Vocabulary and Language Teaching

词汇和语言教学 [英]

Ronald Carter and Michael McCarthy

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Acknowledgements

Preface

One of the chief objectives of the *Applied Linguistics and Language Study* series is to offer books across the range of topics in language pedagogy, focusing research on issues which arise from educational practice. When one looks at the array of books presently available in the series it strikes one as surprising that we have not until now identified *vocabulary* as one such key topic. It is as if its subject-matter has been subsumed, as it were, within other fields, for example within the study of reading in a foreign language, or within writing, or as part of second-language acquisition more generally conceived. It has not had a separate identity. Why should this be so?

Partly perhaps because of the overwhelming concentration in linguistic theory, at least in United States research, on issues of syntactic structure. Partly because interlanguage research, following this focus, has very largely not treated lexical acquisition as a priority. Partly, too, because the emphasis within semantics on the study of paradigmatic structures and denotational meaning has seemed less central to current concerns with pragmatics and the analysis of discourse. Yet, as this book points out very clearly, the study of vocabulary is at the heart of language teaching and learning, in terms of the organization of syllabuses, the evaluation of learner performance, the provision of learning resources, and, most obviously, because it is how most learners see language and its learning difficulty. It is an apposite moment, then, to place *vocabulary* in a pedagogic spotlight, not to argue its relevance, but to indicate how its study offers insights into the process of acquisition, the organization of teaching and the social and linguistic structure of language.

Appropriately enough, the authors begin their account with a historical survey into vocabulary studies in a pedagogical context, showing not only that despite recent emphases on syntax, the groundwork of lexical description has a lengthy history, but also how research into vocabulary control was intimately connected to concerns with acquisition. This introductory chapter establishes the connection between language teaching, the organization and provision of vocabu-

lary resources, and the structure of language which informs the whole volume.

Any discussion of acquisition necessarily raises questions of how learners come to master and exploit relationships and structure, in lexis no less than in syntax. In Chapter 2, therefore, the authors address the issue of the interdependence of the linguistic organization of vocabulary, its acquisition by learners, and its appropriate pedagogic structuring by teachers. They do so by focusing on the need to integrate paradigmatic and syntagmatic dimensions in lexical study as a way of providing organizational principles for pedagogy. The exploration of these dimensions is at the heart of the book, raising as it does the problems of not only the relationship of lexis to grammar but also of the independence of semantics from pragmatics. Problems of dictionary-making, of denotative and connotative meanings, of stable and dynamic interpretations reveal issues of theoretical model as well as those of the boundaries of linguistic analysis. It is here and in the more centrally pedagogic discussions of Chapter 3 that we see applied linguistics most characteristically at work: practical problems raising theoretical and descriptive questions for joint action by researchers and practitioners.

It is at this point in the book that its innovative structure is most valuable. The issues, both pedagogic and theoretical, have been displayed. What is now needed is that they should be taken up in detail. Ron Carter and Mike McCarthy have commissioned and edited six original contributions from researchers and practitioners directly involved in lexicology and lexicography, to which they have added two personal studies of their own. The range of topics matches the scope of the book: trends in vocabulary teaching; the nature of the learner's mental lexicon and the link between learning and teaching; the relationship between lexical study and reading research; the place of users' 'stable' locutions in lexicographic description; the relationship between user needs and styles of dictionary presentation; the use of large-scale computer corpora in lexicology and syllabus design; the implications for cloze testing of current research in lexicology; vocabulary patterns in discourse. Each of these papers by distinguished authors is followed by a set of points for further development, contributed by the editors. These are not to be seen as discussion topics only. They represent questions for action research, eminently appropriate for teachers to undertake as part of their practice with learners.

To this point, then, the book has set *vocabulary* in its pedagogic and research context and, incidentally, has placed it very necessarily

in its historical perspective. Links have been made between the practices of teaching, lexicography and syllabus design and the study of linguistic structure, and connections between acquisition and organization emphasized. The importance of the final chapter, *Lexis and discourse*, is not only to reaffirm the connection between research and practice. Much more importantly it is to show how present studies in lexical description, aided by quite massive advances in technical capacity, can provide the data to underpin the integration of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes in vocabulary study. Such readily accessible data, however, would be impotent without an appropriate theory of language, one which emphasizes lexical structure but which does so in the context of the language user. It is this emphasis which underlines the centrality of vocabulary study both to current issues in linguistic theory and to present concerns of communicative practice.

