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USING MEMRISE
IN LEGAL ENGLISH TEACHING

Abstract. *Mem*rise is an educational tool available both online and for mobile devices. *Mem*rise uses flashcards and mnemonic techniques to aid in teaching foreign languages and memorizing information from other subjects, e.g. geography, law or mathematics. *Mem*rise courses are created by its users through the process of crowdsourcing; therefore they are tailored to the individual needs of the users and may focus on the specific content of a particular coursebook or classes.

The paper will attempt to present possibilities of using m*em*rise in teaching and learning legal English vocabulary during a tertiary course leading to TOLES (Test of Legal English Skills) certificate examination. The paper will look at various types of exercises which facilitate memorizing vocabulary, learning collocations, prepositional phrases, develop the skill of paraphrasing and defining legal terms of art in plain English. Application of the crowdsourcing method enables the learners to participate in the process of the course creation and constitutes for them a supplementary, out of class exposure to the target language.

The second part of the paper will discuss the results of the research conducted by the author among her law students. The aim of the research was to investigate the students' opinions about *mem*rise as a tool which might facilitate individual learning of the specialist language, as well as to assess whether m*em*rise may influence the test results achieved by the students during the legal English course. The paper will contrastively analyse the progress tests results achieved by the students who have used *mem*rise to revise and recycle language material and those who have chosen traditional (non-mobile) methods of learning. The research also attempted to address the question whether the students who had been the contributors to the content of *mem*rise courses had performed better in tests than those who had only been the users.

Keywords: Legal English, ESP, teaching vocabulary, collocations, new technologies, memrise.

Introduction

Lexical approach to foreign languages teaching gained popularity in the 1990s of the twentieth century as an alternative to methods based

on teaching grammar and vocabulary. Michael Lewis, inspired by works of Willis (1990) as well as Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992), created the foundations of the approach, which he described as a lexical approach. The main assumption of the approach derives from the conviction that language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar. In view of the above, language is composed of a rich variety of fixed collocations, expressions and phrases, so called "chunks" which are habitually and traditionally used together. Therefore, foreign language learners should concentrate on mastering and memorizing these chunks rather than individual words. Lexical approach is a very pragmatic approach according to which learners acquire ready-made, indivisible chunks of language, which later enable them to build full length correct sentences.

Human brain tends to remember information rather than to process it. Thus, collecting a large number of ready-made fixed fragments of a language facilitates the development of both fluency through easier, mechanical construction of longer, coherent utterances by the speaker and understanding the language by the recipient. Lexical approach inspired some changes in the process of teaching and learning foreign languages, where the focus shifted from the traditional model of text analysis composed of vocabulary presentation, reading and practice, to (1) the individual analysis of the texts, and specially the collocations used in the texts, (2) selection of the most useful collocations, and (3) finally attempts to use them by the learners.

Collocations in foreign language teaching

Oxford dictionary defines a collocation as "the habitual juxtaposition of a particular word with another word or words with a frequency greater than chance". In English collocations can be composed of a varied number of words and many authors made attempts to classify them.

Hausmann (1989: 1010) divided collocations into six types: adjective + noun (wrongful dismissal), (subject-) noun + verb (court ruled), noun + noun (piece of advice), adverb + adjective (summarily tried), verb + adverb (severely criticize) and verb + (object-) noun (receive a salary).

Aisenstadt (1981) suggested similar classification but he divided the collocation composed of verb + noun into two more detailed ones: verb + noun (make a decision) and verb + preposition + noun (come to a decision). Benson et al. (1997) also postulated the incorporation of prepositions into English collocations and added the following combinations to the Hausamann's classification: noun + preposition (interest in), preposition + noun (on de-

mand) and adjective + preposition (worth of), which constitute the so called grammatical collocations.

Unlike grammar, formation of collocations does not follow any clearly specified rules. Certain words are used together only because they have been used together for a very long time. Therefore, it is hard to explain why you say "to throw, hold, have a party" and not "~~to make a party~~". Similarly, in legal English you say "to break the law" when you violate the law, but "to breach a contract" when you violate the terms of the contract, and "to infringe a copyright" when you violate the copyright. As a result, mastering the knowledge of collocations becomes one of the most difficult aspects of learning and teaching legal English, and the greatest challenge for the students.

