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TEACHING PRACTICAL PHONETICS ADULT LEARNERS AT AN EARLY STAGE

This paper deals with innovative approaches to practical phonetics teaching. Articulatory phonetics: different structures of the vocal tract, called the articulators (tongue, lips, jaw, palate, teeth etc.) have been studied. Auditory phonetics: methods of sound production and reception – the ear to the brain and those processes have been analyzed. Acoustic phonetics: acoustic aspects of speech sounds like the mean squared amplitude of a waveform, its duration, its fundamental frequency, and other properties of its frequency spectrum, have been investigated. Neuro-linguistic programming has been described as one of the innovative approaches in the study of phonetics.

Key words: *phonetic material, voice imitation, voice setting, neuro-linguistic programming, communicative approach, metacommunication.*

Introduction. New developments in pronunciation pedagogy result from a general tendency in foreign language teaching to embrace communicative and holistic approaches. Moreover, current trends have been affected by clear influences from other disciplines such as psychology, neuro-linguistics, drama and technology.

Communicative perspective. A lot of modern pronunciation teaching practitioners try to go beyond traditional classroom techniques such as repetition drills, recognition and discrimination tasks, descriptions of the articulatory system or transcription practice. Since the advent of communicative approach, which has dominated the whole spectrum of foreign language teaching, pronunciation methodology has started to advocate more discourse-based approaches. In addition, the focus has shifted dramatically from teaching segmentals to supreasegmentals with a view to improving general comprehensibility. Today's pronunciation curricula tend to reflect a more balanced treatment of suprasegmentals integrated with segmentals with highly functional load (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). For some time, however, pronunciation has ignored the interaction of the sound with function and meaning, traditionally focussing only on accurate production of sounds and intonation patterns. Now the scope of pronunciation instruction is being seriously questioned since accuracy and fluency are regarded to be highly interrelated. Consequently, fluency-based communicative activities are more and more often incorporated into pronunciation instruction, particularly into initial stages of a lesson in the form of warm-ups. For a detailed treatment of fluency-building activities such as discussion wheel, fluency workshop or personal introduction collage see Celce-Murcia et al. (1996).

Voice setting. Current approaches to the teaching of practical phonetics have become concerned with developing a more authentically native-like "voice quality" or "setting", which cannot be achieved through mastering sound segments alone. Voice quality refers to characteristic features of a given language such as pitch level, vowel space, neutral tongue position and the degree of muscular activity that are common to

speakers of a target variety and result from using organs of articulation in a particular way.

General features which contribute to the quality of the English voice include the position of the larynx which is neutral or slightly lowered, thus giving usually a warmer and more resonant effect. The larynx is used predominantly with low energy and low tension, therefore, English sounds rather relaxed and "breathy". The supralaryngeal tract is also quite neutral and relaxed with the exception of the tongue tip which tends to be very active frequently moving towards the alveolar ridge (Jenner, 1995). It is essential for the students who wish to sound more authentically English to become aware of these characteristics and to try to modify their own voice quality. It can be achieved through a number of exercises involving the observation and imitation of articulatory movements employed in speaking English.

The following techniques may be useful to develop some general features of the English voice:

– speaking with a light object placed between the lips (e. g. a pen-cap) which indicates a small degree of opening in English;

– using a "yawning" voice when counting in English to lower the position of the larynx;

– applying breathing exercises to achieve an almost total laxity of the English voice;

– exaggerating the length of long open vowels and diphthongs produced in context e. g. I'll see to the tea. How now, brown cow?, as long vowels in English are closely connected with muscular laxity;

– practising rhythmic sentences with frequent [t], [d] or [n] sounds to activate the tip of the tongue to make contact with the alveolar ridge, e. g. Tip this tin into the bin.

Students are also encouraged to create new more confident-sounding voices by changing the pitch, speed and timbre and possibly imitating more L2-like body postures in order to develop a more authentically sounding English voice quality.

Traditional techniques. Basically, traditional exercises are simple, accessible, fun and combine reception and production. Some students (usually adults) do feel

embarrassed to pull ridiculuous faces when practising vowel sounds (this may be personal or cultural or both). Where possible, exercises are communicative in that they should (and do generate differences of opinion and disagreement about what was said/heard. Below are two examples.