Christopher N. Candlin   *Lancaster*
General Editor   *January 1987*

Introduction

This book is divided into five main chapters which are sequenced to provide an overall historical perspective on developments in vocabulary teaching in the past sixty years. Chapter 1 examines the important contribution of the vocabulary control movement and reviews some key issues in the learning of vocabulary. Research into vocabulary learning is both vital and in many respects necessarily antecedent to the teaching of vocabulary. A separate book would be required to present a proper psycholinguistic perspective on vocabulary learning, and we do not pretend to do more than acknowledge some highly relevant topics here. Also relevant to vocabulary teaching is a knowledge of the linguistic organization of vocabulary, and Chapter 2 attempts to provide a descriptive account of current research into the structure of the lexicon. Key topics in structural semantics and word meanings as well as studies of collocations and fixed expressions are examined here. Chapter 3 reviews advances in vocabulary teaching since 1945, and explores some interrelations between linguistic description of the lexicon, and discussion and design of vocabulary teaching materials during that period. A final section of this chapter reviews recent progress in pedagogical lexicography and computer-assisted lexicographic description. Chapter 4 brings us up to the present day and presents a selection of papers which we specially commissioned for this book, and in which the authors explore current issues in the teaching of vocabulary. Several of these papers draw on recent research into lexicology and lexicography. Topics covered include: vocabulary and reading, lexical syllabuses, pedagogical lexicography, lexis in spoken discourse, vocabulary discourse and cloze procedure, the mental lexicon and language teaching. The fifth and final chapter is possibly a little more programmatic and polemical. It is concerned with vocabulary in discourse. One of the main arguments which we advance here is that vocabulary teaching should pay greater attention to the role of vocabulary in naturally-occurring text, and in particular to the ways in which vocabulary is used to negotiate meanings across speaking turns and

sentence boundaries. The chapter explores aspects of discourse analysis and communicative approaches to language pedagogy where they meet in the teaching of vocabulary.

This book does not claim to say all there is to say about vocabulary teaching, even though it may look as if we have tried to do so. Vocabulary teaching has a long history, and applied linguists and language teachers are only just beginning to turn their attention to it again after a couple of decades or so of relative neglect. There is much work still to be done and many approaches from many different perspectives to be considered. We hope that this book will contribute to developing discussion and debate.

Ronald Carter   *Nottingham and Birmingham*
Michael McCarthy   *1987*

Contents

1 Word lists and learning words: some foundations

Throughout this book we claim that vocabulary study has been neglected by linguists, applied linguists and language teachers. We believe that we are justified in claiming this. Although interest has grown quite rapidly during the 1980s, there is certainly not much evidence of interest in vocabulary in the last twenty-five years taken as a whole, and relative to investigation at other linguistic levels. This opening chapter gives us an opportunity for qualifying this claim, or, at least, placing it in some kind of historical perspective. For taken over the last sixty years, the picture is rather different, because the 1930s witnessed the beginnings of what has come to be called the 'vocabulary control movement'. There are a number of strands and offshoots to this movement both in Great Britain and in the United States, but we shall focus here on two particular developments: the work on *Basic English* of C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards; and the work on definition vocabulary which led to the production by Michael West of *A General Service List*. A number of issues raised in this book, and a number of articles in Chapter 4, can be examined in relation to the aims and goals of these earlier pedagogically-inspired efforts at vocabulary control.

It may be useful, however, to begin this chapter by listing some questions which teachers and students have asked, usually quite persistently, about vocabulary and language study. The list is not exhaustive and answers will, in any case, not be forthcoming to all the questions, either in this chapter or after reading this book. But, we hope to try and lay some foundations from which answers might be found:

1. How many words provide a working vocabulary in a foreign language?
2. What are the best words to learn first?
3. In the early stages of learning a second or foreign language, are some words more useful to the learner than others?

