The Teaching of Pronunciation to Learners of Greek as a Foreign or Second Language: Principles for the Design of a Pronunciation Book

1. Introduction

The teaching of pronunciation has received differential attention by the dominant approaches to language teaching over the years. Some language teaching meth-
ods have neglected pronunciation focusing on other aspects of language teaching such as grammar, text comprehension, vocabulary, and so on, e.g. the Grammar Translation Method, reading-based approaches, the Cognitive Approach. Other approaches have placed attention to pronunciation teaching, albeit to different degrees, basing instruction either on intuition, imitation, and repetition (e.g. Direct Method, Community Language Learning) or on explicit teaching and repetition (Audiolingualism, Oral Approach). Special focus on pronunciation was placed by approaches such as the Reform Movement, Audiolingualism / Oral Approach, and the Silent Way that also emphasised the need for accuracy in production. More recently, with the Communicative Approach, emphasis has shifted from accuracy towards comprehensible, socially acceptable and communicatively functional language (for a review of teaching approaches relevant to pronunciation instruction, see Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin 1996).

Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) have proposed a framework for the teaching of pronunciation communicatively. This involves five steps in the teaching stage. Initially learners’ awareness of a particular pronunciation feature is raised through description and analysis. This can be implemented by the teacher using a variety of techniques, e.g. oral description, visual information such as vocal tract diagrams, tactile and kinesthetic information, e.g. feeling the vocal folds vibrate during voiced sounds, using the hands as a model of the oral cavity (e.g. roof of mouth and tongue) to show articulatory positions during sound production, and so on. Then emphasis is placed on practice commencing with listening discrimination and followed by production and feedback. Three production steps are proposed which progressively take the learner from controlled activities through guided practice to free communicative exercises. Controlled activities focus very precisely on the pronunciation feature taught, e.g. through the use of minimal pair drills. Guided practice involves communication exercises that are still structured, e.g. information gap activities. Free communicative exercises give the opportunity to the learner to attend to the pronunciation feature but also to pay attention to the content of the communicative act.

Generally, it can be admitted that other aspects of language learning and instruction such as grammar and vocabulary, have received more attention in teaching and research compared to pronunciation. It is true that for languages such as English, there has been a longer tradition in the teaching of pronunciation to foreign or second language learners. Despite this, many textbooks used in EFL settings do not contain a pronunciation syllabus leaving the language teacher essentially unguided in what material to teach with respect to pronunciation. There are however several specialised books on the teaching of pronunciation for different language proficiency groups which the teacher can use in addition to the main textbook. These commonly include description and practice of basic aspects of pronunciation, i.e. the segmental (e.g. consonants and vowels) and
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suprasegmental (stress, intonation and rhythm) components of language. These books generally provide a basic description of the pronunciation phenomenon to be taught, e.g. vocal tract diagrams for the production of sounds and/or basic description of articulatory movements, basic rules for stress placement etc., and include several activities both for listening and production. There is commonly a stronger emphasis towards more controlled practice including discrimination and production of minimal pairs, production of sentences with frequent occurrence of a sound although relatively more free activities are also included (see e.g. Baker 2006a, b; Hancock 2003; Marks 2007). Books with photocopiable activities containing materials such as games for pronunciation instruction as also available and can be used by the teacher for selected aspects of pronunciation based on the needs of particular groups (e.g. Hancock 1996).

For languages such as Greek, there has been limited emphasis on the teaching of pronunciation. The majority of textbooks used for learners of Greek as a foreign or second language provide no or very limited coverage of pronunciation while there are currently no specialised books on the teaching of pronunciation. To examine how pronunciation is incorporated in popular textbooks currently used for the teaching of Greek in Greece and abroad we carried out some small-scale research on seven course books and one activity-corpus (Ta Nea Ellinika gia Xenous 2005; Oriste! Ellinika gia Archarious 2004; Kalimera 1996; Epikoinono sta Ellinika 1: Epipedo Archarion 1996; Asterias 2 2007; Ellinika apo Konta: 20 glossika mystiria gia ton epitheoriti Sachini… ki esena 2001; Ellinika me tin Parea mou 1999; activity corpus available at http://www.media.uoa.gr/language/exercises). These publications are used for different language proficiency levels (A1, A2, B1), for different ages (children, young people, adults) and different backgrounds (e.g. (a) students of Greek as a foreign language, in particular German-speaking learners of Greek abroad, (b) students of Greek as a second language, i.e. Greek repatriates, (c) Greek expatriates, (d) muslim children in Greece). Several important similarities and differences among these publications are worth pointing out. All eight publications incorporate some information on the pronunciation of Greek, the majority use phonetic symbols (although not always standard IPA), present phonological rules explicitly for the teaching of selected pronunciation aspects and focus mainly on segmental aspects. However, there is large diversity in the selection, presentation and opportunities for practice of the pronunciation aspects incorporated in the publications. In three out of the eight publications information on pronunciation, mainly relating to orthography, is included in the preface rather than the units and no activities are available for practice. Only two of the publications are accompanied by audio material. Only the activity corpus includes sound charts and diagrams for the articulatory description of sounds. With reference to the balance between segmental and suprasegmental aspects, there is noticeable lack
of activities on intonation and rhythm with major focus on segmental aspects and in some cases stress. Although most of these publications integrate selected pronunciation material for practice in their units, none of them offers the opportunity to the learner to use the acquired knowledge in real-life situations (communicative activities) or in relatively more free tasks (guided activities). Instead, there is increased focus on controlled practice. Furthermore, listening discrimination activities are under-represented. Finally, activities offering the opportunity for pair or group work, peer interaction, evaluation and feedback are not available. Summing up, there appears to be a lack of systematic coverage of pronunciation in popular textbooks for the teaching of Greek.

