulary development books have long been regarded as definitive resources for learners of English. Nonetheless, the advent of AI platforms and services like ChatGPT has introduced a new reference framework, one likely to challenge the existing *status quo*. Traditional ELT publications increasingly appear dated, incomplete or even abandoned projects, shaped by macrofragmentation (via rigid taxonomies) and microfragmentation (through subjective and often inconsistent inclusion or omission), resulting in fragmented learning. This paper seeks to explore whether AI tools like ChatGPT can build on or even replace traditional publications by offering a more dynamic, holistic and inclusive approach to language learning.

AI; ChatGPT; ELT; fragmentation; holism.

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## 1. Introduction, premises and disclaimers

Until recently – a couple of years ago – prestigious publishers like Oxford, Cambridge, Longman (Pearson), Macmillan, or Collins (COBUILD) used to be considered the last word in ELT publications. From grammar to vocabulary and covering the entire language level range, from A1 to C2, these publishers have relied heavily (perhaps also to legitimise their marketing strategies) on the authority of in-house corpora to power their end products – examples of such corpora include the Cambridge International Corpus, the Collins Corpus, the Oxford English Corpus, the Longman Corpus Network, etc. Towards the end of 2022, ChatGPT (OpenAI, n.d.) came along and started – perhaps unwittingly – to challenge the entire ELT materials publishing industry, not only thanks to the sheer size of the LLMs at its disposal, but also by providing something that the aforementioned publishers could not: a tool at any language teacher's / learner's disposal, capable of upending the traditional paradigm of *language authority* → *final product*. This new context signals a paradigm shift towards *language user* → *final product*. In other words, AI services like ChatGPT can contribute to the *democratisation* of language learning materials

development and use – but this carries a logical caveat: traditional ELT publications are finished products provided by established, traditional publishers *as such*, whereas ChatGPT (or any similar AI service) is a tool, not a product (or a finished product in itself, for that matter).

This article seeks to explore this possible paradigm shift: from ELT end products from traditional publishers to ELT product creation by language teachers or learners themselves through the use of AI tools. The whole logic of this article is based on three main premises (or disclaimers):

(1) As the author of this article, I automatically benefit from a double status. I am not only a teacher of English, but being a non-native speaker of English, I could be considered a lifelong learner of English as well – this is what, for purely logical reasons, native-speaking teachers of English do not possess in terms of language acquisition experience, nor perspective.

(2) The scope of this article cannot possibly allow for an exhaustive look at ELT within the traditional paradigm and the new one I am mentioning here. Drawing on the Lexical Approach, I will be focusing on what has been traditionally treated as *vocabulary* teaching and learning. In summary, the Lexical Approach posits that vocabulary cannot be *divorced from* grammar or *vice versa* (Hill, 2000, p. 65); language needs to be looked at holistically, in terms of *grammaticalised lexis* and not *lexicalised grammar* (Lewis, 2000a, p. 137). *Language chunks* (i.e. collocation + colligation) are intrinsic to language learning and acquisition, based on repeated exposure to language contexts (i.e. recurrent language chunks) (Lewis, 2000b, p. 198). Within this framework, *unedited examples of usage* (containing language chunks) are crucial for language acquisition, in that they provide actual instances of language use in context (Woolard, 2000, p. 35), where grammar and vocabulary merge naturally and organically.

(3) Like any other novelty, AI services such as ChatGPT have given rise to some concerns. In this particular case, (a) that language teachers will be replaced by AI – this is nothing but nonsensical. Language teachers *cannot* be replaced by AI for the simple reason that language teachers will always be *the necessary interface between* their students and AI: teachers can use AI to design and streamline their courses and students can benefit from guidance in using AI on their own, based on prompt engineering, in its turn, facilitated by teachers through adequate training. The second case (b) regards using AI for fraudulent purposes (i.e. students delivering assignments or sitting language exams) – this issue, although not covered in this article, deserves separate treatment (perhaps another article); while this can be a challenge (and not just in the case of language instruction), it all comes down to a simple fact: using AI *is not about using an end product, but a tool!* The tool itself *cannot be blamed for its mere potentiality* – the use of it, yes, but again, this deserves a separate discussion, not present here.

## 2. Traditional ELT publications today: timelines and accessibility

Following from the above delineation, by *traditional ELT publications* I mean learner's dictionaries and vocabulary development books or resources produced by major publishers in the field, such as Oxford, Cambridge, Longman (Pearson), Collins / COBUILD and Macmillan. For the sake of my argument, first, I will be providing a list of such products below – special attention should be paid to the release year for each one – and then I will be discussing some problems or shortcomings that have become apparent, all referring to very practical considerations as regards their consistency, usability and usefulness at the present time.