4. Are some words more difficult to learn than others? Can words be graded for ease of learning?
5. What are the best means of retaining new words?
6. Is it most practical to learn words as single items in a list, in pairs (for example, as translation equivalents) or in context?
7. What about words which have different meanings? Should they be avoided? If not, should some meanings be isolated for learning first?
8. Are some words more likely to be encountered in spoken rather than written discourse? If so, do we know what they are?

1 Basic English: how basic is Basic?

The proposal for Basic English was first put forward in the early 1930s. Essentially, it was a project designed to provide a basic minimum vocabulary for the learning of English. The originators of the proposal were C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards (Ogden 1930, 1968), though the latter author was responsible for numerous revisions, refinements and extensions to the scheme. Throughout the project had two main aims: 'the provision of a minimum secondary world language and the designing of an improved introductory course for foreign learners, leading into general English' (Richards 1943, p. 62). Its design has been outlined succinctly as follows by Richards (who, in fact, uses Basic English for the outline):

> Basic English is English made simple by limiting the number of words to 850 and by cutting down the rules for using them to the smallest number necessary for the clear statement of ideas. And this is done without change in the normal order and behaviour of these words in everyday English. It is limited in its words and its rules but it keeps to the regular forms of English. And though it is designed to give the learner as little trouble as possible, it is no more strange to the eyes of my readers than these lines which are, in fact, in Basic English
> (Richards 1943, p. 20)

In other words, for Ogden and Richards it is a basic principle that, although their scheme will not embrace full English, it will at least not be un-English. In Figure 1 (pp. 4–5) is the list of words selected by Ogden and Richards as their basis. And the fact that they can be conveniently listed on a single side of paper is seen as one of the advantages of the proposal.

At the basis of Ogden and Richards's *Basic English* is the notion of a communicative adequacy whereby, even if periphrastically, an adult's fundamental linguistic needs can be communicated. Even

though more complex ideas may have to be paraphrased, it is claimed that the words supplied will both serve to express complex ideas and be in themselves easy and fast to learn. The learning burden on these words is likewise kept to a minimum because, instead of introducing a wide range of verbs which, in English, necessitates the additional learning of numerous and often irregular inflections, Ogden and Richards confine their list to no more than eighteen main verbs, or 'operations' as they prefer to term them. The verbs are *send*, *say*, *do*, *come*, *get*, *give*, *go*, *keep*, *let*, *make*, *put*, *seem*, *take*, *see*, plus the modal verbs *may* and *will* and the auxiliary words *be* and *have*. The only inflections to be learned (on verbs and nouns) are *-er*, *-ing* and *-ed*, and Basic English does not even permit the bound morpheme inflection *s* for verbs, so that *he make(s)* becomes 'ungrammatical'. An example of the kind of periphrasis made possible or, depending on your point of view, unnaturally enforced by the system, is the omission of the verbs *ask* and *want* from the list of operators for the simple reason that they can be paraphrased. That is:

> *ask* ——— put a question;
> *want* ——→ have a desire for.

The idea that many notions can be re-expressed using more basic language is central to the Basic English project. Other examples might be:

> *smoke* ——→ have a smoke;
> *walk* ——→ have a walk.

Closer scrutiny of the word list reveals further difficulties in the way of answers to some of the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter. Firstly, learning 850 word forms is not the same thing as learning 850 single senses. One calculation is that the 850 words of Basic English have 12,425 meanings (Nation 1983, p. 11). Which meanings should be learned first? Are there core meanings which are more easily retained or which are more important? Ogden and Richards seem to suggest that there are. For example, they have a category of 200 'pictured' words which, presumably, have defined physical or concrete properties. But even these items can be polysemous. Which 'picture' of the following items is the right one, and should it be learned first: *pipe*, *head*, *stamp*, *line*? Secondly, it is interesting to note just how many of the 850 words have more than one sense. This applies to both lexical and grammatical words as well as to words such as *round* or *right* or *past*, which can have either primarily lexical or grammatical functions. This raises an interesting psycholinguistic question of whether the senses of single word forms (however polysemous) are easier to retain than the same number of monosemous