In view of this and the increasing demand for the tuition of Greek as a foreign or second language to learners of different language backgrounds, the aim of this paper is to present the principles for the design of a specialised book for the teaching of Greek pronunciation. Such a book aims to fill in a gap in the existing bibliography for the teaching of Greek and is intended to address the needs of selected groups of learners with respect to pronunciation. The book has been designed for adult learners of Greek, at the beginner and intermediate levels of language proficiency (levels A1, A2 and B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages [CEFR]). It provides a comprehensive coverage of the segmental and suprasegmental aspects of Greek (vowels, consonants, stress, intonation, rhythm, aspects of connected speech) and offers activities for listening practice and discrimination, controlled, guided and communicative practice for each pronunciation aspect covered. It is accompanied by a CD which includes both custom-made and authentic audio material for the purposes of the exercises included in the book.

2. Major design principles

The methodology adopted for the preparation of the pronunciation book was largely based on the communicative language framework. The activities designed can be implemented in the classroom using a variety of techniques that draw from different approaches and have been utilised by communicative language teaching. For the design of the book, the following were considered:

(a) common pronunciation difficulties: it is important for a pronunciation book to address the common pronunciation difficulties encountered by learners of different language backgrounds. To this end, we carried out a systematic comparison of the segmental and suprasegmental features of Greek and eleven foreign languages.

(b) vocabulary selection: it is necessary for a book addressed to beginner and intermediate learners to include appropriate vocabulary for these levels. To this end, we compiled an electronic dictionary of approximately 5,000 words based...
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on three popular textbooks as well as dictionary tables available from the Centre for the Greek Language for the corresponding levels.

(c) activity types: it is significant for a pronunciation book to offer activities both for perception/listening discrimination and production. To this end, we designed both types of exercises for the segmental and suprasegmental features included in the book. A gradual shift from more controlled to free production is achieved by the inclusion of controlled, guided and communicative activities for all pronunciation aspects included.

2.1 Common pronunciation difficulties

A comparison of segmental and selected suprasegmental aspects between Greek and eleven languages was conducted aiming to identify and tabulate common pronunciation difficulties encountered by learners of different language backgrounds. The foreign languages examined were Albanian, Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese, English, French, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. The selection includes major European languages, languages spoken in the Balkans, and other languages spoken by many immigrants in Greece currently.

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<tr>
<th>Χώς</th>
<th>Προφέρεται ως:</th>
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<th>Αλβ</th>
<th>Αρα</th>
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<td>[f] [fesalonic] αντί για [θεσαλονικ]</td>
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Table 1: Common pronunciation difficulties for /θ, ð/
Handbook of the International Phonetic Association (1999) and those published in the Journal of the International Phonetic Association from 1999 onwards. On the basis of this information, we prepared a table which includes all the sounds of Greek on the vertical axis and all the languages examined on the horizontal axis. Potential pronunciation difficulties are included in separate rows next to each sound and an asterisk indicates the particular language background of the learners that are expected to present with this pronunciation difficulty (see Kelly 2000 for a similar table for English). A section of the table is presented above for the dental fricatives /θ, ð/ which are problematic for learners of several language backgrounds. Table 1 shows that speakers tend to replace /θ, ð/ with other front sounds such as [t] or [s] for /θ/ and [d] or [z] for /ð/, or [f] for /θ/.

Separate tables have been prepared for the consonants, vowels and selected clusters of Greek, spelling and pronunciation, as well as for stress, intonation and rhythm. Presentation of the common pronunciation difficulties in a table of this type has many advantages. It provides immediate visual information of the sounds (or other pronunciation features) that are more problematic, it presents the range of substitutions made, it presents information about the particular language background of the learner that is expected to present with this difficulty, it provides an example of the substitution. To our knowledge, such presentation of common pronunciation difficulties is available for the first time for Greek and it is expected that the information included in the tables will provide a helpful tool for all those involved in the teaching and learning of the Greek language.