To keep these lists as concise as possible, I will be quoting *only* such publications at an *advanced* level. They are all numbered continuously and, for simplicity, I will be making reference to them later, based on their identifying numbers below.

Starting with learner's dictionaries, from Oxford University Press:

- (1) *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary*, 10th ed. (2020); book + free online + app;
- (2) *Oxford collocations dictionary for students of English* (2009>2021); book + app;
- (3) *Oxford learner's thesaurus – a dictionary of synonyms* (2008>2021); book + app;
- (4) *Oxford phrasal verbs dictionary for learners of English*, 2nd ed. (2006); book;
- (5) *Oxford idioms dictionary for learners of English*, 2nd ed. (2006); book.

From Cambridge University Press:

- (6) *Cambridge learner's dictionary*, 4th ed. (2012); book + free online + app;
- (7) *Cambridge idioms dictionary*, 2nd ed. (2006); book;
- (8) *Cambridge phrasal verbs dictionary*, 2nd ed. (2006); book.

From Macmillan:

- (9) *Macmillan English dictionary for advanced learners*, 2nd ed. (2007); book;
- (10) *Macmillan collocations dictionary for learners of English* (2010); book;
- (11) *Macmillan phrasal verbs plus* (2005); book;
- (12) *The Macmillan dictionary of English colloquial idioms* (1995); book.

From Longman (Pearson):

- (13) *Longman dictionary of contemporary English*, 6th ed. (2014); book + free online + app;
- (14) *Longman collocations dictionary and thesaurus* (2013); book;
- (15) *Longman phrasal verbs dictionary* (2000); book;
- (16) *Longman idioms dictionary* (1998>2000); book.

From Collins / COBUILD:

- (17) *Collins / COBUILD advanced learner's dictionary*, 10th ed. (2023); book + free online;
- (18) *Collins / COBUILD phrasal verbs dictionary*, 4th ed. (2020); book;
- (19) *Collins / COBUILD idioms dictionary*, 4th ed. (2020); book.

As for vocabulary development / practice books, for the sake of illustration, I would consider just one *complete* set (again, at an advanced level), such as the *in use* suite from Cambridge University Press (the numbering above continues below):

- (20) *English vocabulary in use, advanced*, 3rd ed. (2007>2017); book + e-book;
- (21) *English collocations in use, advanced*, 2nd ed. (2008>2017); book;
- (22) *English idioms in use, advanced*, 2nd ed. (2010>2017); book;
- (23) *English phrasal verbs in use, advanced*, 2nd ed. (2007>2017); book.

The first problem I would mention, which is also self-evident, concerns the years of release. At a glance (the numbers above are reference numbers),

- (a) published until 2000: (12), (15) and (16);
- (b) published in the mid 2000s: (4), (5), (7), (8), (9) and (11);
- (c) published in the early and mid 2010s: (6), (10), (13) and (14);
- (d) published in the early and mid 2020s: (1), (17), (18) and (19).

In the case of (2), (3), (20), (21), (22) and (23), the first year in brackets refers to the first release (or edition) and the second, while indicating the *latest* edition, is in actual fact more of a reprint than a new edition – the original content is largely the same but presented in a different layout (or format, in the case of the app equivalents). Based on the release years specified above, quite a lot of these publications appear to be either discontinued / out of print or, simply, abandoned. The obvious question is *Why?* While the vagaries of marketing strategies might have come into play over the years to justify this *abandonment* or, at least, stagnation, this problem *does* point to a certain kind of *fracture* in consistency – add to this the fact that one of the publishers mentioned (Macmillan) discontinued its line of dictionaries altogether and in any format (book, online, app).

Another self-evident aspect that may be considered problematic now in 2025 is that of the *format* or *accessibility*, especially in the case of dictionaries. (7) and (8) above used to be complemented by mobile app formats (now discontinued / no longer available, at least on Android); (4), (5), (10), (11), (12), (15), (16), (18) and (19) have always been solely available in book formats, which makes consulting them extremely slow and laborious – strangely enough, although released in the early 2020s, (18) and (19) are still just books, without any digital counterparts (online / apps), seriously detracting from their usefulness, regardless of content quality. Special mention should be made about (9) and (14): (9) is accompanied by a CD-ROM counterpart, which is now totally unusable, given its

incompatibility with newer computer operating systems (e.g. Windows 10 / 11), not to mention / reiterate the fact that even its free online version is now defunct. As to (14), it originally came with free two-year access to its dedicated online counterpart, now no longer available (discontinued).

If this section has looked at more physically tangible features of traditional ELT publications in terms of *release timelines*, *availability* and *accessibility* based on their formats, the next one will go deeper, by analysing the conceptual framework behind their content, applicability and relevance to learning and teaching needs at this point in time.

