

## Teaching Pronunciation by Communicative Methods

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**Abstract:** The article carries out the following tasks of the research: to differentiate the peculiarities of English pronunciation, to observe the difficulties in teaching pronunciation, to investigate the process of teaching pronunciation, to develop correct pronunciation by phonetic exercises, to study the influence of intonation, pitch range, tone on the meaning of speech, to investigate the ways of teaching correct pronunciation, to increase the confidence in teaching pronunciation effectively.

**Keywords:** pronunciation, to investigate, confidence in teaching, fossilized pronunciation.

When teachers decide to focus on pronunciation practice many of them make the mistake of trying to teach pronunciation along with introducing vocabulary. This can work with students who have a "good ear," or who perhaps speak a related language. However it can be hit and miss with students whose mother tongue has no relation to the target language. [2, 76] This brings us back to the question of whether pronunciation can be effectively taught at all? The answer is yes, of course it can be taught, and it's just that the way many textbooks tell us to teach it is actually one of the least effective. Most textbooks will have you drill pronunciation with repetition of the vocabulary. Some of the better ones will have you work on it with spelling, which is an important skill, especially in English with its many irregularities and exceptions. Very few will start you and your students where you need to start, however, and that is at the level of the phoneme.

### *Start with Phonemes*

The dictionary defines "phoneme" as "any of the perceptually distinct units of sound in a specified language that distinguish one word from another, for example p, b, d, and t in the English words pad, pat, bad, and bat." This definition highlights one of the key reasons that we must, as language teachers, start our pronunciation instruction at the level of the phoneme. If a phoneme is a "perceptually distinct unit of sound" then we have to realize that before students can consistently produce a given phoneme, they must be able to hear it. Thus the first lessons in pronunciation should involve your students listening and identifying, rather than speaking. Introduce your phonemes in contrasting pairs like /t/ and /d/. Repeat the phonemes in words as well as in isolation and ask the students to identify them. In order to visually represent the differences they are listening for, you may want to draw pronunciation diagrams for each sound showing the placement of the tongue and lips.

You might also consider teaching students the necessary symbols from the phonetic alphabet, because although T and D are written differently in English, the TH in "there" and the TH in "thanks" are written exactly the same, despite the difference in pronunciation. This isn't essential, and really works best with adults rather than children, but it is worth it for any students who are highly visual or analytical learners. You can play all sorts of matching games with this material to make the drills more fun and less stressful. You can have students play with nonsense sounds

and focus on the tiny differences between contrasted phonemic pairs, the key being to get them to hear the phoneme.

#### From Recognition of Phonemes to Practice

Once they can hear and identify a phoneme, it's time to practice accurate production of the sound. For this, pronunciation diagrams are useful. Students need to be able to see where to put their lips and tongues in relation to their teeth. Most sounds are articulated inside your mouth and students have no idea what you are doing in order to produce that particular noise. If you have ever tried to teach a Japanese student how to say an American /r/, then you have experienced the frustration of trying to get a student to produce tongue movements they can't see. There are books out there with diagrams, and with a little practice you can probably produce sketches of them yourself. If you can't, get hold of a good reference book so that you can flip to the relevant pages. Students will thank you for this insight into the mouth, especially since there is no danger of the embarrassment of bad breath with a drawing. While this may sound time consuming and unnatural, you have to realize that you are in the process of reprogramming your students' brains, and it is going to take a while. New neural pathways have to be created to learn new facial movements and link them with meaning.

In the classroom, teachers are recreating an accelerated version of the infant's language learning experience. They are providing examples and stimulus through grammar and vocabulary lessons, but with pronunciation lessons they are also breaking down language to the point of babbling noises so that their students can play with the sounds, as infants do, and learn to distinguish meaningful sounds on an intuitive level while making use of more mature analytical skills that an infant doesn't have. [4, 56] If a teacher regularly takes ten minutes of lesson to do this kind of focused phonemic practice, students articulation and perception of phonemes will see improvement after several weeks, and a teacher will get them all to the point where he/she can practice pronunciation on a word or even a sentential level.

#### Moving on to Pronunciation of Words

The progress will be more pronounced with younger students, but even adults will begin to give up fossilized pronunciation errors when reciting vocabulary words in isolation. It's time to make the next leap – correct pronunciation in the context of natural conversation. Make no mistake; this is a leap, not because it is more physically challenging, but because you are about to address a completely different set of barriers.

When methodists teach on the phonemic level, they are struggling to expand physical and neurological limitations. They are taking irrelevant noises and making them significant to students, while trying to teach them a greater range of articulation with their mouths, tongues, and lips. But when they work on pronunciation at a lexical or sentential level, they are dealing with complex emotional, psychological, and cultural motivations that require their own kind of re-education.

There are two reasons why pronunciation tends to be neglected: firstly, the lack of clear guidelines and rules available in course books, and secondly the fact that isolated exercises once a month does not seem to have much of an effect. This is not surprising, however; like all other areas of language teaching, pronunciation needs constant attention for it to have a lasting effect on students, which means integrating it into daily classroom procedures. One can find that addressing issues regularly during the language feedback or group correction stage of a lesson helps to focus learners' attention on its importance and lead to more positive experiences. Standard pronunciation may be defined as the elaborated variety of the national language, in its spoken form, which obeys definite norms recognized as standard and, therefore, acceptable (implicitly) in all kinds and types of discourse. [4, 35] Standard pronunciation is the pronunciation governed by the orthoepic norm. The orthoepic norm is then "a regulator which determines the inventory of variants, the borders of variation and also acceptable and non-acceptable variations in pronunciation". The standard includes in its inventory the pronunciation

forms which reflect the main tendencies in pronunciation that exist in the language. It is the pronunciation used by educated people, typified by radio and TV announcers and recorded in pronunciation dictionaries as the "proper" and "correct" pronunciation. However, standard pronunciation is not fixed and immutable. It is subject to change through the normal evolution of language and as a result of external factors (such as the movements of populations), though the rate of change is not a rapid one.

