Combining vocabulary and pronunciation teaching

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Abstract

This paper discusses a new method for the combined teaching of vocabulary and pronunciation to learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). While there is commonly strong emphasis on the teaching of vocabulary, pronunciation teaching is usually neglected in the EFL classroom. This paper first presents the results of a national survey regarding the teaching of vocabulary and pronunciation in the Greek EFL context. It then discusses selected principles characterising L1 and L2 vocabulary acquisition and elaborates on the nature of lexical units which combine meaning and form. It proceeds by providing a detailed account of the new method proposed and finally it elaborates on its potential advantages by expounding its major principles.

Keywords: vocabulary teaching, pronunciation teaching, mental lexicon, categorisation, learning strategies

1. Introduction

The mental lexicon consists of lexical items represented in terms of form and meaning. Research by Fay and Cutler (1977) has suggested that lexical entries are accessed by two different networks, i.e. a phonological and a semantic one. Comprehension and production processes are based on a unidirectional mapping between meaning and sound, i.e. a mapping from sound to meaning for comprehension and from meaning to sound for production.

A particularly challenging area of research concerns the organisation of the L2 lexicon. Despite different claims regarding the existence of a single vs two separate lexical stores and the primacy of phonological over semantic organi-
sation, research has underscored the importance of phonology in the L2 mental lexicon. Meara (1982) has suggested that phonology plays a much more important role in the organisation of the L2 mental lexicon than in L1; Wolter (2001) has acknowledged the importance of phonology but has claimed that factors such as learners’ proficiency level and degree of word knowledge influence the structure of the L2 mental lexicon. Phonology appears to be more important for words that are not very well known; as words become better known, semantic organisation takes precedence.

Such research findings have important implications for L2 instruction. Generally, the teaching of vocabulary has focused upon the teaching of meaning, semantic relations and collocations. On the contrary, the teaching of ‘form’ has generally not received systematic attention; it usually relies on the teacher providing the form of words without further elaboration or use of methodology aiming to assist retention and recall of the pronunciation of the target form of lexical items. It is worth pointing out that the pronunciation of words provided by non-native teachers may or may not adhere to a native model.

This paper proposes new methodology for the joined teaching of meaning and form, i.e. vocabulary and pronunciation, to EFL learners. It thus aims to address a relative imbalance in the teaching of pronunciation and vocabulary, which may affect negatively learners’ general fluency skills, degree of intelligibility and communicative competence.

Interest in vocabulary instruction has increased in the last twenty years as it has been recognised that vocabulary plays a major role in language learning (Laufer 1989); there has also been a growing number of studies on issues related to vocabulary acquisition while the availability of computerised corpora has promoted the study and teaching of vocabulary. Interest in pronunciation teaching has waxed and waned over the years depending on dominant approaches to language teaching. Generally, teaching and research on pronunciation have lagged behind almost all other aspects of language learning and instruction. Recently there appears to be a renewed interest in pronunciation, which may in part be related (a) to current methodological approaches that emphasise the integration of language components in L2 teaching, and (b) to the importance currently placed on the production of socially acceptable and communicatively functional language.

Over the years several Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) have been proposed for the teaching of vocabulary. These include strategies that vary in the depth of processing, i.e. the so-called ‘shallow strategies’ such as simple memorisation, repetition and note taking, and ‘deep strategies’ such as use of
imagery, grouping, the Keyword Method, etc. Schmitt (1997) presents a comprehensive account of VLS and provides a taxonomy of strategies divided into two major categories, i.e. strategies for the discovery of a new word’s meaning and strategies for the consolidation of meaning. Each category includes several VLS (i.e. determination, social, memory, cognitive and metacognitive strategies) (see research by Cook and Mayer 1983, Nation 1990, Oxford 1990).

The proposed approach for the combined teaching of vocabulary and pronunciation exploits a selection of VLS, that is, a subset of memory and social strategies, in order to facilitate and enhance the acquisition of both facets of the lexical entry, i.e. its form and semantic content. Memory strategies focus on promoting deep processing so that the meaning and form of each vocabulary item will be better retained and recalled. Social strategies promote learners’ interaction with the teacher and the classmates and aim to further support the learning of form and meaning. The originality of this approach lies in the equally balanced treatment of vocabulary and pronunciation so that there is mutual reinforcement in the learning of these components.

