

THE BASIC METHODS IN TEACHING PRONUNCIATION YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract: Pronunciation Learning styles have been studied for decades and there are several models that have been proposed by various researchers. Parallel to the ideas put forward by the reformers, there was an interest in developing principles for language teaching out of naturalistic language learning; such as are seen in first language acquisition.

Keywords: learning, language, method, grammar, teaching.

The attempt to duplicate how pupils learnt their first language led to what have been termed 'natural methods'. These ultimately led to the development of what came to be known as the Direct Method.¹ The Direct Method was the first oral-based teaching method that was widely adopted as a reaction against and a refreshing alternative to Grammar- Translation. One cannot fail to acknowledge the debt owed to Maximilian D. Berlitz for making the Direct Method available to large numbers of learners through his network of language schools; according to Howatt, "without Berlitz, very few people would have benefited from it". Berlitz opened his first language school in Providence, Rhode Island in 1878 and by 1914 he had nearly 200 schools in both America and Europe. The tenets of the Direct Method held that oral work should be strongly emphasized and pronunciation should receive great attention from the beginning and throughout the course.

The popularity of *the Direct Method* began to wane in the 1920s as light was shed on its drawbacks. The strict adherence to Direct Method principles was perceived to be counterproductive by the critics of the method. Moreover, the more academically oriented proponents of the Reform Movement, for example the prolific writer Henry Sweet, pointed to the fact that the Direct Method lacked a systematic basis in applied linguistic theory. Sweet and other applied linguists argued for the development of sound methodological principles that would serve as the basis for teaching techniques. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, British applied linguists engaged in the systematization of the principles that had been proposed earlier by the Reform Movement. Their work laid the foundation for an oral-based approach to the teaching of English which, unlike the Direct Method, was thoroughly grounded in applied linguistic theory. The final outcomes of this movement are known as the Oral Approach and, later on, Situational Language Teaching, which became the accepted British approach to English Language Teaching by the 1950s.

Teachers and students should be phonetically trained and the use of phonetic transcription should be extensive, especially in the early stages of language learning. Throughout his works, he maintained, that teachers and students should be seriously concerned with the mastery of accurate pronunciation. Palmer went as far as to describe students' "bad (or relatively bad) pronunciation" in terms of having a "linguistic disease"². This 'disease' can be prevented by employing procedures that will "cause our pupils to listen to the foreign language and to enunciate it in the manner of the native listener and speaker" (ibid: 107). Thus, intensive and systematic exercises in pronunciation, including ear-training exercises and exercises in articulation" (ibid: 107) form an integral part of Palmer's 'prevention' plan. Habit-formation was Palmer's core methodological principle.

Owing to the work of A. S. Hornby among other applied linguists, further development of Oral Approach teaching techniques led to the emergence of Situational Language Teaching (SLT) and its dominance in Britain and other European countries in the 1950s and 1960s. SLT adhered to the same principles as the Oral Approach; nevertheless, it placed greater emphasis on the principle that new language points should be presented and practised through situations. The language lesson began with the focus on

¹ (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 12).

² (Palmer and Redman, 2nd edition, 1969: 106).

pronunciation; drilling formed part of classroom tasks. Accuracy in pronunciation was regarded as crucial and practice techniques consisted of “guided repetition and substitution activities, including chorus repetition, dictation, drills and controlled oral-based reading and writing tasks”.

Turning our attention to the United States of America, the Direct Method began to fall from favor following the publication of the Coleman Report in 1929, which identified the acquisition of reading knowledge of a foreign language as a more appropriate and feasible goal. Most foreign language courses concentrated on reading until the Second World War (ibid: 13) but subsequent developments ultimately led to the decline of such ‘reading courses’ and the advent of the *Audio-lingual Method* to the teaching of English and other languages in the 1950s.

The first American English Language Institute was developed by the University of Michigan in 1939 and specialised in the training of teachers of English as a foreign language and the teaching of English as a foreign language. The director of the institute, Charles Fries, and his colleagues rejected approaches such as those of the Direct Method because they were structural linguists and as such saw grammar, or ‘structure’, as the starting point rather than the end-point of language learning. Structuralism views “language as a system and... investigates the place that linguistic units such as sounds, words, sentences have within this system”. As the dominant linguistic model of the 1940s and 1950s, it placed great emphasis on the description of different levels of production in speech. In the application of structuralism to second language acquisition (SLA), as pioneered by Fries, pronunciation was placed at the forefront of L2 pedagogy. In his seminal volume entitled ‘Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language’, Fries proposed that in learning a new language the primary concern should be “first, the mastery of the sound system” (: 3) and then the mastery of morphology, syntax and lexis. Overall, the syllabus should be characterised by systematic attention to pronunciation right from the beginning as well as intensive oral drilling of the basic sentence patterns of the target language.