Collocations in ESP

Some collocations in legal English are comparatively flexible and some verbs, adverbs or adjectives can be replaced with their synonyms without changing the meaning of the collocation. For example in a phrase "to settle a dispute" the verb "to settle" can be replaced with the verb "to resolve" and the meaning of the phrase will remain unchanged. However, in legal English there are many collocations which were created as a result of the centuries long tradition. These collocations were used by the generations of lawyers and transferred from generation to generation in texts which often were grammatically and syntactically incorrect, often with poor punctuation. Nevertheless, next generations of lawyers were educated with the use of these texts, and they calqued certain expressions and phrases fixed and preserved by the tradition to refer to specific problems, phenomena, and elements of the legal process. What is more, the use of other expressions and phrases might introduce ambiguity and vagueness. Thus, it is really important to master the knowledge of specialist collocations in the process of legal English learning and teaching, since they not only facilitate the fluency of the learners, but also boost the professionalism of the language users and the language they produce.

Rupert Haigh in "Legal English" (2012: 91–92) illustrates the above issue with a series of collocations (verb + noun) used to describe the ways in which certain legal events and processes are begun and ended: "annul marriage/contract", "cancel order/meeting/appointment", "discharge obligation/duty/invoice/contract/from liability", "dismiss application/employee/appeal", "repeal law/statute", "repudiate contract", "rescind contract", "revoke order/power of attorney/ permission/authorisation", "terminate contract/employment", "withdraw offer/permission/support".

Prepositional phrases in ESP

Another important aspect of legal English are grammatical collocations, i.e. those containing prepositions, and especially prepositional phrases. Mariusz Bęcławski in his presentation of the unpublished paper entitled The Application of Prepositions in Legal English: Theory and Practice presented during the 3rd International Legal English Conference in Warsaw in 2009 talked about 290 prepositional phrases, which he identified in his research on the frequency of their occurrence in legal English texts.

The above number shows how challenging may be an aspiration to linguistic accuracy in the process of legal English learning, which also constitutes one of the most significant skills graduates must have in the eyes of the employers. The survey conducted among the Human Resources staff of the Magic Circle (i.e. the biggest, international law firms comprising Allen & Overy, Clifford Chance, Linklaters, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, and Slaughter and May) by Catherine Mason from Global Legal English publishing house in 2010 confirmed that excellent command of English is one of the most important recruitment criteria. Hence, prepositional phrases are one of the most important elements of the legal language and may lead to many inaccuracies as in the following phrases: "submit your offer WITHIN seven days" (i.e. on any day before seven day pass) and "submit your offer IN seven days" (on the seventh day counting from now). Another example can be the difference between "draft the contract BY 5 o'clock" (finish writing before 5 o'clock) and "draft the contract UNTIL 5 o'clock" (continue writing till 5 o'clock).

*Mem*rise – interactive online flashcards

*Mem*rise is an online educational tool available on the website www.mem rise.com as well as in a mobile version provided by Apple Store and Google Play. *Mem*rise uses flashcards combined with mnemonics to teach foreign languages and to memorize information from other disciplines, e.g. geography, law or mathematics. *Mem*rise courses are created by the internet users through the method of so called crowdsourcing (i.e. all members of the *mem*rise community can contribute course content), so they can be tailored to satisfy individual needs of the users and can supplement traditional language classes through practice and revision of the content taught there. *Mem*rise users can also follow the courses created by others without the need of their own course creation. *Mem*rise uses the achievements of the memory studies and is programmed so that it reminds the users, by sending

automatic email messages, to revise material already studied in order to increase chances of remembering it. These messages can be cancelled in the settings, though.

*Mem*rise allows its users to create simple sets of flashcards containing varied kinds of information whose number can be individually tailored to the needs of the learners. Flashcards may contain e.g. definitions, synonyms, L1 translation, verb forms, missing prepositions, pictures illustrating the meaning of the word taught, which is especially useful for children. The amount of information provided depends on the author of the course. *Mem*rise allows its contributors to enrich the course content with audio files demonstrating the pronunciation of the words and phrases taught. These can be recorded by the course author or if the author is not a native speaker and prefers not to record his/her own voice to upload mp3 files which can be quickly downloaded from http://soundoftext.com/ website.