With respect to the methodology of vocabulary teaching, this has been widely researched (Laufer 1988, 1989, 1991, Carter and McCarthy 1988, Nation 1990, Schmitt 1997, 2000) and there exist vocabulary teaching syllabi that are commonly used by language teachers. The methodology of pronunciation teaching, on the other hand, needs to address particular features such as language factors, i.e. the linguistic background of the learner, learner factors and their relationship to personal identity, as well as an assessment of learner needs and goals in pronunciation learning. As a result, the design of a pronunciation syllabus needs to address specific learner needs and consequently may vary considerably within or across EFL contexts. In the Greek EFL context, in particular, although there are some broad guidelines regarding the teaching of pronunciation in primary education, there is not a specific syllabus for either the primary or secondary level of education. In addition, most of the popular EFL coursebooks used in Greece lack any treatment of pronunciation.

In view of this reality, the approach we are proposing aims to fill in a gap in the current English Language Teaching (ELT) context, not by singling out pronunciation as a separate language component, but by combining it with vocabulary teaching and thus by integrating and promoting the learning of these two important aspects of language.
2. National Survey

A national survey was conducted aiming to investigate issues related to the teaching of vocabulary and pronunciation in the Greek primary and secondary EFL education. In particular, the questionnaire included a general section inquiring about teachers’ academic background, years of experience, and so on. A separate section included specific questions about the university or other courses teachers had attended regarding the methodology of teaching vocabulary and pronunciation, the methodology they adopt for the teaching of these language components in their teaching practice, their preferences regarding learners’ assessment, books and materials they use, and so on. Questionnaires were sent out to all state and private schools through the Educational Directorates and to language institutes through their professional associations.

In total, we received 542 completed questionnaires. The majority (489) was answered by state school teachers; in particular, 202 came from primary state schools and 287 from secondary state schools. The majority of teachers were between 31 and 45 years old and had over 4 years of experience; a large number of these teachers (222) had a teaching experience between 10 and 25 years. Most of the teachers were graduates of Greek universities (474), 50 had an MA degree and 3 were Ph.D. holders.

One of the questions required teachers to indicate some of the criteria they use for choosing their textbooks. Teachers were given a selection of criteria and were asked to rate the five major criteria they use on a scale from 1 to 5. These criteria were: the teaching of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, skills, the variety of activities and tasks the book contains, its thematic content, material for student assessment, availability of supplementary materials and a category of ‘other’ criteria teachers may have wanted to specify. Teachers’ answers indicated that most select their textbook on the basis of either a comprehensive treatment of skills or the variety of topics covered in the book. The rest of the criteria were selected by a considerably smaller number of teachers; it is worth noting that only 18 teachers select their textbooks on the basis of its vocabulary while none indicated that pronunciation was one of the criteria used for the selection of their textbook.

Regarding the teaching of vocabulary, 334 teachers stated that they had been taught methods and techniques of vocabulary teaching at the university, although the emphasis placed on this particular component by the relevant university course was average or limited. Regarding the application of this background knowledge to their teaching, 134 teachers stated that they apply it to an average degree and 199 teachers stated that they make very limited or no use of
this knowledge in their teaching practice. In addition, 360 teachers reported that they had attended independent seminars on the teaching of vocabulary and 140 of those indicated that they make extensive use of the knowledge acquired in these seminars, while 133 teachers stated that they make moderate use of such knowledge.

With reference to pronunciation teaching, 485 teachers stated that they had attended theoretical courses on Phonetics and/or Phonology at university while 345 indicated that they had not attended any course on the methodology of teaching pronunciation. To the question whether they teach pronunciation in their classes, 319 teachers stated that they do. Teachers were asked to rate the degree to which they apply the knowledge of phonetics and phonology acquired at university to their teaching practice. The majority of those who apply such knowledge stated that they do so to an average degree (regarding phonetics=135 teachers, phonology=109, methodology=49), although there was a large number of teachers (100) who indicated that they make use of their knowledge of Phonetics to a large degree in the classroom. In addition, 420 teachers stated that they had not attended any independent seminars on pronunciation teaching while 112 indicated that they had. Of those, 99 teachers stated that they make use of the knowledge acquired at these seminars to an average or large degree.

