

# Teaching Pronunciation Skills

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**Annotation:** This article focuses on making teachers think about teaching English pronunciation, getting acquainted with the techniques of teaching pronunciation, exploring your own experience of using the techniques. The aim of the article is consideration the significance of developing learners' pronunciation skills in teaching English.

**Key words:** Phonetic competence, word recognition, word spelling, Contextual minimal pair drill, Visual aids;

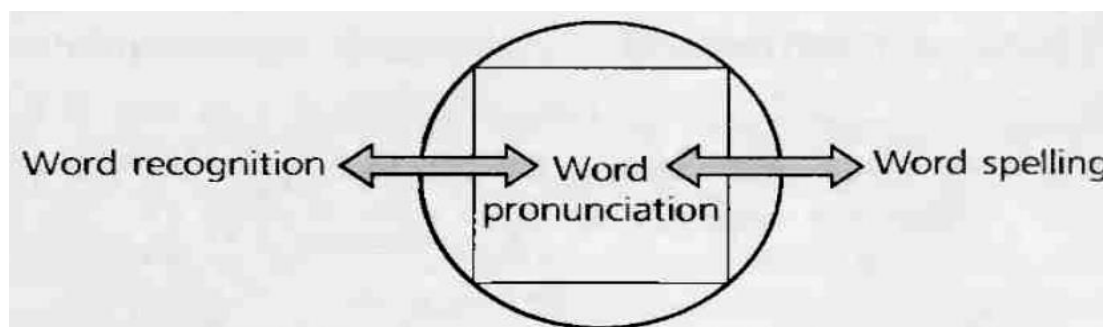
**General features of teaching pronunciation.** Teaching pronunciation is important not just because it is necessary to communicate one's ideas clearly. Articulation movements accompany the process of using the language not only when a person is speaking but also during listening, reading and writing. Hidden articulation movements were registered when a person seemed silent just listening to somebody else talking or when reading a text. The more difficult the cognitive task, the more obvious become sound articulations. Language articulation is thus closely linked to the language -and-thought processes. If the hidden articulation movements are surprised (in experiments the subjects are asked to perform some movements with their tongue while doing a thinking task), the subjects find it difficult to perceive the words. Pronouncing one's thought or at least making hidden articulations facilitates the process. People often resort to pronouncing words while reading a text when they find the text ambiguous.

## Exploitory Task 1.1

The task is done by a pair of students. One attempts to solve silently the two verbal problems given below. The other observes the process and reports on the emergence of slight articulation movements. When and why does articulation appear?

Problem 1	Problem 2
Eleven men are crawling along a green lawn in a straight row. What are they doing?	John is taller than Paul but is shorter than Pauline. Who is the tallest in the family?

Speech sound articulation is important not only to pronounce the words but also to recognize and to spell them. Russian learners of English often mistake the [t] sound for [ch] sound, believing that the words "teacher" is pronounced as [chicher], and the structure "it is", is pronounced [ichis]. Mistakes in orthography can also be traced to erroneous pronunciation. The following words can be both pronounced and spelt by the learners as [instinct]. This interdependence word pronunciation and spelling is shown by the graph:



The communicative approach since 1980 holds that pronunciation is important for teaching the language for the purposes of communication. The studies of the importance of sounds and intonation have shown that intonation appears to be more important for communication than speech

sounds. Mistakes in intonation cause more comprehension problems than mispronounced phonemes. Mastering the pronunciation of foreign languages presents great difficulties for the learners. Uzbek learners of English can find it difficult to distinguish between the sounds in the words “bed” and “bad”. They can equally find it difficult to distinguish the sound in the words “ten” and “tan”, etc. The reason for the difficulty is that Uzbek students of English do not have in their native tongue the distinction between open, half-open and closed vowels, as well as between short and long vowels (as in “bin” and “bean”) and monophthongs and diphthongs (as in “pen” and “pain”). English rhythm and stress pattern of sentences are also hard to master for the Uzbek learners. Uzbek speech is less rhythmical. Uzbek words do not have a primary and secondary stress. Uzbek learners of English are no exception in their difficulties. Japanese students find it next to impossible to perceive the difference between “rice” and “lice”. Thai students find English intonation confusing because in the Thai language the word “haa” said with the falling tone means “five”, while the same word pronounced with the rising tone means “to look for”.

People reason for the learners making errors in pronouncing the foreign sounds are that a particular sound may be absent in the mother tongue. A sound may exist in the mother tongue but with a different articulation. Similar native sounds may not distinguish the meaning as in the foreign language (e.g. long and short vowels). Learners may mispronounce the sound because they may mishear it. Conversely, the learners can mishear the sound because they mispronounce it. That is why the first thing that needs to be done is to check that the learners can hear and identify the sounds that are to be taught. After the learners have acquired the sound-symbol correspondence, they may in some languages immediately decode any given word or write down any spoken word without much hassle. In the English language it is not so simple. This happens because in the English language the words have long changed their pronunciation but their original spelling still remains the same. The English orthographic system functions on the “conservative principle” while pronunciation appears to be more dynamic and changes with time.