Exercise A:

After having taught or exposed the students to long and short vowels through listening and oral work, the teacher can check recognition, retention and ability to discriminate in the following way. This could also be used simply for teaching.

Stage 1:

The teacher writes a variety of words containing the target sounds (long and short vowels) on the board. The following is just one possible set.

PORT PIT PAT PERT PET POT PUTT
0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 8   9
PUT   PART PEAT

Here, the only difference in sound is that of the vowel – familiar to anyone who has done minimal pair work. As in these examples, the word should begin and end with the same consonant. 0, 3, 8, and 9, are long vowels and the rest are short.

Stage 2:

The teacher models each word and individual repetition follows. The vowel sound can be isolated and the procedure repeated until the teacher is reasonably sure that there are no major problems. He or she then tells the students that they are going to hear one of the words and must write the number which corresponds to the word they hear. What the students have written is then checked and compared.

This automatically leads into a discussion of what they heard and what sounds they are confusing. If student X heard 1 when the teacher said 9, they are confusing the short vowel [I] with the long vowel [i:]. The teacher gives feedback and the sounds may then be modelled again and practised.

Stage 3:

Two or three words are then presented together and the procedure repeated. The teacher then tells the class they are going to hear six words and that the numbers correspond to an important telephone number. The teacher delivers the words and asks, "What's my number?". Again there will be differences in what was heard. This allows a focus on which sounds are not being discriminated effectively by which students and where their problems lie. Later discussion may revolve aloud what strategies students may employ to improve their discrimination skills – songs, minimal pair games with friends, movies, radio, etc.

Stage 4:

Learners are then invited to model the telephone number. This stage usually generates much discussion and disagreement along the lines of – "You said...", "No I didn't", "Say it again" and so on and is usually very lively. The teacher is, of course, the final arbiter of what was really said. The important thing is that the learners are thinking actively about their pronunciation and how to repair it if necessary. They also begin to hear themselves (often for the first time) and this is of immeasurable importance in the retention of sounds.

Exercise B:

This exercise was designed for a multi-lingual class, but is equally effective with monolingual groups. It is more communicative in nature than Exercise A as it involves giving and carrying out instructions.

Stage 1:

Having identified some problem areas for the class, the teacher makes a list of instructions containing these. Below is such a list.

Draw a sheep on the board (Spanish speakers often draw a ship).

Write the letter "P" above the sheep (Arabic speakers often write "B").

Use the "P" as the start of the word "pleasant" and write the word (Japanese speakers often write "present").

Write "light" next to pleasant (Japanese speakers often write "right").

Draw a mouse next to the word "light" (Spanish and Japenese speakers often draw a mouth).

Draw a pear next to the mouse (Arabic speakers often draw a bear).

Other examples can be added.

Stage 2:

After presentation and practice of the problem areas, each student is given a piece of paper with an instruction containing such sounds. The papers are given so that a student will hear an instruction containing a sound which they have a problem hearing. The instruction is then whispered in the ear of the receiving student and they carry out what they hear. They sit down and read their instruction to the next student. This continues until all the instructions have been carried out and there is something resembling a picture on the board. No comments should be made as the work is in process.

Stage 3: Feedback

There will be reactions from laughter to dismay as the students see how their instructions were carried out. The teacher needs to focus the students on what went wrong. Was the problem production or reception? What did Miko say and what did Joel hear? The dilemma pushes the students to correct themselves and hear what they are saying. The discussions are often very animated and again the teacher must arbitrate. The learners also see the real-life consequences of not producing or not hearing appropriate English sounds as well as getting personal and class feedback

on their problem areas. As in Exercise A, discussion can take place on strategies for pronunciation.

Minimal pairs technique

Selecting minimal pairs

Minimal pairs can be defined as two words which only differ by a single sound, such as "tree" and "three". This potentially huge list of words is usually cut down by limiting it to words that differ in ways that students often misunderstand and/or cannot produce. Which sounds, and therefore which words, are relevant can often be guessed from students' first language, e. g. choosing "bat" and "bet" for Korean students. The list of sounds that people find difficult can often be further cut down by eliminating ones that they don't in fact have (many) problems with.