Comparing teachers’ answers with regard to vocabulary and pronunciation teaching, it is worth noting that more teachers attended university courses on phonetics and/or phonology than vocabulary teaching. Such a response was expected since courses on phonetics and phonology were compulsory for a number of years at relevant university BA degrees, while vocabulary teaching was never an autonomous subject; it was occasionally included in a general methodology course and the degree of coverage was in general limited and variable. Along similar lines, the course on the methodology of pronunciation teaching, which is usually an optional course and has not been offered for as many years as the theoretical courses on Phonetics/Phonology,¹ was attended by a relatively limited number of teachers.

Despite the relative lack of methodological background relevant to vocabulary teaching, it can be claimed that in the Greek ELT context, vocabulary is systematically treated as it is an essential component of the ELT syllabus and of all EFL textbooks. With respect to pronunciation teaching, however, the number of teachers who claim that they teach pronunciation exceeded our expectations since the results showed that a very limited number of teachers had

¹ At least in Aristotle University, School of English.
attended courses on the teaching of pronunciation. This suggests that if teachers 
incorporate activities on pronunciation in their practice, this may be assumed to 
be based on some theoretical descriptive knowledge of the sound system of the 
English language and perhaps be performed in a non-systematic way. Such a 
claim is further supported by the fact that the majority of course books do not 
include a pronunciation component; this is in contrast to vocabulary which is 
extensively treated in all course books and for which there is a detailed syllabus 
to be followed by the teacher. In addition, the emphasis of tests and exams on 
the written component of the language in the Greek educational system ensures 
the detailed teaching and assessment of vocabulary but not of pronunciation.

3. The new method

The proposed method is founded on the principle of categorisation, i.e. organi-
sation and grouping of vocabulary items according to a particular pronunciation 
aspect, e.g. a common sound or other feature such as stress pattern. Categori-
sation can vary according to the pronunciation focus selected by the teacher and 
both segmental and suprasegmental features can be categorised. In addition to 
the pronunciation focus, this method incorporates a vocabulary focus in the 
form of teaching new vocabulary items, collocations, sense relations and so on.

Below we are going to expound this principle of categorisation by presenting 
two examples; the first one includes the teaching of vocabulary at the beginners' 
level where the focus is on frequent lexical items and concrete nouns and the 
pronunciation aims at the teaching of the English vowel categories. The second 
example presents vocabulary related to countries, nationalities and food to 
intermediate students combined with the teaching of selected English conso-
nants and the phenomenon of stress shift.

It is worth noting that the pronunciation examples selected are well-suited 
for language systems that are characterised by small vowel inventories or 
genaturally lack some of the vowel and consonant contrasts of English. For 
example, Greek has a simple five vowel system /i, e, σ, u/ and lacks the post-
alveolar consonants /ʃ/, /ʒ/ and /tʃ/, /dʒ/. Hence, a lot of English contrasts are 
naturalised by Greek learners of English, e.g. contrasts between /i/-/ɪ/, /e/-/ɛ:/, 
/æ/-/ʌ/-/ɔ:/, /ɒ/-/ɔ:, /u/-/u:/, /s/-/ʃ/, /z/-/ʒ/, while the postalveolar affricates 
are produced as alveolar [ts] and [dz].

Example 1. Proficiency level: beginners

For the implementation of the new method at the beginners' level, the teaching 
of vowel categories is based on the use of a coding system (see Celce-Murcia,
Brinton and Goodwin 1996). This can involve the use of colours, proper names, animals and so on. An adaptation of the colour-coding scheme proposed by Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) is presented here for the teaching of the vowels of the standard southern British variety. In particular, the following colours have been selected, each one containing one of the English vowels: green /i:/, pink /ɪ:/, red /æ/, purple /ɔː/, black /æ/, rusty /æ/, scarlet /ɑː/, orange /ɒ/, auburn /ɔː/, sooty /ʊ/, blue /uː/, colourful /ɔː/. Any new vocabulary item introduced is categorised according to the colour which contains the same vowel as the vocabulary item. For example, under green, which contains /i:/, common words such as tree, sheep, bean, cream, dream, peace, etc. can be categorised. For the teaching of /ɪ:/, vocabulary items such as pig, bin, fish, ship, pin, etc. can be categorised under pink. A similar procedure can be followed for the teaching of all vocabulary items introduced at the beginners' level which will be categorised under the appropriate colour and, therefore, vowel.