Pronunciation divergences are directly due to innovations. The factual material on the national varieties of English pronunciation testifies to the fact that each national variety may fall into several regional standards which, too, are considered equally "correct" or acceptable. They may be described as varieties of the national standard pronunciation which have more similarities with it than differences. In other words, the regional standard has more features consistent with the norm than those at variance with it. Regional standards are usually grouped into major dialect areas. [32, 14] Every regional standard of pronunciation is characterized by features that are common to all the dialects used in that region; dialects in their turn, are marked one from another by a set of features (in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar) that distinguish them from all the other dialects.

The relation of the regional standards of pronunciation towards dialects is no different from the relation of the national standard forms towards dialects. A regional standard is a variety of the national standard. A national variety of the language is a unified complex of regional and dialectal varieties. Dialects may be geographical in the sense of being spoken by those living in certain areas. They may also be classified according to criteria other than geographical ones, i.e. sociolinguistic. These dialectal differences may arise from a variety of sources, such as locality, early influences, education, occupation, social surroundings, class distinctions, etc. Dialect speakers are, as a rule, the less educated part of the population.

Thus, dialects may be defined as varieties that are spoken by a socially limited number of people, or are characteristic of certain localities. The degree to which dialects differ from the standard depends on a number of factors, such as the history of the development of the dialect, the socio-economic structure of the society, etc. Dialects often preserve features which have disappeared from its vernacular. Moreover, dialects remain free from outside interference. [4, 38]

Dialect studies are particularly useful for problems of history, such as the development of English phonology, changes in the distribution of particular features, the survival of relics, the delimitation of culturally isolated areas, etc. For reasons of political, economic and other social factors, one of the local dialects becomes the standard language of the nation, and the pronunciation of the dialect becomes the national standard, whereas the pronunciation of other dialects is regarded as substandard. In the history of the English language in Great Britain dialects followed the familiar pattern. In the fifteenth century England was a continuum of regional dialects. With the rise of urbanism a standard language emerged; this was basically the London form of Southeast dialect.

In the course of time it lost some of its local characteristics and was finally fixed as the speech of the educated class. It is essentially the pronunciation of the educated at public schools (which are private). It is largely through these schools that the pronunciation, known as Received Pronunciation, or RP, is perpetuated. RP is not the pronunciation of any region (except historically). Today because of its use on radio and television within Britain RP has become the social standard. Great prestige is still attached to this implicitly accepted social standard of pronunciation. It has become more widely accepted through the advent of radio. Thus, RP is often identified in the public mind with "BBC English". It is the form of pronunciation most commonly described in books on the phonetics of British English and traditionally taught to foreigners. [2, 47]

It would be wrong to think, however, that RP is used by the entire population of Great Britain. It is the "accent" of a minority (incidentally, it is spoken by only 3% of the British population). Moreover, present-day RP is not homogeneous either. A. Gimson, a British phonetician, within

RP itself distinguishes three main types: "the conservative RP forms used by older generation and, traditionally, by certain professions or social groups; the general RP forms most commonly in use and typified by the pronunciation.

It should be also pointed out that the linguistic situation (including pronunciation) has changed greatly since the fifties due to communication, greater mobility, the influx of films, pop music, etc. from other English-speaking countries, especially the USA. For instance, in the thirties and forties, as well as the post-war years, American films were dubbed in England. It is no longer the practice today. Incidentally, A. Gimson also writes that improved communications and radio have rendered influences of American English: "An American pronunciation of English, for instance, is now completely accepted in Britain; this was not the case at the time when the first sound films were shown in this country, an American pronunciation then being considered strange and even difficult to understand". [2, 48] It is through constant use and modification on the part of its speakers, however, that forms of spoken national varieties of the English language change.

Owing to communication devices today, such as radio, television, films, as well as the ever-growing mobility of population, or movement from one cultural group to another, the increasing urbanization and the spread of educational opportunities, regional and dialectal differences of national varieties of English pronunciation tend to become less marked. This does not mean, however, that the pronunciation of one dialect does not continue to differ from the pronunciation of another dialect. As A. Marckwardt notes wisely "a Yorkshire man and an Alabamian will not understand one another easily and without some effort, but they will understand one another". [2, 14]

Students who feel a lot of anxiety in speaking are generally well aware of the situation and they know that it is impeding their progress. The best remedy for anxiety is highly structured, low-pressure practice. In other words – games. Learned helplessness is much harder to bring to a students attention, and may be difficult for the teacher to recognize. If students are getting negative feedback on their English skills, especially pronunciation, and if they try to improve but feel they haven't, then they stop trying. They have already given up. Students that don't want to be assimilated into an English speaking society aren't going to give up the things that mark them as different. Teaching pronunciation properly can be fun, easy, and quite the learning experience for teachers and students. A teacher should take a few ideas from textbook and devote 10-15 minutes for improving pronunciation every class. With a little time, he/she will see quite a difference, not just in pronunciation, but in attitude and overall language skills.

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