### 3. Traditional ELT publications: fragmentation

Regardless of the publisher, most – if not all of them – follow the same product release pattern. In the case of learner’s dictionaries: a general dictionary (all publishers) + a collocations dictionary (some publishers) + a thesaurus (some publishers) + a phrasal verbs dictionary (all publishers) + an idioms dictionary (all publishers). Regarding vocabulary development books / resources, a *complete* suite would be the pattern adopted by Cambridge University Press, with its *in use* series (cf. the previous section): a book for general vocabulary, one for collocations, one for idioms and one for phrasal verbs – the content of each being structured by topic.

While the above patterns can seem logical in conception and purpose, they reflect a traditionally analytical way of thinking: A + B + C etc. = TOTAL *relevant* content / knowledge to be mastered by learners. In other words, I would call this *macrofragmentation* or *fragmentation by taxonomy* (*general vocabulary + collocations + phrasal verbs + idioms*). For a better understanding of the problems this could engender for language learners, as a teacher, imagine that a student approaches you with a question like: *I want to be able to reach and master an advanced level of English. Could you tell me what / how many books (or resources) I should get and what kind?* A logical answer to this kind of question from a student might be: *Well, let’s see... You will surely need a good general dictionary, but given its space limitations, you would also need some specialised ones that can offer more details on collocations, phrasal verbs, idioms and synonyms. Besides, to practise all these, you should also get some vocabulary development books (separately) focused on each of these problems...* Any (teacher’s) answer to such a (student’s) question would certainly be quite complicated to offer and likely not only to confuse students but also dishearten them through the sheer effort and volume of work implied. This kind of *fragmentation by taxonomy* is likely to fracture the learning process (and ultimately the acquisition of language) for the simple reason that in this way, a student’s approach, understanding and learning in general will become *fragmented* – thus, *not free-flowing or organic*; students may (falsely) have the impression that each distinct problem (vocabulary / collocation / idiom / phrasal verb) is disconnected from (or irrelevant

to) any of the others, consequently adopting a *fractured* or *fragmented* approach and attitude to learning, e.g. *Now that I've done some practice on collocations, I'll do some on phrasal verbs – and after that, on idioms etc.* This is exactly what traditional ELT dictionaries and vocabulary development publications have encouraged so far, slowing down learning progress by focusing too much on analytical taxonomies instead of on an integrative and holistic framework.

Possible solutions to the above problem could be provided in a twofold manner (*content + accessibility*): by merging all different types of learner's dictionary into a single one featuring all relevant target language items (words, collocations, idioms, phrasal verbs, synonyms etc.) – of course, due to the sheer volume of the content involved, *accessibility* should be through *electronic formats* (online or apps) rather than books; by merging all different types of vocabulary development books into a single one as well, with all relevant target language items unified under *one single taxonomic label: language chunk* – students will have been briefly trained beforehand in distinguishing between *fixed phraseology* (idioms, phrasal verbs, prepositional phrases) and *semifixed expressions* (collocations) but for the practice itself by using such books and resources, having in mind the concept of *language chunk* should suffice, this facilitating a smoother and more organic experience, uninterrupted (*not fragmented / fractured*) by being constantly reminded of separate taxonomic labels.

*Macrofragmentation*, or *fragmentation by taxonomy* as described above, also inevitably leads to *microfragmentation*, or *fragmentation by omission* – the latter is to be found at sentence level and refers to highlighting different words or expressions in an example sentence in order to draw attention to them as targeted language items (e.g. single words, collocations, phrasal verbs, idioms etc.). While apparently useful for students, singling out such language items through highlighting ignores (i.e. omits) other relevant language items in the same sentence, which are not highlighted. Besides, the targeted (highlighted) language items are usually *artificially separated* from the larger (relevant) context within the same example sentence, making students see them *analytically*, as *taxonomic labels* to the detriment of the rest of the (relevant) language in one particular example sentence – this is why a single label, such as *language chunk*, would be much more helpful to be aware of; a *language chunk* is not only, for example, a binary construction (e.g. verb + particle or word 1 + word 2 in a collocation etc.) but more importantly, a larger, more natural and integrative context, where *collocation and colligation merge*. For a better understanding of *microfragmentation (by omission)*, let us consider some example sentences from vocabulary development books. Example sentence (A) contains the author's original highlighting of a certain targeted language item; example sentence (B) also accounts for the relevant language omitted in the original version (A) (example sentence (B) offers *my own* suggestion for highlighting).