2.2 Vocabulary selection

An important methodological question concerned the selection of vocabulary items for the activities designed. To ensure that the lexical items were appropriate for the beginner and intermediate levels of language proficiency, we compiled an electronic dictionary based on four textbooks for the teaching of Modern Greek as a foreign language, i.e. for beginner learners Epikinoniste Ellinika 1 (1564 lexical items) and Oriste! Ellinika gia Archarious (1924 lexical items) and for intermediate learners Epikinoniste Ellinika 2 (1700 lexical items) and Ta Nea Ellinika gia Xenous (NEK) (3015 lexical items). The glossary presented in the last pages of each textbook was included in the dictionary. We also included the vocabulary proposed by the Center for the Greek Language (CGL) for the first two levels of proficiency in Greek (A and B, corresponding to A2 and B1 of the CEFR), (1069 and 812 lexical items respectively). Once lexical items were put together, the entries that occurred more than once were deleted manually. In its final form the e-vocabulary contains 4,968 lexical entries. The dictionary was subsequently annotated manually to include the following information, which appears in separate columns (Figure 1): Word, Grammatical category, Initial letter, Syllables, Noun
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Figure 1: E-dictionary columns

The first column headed ‘Word’ contains all the lexical items in alphabetical order. Nine further columns were created containing the following information for each word.

- Grammatical category. This included: masculine, feminine, neuter nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. A category named Proper nouns was also added which includes mostly place names or person names of all grammatical genders. A final category named Phrases was included to label idiomatic expressions or fixed expressions in Modern Greek but not nominal groups. Emphasis was placed on content words and as a result closed-class grammatical categories or function words such as articles and personal pronouns were not annotated.
- Initial letter: the words have been annotated based on their initial letter. This allows searching for and selecting words with particular initial letters.
- Syllables: the number of syllables for each word separately is included in this column.
- Noun phrase: Noun phrases were annotated in this column as only their gender appeared in the ‘grammatical category’ column.
- Sources: the last five columns contain information about the source of each lexical item. If a word occurs in more than one source, it is marked in the relevant columns.

This database gives the opportunity for different types of search to be carried out, i.e. basic, advanced, search with ‘Find’ on the ‘Edit’ menu. Basic search allows the search of groups of entries based on one parameter. For instance, the user can search for words with any number of syllables (Figure 2).
Advanced search can be carried out on the basis of more than one parameters. For instance, one can search for neuter nouns, beginning with a π/p/, with three syllables that are common in all sources. The following results are obtained after inputting the selection criteria in the relevant columns (Figure 3):

![Figure 3: Results of advanced search](image)

Search with ‘Find’ on the ‘Edit’ menu allows searching for words having a certain vowel or consonant in initial, medial or final position. Figure 4 presents a section of the results of a search for the vowel /a/ in any position in the word.

![Figure 4: Search with ‘Find’ on the ‘Edit’ menu: words including the vowel /a/ in any position](image)
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The e-dictionary was an important tool for the preparation of activities confining the degree of difficulty a student could encounter with unknown words. It also allowed identification of thematic categories where particular sounds appear (e.g. food, countries, animals, weather etc.); this was very useful for the design of activities.

2.3 Activity types

Following the framework proposed by Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) for teaching pronunciation communicatively, we designed all units in the book to include the following information and categories of activities:

(a) Description and analysis of each pronunciation feature.
(b) Listening practice and discrimination exercises.
(c) Controlled exercises.
(d) Guided exercises.
(e) Communicative exercises.

Depending on the overall course curriculum, the language syllabus for a group of learners, the resources and time available, the teacher can cover all the material in each pronunciation unit or can select particular activities. The material included in the book offers the opportunity to the teacher and learners to use and be exposed to a variety of techniques at different stages of learning, i.e. during the awareness phase when students realize important distinctions in the language, during practice in discrimination and in production. The techniques can include different modalities, i.e. use of multiple senses, including visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic modes. Visual information (in the form of vocal tract diagrams and cards), audio recordings, exercises which give the opportunity for movement in the classroom, mime, and so on are available in the book. Use of authentic materials, audio and printed, songs and games are also available for the teaching of pronunciation. Finally, practice in segmental and suprasegmental aspects is frequently combined in the activities designed.

2.3.1 Description and analysis of each pronunciation feature

Important information about the pronunciation aspect to be taught is provided in each unit. For vowels and consonants articulatory information in the form of vocal tract diagrams is available together with easy-to-follow articulatory instructions about the production of the target sound (Figure 5). In addition, information about spelling (Figure 6) and a simple description of phonological processes is available for selected features (e.g. voicing assimilation in /sm/ sequences, palatalisation in /li-Vowel/ sequences). For the suprasegmental aspects, simple description and analysis is provided for key pronunciation features, e.g.
stress in polysyllabic words, enclitic stress, stress in compounds, intonation in wh- vs. yes/no questions, statements, etc.

