

TEACHING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION TO ESL STUDENTS

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***Abstract:** Pronunciation has a positive effect on learning a second language and learners can gain the skills they need for effective communication in English.*

***Keywords:** Pronunciation, phoneme, drilling pronunciation, time-tested techniques, phonetic transcription, visualizing pronunciation, native-like pronunciation drama voice techniques, Multimedia enhancement.*

“Up to a certain proficiency standard, the fault which most severely impairs the communication process in EFL/ESL learners is pronunciation, not vocabulary or grammar”.

In many English language teachers, teaching pronunciation is granted the least attention. Many English teachers avoid teaching pronunciation, not because it is not necessary, but because they have little or no information on the subject. Proper pronunciation is essential when learning English as a second or foreign language.

If we learn a second language in childhood, we learn to speak it fluently and without a ‘foreign accent. If we learn in adulthood, it is very unlikely that we will attain a native accent. In this study, the researchers first review misconceptions about pronunciation, factors affecting the learning of pronunciation. Then, the needs of learners and suggestions for teaching pronunciation will be reviewed.

Pronunciation has a positive effect on learning a second language and

learners can gain the skills they need for effective communication in English. Many teachers begin English pronunciation practice as they introduce vocabulary. This is the way many textbooks advise to teach pronunciation. Unfortunately, for students with a mother tongue that bears no similarity to English, this actually makes comprehension more difficult.

Drilling pronunciation is another less than desirable form of instruction. A step up involves combining the teaching of pronunciation with that of spelling, another important skill, but the real starting point is on the level of the phoneme.

First of all we should know about “phoneme” The term phoneme (from [Ancient Greek](#) "sound made, utterance, thing spoken, speech, language") was reportedly first used by [A. Dufrique-Desgenettes](#) in 1873, but it referred only to a speech sound. The term phoneme as an [abstraction](#) was developed by the Polish linguist [Jan Niecisław Baudouin de Courtenay](#) and his student [Mikołaj Kruszewski](#) during 1875–1895 [1].

The term used by these two was fonema, the basic unit of what they called psychophonetics. The concept of the phoneme was then elaborated in the works of [Nikolai Trubetzkoy](#) and others of the [Prague School](#) (during the years 1926–1935), and in those of [structuralists](#) like [Ferdinand de Saussure](#), [Edward Sapir](#), and [Leonard Bloomfield](#). Some structuralists rejected the idea of a cognitive or psycholinguistic function for the phoneme. A phoneme is one of the units of sound that distinguish one word from another in a particular language. The difference in meaning between the English words kill and kiss is a result of the exchange of the phoneme (l) for the phoneme (s). Two words that differ in meaning through a contrast of a single phoneme form a [minimal pair](#).

The step from pronouncing phonemes to full length words is a short one, and from there it is much larger leap to being able to communicate in a natural conversation. A whole new set of obstacles appears, but there are easy ways to overcome each one [2].

Recent discussion of and research on the teaching and learning of pronunciation has focused on contrasts between the sound systems of a language spoken and a language being learned; the importance of accent, stress, intonation, and rhythm in the comprehensibility of the speech of ESL speakers; the effect of motivation and exposure in the development of native-like pronunciation; and intelligibility of speech among speakers of different English varieties. Linguists have tried to identify potential pronunciation difficulties of ESL speakers of a language by using contrastive analysis, which was popular in the 1950s and 1960s. The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis posits that by contrasting the features of two languages, the difficulties that a language learner might encounter can be anticipated (Crystal, 2003; Fries, 1952). Features of many languages were catalogued by linguists, but it was not possible to systematically predict which areas of English would be difficult for speakers of particular native languages. A less predictive version of the hypothesis was eventually put forth that focused on cross-linguistic influence. Cross-linguistic influence claims that prior language experiences have an impact on the way a language is learned, but these experiences do not consistently have predictive value (Brown, 2000; Wardhaugh, 1970) [3]. So I would like to present an overview of the traditional and time-tested techniques. Phonetic transcription is one of the long-used and known to all teachers technique is phonetic transcription, which is a code consisting of phonetic symbols. Each symbol describes a single sound, which is in fact different from a letter of the alphabet. True as it is, in order to use phonetic transcription one must learn the code and it takes time and effort. All good modern learners' dictionaries use phonetic symbols to indicate pronunciation, and learners must therefore be familiar with them'. Auditory reinforcement As A. Brown (1992) notes, there is a common assumption among teachers that perceptual and productive language skills such as listening and speaking are taught through the same medium, namely speaking and listening. As the result many of them use the traditional listen-and-repeat

approach in spite of the present tendency for communicative language teaching. Visualizing pronunciation technique is useful for adult learners who undergo the process of fossilization. While children benefit from oral repetition, drills and taping themselves, adult learners find it difficult to learn the patterns of intonation, stress and rhythm. The reason may be that they simply do not know whether the patterns they produce are acceptable. Real time visual displays are to show learners the relationship between the patterns they produce and those they are required to repeat. One of the possible conventions for making the word stress visible is writing the stressed syllable in capital letters: F**A**shion, S**E**ssion, b**E**HAVE.

Some teachers might be taking advantage of it without even realising this. Celce-Mauricia (1996) calls this mode a visual reinforcement. One of the forms of this reinforcement includes placing fingers on the throat in order to feel the vibration of the vocal cords, and it may be useful when teaching the distinction between voiced and voiceless consonants. A different form of tactile reinforcement incorporates simple tactile descriptions given to the students: ‘When you pronounce /r/ your tongue feels liquid and your jaw is tight (Celce-Mauricia, 296). Drama Voice Techniques is the focus of the above techniques has been generally on accuracy of sounds and stress at a word level. Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that both the ability to produce isolated sounds or recognising suprasegmental features and fluency contribute to effective communication.

Today’s pronunciation curriculum which has communicative language teaching as its goal thus seeks to identify the most important features and integrate them in courses. The interactive aspect of pronunciation as well as other aspects of English can be emphasized by the use of drama techniques. In classes where these techniques are employed, they help to reduce the stress that accompanies oral production in a foreign language. They are fun, entertaining and relaxing. One means in which drama voice techniques can enter

pronunciation classroom is for teachers to employ poetry, tongue twisters and raps. Audio feedback In traditional methods, which have been used for a long time now, teachers have taken the advantage of the audio medium, namely a tape recorder, for a dual purpose [4].

Multimedia enhancement is one of the major developments in the field of linguistics following the audio medium are video recorders and the use of software. These are an advance over audio tapes in that they provide visual support, which is as important in pronunciation teaching as auditory. Celce-Mauricia (1996) lists also other advantages of multimedia enhancement (313): 1. access to a wide variety of native-speaker speech samplings 2. sheltered practice sessions in which the learner can take risks without stress and fear of error. 3. opportunity for self-pacing and self-monitoring of progress 4. one-on-one contact without a teachers' constant supervision 5. an entertaining, game like atmosphere for learning. As for video recorders, they may serve both as a source of learning material and feedback. Students may not only view a native speakers' production of speech but can also see and hear themselves if videotaped.

In conclusion I want to say that we should work with our students' pronunciations with these old and modern techniques. We should not avoid of these difficult job. All teachers should try to develop students' writing, reading, speaking and listening skills.

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