ELT Ireland bulletin

No. 4

18th February 2018

IN THIS EDITION

ELT Ireland features (Pages 2-5)

Welcome to our Fourth Bulletin
by Dr. Lou McLaughlin

Keeping you up to Date by Ben Dobbs

ELTChinwag by Jane Seely

Letter from the Editor by Laura O'Grady

IATEFL Report by Tom Le Seelleur

Email us to write for the next ELT Ireland Bulletin!

info.eltireland@gmail.com   @ELTIreland

elt-ireland.com

Using the Lexical Approach to outline & develop areas of pronunciation

by **Brian Duignan (** Teacher, Centre of English Studies**)**

Like many other teachers, I found the area of pronunciation difficult to teach and integrate into the classroom. I want to show how teachers might be able to integrate features of pronunciation teaching into lessons. It is an area that many of us feel less than confident in and it is an area that our learners want and need to work on. Additionally, I believe pronunciation is an area that covers all aspects of English language learning and therefore that it should be integrated into most lessons. Patsko (2016) outlines the importance that pronunciation has on not just speaking, but writing (matching sounds to letters), reading (our internal pronunciation versus external), listening (hearing features of connected speech) and furthermore how producing individual sounds that increases intelligibility can help produce larger chunks of language and increase confidence using the language.

I will outline what the lexical approach is and why I have chosen it as a vehicle to integrate features of pronunciation. I aim to describe how I used it in the classroom and how practical it is for the teacher using personal examples along with widely published theory. I have also got feedback from students who participated in a class using the lexical approach with and without integrated pronunciation.

Theory

The lexical approach is a way of analysing and teaching language based on the idea that it is made up of lexical units rather than grammatical structures. Chunks include idioms (it's raining cats and dogs), proverbs (make hay while the sun shines), common collocations (heavy rain) and phrasal verbs (lashing down). The learners aim is to acquire these "chunks of language".

Incorrect Grammar	Correct Grammar
I go to zoo yesterday	I went to the zoo yesterday

Incorrect Lexis	Correct Lexis
I go to zoo tomorrow	I go to zoo yesterday

Figure 1

by Author

Furthermore, a lexical mistake often causes a misunderstanding, while a grammar mistake rarely does (John Sinclair, IATEFL 1996). Therefore, meaning is carried by lexis not grammar as the listener understands what the speaker means with incorrect grammar compared to incorrect lexis (see figure 1).

This concept of language consisting of grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar has intrigued me, as I had begun to see some limitations to integrating pronunciation into a grammar centred approach relying on the basic "meaning, form and pronunciation" delivery with a typical P.P.P. grammar presentation.

Further investigation into the lexical approach reflected my beliefs that language is more descriptive than prescriptive, with its main goal being communication, using appropriate language for the task at hand. Language is always evolving and I do not believe in the prescribed approach of "you can't say that", I feel as an example of language "I mightn't say that, but I know in this sitcom this character might in this context." This is where I find collocations and the Lexical approach very useful, it is more descriptive and reflects how the language is used at the moment.

I found that learners were able to produce the appropriate grammar structures when asked, but there were still some issues with fluency. Generally, speaking fluency could be classed as "speaking easily, reasonably quickly and without having to stop and pause a lot. This led me to the lexical approach which outlines what words are often used together.

With the lexical approach being more descriptive and using chunks of language, I found it beneficial to include not just the weak forms i.e. used to becoming /juːstə/, but it also allowed me to introduce other aspects of pronunciation. By automatically including how it is possible that some lexical chunks can use one or more aspects of these features it helps our learners to recognise chunks and gives them the tools to decode messy, natural speech. However, I do not think it is necessary for our learners to reproduce all of these features for clear, intelligible speech.

From theory to practice
As I mentioned producing individual sounds that increases intelligibility can help produce larger chunks of language and increase confidence using the language. Therefore, it may be an idea to identify the variety of the phonemic symbols used in English. I use Adrian Underhill's phonemic chart as it's a fun, logical and interactive way to introduce the sounds and drilling. It also helps ease the students into pronunciation as at times learners can feel self-conscious.

"The lexical approach is a way of analysing and teaching language based on the idea that it is made up of lexical units rather than grammatical structures."