This system can provide opportunities for work on listening discrimination and production and can progressively lead from activities at word level to activities at phrase level. For instance, once several words are categorised according to the appropriate vowels (colours), a variety of activities can be designed focusing on the pronunciation of vowels but at the same time promoting the development of semantic relations between words at a paradigmatic or syntagmatic level. Paradigmatic word relations provide opportunities for work on the pronunciation of lexical items; for example, substitution of pig for fish focuses on identifying vocabulary with a common vowel. At the same time, they promote vocabulary consolidation and enrichment. Syntagmatic word relations focus on the formation of phrases and collocations and promote both semantic and phonetic/phonological knowledge. For example, collocations and meaningful phrases can be formed between colours and nouns, e.g. green tree, blue moon, black hat, scarlet heart, orange frog, etc. and can contain common (as before) or contrasting sounds (e.g. green ship, black hut, scarlet cap, auburn frog and so on).

The teacher can implement this method in several ways and can design numerous activities that will promote the combined teaching of vocabulary and pronunciation but will also motivate and involve students actively in the learning process. In particular, a possible technique can be the use of flashcards for all the colours (i.e. use of coloured cards: green, red, etc.) and for all new vocabulary items (i.e. use of pictures or cards presenting the words in orthographical form), which can be visually displayed in the classroom. The colour flashcards can be on permanent display on the wall and below the vocabulary items with the common sound can be attached; learners will thus have the opportunity
to be continuously exposed to a visual display of vocabulary lists categorised according to the coding system proposed. A variety of activities can be implemented for reinforcing memorisation, promoting recycling, providing feedback and conducting assessment. For example, flashcards can be detached from the display and mixed so that learners can match them and attach them to the right category. Colour flashcards can be given to learners so that they can match them with appropriate word flashcards in order to produce phrases with similar or contrasting vowels in the classroom. Such activities enhance motivation as they can involve students in interactive games, promote peer cooperation and feedback, as well as physical movement in the classroom.

Example 2. Proficiency level: intermediate

The principles expounded above can also be used for the combined teaching of vocabulary and pronunciation at more advanced levels. For instance, the teaching of vocabulary related to countries, nationalities and food at the intermediate level can be combined with a pronunciation focus on the teaching of the consonants /s/, /ʃ/, /z/, /s/ and /tʃ/, /ðʒ/. Vocabulary items related to countries, nationalities and food are categorised according to these sounds, for example: /s/ Greece, Swiss, sauce, /ʃ/ Russia, British, sugar, /z/ Zaire, Lebanese, zucchini, /s/ Indonesia, Malaysian, courgette, /tʃ/ China, French, cherry, /ðʒ/ Japan, Belgian, jam.

Activities that promote paradigmatic and syntagmatic word relations can be designed in order to practise semantic and phonetic/phonological knowledge; for example, phrases and collocations can be formed on the basis of common and contrasting sounds. Nationalities and food can be combined in examples involving similar sounds such as Chinese chopsticks, Japanese jam, British sugar, or contrasting sounds such as Belgian chocolate (voicing contrast), Russian soup, Lebanese courgette (place of articulation contrast). The formation of such phrases also raises students’ awareness and practises the phenomenon of stress shift, including a suprasegmental aspect in pronunciation teaching. At the same time such phrases build on students’ existing vocabulary and can also assist in promoting cultural knowledge.

Both the above examples are based on the same principles, i.e. categorisation of vocabulary according to a pronunciation focus; an interesting difference is centred on the use of a coding system in the first example which can be more appropriate for younger learners at the beginners’ level. At more advanced levels, such a coding system may be replaced by the presentation of the actual sounds to be practised using phonetic symbols, when the teacher considers this appropriate for a particular group.
4. Discussion

This section discusses some of the main principles the new method is based upon and some of the potential advantages it can bring forward towards the more effective teaching and learning of vocabulary and pronunciation.