BASIC ENGLISH WORD LIST

OPERATIONS 100

COME
GET
GIVE
GO
KEEP
LET
MAKE
PUT
SEEM
TAKE
BE
DO
HAVE
SAY
SEE
SEND
MAY
WILL
ABOUT
ACROSS
AFTER
AGAINST
AMONG
AT
BEFORE
BETWEEN
BY
DOWN
FROM
IN
OFF
ON
OVER
THROUGH
TO
UNDER
UP
WITH
AS
FOR
OF
TILL
THAN
A
THE
ALL
ANY
EVERY

THINGS

400 General

ACCOUNT
ACT
ADDITION
ADJUSTMENT
ADVERTISEMENT
AGREEMENT
AIR
AMOUNT
AMUSEMENT
ANIMAL
ANSWER
APPARATUS
APPROVAL
ARGUMENT
ART
ATTACK
ATTEMPT
ATTENTION
ATTRACTION
AUTHORITY
BACK
BALANCE
BASE
BEHAVIOUR
BELIEF
BIRTH
BITE
BLOOD
BLOW
BODY
BRASS
BREAD
BREATH
BROTHER
BUILDING
BURN
BURST
BUSINESS
BUTTER
CANVAS
CARE
CAUSE
CHALK
CHANCE
CHANGE
CLOTH
COAL

EDUCATION
EFFECT
END
ERROR
EVENT
EXAMPLE
EXCHANGE
EXISTENCE
EXPANSION
EXPERIENCE
EXPERT
FACT
FALL
FAMILY
FATHER
FEAR
FEELING
FICTION
FIELD
FIGHT
FIRE
FLAME
FLIGHT
FLOWER
FOLD
FOOD
FORCE
FORM
FRIEND
FRONT
FRUIT
GLASS
GOLD
GOVERNMENT
GRAIN
GRASS
GRIP
GROUP
GROWTH
GUIDE
HARBOR
HARMONY
HATE
HEARING
HEAT
HELP
HISTORY
HOLE

METAL
MIDDLE
MILK
MIND
MINE
MINUTE
MIST
MONEY
MONTH
MORNING
MOTHER
MOTION
MOUNTAIN
MOVE
MUSIC
NAME
NATION
NEED
NEWS
NIGHT
NOISE
NOTE
NUMBER
OBSERVATION
OFFER
OIL
OPERATION
OPINION
ORDER
ORGANIZATION
ORNAMENT
OWNER
PAGE
PAIN
PAINT
PAPER
PART
PASTE
PAYMENT
PEACE
PERSON
PLACE
PLANT
PLAY
PLEASURE
POINT
POISON
POLISH

SENSE
SERVANT
SEX
SHADE
SHAKE
SHAME
SHOCK
SIDE
SIGN
SILK
SILVER
SISTER
SIZE
SKY
SLEEP
SLIP
SLOPE
SMASH
SMELL
SMILE
SMOKE
SNEEZE
SNOW
SOAP
SOCIETY
SON
SONG
SOUND
SOUP
SPACE
STAGE
START
STATEMENT
STEAM
STEEL
STEP
STITCH
STONE
STOP
STORY
STRETCH
STRUCTURE
SUBSTANCE
SUGAR
SUGGESTION
SUMMER
SUPPORT

200 Pictured

ANGLE
ANT
APPLE
ARCH
ARM
ARMY
BABY
BAG
BALL
BAND
BASIN
BASKET
BATH
BED
BEE
BERRY
BIRD
BLADE
BOARD
BOAT
BONE
BOOK
BOOT
BOTTLE
BOX
BOY
BRAIN
BRAKE
BRANCH
BRICK
BRIDGE
BRUSH
BUCKET
BULB
BUTTON
CAKE
CAMERA
CARD
CART
CARRIAGE
CAT
CHAIN
CHEESE
CHEST
CHIN
CHURCH
CIRCLE