This could be due to their own dialect or other languages they speak having both sounds, or borrowing of words with that sound into their language.

You can also prioritise based on who they will be speaking with. For example, if they are focussed on American English there is little point spending time on the "cap" and "cup" distinction. In the same way, a Spanish person working for a Japanese company is unlikely to gain much from being able to distinguish "ban" and "van". You can also make more general judgments based on students' need for "English as a Lingua Franca".

More minimal pairs

Once you have cut down on and prioritised the minimal pairs, you can start thinking about building their use up beyond what is given in normal pronunciation books and coursebooks. To start with, many useful minimal pairs for particular nationalities, such as the "cheek" and "teak" pair for Koreans and Japanese, are rarely if ever mentioned in internationally available books. For many nationalities, you should also probably add words which are defined by an extra sound rather than different sounds. For example, many students have problems with hearing and adding vowels on the end of words that end with consonants in pairs such as "compute" and "computer" and "church" and "churchy". The same is true with adding sounds to consonant cluster in pairs like "supine" and "spine". These are not strictly minimal pairs but cause the same kinds of problems and can be dealt with in the same way.

Other ways of expanding the definition of minimal pairs is to include combinations of words that sound the same as minimal pairs of single words would, such as "a load" and "allowed".

Finding minimal pairs

Now that we have an expanded group of sounds to deal with, we need a set of words to use for minimal pair activities. You can start doing this with a brainstorming stage. On a piece of paper, write all the English vowel sounds in a column down the middle, prefe-

rably in phonemic script. In the same way, write all the consonant sounds in English twice, once on the left hand side of the vowels and once on the right. Add common combinations of sounds in those positions (e. g. [str] before the vowel and [mp] after the vowel) and delete sounds that never go in that position (e. g. "ng" before the vowel). Circle the two sounds that you want to find minimal pairs for, and use this table to brainstorm all the single syllable words with those sounds, writing down any pairs that you find.

You can then check online lists and pronunciation books and textbooks for any that you missed, e. g. longer words. The list can then be divided to be used with particular classes, e. g. to make lists by level, language point (e. g. contractions or past forms) and/or topic. For lists related to particular topics and language points, you can also take the opposite approach of brainstorming or finding a list of useful words (e. g. family words or a list of irregular past tenses) and then trying to think of words that they could be confused with (e. g. "cist" and "sister" or "bought" and "boat").

Minimal pair activities

Now you have plenty of sounds to practise and plenty of words to practise them with, you will need lots of classroom activities to make so much work on minimal pairs varied and interesting. Most books have endless activities where students circle which of the two words they hear. As you can imagine, this can very quickly get boring. Allowing them to look at the teacher pronouncing the word can be more useful and realistic, as they can often use the mouth position to help them guess. This can be taken further by asking them to guess while the teacher silently mouths the words.

You can also allow them to use the context to guess with sentences like "I don't like beans" and "Please put it in the bin", rather than the "There was a bin on the table" and "There was a bean on the table" pairs that many books use. If those sentences contain common collocations with either or both words, all the better.

You can also introduce minimal pairs without having a dedicated part of the lesson for it. One obvious way is to use minimal pairs when correcting pronunciation, for example by writing up the word that the student was trying to say along with other words that what they said could be misinterpreted as. In a similar way, when you introduce a word you can write up any words that students should be careful not to pronounce it as, e. g. "Teem = Team, like seem. NOT Tim NOT Teen". If you have made a list of minimal pairs arranged by topic, you could even give them the list before you start the unit and tell them to be careful not to make those mistakes.

Drama techniques. There is a growing interest in incorporating drama voice techniques into the

teaching of practical phonetics as they prove to be very efficient in enabling students to gain a better control over their articulation and overcome fossilised pronunciation. These techniques focus mainly on warming up the organs of speech through tongue exercises and increasing pitch range through intonation exercises.