The proposed method is founded on the concept of categorisation as a means for organising knowledge. It is known that organisation and categorisation of experience are needed for storage and effective use of knowledge (Eysenck and Keane 1995: 234). Cognitive economy and natural coherence, which characterise categorisation, facilitate memory and reduce the amount of information individuals need to store and remember (ibid: 234). Along these lines, organisation of words into categories can be viewed as forming a structured system that aids memory. In particular, according to Miller and Gildcea (1987), vocabulary acquisition in L1 initially involves categorisation and at a later stage differentiation within categories. Similarly, Aitchison (1987) identifies categorisation as one of a three-stage process in L1 vocabulary acquisition, which also includes labelling and network building.

To date different models of the organisation of the L1 and L2 lexicon have been put forward. Associative research has suggested that phonological form may be the early organising principle in the L1 lexicon. This is based on the early formation of clang associations before the production of syntagmatic or paradigmatic ones which are indicative of the increasing role of meaning-based associations. Along these lines, Schmitt (2000: 123) claims that categorisation of new words in L1 is initially based on “perceptual similarity (particularly shape similarity)” whereas at later stages it shifts to semantic relatedness (in particular coordinate relationships).

In addition, research by Fay and Cutler (1977) on malapropisms has suggested a phonological arrangement of words and has postulated the existence of a single lexicon accessed by two different networks, a phonological and a semantic one.

The primacy of phonological connections in the organisation of the L2 lexicon has also been suggested by Meara (1982, 1984), Channell (1988), Laufer (1989) and Singleton (1999). Meara, for example, claimed that the organising role of phonology is much more prominent in L2 than in the L1 mental lexicon (1982). Wolter (2001) proposed a developmental model for the mental lexicon, based on the results of a study which aimed to compare the L1 and L2 mental lexicon. According to this, phonological connections are dominant at the early stages of vocabulary acquisition but semantic connections between words become increasingly important as the depth of knowledge of the particular
words increases. Overall, previous research has identified factors such as language proficiency, word frequency and depth of individual word knowledge to play an important role in the organisation of the L2 lexicon and the changes that occur at different stages of the language learning process.

In view of the above claims regarding the organisation of the lexicon, it could be argued that some form of grouping or organisation that is based on particular criteria, e.g. phonological form, can improve word memorisation and aid recall. Schmitt (2000) provides argumentation in favour of grouping new words and attaching new information to pre-existing knowledge in the mental lexicon in order to facilitate memorisation. He claims that unless connections are made between new and old lexical items by some sort of grouping, new words can be much more easily forgotten. Grouping can take various forms including organisation according to meaning, sound structure, orthographic sequences, and so on (Schmitt 2000: 132).

The method proposed in this paper argues in favour of organising new vocabulary according to some aspect of the phonological form of the word, i.e. vowel, consonant, stress pattern, etc. Previous research on English has emphasised the importance of the stress pattern of a word in accurately segmenting connected speech in English, and as a result in efficient word recognition and extraction of meaning. Further evidence comes from work on phonological acquisition which has indicated that English-learning infants in their first year of life use information such as the dominant metrical pattern of English (i.e. trochaic) to segment the continuous stream of speech. Later in their first year, they use information about the phonotactic properties of the words and allophonic information to enhance word segmentation and recognition (Jusczyk 1999). Such evidence underscores the importance of phonetic/phonological information for comprehension and is in line with previous work on L2 vocabulary acquisition suggesting that learners need to “internalise accurately (a) the pronunciation of individual sounds, (b) the number of syllables, and (c) stress” (Channell 1988: 89). Teaching methodology should therefore address these aspects when introducing new vocabulary.

The claim that L2 learners initially rely more on acoustic information to decode words (Goldstein 1983), as they are not yet capable to utilise top-down knowledge, including pragmatic, semantic, syntactic information, lends further support to the importance of placing emphasis on word form and its use in increasingly larger contexts. Attention to phonological form can thus assist the L2 learner in the decoding of continuous speech.