KNEE
KNIFE
KNOT
LEAF
LEG
LIBRARY
LINE
UP
LOCK
MAP
MATCH
MONKEY
MOON
MOUTH
MUSCLE
NAIL
NECK
NEEDLE
NERVE
NET
NOSE
NUT
OFFICE
ORANGE
OVEN
PARCEL
PEN
PENCIL
PICTURE
PIG
PIN
PIPE
PLANE
PLATE
PLOUGH
POCKET
POT
POTATO
PRISON
PUMP
RAIL
RAT
RECEIPT
RING
ROD
ROOF
ROOT
SAIL

QUALITIES

100 General

ABLE
ACID
ANGRY
AUTOMATIC
BEAUTIFUL
BLACK
BOILING
BRIGHT
BROKEN
BROWN
CHEAP
CHEMICAL
CHIEF
CLEAN
CLEAR
COMMON
COMPLEX
CONSCIOUS
CUT
DEEP
DEPENDENT
EARLY
ELASTIC
ELECTRIC
EQUAL
FAT
FERTILE
FIRST
FIXED
FLAT
FREE
FREQUENT
FULL
GENERAL
GOOD
GREAT
GREY
HANGING
HAPPY
HARD
HEALTHY
HIGH
HOLLOW
IMPORTANT
KIND
LIKE
LIVING
LONG

50 Opposites

AWAKE
BAD
BENT
BITTER
BLUE
CERTAIN
COLD
COMPLETE
CRUEL
DARK
DEAD
DEAR
DELICATE
DIFFERENT
DIRTY
DRY
FALSE
FEEBLE
FEMALE
FOOLISH
FUTURE
GREEN
ILL
LAST
LATE
LEFT
LOOSE
LOUD
LOW
MIXED
NARROW
OLD
OPPOSITE
PUBLIC
ROUGH
SAD
SAFE
SECRET
SHORT
SHUT
SIMPLE
SLOW
SMALL
SOFT
SOLID
SPECIAL
STRANGE
THIN

FIGURE 1 Basic English word list

NO
OTHER
SOME
SUCH
THAT
THIS
I
HE
YOU
WHO
AND
BECAUSE
BUT
OR
IF
THOUGH
WHILE
HOW
WHEN
WHERE
WHY
AGAIN
EVER
FAR
FORWARD
HERE
NEAR
NOW
OUT
STILL
THEN
THERE
TOGETHER
WELL
ALMOST
ENOUGH
EVEN
LITTLE
MUCH
NOT
ONLY
QUITE
SO
VERY
TOMORROW
YESTERDAY
NORTH
SOUTH
EAST
WEST
PLEASE
YES

COLOR
COMFORT
COMMITTEE
COMPANY
COMPARISON
COMPETITION
CONDITION
CONNECTION
CONTROL
COOK
COPPER
COPY
CORK
COTTON
COUGH
COUNTRY
COVER
CRACK
CREDIT
CRIME
CRUSH
CRY
CURRENT
CURVE
DAMAGE
DANGER
DAUGHTER
DAY
DEATH
DEBT
DECISION
DEGREE
DESIGN
DESIRE
DESTRUCTION
DETAIL
DEVELOPMENT
DIGESTION
DIRECTION
DISCOVERY
DISCUSSION
DISEASE
DISGUST
DISTANCE
DISTRIBUTION
DIVISION
DOUBT
DRINK
DRIVING
DUST
EARTH
EDGE

HOPE
HOUR
HUMOR
ICE
IDEA
IMPULSE
INCREASE
INDUSTRY
INK
INSECT
INSTRUMENT
INSURANCE
INTEREST
INVENTION
IRON
JELLY
JOURNEY
JUDGE
JUMP
KICK
KISS
KNOWLEDGE
LAND
LANGUAGE
LAUGH
LAW
LEAD
LEARNING
LEATHER
LEVEL
LIFT
LIGHT
LIMIT
LINEN
LIQUID
LIST
LOOK
LOSS
LOVE
MACHINE
MAN
MANAGER
MARK
MARKET
MASS
MEAL
MEASURE
MEAT
MEETING
MEMORY