Example 1 (McCarthy et. al., 2002, p.32) – targeted language: general vocabulary about work routines:

(A) *She works fixed hours; she has a **nine-to-five job**.*

(B) *She **works fixed hours; she has a nine-to-five job**.*

Example 2 (O’Dell et. al., 2017a, p. 26) – targeted language: collocations related to working life:

(A) *I had managed to build up a **network of contacts** and this gave me a good start.*

(B) *I had managed to **build up a network of contacts** and this gave me a good start.*

Example 3 (McCarthy et. al., 2017, p. 66) – targeted language: phrasal verbs related to work:

(A) *We have to keep talking constructively and try not to get **bogged down** in lengthy negotiations which only prolong the strike.*

(B) *We have to **keep talking constructively** and try not to **get bogged down in lengthy negotiations** which only prolong the strike.*

Example 4 (O’Dell et. al., 2017b, p. 62) – targeted language: idioms related to work:

(A) *She got a very generous **golden hello** when she started her first job after university.*

(B) *She **got a very generous golden hello** when she started her first job after university.*

As can be seen above, the original author’s choice – the (A) example versions – of which items to highlight, certainly guided by the best intentions in trying to signal a taxonomic item, results in the *omission* of other relevant language present in the same sentence and / or in *removing* that particular highlighted item from its natural context (*language chunk*) by severing its colligational ties. This *microfragmentation (by omission)* ends up defeating the purpose of language exposure and *intake* by hampering further *encoding*, given that learners are distracted from a more integrative language context (*language chunk*) for the sake of being made aware of an *isolated* language item.

The last type of fragmentation I would like to discuss here is that by *topic tagging* (or *subjective choice* of language items). Most vocabulary development books (including those focused on taxonomic categories like collocations, idioms and phrasal verbs) are structured by topic. While at first sight this method would seem helpful, two problems arise.

The first problem concerns the *scope* of the language covered in each topic-based unit of such a book. A typical book unit presents and practises around 15–20 language items *connected to a specified* topic. Due to obvious space constraints, the author’s choice

of which items to include and which ones to leave out becomes obviously *subjective*, let alone *impressionistic*. For example, in *English phrasal verbs in use, advanced*, the topic unit entitled *Business* (McCarthy et. al., 2017, p. 74) features two small (even tiny) subsections: (A) *Structuring a business* – with only 5 language items (phrasal verbs) covered and (B) *Doing business*, which includes 9 such items; thus, a total of 14 items in this entire unit. While space constraints are understandable, the danger posed by too much generalisation and heavily trimming down the volume of language presented (and practised) is that learners may be left with the wrong impression that in order to talk effectively about e.g. *structuring a business*, 5 phrasal verbs are enough and, respectively, for *doing business*, 9 would suffice. In other words, the author's *authority* behind their (necessarily) subjective choice dictated by space limitations will be reflected in learners' choices later on.

The second problem posed by this type of *fragmentation* refers to the relevance of the language covered. By way of illustration, let us consider a few instances of input language (example sentences) taken from some of the *in use* suite of books from Cambridge University Press – the example sentences below include the author's original highlighting of the language items covered / presented / exemplified (incidentally, in some cases this also provides further illustration of *microfragmentation*).

Example 1 (O'Dell et. al., 2017b, p. 88) – targeted language: idioms for advising and warning:

*My advice to you is to **reach for the stars**.*

Comment: This example sentence is featured in the unit called *Advising and warning*; however, the only language that explicitly refers to advice is *not* the targeted idiom (**reach for the stars**), which could be used in a lot of other situations, not necessarily connected to the topic *advice*, but simply, *my advice to you is...* (which is not an idiom).

Example 2 (same book, same unit):

*It's time to **turn over a new leaf** and start behaving responsibly.*

Comment: Again, the targeted idiom itself (**turn over a new leaf**) is *not* intrinsically linked to giving advice but the language not targeted as such (*it's time to...*) is.

Example 3 (O'Dell et. al., 2017a, p. 56) – targeted language: collocations about travel and adventure:

*I could hardly **contain my excitement** when I set off for South America...*

Comment: The highlighted collocation **contain my excitement** does *not* necessarily refer to the topic *travel and adventure*, whereas the phrasal verb construction *set off for South America* (not highlighted) does!

Example 4 (same book, same unit):

*The women have **faced severe weather conditions** since setting off to walk to the North Pole...*

Comment: Once again, the highlighted collocation **faced severe weather conditions** is more related to the topic *weather* rather than *travel and adventure*, whereas *setting off to walk to the North Pole* (not highlighted) does refer to the topic in question.

Example 5 (same book, same unit):

*... they had been relieved to report the weather was sunny and **their spirits were high**.*

Comment: Like in the preceding examples, the highlighted language item does *not* directly refer to the topic announced in the title of that respective unit.