If you want to start using *mem*rise, please follow the instructions below. You can also download more detailed, illustrated tutorial from: http://luczak.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/memrise-tutorial.pdf, which may especially useful since the instructions are supplemented with pictograms.

*Mem*rise tutorial

In order to start using *mem*rise:
1. Go to www.memrise.com.
2. Create an account by signing up.
3. Or quickly sign up with your Facebook account.
4. When your account is ready, you can login.
5. When you are logged, you can:
    – start using *mem*rise by browsing the existing courses created by *mem*rise users, e.g. Legal English courses created under my supervision by Kozminski University students available to study on: http://www.memrise.com/user/LegalEnglish/courses/teaching/
    – use *mem*rise on your mobile devices (iPhone and Android); courses can be downloaded and studied offline
    – or create your own course.

If you want to create your own *mem*rise course:
1. When you are logged in, from the top toolbar at *mem*rise main page choose CREATE.
2. Complete the required information and click CREATE COURSE when you finish.

3. Now it is time to ADD WORDS to teach/learn by filling the boxes:
4. To add more words click PLUS.
5. You can delete columns you do not need by clicking them and following instructions. E.g. if you do not need AUDIO column, click it and follow the instructions in a pop up window.
6. If you want to add more words at once, it is easier to prepare the list in Excel.

TIP: A good idea is to share a Google Sheets file with your student(s) and coedit the list or only monitor the list your student(s) prepare.

1. Remember to separate the columns with a comma and not to use commas anywhere else in the text. Instead use colons for example.
2. When your list is ready copy it and go to BULK ADD WORDS in ADVANCED menu of your *mem*rise course.
3. Choose BULK ADD WORDS option, choose COMMA as a delimiter, and PASTE your list into the box.
4. Confirm by clicking ADD.
5. Go to course DETAILS to make your course PUBLIC (visible to other users).

If you want to add audio to your *mem*rise course:

1. Go to http://soundoftext.com/.
2. Type the word or phrase the pronunciation of which you want to hear in the search box (you can type longer phrases up to 100 characters), choose the language your word or phrase is in and click SUBMIT. Now you can play the sound or
3. Save the result (i.e. mp3 file with the recording) on your disc.
4. Go back to editing your course on *mem*rise.
5. Upload the mp3 file to AUDIO column on *mem*rise.

Learners will hear the pronunciation each time this word will be learnt or tested, i.e. each time the word appears on the screen.

Once you create your course, you can always edit it. When learners begin the course, they can display all the items that are to be learnt during the course and ignore those they do not want to study and customize (shorten) courses to suit their needs. The title avatar of each course shows how long it takes to cover the course and how many people are enrolled at this course.

Learners can choose their style and set their learning/reviewing pace in settings. They can choose how many items they want to learn in one session, and the choice is between five, ten, and fifteen items. They can also decide how many items they want to revise at a time: ten, twenty five, or fifty. In settings they can also disable notifications by e-mail if they find them annoying.

Users can set their daily goals (i.e. how many numbers they want to learn a day) to be reminded to study.

Users' ratings which are visible next to each course, can be motivating for some of them, and an interesting feedback for the teacher who an active learner is.

*Mem*rise allows for the provision of alternative correct answers through the use of "ALTS" option when creating the course. However, you may wish that your students learn all required collocations, e.g. "make/issue/start/file a claim", and not just one of them. In that case instead of creating alternative answers, the first letter of the required verb has been given in bracket in order to make the learners memorize all the options.

*Mem*rise in ESP – an example of good practice

The author of this paper has decided to supervise the project the aim of which was creating a *mem*rise collection of legal English vocabulary required by the syllabus of the TOLES (Test of Legal English Skills) certificate examination at Foundation (B1) and Higher (B2) levels. The project was based on the phenomenon of crowdsourcing and in this case the first, the second and the third year students who attended legal English compulsory classes run at the Law Faculty of Kozminski University in Warsaw were invited to co-author the content of the *mem*rise courses. The courses are now available on http://www.memrise.com/user/LegalEnglish/courses/teaching/. The courses are based on the linguistic material of Global Legal English publication "The Lawyer's English Language Coursebook" (2011), which constitutes the primary coursebook leading the candidates towards the TOLES examination. Therefore, the *mem*rise courses created during the project correspond to the chapters of "The Lawyer's English Language Coursebook" and comprise the following subject areas:

1. Legal Profession
2. Banking
3. Employment Law
4. Tort
5. Business Law
6. Company Law
7. Contract Law.

The last but not least course comprises material from all chapters in the coursebook devoted to Contract Law and understanding the language of English contracts.