The goal of teaching pronunciation is not to make the learners sound like native speakers of English. Only few highly gifted and motivated individuals can achieve it. A more realistic approach is to enable the learners to pronounce the language without detracting from the ability to comprehend the message. This approach to teaching pronunciation is called approximating. The target of teaching pronunciation is to develop in learners phonetic competence, which is the knowledge of the English phonetic means such as phonemes, syllable formation, word stress and intonation.

Phonetic competence includes the knowledge of how speech sounds (phonemes) are used in actual speech production. This includes elisions (absence of sounds as in “Chris/t/mas”) and assimilation (where one sound merges in the next sound as in “hambag” standing for “handbag”). This is called “modification of phonemes in connected speech”. There are some typical modifications of phonemes in connected oral speech. If these words are spelt as they are pronounced they will look like: “GrapeBritain” (Great Britain), “stapement” (statement), “lasyear” (last year), “aspecs” (aspects), etc. One of the reasons that the phonemes merge together in oral speech is that it saves speakers from making articulation efforts.

There are two kinds of knowledge in mastering English pronunciation. One type of knowledge is intuitive, which is a language feeling. The other type of knowledge is analytic and is based on the knowledge of articulation.

Techniques for teaching pronunciation that have traditionally been used and are still being used in instructed settings. The traditional approach to teaching pronunciation that still survives is the “pronunciation drill”. Drills are still very popular and there are a number of reasons for that. Drills engage the students in narrowly defined tasks. This provides emotional security for the learners and teachers. Drills are relatively easy to perform. They guarantee in most cases the immediate result of mastering the learning material. In other words a drill works and that is what matters. It is evident that one can’t master pronunciation of the foreign language without some form of repetitive drilling. Repetition can be by the whole class, individually in the fixed order, slow tempo and fast tempo, repetition in small groups, etc.

Listen and imitate. Students listen to the models provided by the teacher and imitate them.

E.g. 1: back, lack, lap, tap, map, cat....(phoneme [a] in the closed syllable).

E.g. 2: Why Willie, why wink widely, weep wildly, whoop weirdly...? (every word begins with [w]).

Repetitious exercises train the learners to pronounce long chains of words and/or phrases. E.g. lunch, much, crunch, such, touch.... . At lunch I like to crunch so much and touch what I can crunch. Analogy exercises consist of filling in the gaps in word chains on the analogy. E.g. My loved one is so near, and dear, but I .....(fear) that he will not come here.

**Tongue twisters** (phrases that are difficult to say without a sound mistake because of the sounds interesting with each other). E.g. “ Swans swam in swarm and swiftly swerved to swallow the sweet worm” or She sells sea shells on the sea shore and she sells are sea shells.

**Contextual minimal pair drill.** A situation setting is used to distinguish between similar words. E.g. The situation is that a blacksmith is shoeing a horse. What sentence do you hear? “The blacksmith (a / hits, b / heats) the horseshoe.”

**Visual aids.** Devices such as charts, pictures, mirrors, real things are used to enhance pronunciation training.

**Tasks with interjections.** Tasks with interjections are used to develop in learners the ability to use phonetic means in the given situational circumstances. There are quite a few phonemes that can be used in speech as “interjections”, i.e. short exclamatory words. The learners are given a situational phrase, to which they react using an interjection with the correct articulation and intonation.

**Reproduction Exercises.** They are designed for developing pupils’ pronunciation habits, i.e. their ability to articulate English sounds correctly and to combine sounds into words, phrases and sentences easily enough to be able to speak and comprehend while listening. The following techniques can be recommended. Record the following conversation and play it for students. Ask students to guess who the participants are and what the setting is.

He: Ready? ↑  
She: No. ↓  
He: Why? ↓  
She: Problems. ↓  
He: Problems? ↑  
She: Yes. ↓  
He: What? ↓  
She: Babysitter. ↓

After the students have figured out what is going on, the teacher plays the conversation again. This time the teacher puts the dialogue on the board and draws arrows next to each utterance. Then the students pronounce each word with the teacher. The teacher checks the rise or fall in pitch.

The material used for reproduction exercises or drills should be connected with the topic or unit of lesson pupils study. For example, to teach students the correct pronunciation of [w] the rhyme can be used: “Why do you cry Willy? Why? Why, Willy, why?” If students are taught how to pronounce [d] they following proverb can be used: A friend in need is a friend indeed.

The teacher may take poems, some useful expressions, short sentences, rhymes, geographical and proper names, international words as materials for pronunciation drills. Pronunciation is a skill that should be developed and perfected throughout the whole course of learning the language. That is why the teacher should use pronunciation drills during every lesson, irrespective of the stage of instruction.

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