Examples like these abound in vocabulary development books like those belonging to the *in use* suite from CUP. It becomes evident that *fragmentation by topic tagging or subjective choice of language items* is based on *impressionistic assignment of topic tags* to language items not necessarily directly linked to the purported theme or topic. This is further compounded by space constraints (understandable when it comes to *book* formats) that limit the number of targeted language items covered in one particular topic-tagged book unit. All these are highly likely to confuse learners and misdirect them in their language acquisition endeavours despite the best of intentions behind such learning resources.

#### 4. The promise of AI

As shown in the second section of this article, the vast majority of *traditional* ELT books and resources were released in the mid 2010s – if that were to be considered their heyday, one could not help wondering *why the huge gap between the mid 2010s and 2022 (almost a decade) when AI services like ChatGPT became publicly available?* This substantial time gap demonstrates that the stagnation of traditional ELT publications has *not* been caused by the advent of AI. Stagnation through abandonment and lack of innovation on the part of the major ELT publishers may also testify to a plateau reached naturally: this is pretty much all that could have been achieved based on the traditional mindsets that have been the norm in ELT publishing for decades. So, how about the new age of artificial intelligence regarding ELT? Where and how do / can AI services like ChatGPT come into play?

As mentioned among the premises of this article, right from the outset, no confusion should be made between traditional ELT publications and AI – they cannot be compared

to one another since they are different entities: the former are already finished products existing as such while the latter is a tool possibly conducive to other (kinds of) finished products related / relevant to ELT. For clarity and ease of reference, from now on I will be referring to ChatGPT as the prime example of AI service for further arguments in this article.

As a tool, ChatGPT is completely dependent on how effectively it is used – from an ELT standpoint, by teachers and learners alike. This effectiveness rests on users' competence in crafting prompts that are likely to yield the best possible results – the end products achieved in the process will reflect exactly this kind of *competence*. In what follows, I will provide a few examples of ChatGPT-generated material that can address the shortcomings of the traditional ELT products mentioned in this article.

First, the problem of single items, i.e. *language chunks*. I have already made the case for larger contexts, where collocation and colligation are taken as a whole, thus making the need to refer to distinct taxonomic categories (collocation, phrasal verb, idiom, prepositional phrase) irrelevant or inapplicable. While it may apparently be helpful for learners to *know what's what* in terms of such taxonomies, insisting too much on them can obstruct or fracture understanding, decoding, intake and encoding afterwards. Making use of the generic term *language chunk* (instead of collocation, idiom, phrasal verb etc.) can confer much more freedom and relevance as regards learners' efforts – what counts more: to make learners analytically aware of the theoretical / technical concepts behind language use, or to make them more capable of sounding *fluent* and *natural* in the use of language by facilitating *encoding* (language *output*) itself? Here are two examples.

Example 1: Without explicitly asking ChatGPT to provide a definition and usage examples for the *phrasal verb to get bogged down in something*, I simply asked for these by just providing ChatGPT with the language chunk (*get*) *bogged down in....*. Here is what ChatGPT offered:

*get bogged down in... (to become so involved in details, problems or a particular task that progress is delayed or halted):*

*Try not to get bogged down in **minor issues** and focus on the bigger picture.*  
*We got bogged down in **endless paperwork** and couldn't move the project forward.*  
*She tends to get bogged down in **overanalysing things** rather than taking action.*  
*Let's not get bogged down in **technicalities** — just explain the main idea.*  
*The team got bogged down in **meetings** that achieved very little.*  
*He often gets bogged down in **perfectionism** and misses deadlines.*  
*I don't want to get bogged down in **this argument** — let's just agree to disagree.*  
*They got bogged down in **bureaucratic red tape** and couldn't open the shop on time.*

*We were bogged down in **so many details** that we forgot our initial goal.*

The number of example sentences could obviously continue – what is important is that ChatGPT can offer *both* a very clear definition of a specific language item *and also* a large number of example sentences to illustrate typical usage (in the above example sentences I highlighted the collocates of *be / get bogged in...* in testimony to this), thus providing what traditional dictionaries *cannot*, due to space constraints. To keep this article section succinct, I will not be discussing here the vast array of teaching / learning activities that can be derived from such a list of examples; I would only draw attention to the wealth of useful language in each sentence – e.g. in the first sentence, learners see not only a chunk containing the targeted item (*get bogged down in minor issues*) but also another chunk worth paying attention to: *focus on the bigger picture*; in the second example sentence, not only *got bogged down in endless paperwork* but also *couldn't move the project forward* and so forth – in other words, by drawing attention to all the language chunks in one particular example sentence, not only that / those containing targeted items, the problem of *microfragmentation* disappears (see previous section).