As it was mentioned above *mem*rise uses the technique of flashcards and was originally created to facilitate the process of learning a foreign language. Legal English courses created by Kozminski University community have been, in most cases, divided into three parts:

1. **Definitions** which develop the skill of defining specialist legal English terms in standard, modern English, so called plain English. Definitions courses also contain supplementary Polish translation which is not tested, though and is only meant to facilitate the memorization process.
2. **Collocations** which develop and test the knowledge of common legal English collocations and improve the fluency.
3. **Prepositions** which develop and test the knowledge of prepositions used in prepositional phrases which improve the accuracy.

Learners who decide to follow the course start with the presentation of the terms, collocations or prepositional phrases whose number they can adjust in the settings and then the presented content is tested in various kinds of exercises which include matching, multiple choice, jumbled words or letters, typing, etc. It is worth noting that mobile version of *mem*rise offers different kinds of exercises, so using *mem*rise both online and on mobile devices introduces variety. Moreover, *mem*rise can be used offline on mobile devices which may be important of those users who do not want to incur extra costs of transfer.

Kozminski University students' opinions on using legal English *mem*rise courses

The aim of the research was to investigate the opinions of Kozminski University law students who used *mem*rise as an element of their individual study during legal English course at university and to assess how *mem*rise influenced the grades students obtained in legal English tests they had to write. The research was an attempt to address the question whether the students who used *mem*rise scored better in test than those students who did not use *mem*rise and whether the students who co-authored the content of the courses scored better than those who only learned and revised with *mem*rise.

In addition, the research aimed at collecting users' opinions on work with *mem*rise, strengths and weaknesses of *mem*rise courses which had been set up already in order to modify and change them accordingly.

The research was conducted with the help of a short questionnaire con-

sisting of seven questions among the first, the second and the third year students who participated in B2+ legal English course. The questionnaires were distributed among 32 respondents after they were handed in the results of their end-of-chapter tests.

Research results

One in three respondents did not use *mem*rise courses while preparing for the test and revising material. Over a half of those students received satisfactory (3/5) grades from the tests, only one person achieved a good grade (4/5) and one third of the students failed the tests.

On the other hand, only 17% of the students who used *mem*rise failed the tests, just slightly more than a half of them attained satisfactory (3/5) grades and one third – good (4/5) grades.

Most of the learners (75%) who failed the tests spent less than one hour on *mem*rise. Only one person in that group devoted *mem*rise more time (1–3 hours) but still received an unsatisfactory (2/5) grade.

The students, who obtained the best results, had worked with *mem*rise during a varied timespan. Two out of seven most successful students used the application for less than an hour. Another two students devoted from one to three hours to *mem*rise practice and one student revised with *mem*rise for over six hours. Two of those respondents took part in creating the content for *mem*rise courses.

Majority of the subjects who achieved satisfactory (3/5) results worked with *mem*rise for about 1–3 hours, three out of the students spent about 3–6 hours and one student less than an hour. Two students in this group (20%) co-authored the courses.

One out of eight respondents was engaged in drafting definitions for *mem*rise courses. They declared that they had spent most time learning for the tests. A large proportion of them revised with *mem*rise from three to six hours and one person – over six hours. Half of these students attained good (4/5) grades in tests and the other half – satisfactory (3/5) ones.

Students who did not use *mem*rise to prepare for the tests provided the following reasons as their arguments against:
 – they prefer and trust their notes and the coursebook more (50%)
 – *mem*rise courses take a lot of time (50%)
 – they experienced some technical problems (38%)
 – they do not like to learn with a computer (13%)
 – they did not know *mem*rise existed (13%). Sic!