PORTER
POSITION
POWDER
POWER
PRICE
PRINT
PROCESS
PRODUCE
PROFIT
PROPERTY
PROSE
PROTEST
PULL
PUNISHMENT
PURPOSE
PUSH
QUALITY
QUESTION
RAIN
RANGE
RATE
RAY
REACTION
READING
REASON
RECORD
REGRET
RELATION
RELIGION
REPRESENTATIVE
REQUEST
RESPECT
REST
REWARD
RHYTHM
RICE
RIVER
ROAD
ROLL
ROOM
RUB
RULE
RUN
SALT
SAND
SCALE
SCIENCE
SEA
SEAT
SECRETARY
SELECTION
SELF

SURPRISE
SWIM
SYSTEM
TALK
TASTE
TAX
TEACHING
TENDENCY
TEST
THEORY
THING
THOUGHT
THUNDER
TIME
TIN
TOP
TOUCH
TRADE
TRANSPORT
TRICK
TROUBLE
TURN
TWIST
UNIT
USE
VALUE
VERSE
VESSEL
VIEW
VOICE
WALK
WAR
WASH
WASTE
WATER
WAVE
WAX
WAY
WEATHER
WEEK
WEIGHT
WIND
WINE
WINTER
WOMAN
WOOD
WOOL
WORD
WORK
WOUND
WRITING
YEAR

CLOCK
CLOUD
COAT
COLLAR
COMB
CORD
COW
CUP
CURTAIN
CUSHION
DOG
DOOR
DRAIN
DRAWER
DRESS
DROP
EAR
EGG
ENGINE
EYE
FACE
FARM
FEATHER
FINGER
FISH
FLAG
FLOOR
FLY
FOOT
FORK
FOWL
FRAME
GARDEN
GIRL
GLOVE
GOAT
GUN
HAIR
HAMMER
HAND
HAT
HEAD
HEART
HOOK
HORN
HORSE
HOSPITAL
HOUSE
ISLAND
JEWEL
KETTLE
KEY

SCHOOL
SCISSORS
SCREW
SEED
SHEEP
SHELF
SHIP
SHIRT
SHOE
SKIN
SKIRT
SNAKE
SOCK
SPADE
SPONGE
SPOON
SPRING
SQUARE
STAMP
STAR
STATION
STEM
STICK
STOCKING
STOMACH
STORE
STREET
SUN
TABLE
TAIL
THREAD
THROAT
THUMB
TICKET
TOE
TONGUE
TOOTH
TOWN
TRAIN
TRAY
TREE
TROUSERS
UMBRELLA
WALL
WATCH
WHEEL
WHIP
WHISTLE
WINDOW
WING
WIRE
WORM

MALE
MARRIED
MEDICAL
MILITARY
NATURAL
NECESSARY
NEW
NORMAL
OPEN
PARALLEL
PAST
PHYSICAL
POLITICAL
POOR
POSSIBLE
PRESENT
PRIVATE
PROBABLE
QUICK
QUIET
READY
RED
REGULAR
RESPONSIBLE
RIGHT
ROUND
SAME
SECOND
SEPARATE
SERIOUS
SHARP
SMOOTH
STICKY
STIFF
STRAIGHT
STRONG
SUDDEN
SWEET
TALL
THICK
TIGHT
TIRED
TRUE
VIOLENT
WAITING
WARM
WET
WIDE
WISE
YELLOW
YOUNG

WHITE
WRONG

SUMMARY
OF
RULES

PLURALS
IN 'S'.

DERIVATIVES
IN 'ER', 'ING', 'ED'
FROM 300 NOUNS

ADVERBS
IN 'LY'.
FROM
QUALIFIERS

DEGREE
WITH
'MORE' AND 'MOST'.

QUESTIONS
BY INVERSION
AND 'DO'.

OPERATORS
AND
PRONOUNS
CONJUGATE
IN FULL.