Example 2: Starting from the fact that for the idiom *to trim your sails* *OALD 10* only offers the brief definition *to reduce your costs*, without any usage example sentence at all, I asked ChatGPT for a clearer definition and several example sentences for the language chunk *trim their sails* (this being the exact form – cf. *colligation* – in which I had encountered it in context). Here is what ChatGPT came up with:

*trim their sails (to reduce one's ambitions, spending or activities in response to changing conditions or limitations, often financial or strategic):*

*With the downturn in the economy, **many companies had to trim their sails** just to stay afloat.*

***The council was forced to trim its sails** after government funding was slashed.*

*When the budget was cut in half, **the project team had no choice but to trim their sails**.*

*He had big plans for the business, but **once reality hit, he had to trim his sails**.*

***Many households have been forced to trim their sails** in the face of rising living costs.*

***After a few bad investments, she had to trim her sails** and rethink her retirement plans.*

***We'll need to trim our sails** this year if we want to avoid going into the red.*

Again, in order to make the most of the ChatGPT response, I would draw attention to relevant collocations / colligations (see the highlighted chunks) that can be used together with the idiom itself; more than that, just like in the first example, more relevant language chunks are present in such example sentences, *not only the targeted item*; e.g. in the first

sentence, *the downturn in the economy, stay afloat*; in the second sentence, *government funding was slashed*; in the third sentence, *the budget was cut in half* etc.

Example 3: We have already seen that topic coverage in traditional vocabulary development books is hampered by space limitations as well as by *macrofragmentation* (i.e. dealing with different taxonomic categories of language items in different books – an artificial separation or fragmentation of vocabulary material). ChatGPT may offer a solution in that space limitations are no longer a problem and vocabulary is treated synthetically and holistically, *as a collection of language chunks*, rather than analytically, based on taxonomic labels. Here is a ChatGPT-generated example referring to the topic *BUSINESS*, focused on the subtopic *COMPETITION AND COMPETITORS* (in order to keep this example concise, I have included only 20 language chunks – they may illustrate idioms, phrasal verbs, collocations, prepositional phrases etc.; obviously, ChatGPT can generate an indefinite number of such examples of language chunks and their typical usage):

***face stiff competition*** (*encounter strong rivals in the market*)  
*We face stiff competition from larger firms offering similar services.*

***stay ahead of the competition*** (*maintain a lead over rival businesses*)  
*We're investing in new technology to stay ahead of the competition.*

***undercut the competition*** (*offer lower prices than rivals*)  
*They managed to undercut the competition by sourcing cheaper materials.*

***outperform rivals*** (*do better than competing businesses*)  
*Our online sales have outperformed rivals for the third quarter in a row.*

***gain a competitive edge*** (*achieve an advantage over others*)  
*Offering next-day delivery gave us a competitive edge.*

***a saturated market*** (*a market with too many similar products or services*)  
*It's hard to stand out in a saturated market like mobile phone accessories.*

***a fierce competitor*** (*a very strong and aggressive rival*)  
*They've become a fierce competitor in the online fashion space.*

***monitor the competition*** (*observe and analyse what competitors are doing*)  
*We regularly monitor the competition to adapt our strategy.*

**a crowded marketplace** (a business environment with many players)  
 With so many apps available, it's **a crowded marketplace**.

**gain market share** (increase the percentage of sales in a market)  
 They launched an aggressive campaign to **gain market share**.

**keep up with the competition** (maintain pace with rival businesses)  
 We need to innovate if we want to **keep up with the competition**.

**an emerging competitor** (a new business starting to challenge established players)  
 There's **an emerging competitor** that's gaining popularity with young customers.

**edge out the competition** (slightly surpass rivals)  
 Their latest ad campaign helped them **edge out the competition** last month.

**take on established players** (challenge well-known, long-standing businesses)  
 We're ready to **take on established players** in the home delivery market.

**outmanoeuvre competitors** (gain an advantage by acting more cleverly)  
 They managed to **outmanoeuvre competitors** by securing early access to the tech.

**carve out a niche** (create a distinct position within a competitive market)  
 We've **carved out a niche** by focusing on sustainable materials.

**a key rival** (an important or primary competitor)  
 Tesco remains **a key rival** for any new supermarket chain in the UK.

**cut-throat competition** (very aggressive or ruthless rivalry)  
 The travel industry has become **cut-throat competition**, especially online.

**go head-to-head with someone** (compete directly)  
 We're about to **go head-to-head with** our biggest rival in the streaming sector.

**dominate the market** (be the most powerful player in a particular industry)  
 They continue to **dominate the market** in contactless payments.