The combination of structuralism with the then dominant theory of psychology known as *behaviourism*, which views learning as the result of habit formation led to the development of the Audio-lingual method in language teaching³. As debt at all puts it: “structuralism linguistics provided tools for analyzing language into chunks and behavioral theory provided a model for teaching any behavior by conditioning”. In audiolingualism, language was primarily identified with speech and, thus, the oral/aural skills received most of the attention. The focus was on the mastery of accurate pronunciation and grammar of the target language through drills and practice. Listening and speaking exercises were designed to concentrate on the area of pronunciation, for example, the discrimination between members of minimal pairs, and “oral proficiency is equated with accurate pronunciation and grammar”. Thus, pronunciation and grammar were accorded a far more important role compared to vocabulary.

The Audio-lingual method dominated the teaching of English and other foreign languages in the 1950s and 1960s in the United States.

This thesis is mainly concerned with the place of pronunciation in English Language Teaching, and, thus, at this point, the reader’s attention needs to be drawn to the specific reference to ‘English language teaching’ (at the end of the previous paragraph) instead of the more general reference to ‘the teaching of modern or foreign languages’ that has been employed so far. In determining pronunciation objectives for an ESL/EFL course, the teacher must be well acquainted with the English sound system. This system consists of the English vowel and consonant sounds and their possible combinations, as well as the modifications the sounds can undergo in various contexts. Pronouncing English well is not just about getting the individual sounds right. Students also need to know:

- Which parts of a word are stressed.
- Which parts of a sentence are stressed.
- Basic intonation patterns.
- What it means when we change the intonation in a sentence.
- How to link together the sounds within a sentence.

Sound System of English

³ 36. Paulston, C. B., & Burder, M. N. (1976). Teaching English as a Second Language. Techniques and Procedures. Cambridge: Winthrop Publishers, Inc

Doff believed, " ...there is normally no need to teach the sounds of English individually; students are able to pick up the sound system of the language..." . However, he also stated that teachers should find difficult sounds or sound combinations and focus on them. He suggested the following three steps in order to show sounds that cause difficulty:

Repetition: The experience of many learners is that pronunciation can be, and often is, acquired by imitation. The teacher can help students to hear the sounds clearly by saying the sounds clearly on their own several times and asking students to repeat it. The teacher can use the sound in one or two words and ask students to repeat it in chorus and individually. The teacher can also use recordings to be a good model for the students.

Contrast: Sometimes students confuse two similar sounds, it is obviously useful to contrast them. The teacher can help students distinguish between similar sounds by reading out pairs of words with only one difference between them. Contrasting the sound with a similar sound will help students clearly hear the difference

Description: sometimes students don't have a particular sound in their own sound system; therefore, they can not produce it correctly. Using simple English or native language, the teacher can explain about the way of the pronunciation of that sound. For a course focusing on pronunciation at a more advanced level, it is useful to present a diagram of the organs of speech, the phonetic alphabet, the consonant chart, and the vowel chart.

Contextualized Minimal Pairs: Bowen as cited in Celce-Marcia was one of the firsts to stress the importance of teaching pronunciation in meaningful contexts. He argued that learners control a feature when focusing on form but lose it once they focus on the meaning of the message. He believed that the teacher should set up a contextualized situation in which the learner must distinguish the correct form aurally in order to provide the correct response or produce the correct form in order to elicit the correct response. For example:

This pen leaks.

Then don't write with it.

This pan leaks.

Then don't cook with it

Listening Activities: Most research however, shows clearly that the problem is more likely to be reception - what you don't hear, you can't say. According to Dalton if the "English" sound is not clearly received, the brain of the learner converts it into the closest sound in their own language. Thus the dental English fricative / ʃ / in "those", becomes converted by Iranian speakers into the detailed /d/ , producing "dose" as this is what the speaker hears. Given this reality, it would seem logical to place a heavy emphasis on listening (reception) as a way into releasing appropriate pronunciation (production).