MEASUREMENT.
NUMERALS.
CURRENCY.
CALENDAR.
AND
INTERNATIONAL
TERMS
IN ENGLISH
FORM.

words with different word forms. Ogden and Richards offer no guidance here (and do not seem particularly aware of the question), although, to be fair to them, this is still a problem today which requires more extensive exploration. Thirdly, there is little guidance given as to how Basic English might be extended, and thus how this list and any additions to it might be graded for relative difficulty or usefulness, or, indeed, how much further, if at all, a learner would need to go to have a 'working vocabulary'. Fourthly, the system is not designed to enhance social interaction through language. The object is one which bears not only on more specific features such as the fact that items such as *goodbye* or *thank you* or *Mr* and *Mrs* do not appear in Basic English, or that communication would be inevitably rather neutral or slightly formal stylistically (for example, *have a desire for*, *take a walk*), but also on the fact that the extent of periphrasis required can make communication a relatively clumsy affair. Additionally, there is the problem already noted that in the process of transfer to Standard English, a relatively large number of constructions which will have been created in the course of learning Basic English will have to be unlearned.

This is not to say that Basic English is not eminently 'usable' as an auxiliary language for general purposes of simplified international communication, and as a practical introduction to a more standardized form of English than can be found in many intranational contexts of English usage. It is also, as Ogden and Richards themselves have amply demonstrated, a useful system for producing clear and comprehensible *written* texts, particularly where high degrees of communicative expressivity are not required, such as in expository texts or material with high levels of information content. Although *Basic English* is not widely used or referred to today, the underlying impulse to provide systematically graded introductions to language, to specify lexical syllabuses and to construct core or nuclear Englishes for language learning purposes, is still an active one. (See, for example, Stein 1979; Quirk 1982; Stubbs 1986b; Carter 1982b, 1985, 1987a and b.)

2 Michael West and 'A General Service List'

Published in 1953, *A General Service List* (hereafter *GSL*) is the outcome of almost three decades of major work in English lexicometrics. The main figures associated with this work are Michael West himself, whose work in English as a foreign language was concentrated in Bengal in India, and Harold Palmer – one of the founding

fathers of English language teaching – who was Director of the Institute of English Language Teaching in Tokyo from 1923–1936. The 'history' of their association and academic collaboration on the development of vocabulary and other teaching materials has been lucidly charted by Howatt (1983, Chapter 17). West is also known for his *New Method Readers* and his *New Method Dictionary*, which make use of controlled vocabulary for, respectively, graded reading in a second language and for a lexicographic definition vocabulary (see Nolte 1937).

West's General Service List grew organically from major studies in the 1930s on vocabulary selection for teaching purposes. These studies culminated in the Interim Report on Vocabulary Selection (1935) (known as the 'Carnegie Report') which in turn issued the first General Service List which was published in 1936. The revised *GSL* (1953) made particular use of word counts such as that of Thorndike and Lorge (1944) developed in the USA. It should also be noted that the *GSL* developed at the same time as and along not dissimilar lines to C. K. Ogden's *Basic English*, and that the two schemes ran in parallel and in competition for many years. West's *GSL* has had by far the most lasting influence, and the 1953 word list is widely used today forming the basis of the principles underlying the *Longman Structural Readers*. West's notion of a limited defining vocabulary is one of the main informing design principles of the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1978). (See Chapter 3, pp. 52–4.)

The main criteria of West, Palmer and others for the selection of vocabulary for learning in the early stages of acquisition, are that:
a) the frequency of each word in written English should be indicated;
b) information should be provided about the relative prominences of the various meanings and uses of a word form.

Both these criteria, which were more extensively developed in the 1953 edition than in previous versions, provide particularly useful guidance for teachers deciding which words and which meanings should be taught first. The list consists of 2,000 words with semantic and frequency information drawn from a corpus of two to five million words. It is claimed that knowing these words gives access to about 80 per cent of the words in any written text, and thus stimulates motivation, since the words acquired can be seen by learners to have a demonstrably quick return. Other criteria adopted in the selection of words include their universality (words useful in all countries), their utility (enabling discussion on as wide a subject range as possible), and their usefulness in terms of definition value. The list can