In addition to advantages in comprehension, a further domain that can be
significantly influenced by attention to word form is production. The proposed
method can be implemented with a wealth of activities that can increase oppor-
tunities for classroom work on the production of individual words, phrases and
longer stretches of speech while there is attention to a particular pronunciation
aspect. Activities can vary from controlled to guided to communicative and can
assist students in repeating and consolidating the particular pronunciation focus
selected by the teacher. This can improve pronunciation and additionally
facilitate the learning of new vocabulary. As has been shown in previous work,
the ability to vocalise new vocabulary assists its learning (Papagno, Valentine
and Baddeley 1991). Similarly, Ellis and Beaton (1993) have stressed the neces-
sity for learners to hear and practise the pronunciation of new words and
Schmitt (2000: 129) has suggested that productive words are better retained
than receptive ones. If productive words are also vocalised, benefits can be
expected both in terms of retention but also improved pronunciation. It should
be noted that speech production is a skilled activity involving the movement of
muscles, joints, and coordination of articulatory gestures. As with other activi-
ties involving maturation in motor skill, emphasis on practice in production is
essential for fluent speech as it provides opportunities for neuromuscular
control over articulatory movements and the coordination of gestures. Through
practice, movements become more automatic, precise and easier to execute in
order to produce fluent meaningful speech.

It can be concluded therefore that organisation of lexical items on the basis
of phonological form and the use of activities that promote comprehension and
production can improve the decoding of connected speech, assist vocabulary
learning, enhance vocabulary retention and recall, and improve pronunciation
and thus the intelligibility of non-native speech.

The method proposed and the activities described above, as well as several
others that can be integrated in the lesson plan, aim towards promoting multiple
manipulations of a word. According to the depth of processing hypothesis
(Craik and Lockhart 1972), active manipulations are associated with deep
processing, which has been shown to relate to enhanced retention of vocabu-

Furthermore, the method utilises several of the memory / consolidation
strategies that have been claimed to promote vocabulary acquisition (Schmitt
2000). First, it is based on the principle of organising or grouping new vocabu-

lary according to some parameter, i.e. an aspect of the word’s phonological
form, so that they are better retained. Second, relating new vocabulary with old
on the basis of this parameter assists memorisation. Third, in addition to verbal
repetition of individual words or word lists organised according to a particular pronunciation focus, the method involves further manipulation of new words and integration with old vocabulary by focusing on paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations between words, i.e. substituting words with similar or contrasting sounds and forming phrases and collocations on the basis of similar or contrasting sounds. Such phrases and collocations create vivid images, e.g. orange frog, blue moon, black cat, and can facilitate visualisation. Image formation and imageability are major facilitating factors in L2 word learning and retaining (Ellis 1994, Ellis and Beaton 1993). Thus, such vivid imagery can act as a mnemonic device that will assist the learner in remembering the pronunciation of a new word. For example, linking a new word such as boot to the adjective blue, which is already known and produced by the learner with the target vowel quality, will create an image that will assist him/her in remembering the vowel quality of the new word. Such memory pegs can be used for different word classes by forming short phrases or sentences. At the same time, the creation of phrases and collocational relationships have very strong links in the lexicon (Aitchison 1987). As the mind stores and processes lexical phrases as individual wholes, these can be easily recalled and used with little or no additional mental processing (Schmitt 2000: 101). In addition, making word lists according to a pronunciation focus familiarises learners with the spelling of the words and makes them aware of spelling-to-sound correspondences which can help them to predict to some extent the pronunciation of new vocabulary and organise it under the correct category. Verbal repetition of words and activities that can focus on rehearsing and recycling vocabulary further promote vocabulary retention and improved pronunciation.

Many of the principles for explicit vocabulary teaching, as proposed by Sökmen (1997: 146-7), can also be identified in the above description. Such principles are (a) building of a large sight vocabulary, so that L2 learners may automatically access word meaning, (b) providing a number of encounters with a word, so that the meaning and use of a word will be more accurately understood, (c) integration of new words with the old, so that information about the word becomes more organised, (d) promotion of a deep level of processing, since word acquisition is facilitated by cognitive effort in the learning process, (e) facilitation of imaging which increases the possibility for vocabulary recall, (f) making new words real by connecting them to the student’s world in some way.