The criticism of the fact that work with *mem*rise is time-consuming and tiring was most often (44%) postulated by the respondents who did learn with *mem*rise before tests. Another essential weakness that was stressed by one out of four students was the fact that *mem*rise did not recognize synonyms and did not award points for such answers, since they were treated as the wrong ones. About 15% of students complained about technical problems they had experienced, individual respondents mentioned too long definitions, too frequent repetition of tested items, some lacks in the course content, i.e. the class tests included some items which were not on *mem*rise, and the possibility of revising the items once covered only in four hours' time.

The research shows that the most important advantage of learning with *mem*rise, mentioned by the majority of the surveyed students, is the effective memorization of the vocabulary due to the frequent revision enforced by this tool. One out of three research subjects stressed the fact that *mem*rise now constitutes a kind of data base where the course participants have access to the most important vocabulary covered during the classes. The same number of users also praised the modern, electronic form of the tool and its mobile version. According to every seventh respondent the element of competition plays an important role and the rating of most active learners of each course visible on the website is very motivating.

The less significant advantages of *mem*rise courses included professional and clear interface, a variety of the task generated by the tool or the fact that *mem*rise also teaches spelling.

Conclusions

The research confirmed that learning with *mem*rise tool positively influenced the test results achieved by the students.

One in three students who did not facilitate their learning process with *mem*rise failed the test, while among those who revised with *mem*rise – only one in six. All of the students who were unsuccessful devoted less than one hour to *mem*rise practice. As it was expected, all students who co-authored the *mem*rise courses passed the tests and a half of them attained good (4/5) grades as compared to only 33% of good grades among the *mem*rise users who only learned with *mem*rise and did not contribute to course creation.

The above results prove that both the timespan devoted to learning as well as engagement in the course creation, positively affect the results obtained by the students. Therefore, it seems worthy of inviting learners to create the course content, since this increases the time they spent on

individual work and in the long run positively influences the grades they achieve during tests.

*Mem*rise project was welcomed very enthusiastically by the students who contributed eagerly to course content creation and built a large body of followers who learned with *mem*rise before tests. This has also allowed the author to collect their opinions about this online tool in order to identify and eliminate certain weaknesses when constructing new courses and modify the existing ones.

After analysis of the feedback provided by the *mem*rise, it can be recommended that the courses created are composed of a smaller number of items to be learned and as a result covering them will take less time. Alternatively, the students can be trained before they start using *mem*rise to adjust the setting of the courses they follow so that they learn as many items as they prefer at a time and eliminate, by ignoring, the vocabulary they know from the course content.

It is advisable to use plain language when drafting definitions; they should be short and simple, sometimes a synonym works the best. Especially that a skill of writing such definitions is especially important for law graduates who must be trained in using plain English in their work. *Mem*rise courses can be a place where this skill can be developed outside the classroom.

*Mem*rise project whose aim was to create an extensive base of legal English vocabulary on www.memrise.com brought a very positive effect in the form of students' engagement in work on very thorough linguistic material which now can serve new generations of law students and facilitate their preparation for tests and certificate examinations. The existing base can be constantly extended and revised, improved in accordance with the suggestions of the users collected during the above discussed research as well as new users who will follow the courses.

*Mem*rise content creation has also resulted in the collection of Excel spreadsheets with legal English vocabulary which now can be exploited further. The next project planned will involve preparation and online publication of a series of glossaries containing vocabulary from various areas of law which can be downloaded as pdf files form the internet. This project is a response to those comments in which some of the users complained about the lack of time to follow the courses on *mem*rise and monotony of the tasks. Now, they will have an access to linguistic material and will decide on their own how to exploit it. Ideally, the glossaries will be supplemented with exercises which will allow the students to test their knowledge of the lexis studied. Glossaries will probably satisfy the needs of those students

who are not fascinated with new technologies and prefer more traditional learning methods.

Excel spreadsheets can be used to create flashcards with the use of other online tools, such as quizlet.com for example, which is very similar to *mem*rise but offers automatic audio of all the items and might recommended for those students who have problems with proper pronunciation.

All in all, the use of *mem*rise proves to be very beneficial both for the users and the authors of the courses. *Mem*rise courses can be created almost instantly with just one click and later the vocabulary base can serve other purposes, i.e. to generate tests and glossaries or for conducting oral examinations.

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