Furthermore, they offer valuable insights into the mechanics of speech, the process of breathing as well as help monitor the shape of the mouth, posture and body language. Drama voice modulation techniques are fun and they also help to reduce the stress which is often a feature of speech production in a foreign language.

The following sample activities were selected as most applicable for pronunciation classes.

Relaxation and posture: these exercises are designed to release tension as stiff bodies impair our breathing and, consequently, decreasing voice control. They include assuming a correct posture, basic stretching exercises and relaxation of face muscles by e. g. smiling broadly or tensing and relaxing facial muscles by making the face as big and then as small as possible. The main aim is to relax and warm up the organs of articulation for further training.

Breathing and resonance exercises: a basic breathing exercise consists in breathing in for a count of three, holding the air inside for three, and releasing the air for three. Resonance exercises involve inhaling the air and letting it out on a long vowel or a consonant-vowel sequence (e. g. aaah, oooh, eeeee, mm-maaaa, mmmoooo, mmuuu).

Phoneme sequences: practising phoneme sequences can be compared to playing scales on the piano, so that the production becomes semi-automatised e. g. lee lay la low lu, pin nip pin nip, thick tin thick tin.

Pitch, volume and rate control: producing sound sequences or whole passages progressively louder or softer and at different rates of delivery; practising (i. e. singing, humming, chanting) sentences like "I can make my voice go really high/fall really low" with a gradually falling or rising intonation.

Tone awareness exercises: learning to use resonators to create particular tones (e. g. soft or harsh, bright or dull, etc.). This can be accomplished through practising mini-dialogues expressing each time different emotions such as surprise, anger, great pleasure or politeness, e. g. "Let's go for a walk." "OK."

Articulation exercises: called "vocal warm-ups" since they help to exercise the muscles of the mouth and the tongue, contributing to a greater articulatory agility and clearer speech. They include popular tongue-twisters (e. g. She sells sea shells on the sea shore), chants and raps.

Imitations of a native-speaker model:
– mouthing – miming a dialogue without words;

– mirroring – repeating simultaneously with the speaker and imitating his/her gestures and facial expressions;

– tracing – repeating simultaneously without mirroring the speaker's gestures;

– echoing – repeating slightly after the speaker (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

Other drama techniques that are nowadays frequently applied in pronunciation teaching involve performing dialogues or scenes from a play. Emotional involvement and context provided by the dramatic situation foster communicative competence and lead to increased empathy and self-esteem. When performing students tend to go beyond the normal limits of fluency and accuracy and there is a clearly visible improvement, particularly in intonation.

Multisensory modes. A holistic approach to teaching practical phonetics manifests itself in the use of multisensory modes. Auditory, visual, tactile and kinaesthetic as well as olfactory and gustatory reinforcements have been shown to enhance acquisition through appealing to different learning styles. Multisensory approach is in line with the findings of the so called "brain-friendly revolution" according to which learning should be experienced as a combination of modalities appealing to different senses. It also reflects a strong tendency nowadays to emphasise the physical rather than abstract aspect of pronunciation (Underhill, 1996). The following examples of multisensory reinforcements are being applied successfully by many pronunciation practitioners to make their lessons more effective:

Visual: seeing images and pictorial representations of phonemic symbols; using vowel charts, phonemic charts, diagrams and flash cards; relying on learners' visual perception of muscular movements of articulators when presenting a new sound or word by miming rather than saying it.

Auditory: listening and repeating; associating a sound with a phrase used as a mnemonic device or memory peg; uttering a model only once and leaving a silent space for conscious internal processing.

Tactile: using props to demonstrate features of the English sound system e. g. elastic band to illustrate vowel length, matches or a piece of paper to introduce aspiration; placing fingers in two corners of the mouth to trace lip movements between spread to rounded position when producing iii uuu iii uuu sequences.

Kinaesthetic: tracing intonation contours with arms, modelling the mouth with hands, counting the number of syllables on fingers, clapping or stamping the rhythm.

Affective domain. It has been established that pronunciation is very sensitive to emotional factors (Brown, 1995) and that its nature is strongly related to students' ego, identity and the level of self-confidence.

Therefore, new trends in teaching practical phonetics put a strong emphasis on the affective or emotional domain of learning to counterbalance the traditional focus placed exclusively on intellectual learning.