The Lexical Approach

Look at what your learner outcomes are – are they giving an opinion, making a presentation, ordering a coffee, asking for directions, etc. Identify what language they need to achieve their outcome – language to (dis) agree, to introduce topics and linking ideas, polite and formulaic language. Identify blocking language – how can I order a coffee if I don't know what the difference is between an espresso, a cappuccino, a flat white and an americano? Or what to say when ordering a steak when asked "how do you like it, medium, rare or well done?" "Yes?!?". Look at the pronunciation of these sounds and practice saying them or ask your colleagues paying attention to how they are said as a chunk of language. Be prepared to highlight the pronunciation features, but that the learners are not expected to produce the chunks in this way, but it will help their receptive skills. Divide the board into section with all chunks of language in the vocabulary on one side. Similarly you can list chunks of language which will identify a problem with a feature of pronunciation.

A class that have a problem with /ɪ/ and /iː/. Use "hand in the till" /ˌhænd.ɪn.ðə.ˈtɪl/ to highlight the problem of the diference in the length of vowel sounds /ɪ/ and /iː/ " till" not "teeeel" (/tɪl/ not /tiːl/) (or a similar chunk depending on your topic). Ask them how to produce it. Get them to become aware of how to make the sound (what in your mouth do you use to make the sound). Board /θ/ in the pronunciation section along with a tongue twister and picture of place or articulation and typical spelling. Alternatively board the symbol and give it to them for homework to review first thing next day.

Phoneme bingo

Get students to draw a grid with 9-12 squares. Ask them to fill in the squares with phonemes (either a select few you have focused on or they have trouble with hearing/producing). Dictate at random phonemes (keep a record of what ones you use and allow students time to check their card). Students can pass their card to the left and repeat.

Phoneme (or words spelt phonetically) chains.

Prepare these before the class using phonemes or words spelt using the phonemic script. Ideally use sounds you have covered, or that learners have problems hearing/using, or minimal pairs (similar sounding words that differ in one sound alone – "peach" and "beach") Below you can see a variety of vowel sounds. Group a class of 6/9/12 with the same card together (group A, B , C – figure 2).

Explain the first round is a practice. When students hear the sound/word in the "you hear" column they say the sound/word in the "you say" column. After the practice round tell students this is the "real deal" and time them to get their best score. Write their score on the board. Divide the groups into [A,B, C] , [A,B, C] , [A,B, C]. Time them racing against each other. Swap cards as they might be used to the order and repeat.

You hear	You say
start	/e/
/ɒ/	/ɔː/
/ɪ/	/uː/

You hear	You say
/uː/	/æ/
/ɔː/	/ʌ/
/iː/	/ɪ/

You hear	You say
/æ/	/ɒ/
/e/	/iː/
/ʌ/	finish

Figure 2

by Author

Conclusion

While most course books take lead from Underhill (1994) and Kelly (2001) outlining individual sounds and features of pronunciation, it seems to be a footnote. To my relief, I also discovered that we do not need to speak "received pronunciation" according to Jenkins (2000) who believes that when English is being used between two non-native speakers intelligibility is more important than producing language like a native speaker. Smith and Swan (2001) highlight how learners L1 can influence pronunciation in English.

I have found from feedback from students quite constructive and positive. Learners recall on idioms has been quite impressive, with students using either a single phoneme or a stress pattern to remember the chunk of language. Surprisingly, while using the lexical approach through guided discovery, the learners' recall was similar but accuracy was higher when pronunciation was integrated. Many students commented that they enjoyed pronunciation being a feature in the class and that they were not aware of some of the features before the class and enjoyed the revision of certain features (weak forms, contractions etc.) that were highlighted on the board in the pronunciation section or the errors section.

Further Reading

Collins, B & Mees, I. M (2013) Practical Phonetics and Phonology. Routledge
Jenkins, J (2000) The Phonology of English as an International Language. Oxford University Press
Kelly, G (2001) How to teach pronunciation. Pearson
Lackman, K (2012) Best Activities. Ken Lackman & associates Educational Consultants
Lackman K (2010) Lexical Approach Activities. Ken Lackman & associates Educational Consultants
Lewis, M (1993). The Lexical Approach. Heinle
Underhill, A (1994) Sound Foundations. MacMillan
Patsko, L (2017) Everything you always wanted to know about pronunciation* (*but were afraid to ask.) CUP
Underhill, A (2011) Introduction to Teaching Pronunciation Workshop. MacMillan.