Integrated Whole-body Approach: This is a model for teaching pronunciation that is suggested by CelceMurcia . In this approach teachers should use short video taped interactions as the basis for instruction. First, clips from film or television are shown silently for general cues. Then, it is shown with sound to confirm predictions about the context. Through repeated listening each line is carefully analyzed. This intensive listening is followed by intensive speaking practice in which learners try to imitate the pronunciation as well as the movements of each line. Teachers can also use audio recordings in order to provide students with intensive listening activities to improve pronunciation.

In dealing with word stress, first the teacher should talk about syllable. The teacher must be sure that the students understand the meaning of syllable. Through different examples, the teacher should point out that most words with two or more syllables have one stressed syllable and two or more unstressed ones. The teacher should talk about stress and the way of producing stressed syllables through different examples and in a meaningful way. For example:

1) "A contest for a top job".

Contest: N

2) "Contest a statement". Contest: V

In the first sentence stress is on the first syllable of contest, and in the second sentence stress is on the second syllable.

The teacher should also talk about sentence stress. S/he should point out that we also stress certain syllables within a sentence, not just within a word. To mark stress in a sentence, we make those syllables louder and longer, and also higher. This stress comes on the most important word or words in a sentence and these are usually nouns, verbs and sometimes adjectives and adverbs. Other little word, like "on", "a", and "and" disappear. We can also change the meaning of what we say by stressing those syllables in a sentence

that we want to make more important than the others. Maybe we want to emphasize something, or to express our surprise or to correct what someone else has said. For example:

I saw Maiy in the library. (Not in the classroom)

I saw Mary teaching in the classroom. (Usually I don't see her teaching in the classroom)

According to Doff teachers can show the stress pattern of a sentence by using their voice, gestures, and the blackboard.

It is very important that the students have enough practice of the new language. Students can do this in pairs, groups or as a whole class. This phase gives the students a chance to physically practice pronouncing the new language, getting the sounds, stress, and intonation right.

English sounds

After presenting English sounds, the teacher should help students practice difficult, similar, and new sounds. The following three activities are suggested by Doff (1990):

a. **Minimal Pairs:** minimal pairs are pairs of words that only differ in one feature. For example: ship- sheep/ loose-lose. Minimal pairs can be used to focus on differences in vowel or consonant sounds. The teacher writes a long list of contrasted words on the blackboard. Students draw two columns in a notebook. They write one sound at the top of one column and the other sound at the top of the other. They have to write the list of contrasted words down in the correct column⁴.

b. **Missing words:** sometimes the teacher wants to practice a difficult sound. In this case s/he can say short sentences or phrases in which one word is missing. That missing word contains that specific difficult sound.

For example:

A boy and a .

First, second and

A pigeon is a kind of.

c. Making sentences: By using Bowen's technique the teacher can provide lots of meaningful practice of English sounds. The teacher writes a list of minimal pairs and students write sentences by using those words.

For example: Thin-tin, sit- seat

He is thin.

He has tin.

Don't sit on that seat.

Classification activity: Celce-Murcia suggested that the teacher could provide a classification system, usually consisting of one example or model for each category. Students are divided into groups. Then, different packets of cards with additional words or phrases are distributed to each group and they must decide in which category each card belongs. For example, for regular past -ed endings, the teacher writes at the top of three columns on the blackboard:

/ad/ /d/ /t/

added moved baked

The teacher first shows how the -ed ending is pronounced in each case. Then, cards with regular past-tense verbs are distributed among the groups. Each group should classify each word and then write it into the suitable columns on the board.

C for consonant, V for vowel: Alan Stanton suggested the following activity to be carried out before introducing phonemic symbols. It is a good activity to practice vowel and consonant sounds in English.

Procedure:

- Choose ten words that students already know. It is important that they be familiar words.
- Choose four or five other familiar words as examples.
- Demonstrate on the board that the word 'cat', for example, can be written C VC, Consonant sound, Vowel sound, Consonant sound. This is a very easy example but there are more difficult ones. 'Caught' is CVC, 'through' is CCV, 'breakfast' is CCVCCVCC, 'brother' is CCVCV, 'hour' is VV, and 'carrot' is CVCVC.

⁴ Fachun, Z. & Pengpen, A. (2009). A study of pronunciation problems of English in China. *AsianSocialScience*, 5(6), 143. doi: 10.5539/ass.v5n6p141

- Ask students to do the same with the ten words you have chosen. You can ask them to do this by looking and writing, by looking, listening (to you) and writing, by listening, saying (to each other) and writing - whichever combination seems valuable and necessary.
- If you are not sure about a word, check the phonemic symbols in a dictionary.
- Check students' answers and explain any difficulties.