An ideal receptive learning state occurs when a person is physically relaxed, emotionally calm and mentally alert. Research findings indicate, that a relaxed frame of mind and a degree of confidence facilitate an accurate production of L2 sounds. Consequently, creating a non-threatening student-friendly environment is amongst prime concerns of modern pronunciation instruction.

Efficient methods of reducing stress connected with pronunciation practice and dealing more efficiently with learners' emotions rely on the use of drama techniques. Thanks to them learners become more expressive and are more willing to experiment with sounds or intonation patterns. A commonly used strategy involves assuming an English or American identity and putting on a strong native accent, as if becoming a different dramatic persona.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming. Neuro-Linguistic Programming is yet another perspective which is frequently advocated by innovative pronunciation instructors as it deals efficiently with affective factors related to learning pronunciation and facilitates an accurate production of L2 sounds. NLP is a collection of patterns and strategies based on a series of underlying understandings of how the mind works and how people act and react. NLP's main concern are neurological processes called states. According to Neuro-Linguistic Programming a desired state of mind, when learning occurs naturally, could be induced through relaxation techniques such as breathing exercises or autogenic training (i.e. guided imagery activities), which render learners emotionally calm and mentally alert and, at the same time, help break down their ego boundaries. Research shows that having students relax at the beginning of each teaching session will increase their learning by 25 percent (Bolstad, 1997).

The NLP perspective attaches much importance to the role of interpersonal relationships between the teacher and the learner. This metacommunication, i.e. rapport, linkage and authority (Bolstad, 1997), is believed to be particularly conducive to success in pronunciation leaning. The process of learning pronunciation of a second language has been demonstrated to be especially sensitive to suggestion (Lozanov, 1979). Sometimes referred to as educational hypnosis, suggestion is one of key priorities in NLP. Murphy and Bolstad (1997) define it as a desire to constantly suggest internal representations that lead someone to facilitative states. Therefore, how instructors talk about acquiring good pronunciation and the messages sent consciously or subconsciously to students contain important suggestive communication patterns. NLP helps to use language more efficiently so that through sending positive messages and suggestions of success we can produce intended responses.

Other pronunciation enhancing techniques adopted from the NLP perspective include visualisation (e. g. visualising a sound or a phonological process to remember them better through building new neurological paths); reframing (changing the context of one's experience e. g. modelling a native speaker speaking our native tongue) or anchoring (i. e. committing an aspect of practical phonetics to memory through doing something striking or linking it with a particular location). Anchoring usually occurs in the final stage of a lesson and may consist in presenting some vivid or memorable phrases, examples of rhyming verse which are to serve as mnemonic devices and imprint on the learner's memory.

Conclusions. Various new developments in the teaching of practical phonetics presented in the article share a number of characteristic features. What prevails nowadays is an interdisciplinary approach that applies findings of the science of the brain, appeals to different senses, takes advantage of drama and voice production techniques and allows for affective factors as well as sociopsychological issues such as identity, ego boundary or interpersonal relationships.

It is hoped that this paper will provide teachers of foreign language pronunciation with practical insights into a variety of innovative techniques and resources, help them expand the repertoire of traditional classroom practices and, consequently, enhance pronunciation instruction.

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ОБУЧЕНИЕ ПРАКТИЧЕСКОЙ ФОНЕТИКЕ ВЗРОСЛЫХ ОБУЧАЮЩИХСЯ НА НАЧАЛЬНОМ ЭТАПЕ

Рассмотрены современные подходы к обучению практической фонетики взрослых обучающихся на начальном этапе. Звуковые явления представлены как элементы языковой системы, служащие для воплощения слов и предложений в материальную звуковую форму и коммуникацию. Исследована не только языковая функция, но и материальная сторона: работа произносительного аппарата, а также акустическая характеристика звуковых явлений. Представлены примеры упражнений и заданий. Проведен анализ типичных фонетических ошибок взрослых обучающихся, предложены способы их нивелирования.

Ключевые слова: *фонематический материал, имитация, постановка голоса, коммуникативный подход, ошибка.*

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