Incidentally, see how the above example sentences also include language chunks, other than the targeted / highlighted ones, which are relevant to the same (sub)topic, e.g. *larger firms offering similar services, investing in new technology, sourcing cheaper*

materials, ... for the third quarter in a row, offering next-day delivery, mobile phone accessories, the online fashion space etc. Additionally, using ChatGPT for this kind of purpose allows for *highly customised / detailed subtopics*. In effect, instead of using a prompt requesting generic vocabulary for the topic *BUSINESS*, teachers and learners could use very specific ones, based on their needs, featuring subtopics like: *BARELY SURVIVING OR STAYING AFLOAT, BEING COMPETENT AND SUCCESSFUL, BEING DISHONEST IN BUSINESS, BEING HONEST IN BUSINESS, BEING INCOMPETENT AND UNSUCCESSFUL, BEING SUCCESSFUL OR VERY SUCCESSFUL, BREAKING INTO NEW MARKETS, BRANCHING OUT, COMPETITION AND COMPETITORS, CONDUCTING BUSINESS IN GENERAL, DOWNSCALING, FIRING EMPLOYEES, FREELANCING AND FREELANCERS, HIRING STAFF, LAYING OFF STAFF, MAKING LOSSES, MAKING PROFIT, LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE, INTERNAL RESHUFFLING, RESTRUCTURING, MERGERS, TAKEOVERS, ACQUISITIONS, ON THE BRINK OF BANKRUPTCY, GOING BANKRUPT, PARTNERSHIPS AND PARTNERS, PROFITABLE OR VERY PROFITABLE, SELLING A LOT, SELLING YOUR BUSINESS OR CLOSING DOWN, STARTING YOUR OWN BUSINESS, UNPROFITABLE OR VERY UNPROFITABLE, NOT SELLING MUCH, UPSCALING, WHEN BUSINESS IS BRISK, WHEN BUSINESS IS SLOW* etc.

Example 4: Language functions (i.e. *what to say / how to say something in situation X*) have traditionally been only barely covered in ELT preparation books – usually, these are featured in minimal lists, either preceding a *speaking* or *writing* task or at the end of the respective book, as an appendix (e.g. *language bank*). However, a well thought out ChatGPT prompt could yield much more substantial and relevant instances of usage (in this example, referring to the main function *PRESENTATIONS*, particularly the subfunction *FINISHING UP, THANKING AND GREETING – INFORMAL TONE*); again, for the sake of brevity, I include only 20 entries here:

*Alright, that's a **wrap**—thanks so much for being here!*  
(**A wrap** is an informal phrase meaning the session is over.)

*Thanks everyone—**really appreciate you sticking around**.*  
(**Really appreciate you sticking around** is a friendly way to thank people for staying until the end.)

*Hope that all made sense—**cheers for listening**.*  
(**Cheers for listening** is an informal and typically British way of expressing thanks.)

*That's me done—thanks a lot for showing up.*

*(Thanks a lot for showing up is a relaxed and genuine way to appreciate attendance.)*

*We're all finished here—big thanks for being part of it.*

*(Big thanks for being part of it is an informal, warm way to show gratitude.)*

*Hope you've enjoyed it—thanks for joining in.*

*(Thanks for joining in is a casual way to acknowledge both presence and participation.)*

*Alright, I'll leave it there—thanks again for your time.*

*(Thanks again for your time is polite but relaxed and suitable for informal settings.)*

*That's everything—you've been a brilliant crowd.*

*(You've been a brilliant crowd is an upbeat, informal way to thank a responsive audience.)*

*Thanks so much—always great to have you here.*

*(Always great to have you here is a warm, informal expression of appreciation.)*

*Hope it wasn't too heavy—thanks for bearing with me.*

*(Thanks for bearing with me is a casual way to thank people for their patience.)*

*And that's all from me—catch you next time!*

*(Catch you next time is an informal and friendly farewell.)*

*Really appreciate the time—drop me a message if you want to chat more.*

*(Drop me a message is a casual invitation to follow up later.)*

*Feel free to hang back for a chat—otherwise, see you around.*

*(See you around is an informal way to say goodbye without formality.)*

*Thanks again—hope you got something useful out of it.*

*(Hope you got something useful out of it is a laid-back way to express your aim for the session.)*

*That's us done for today—go grab a cuppa, you've earned it.*

*(Go grab a cuppa is a light, informal suggestion to relax after the session.)*

*Cheers for sticking with me—you've been fab.*

*(You've been fab is an informal and friendly way to compliment the audience.)*

*Alright then, I'll let you get on with your day.*

*(I'll let you get on with your day is a casual, considerate way to close.)*

*Thanks for making the time—lovely to see you all.*

*(Lovely to see you all is an informal and warm farewell phrase.)*

*Any questions later, just give me a shout.*

*(Give me a shout is an informal offer for further communication.)*

*Take care everyone—and thanks again for coming along.*

*(Thanks again for coming along is a friendly, informal way to end a session on a positive note.)*