In addition to memory strategies, the new method uses social strategies which have also been claimed to improve language learning (Schmitt 1997). The
method is best implemented by involving interaction between the teacher and the learner or the learners themselves. Activities can actively involve the learners in categorisation through cooperation, and multiple other tasks which require peer or teacher-learner feedback can be designed both for comprehension and production.

5. Steps for the teacher

The major procedural steps the teacher needs to follow in order to use this method in his/her classroom are the following:

- Specify vocabulary aims. The teacher needs to select the vocabulary to be taught for a particular proficiency level, e.g. vocabulary related to food, the household, etc.
- Identify a pronunciation aspect. Depending on the pronunciation syllabus and the vocabulary to be taught, the teacher can identify a particular pronunciation focus, e.g. contrast between /æ/ and /ʌ/, nouns with a strong-weak stress pattern, falling intonation of wh-questions, etc.
- Categorise vocabulary according to pronunciation aim. The teacher and learners attempt categorisation of new words, phrases or sentences according to the pronunciation focus. A coding system can be used for categorisation.
- Enrich vocabulary with words that facilitate pronunciation practice. If the vocabulary of the particular unit is not sufficient, the teacher can introduce further vocabulary to promote the pronunciation aim.
- Use activities that facilitate the organisation of the target vocabulary into phrases and collocations with similar or contrasting sounds, or patterns. For example, form phrases such as black cat vs black hut or form wh-questions vs yes-no questions to practise different intonational patterns.
- Include activities for listening discrimination/comprehension and production. Both aspects should be focused upon so that there are benefits in the decoding of connected speech and in promoting fluency.
- Include controlled, guided, and communicative activities. Controlled activities focus very precisely on the pronunciation aim and vocabulary to be practised while guided activities are relatively less controlled and communicative activities can involve the student in the production of fluent speech while incorporating and practising the vocabulary and pronunciation aims selected by the teacher.
6. Conclusion

The method proposed for the combined teaching of vocabulary and pronunciation draws from research on (a) the structure of the L1 and L2 mental lexicon, and (b) learning strategies that promote language acquisition. It is based on the principle of categorisation for the economical and effective storage and use of information. The principal parameter used for the organisation of vocabulary is some aspect of the phonological form of the word, i.e. vowel, consonant, stress pattern, etc. Teaching of new vocabulary thus focuses on categorising it according to a pronunciation focus chosen by the teacher. Forming relations between words that are similar in some aspect of their form is consistent with the view that the mental lexicon is organised on a phonological basis. However, the method proposes further manipulation of words which also focuses on meaning through the formation of phrases and collocations as well as use of vocabulary in connected speech. Thus there is a gradual shift from form-related to meaning-related learning. The procedures involved for the combined teaching of vocabulary and pronunciation involve important memory and social strategies which are known to improve vocabulary retention. In addition, emphasis on the form of words and opportunities for work on comprehension and production enhance students’ ability to decode the incoming stream of speech and to improve their pronunciation and ultimately the intelligibility of their speech. Overall, the proposed method synthesises various facets of research and claims that the combined teaching of pronunciation and vocabulary mutually reinforces the acquisition of both language components.

The basic principles it is founded upon and the advantages it promotes can be summarised as follows:

The new method
- categorises new words on the basis of some aspect of their form, i.e. a vowel or consonantal sound, stress pattern, etc.
- facilitates the teaching of pronunciation of new words
- helps accurate internalisation of pronunciation of individual sounds, stress, syllable structure
- promotes understanding of the relationship between sound and meaning
- raises learners’ awareness of the different spelling-sound correspondences
- integrates new words with old
- builds a large sight vocabulary
- facilitates the learning of collocations
- assists memorisation through deeper mental processing, i.e. vivid imagery, creation of word relations
utilises memory and social strategies.

This paper has expounded the theoretical principles of the new method; work currently underway involves using this method in the actual classroom so that empirical data can be collected and analysed in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the method in terms of improving vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation.

References