This activity will clarify many points for students. For example, that 'br' is two sounds but 'th' is one, final 'er' is one and 'rr' is one. It will show that 'h' is sometimes silent and sometimes not and that final Y is silent. Note that diphthongs count as one vowel sound. This activity is good preparation for learning phonemes because it focuses on sounds and not letters.

Believe it or not: The teacher can also use pictures to practice intonation of surprise; it is called 'Believe it or not.' Take a picture (pictures of people work best for this) and hold it up for the whole class to see. Say some statements about the person in the card, e.g., 'He's 40, he's a bus driver'. Get the students to repeat the statements after you, as in a straightforward drill. Then say something that is either not believable or very surprising, e.g. 'He's had a head transplant!', 'He won a gold medal in the Olympics!' Repeat these sentences yourself with the intonation of disbelief or surprise, as a model. You may like to analyze your own way of showing surprise through stress and intonation before you do this. Practice this with the students for a while, with a mixture of believable and unbelievable sentences, and let the students show their reaction in the way that they repeat the sentence. You may find the students have different ideas of what is credible. Finally, the students can be given their own pictures to make up believable and unbelievable statements for, and allowed to practice in pairs.

Shadow reading: According to Lucy Baylis, the teacher can use a text from the course book in order to practice pronunciation. This task is challenging and motivating and can be used at any level.

Procedure:

- Teacher reads the text aloud and students follow, marking the text for sentence stress.
- Teacher reads the text a second time and the students mark for intonation.
- Individual chunks that show good examples of intonation patterns or problematic pronunciation can then be drilled.
- Students practice these aspects of pronunciation by reading the text to them before the teacher reads the text aloud again and they listen.
- Then the students read the text with the teacher and they have to start and finish at the same time as the teacher, who reads the text at normal speed
- This works well after some exposure to the rules of pronunciation, connected speech, stress and intonation.

Activities, which are performance oriented _such as interviews, speeches, role-plays, drama scenes, and debates_ are useful techniques in this phase. They provide opportunities for self-correction.

An interview allows for a great deal of question formation and is an interesting way to practice the intonation patterns for questions.

Teachers can give students topics for oral presentations. A student presents a topic and other students try to monitor him or her for one particular phonetic feature in each speech, for example, blending, intonation, stress, and individual sounds.

Role-plays and drama scenes are always fun and ideal vehicles for practicing pronunciation. They are fully contextualized, include gestures and body language, and provide opportunities for practicing natural speech.

Providing feedback is very important during instruction because it gives learners a sense of their progress and reveals where they need to focus their attention. According to Celce-Marcia the teacher can provide feedback in three main ways:

A. *Self monitoring*

Self-correction is the most valuable since it encourages the student to be autonomous. Students can correct themselves and improve their pronunciation by listening to the recordings of own speech. The teacher should point out students' errors silently through gestures. Hand gestures can represent different aspects of

pronunciation, for example, number of syllables, linking, rising or falling intonation, etc. Then, s/he lets students correct their mistakes.

B. Peer feedback

Learning from someone who is only a little further along than you can be an effective alternative to instructor feedback alone. By listening to other students' speech, and finding errors, students will become aware of their own problems in speech.

C. Teacher Feedback

As the final step, teacher feedback is indispensable in making students aware of errors that they are unable to distinguish. The teacher might also repeat the student's utterance and pause just before the error occurred to give the student an opportunity to complete the utterance and correct the error. Correcting by simply repeating the student's utterance without error is distracting and gives little clue about where the error occurred. For these reasons, explicit nonverbal correction can often be more effective. It is better to focus on errors that occur as a pattern, not as isolated mistakes. This might include only the feature currently being dealt with in class or that student's specific difficulty, which might be rhythm, word and sentence stress, blending, intonation pattern, final voiced consonants, or similar elements. The teacher should ask whether the error cause a breakdown in communication. If the error hinders the process of communication, the teacher should correct it.

Thus, teaching English pronunciation is an area of language teaching that many English teachers avoid. While there are many textbooks and instruction manuals available, as well as books on the theories and methodologies of language teaching there is comparatively little on learning 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.

Therefore, I think, Based on the data found and its relation to some theories mentioned, it can be concluded that the students' pronunciation skill is improved through the use of several methods in the learning process. Moreover, the students' motivation and confidence are also increased after some additional movements within the methods are implemented in the class. The students become motivated and start to be interested in learning English. Therefore, the students start to speak in English by using correct pronunciation. We should be so experienced to use several methods during the lesson.

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