Just like in the case of topics, *functions* can be broken down into *subfunctions* for more effective coverage and customisation. Here are some examples of subfunctions based on the function *PRESENTATIONS: GREETING YOUR AUDIENCE – NEUTRAL TONE, GREETING YOUR AUDIENCE – INFORMAL TONE, INTRODUCING YOURSELF – NEUTRAL TONE, INTRODUCING YOURSELF – INFORMAL TONE, GETTING STARTED – NEUTRAL TONE, GETTING STARTED – INFORMAL TONE, CHANGING THE SUBJECT – NEUTRAL TONE, CHANGING THE SUBJECT – INFORMAL TONE, INVITING AND TAKING QUESTIONS – NEUTRAL TONE, INVITING AND TAKING QUESTIONS – INFORMAL TONE, ANSWERING QUESTIONS – NEUTRAL TONE, ANSWERING QUESTIONS – INFORMAL TONE, SUMMING UP AND CONCLUDING – NEUTRAL TONE, SUMMING UP AND CONCLUDING – INFORMAL TONE, FINISHING UP, THANKING AND GREETING – NEUTRAL TONE, FINISHING UP, THANKING AND GREETING – INFORMAL TONE* etc. Once again, the *accompanying language* in the examples above (other than the highlights) is perfectly suited to the main function – and, by extrapolation, to other possible functions in similar or related communication situations, e.g. *thanks so much for being here, hope that all made sense, hope it wasn't too heavy, that's us done for today, thanks for making the time* etc.

Examples like the ones above could continue indefinitely. So, what is *the promise of AI* regarding ELT, within the scope of the argument here? No longer in its infancy, an AI service like ChatGPT has already amply demonstrated that it can be an invaluable tool for language teachers and learners alike. Here are some key points that may support this claim – AI / ChatGPT:

- (a) is freely available to all (language) users;
  - (b) uses real-life language instead of *textbook* language;
  - (c) can easily adapt to any user's existing level of language proficiency;
  - (d) can offer highly customised, need-based responses;
  - (e) can greatly speed up and diversify language learning / teaching processes;
  - (f) can offer large amounts of suitable learning and teaching material;
  - (g) encourages learner independence;
  - (h) encourages teaching freedom;
  - (i) can easily contextualise discrete language items and also unify them into a natural-sounding whole;
  - (j) democratises access to language resources (cf. the closed system of ELT publishers' proprietary / in-house corpora only accessible to their authors);
- etc.

Ultimately – echoing one of the main tenets of the Lexical Approach, i.e. *teachers should become learning managers* (Woolard, 2000, p. 46) – AI / ChatGPT can empower both learners and teachers through a paradigm shift: rather than *purveyors of knowledge*, teachers can become *managers of learning* by training their students to craft adept prompts towards their independence in learning and acquiring language – within this new paradigm, being able to use AI tools effectively is likely to become *an essential educational competence* in the near future.

## 5. Conclusions

This article has argued that the emergence of AI tools such as ChatGPT represents *not merely a technological advance but a significant pedagogical opportunity within ELT*. Traditional publications – long the backbone of vocabulary instruction – are now increasingly constrained by *taxonomic fragmentation, space limitations and limited digital integration*. Their stagnation is *not* the result of AI innovation but rather a natural *plateau* reached through decades of working within fixed, analytical frameworks.

In contrast, ChatGPT functions *not* as a finished product but as a *flexible tool* that allows both teachers and learners to generate large volumes of contextualised, meaningful language input tailored to specific needs. This approach closely aligns with the Lexical Approach, which emphasises exposure to grammaticalised lexis through naturally occurring language chunks, rather than isolated, categorised items. In other words, AI helps overcome both *macrofragmentation* (by collapsing artificial / overly analytical taxonomies) and *microfragmentation* (by embedding targeted items within broader, authentic usage).

Nonetheless, realising this potential depends *not* on abandoning traditional ELT practice but on *reimagining the roles of both teacher and learner*. AI should not be seen as a threat to the teaching profession but as a means of enhancing it. Teachers can shift from *purveyors of static content* to *facilitators and managers of the learning process*, guiding students in effective AI use, including prompt design and critical reflection. Learners, in turn, become *more independent and empowered*, with AI granting them agency to explore, test and produce language in ways previously limited by the constraints of print media.

In this light, AI does *not* replace teachers or traditional resources but *reframes* them within *a more fluid, user-led and holistic paradigm*. As AI tools seem to become more embedded in educational contexts, the ability to harness their potential will emerge as *a core professional competence*. *The promise of AI* concerning ELT, therefore, lies *not* simply in speed or scale, but in its capacity to support *a more inclusive, responsive and integrated vision of language learning* – one in which traditional authority gives way to *dynamic, learner-driven exploration*.

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