Figure 5: Vocal tract diagram and articulatory instructions for the production of /θ/

2.3.2 Listening practice and discrimination exercises

Practice in perceiving a particular sound or prosodic feature is an essential initial step before production. For vowels and consonants, each unit starts with a list of words with the target sound in different positions in one-syllable, two syllable and multisyllabic words. Audio recording of these words is available for the learners. These words were selected following a search in the e-dictionary; they are thus lexical items that typically appear in textbooks for learners at the beginner and intermediate levels. In addition, sentences that include words with the target sound appearing frequently are included (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Activities for listening practice, controlled production and familiarization with spelling

Following exposure to the particular sound and familiarisation of the possible positions and contexts it can be found, activities in listening discrimination include the use of minimal pairs in isolation and contextualised (e.g. students are requested to tick the word they hear), (Figures 7a, b) ‘same or different’ exercis-
es (e.g. learners are requested to hear two words and note if they are the same or different) and so on. Similar types of activities are available for the suprasegmental features. It is worth pointing out that in addition to offering practice in listening discrimination, these types of activities can also be used as a diagnostic or assessment tool by the teacher.

Figure 7a: Minimal pair exercise used for listening discrimination

Figure 7b: Contextualised minimal pairs (paradigmatic [exercise 5] and syntagmatic [exercise 6]) used for listening discrimination

2.3.3 Controlled practice

The activities used for listening practice and discrimination also lend themselves to an initial stage of oral production. Learners can be requested to repeat the words or sentences with the target pronunciation feature. Controlled practice typically involves the use of minimal pairs that can be produced in isolation or in context (Figures 7a, b). These can be presented in a variety of ways involving interaction and feedback between the teacher and the learner or between pairs of learners. Other types of activities used for controlled practice include sentences with frequent occurrence of a sound that the learner is asked to produce, exercises requiring the learner to fill in some information from a narrow selection.
of items which include the target pronunciation feature, short dialogues with the
target sound appearing frequently which students can read in class. When vo-
cabulary can be organized thematically short dialogues involving simple ques-
tions and relatively limited potential answers with the target sound can also be
used. An example of a controlled activity is presented in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Controlled practice activity for the vowel /e/.

2.3.4 Guided practice

With guided practice particular emphasis is placed on the target pronunciation fea-
ture but the learner is able to practice this in larger, usually sentence, contexts and
being involved in a communicative act, e.g. exchange of information. A typical ex-
ample is an information gap activity involving pairs of learners to whom the teach-
er hands out different (complementary) information sheets (e.g. maps, calendars).
Learners need to exchange information so that they complete their worksheets.
This allows for practice both in listening and production and gives the opportunity
for peer feedback. The learner has the opportunity to focus on the pronunciation
feature and gain control of production in larger contexts; it is thus an intermediate
stage between controlled exercise and free communicative activities.

Figure 9 presents a typical example of guided practice included in the book.

Figure 9: Guided practice activity for /θ/.
2.3.5 Communicative practice

Communicative tasks give the opportunity to the learner to practice a pronunciation feature in larger contexts and in communicative situations where there is a need for the learner to pay attention to the content as well as form. This is a more demanding task but allows the learner to use language creatively while practicing the pronunciation feature. Several communicative activities have been designed for the book, including interviews and role plays where learners are given the opportunity to work in pairs or groups (Figure 10). In all cases, learners are instructed to carry out the communicative task using a list of key words containing the pronunciation feature they need to practice. Learners are requested to pay particular attention to the feature practiced while also attending to content. As they gain experience, they can produce such activities more fluently, they can consolidate knowledge and have practice in listening and production in more real-life communicative situations.

![Figure 10: Communicative activity for the sounds /x/ and [ç]](image)

Finally, a variety of games have been included in the book, for instance, pronunciation mazes, bingo, card games.

3. Conclusions

This paper has presented the theoretical and methodological framework used for the preparation of a book for the teaching of Greek pronunciation to learners of Greek as a foreign or second language. Activities were carefully designed to address common pronunciation difficulties encountered by learners from various language backgrounds, to include appropriate vocabulary for beginner and intermediate level learners, to cover both listening practice and production, and to provide a gradual progression from controlled to guided to communicative exercises giving the opportunity to the learner to practice the pronunciation fea-
ture in increasingly larger contexts and in more communicative situations. For all types of practice, more than one exercise is included so that learners have the opportunity for further work in different activities.

References


Key-words: Greek, pronunciation, communicative language teaching, material production.