

Techniques for teaching pronunciation

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.

There are 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, fat... (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 in 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.

✓ We can use such an exercise as to practice rhyme given below and observe the errors and slips you and your peers have made. Try to account for the errors and slips.

E.g. A tutor who tooted the flute.

Tried to tutor two tutors to toot.

Said the two to the tutor:

Is it better to toot,

Or to tutor two tutors to toot?

✓ Then you can use the next exercise: Try to add more words into the dialogue to train the sound /au/. Give the text for imitation to the peers.

- I've found a mouse!

- Found a mouse? Don't shout so loud! Sit down.
- I've found a brown mouse! A mouse running around in the lounge!
- On the ground?
- Under the couch!
- Get it out!
- How?
- Somehow. Turn the couch upside-down. Wow! A mouse in the house! Ours is the foulest house in the town?!

(Words to insert: now, round, Brown, cow, ouch, clown, pounds, down, gown, sound, owl...)

Phonetic description. The teachers and learners used articulation descriptions, phonetic alphabets (transcriptions) and sound charts to describe the language.

✓ Try the following activity with your students or peers and reflect on the procedure. Show the learners a picture and ask them to pronounce all the sounds they need to describe it. The learners first pick out the necessary words, analyze the sounds that are used in these words and finally produce a list of the sounds necessary for the description of the picture. After that they practice the sounds, pronounce the sounds in the words and finally describe the picture.

Minimal pair drills. The technique helps the students to distinguish between similar sounds in the target language through listening discrimination. Contrastive exercises train learners to distinguish the meaning with the help of phonemes.

E.g. I feel that I have my ... (fill). I can't go up the hill on high ...(heel). There are too many sheep on such a small... (ship).

In order to make the minimal pair drill (e.g./n/VS/ng/) more communicative, pair work can be organized and the students instructed to ask each other questions using the list of names and activities.

E.g. Where's Ron? — He is running. Where's John? — He is jogging.

Tongue-twisters (phrases that are difficult to say without a sound mistake because of the sounds interfering 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 the shells she sells are sea shells".

Other examples are:

"The scythe of this size is the size of the scythe."

"This thin feather is thinner than that thick leather. Those pieces of leather and feather are both close with those clothes."

✓ Then you can use such a type of an exercise:

Work out an activity to create tongue twisters of your own. Write your full name, including any nicknames you may have.

Now students work in groups of three. Dictionaries are okay! Pass your paper to the person on your right. Write one answer for every question you have received by passing each time your paper to other students, Your answer must begin with the first sound in the person's name (e.g. Mary — made a mess). Continue doing this until all the blanks on all the papers are full. You should have different answers from all the people in your group when your paper comes back to you!

What did s/he do? Where? When? Why? Because

Now use your paper to make funny tongue twister combinations. How many can you create? Which one is the funniest?

Example answers:

WHO: Mary

DID WHAT: met a man. ate mangoes, married a monkey

WHERE: in Minnesota, at the Market, in Montreal

WHEN: on May 5th, at midnight, in the middle of winter

WHY: because she was mad, by mistake, because her mother made her do it.

Possible texts of the tongue twisters:

Mary met a man at the market on May and her mother made her do it.

Mary married a monkey in Minnesota at midnight because she was mad.

Mary ate mangoes in Montreal in the middle of the morning by mistake.

Students can illustrate their best tongue twisters with pin-ups for the class!

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.

Developmental approximation drill. The technique reconstructs the way, in which children acquire pronunciation by substituting sounds in the place of others. E.g. children acquiring English as their native tongue often substitute /w/ for /r/ or /y/ for /I/. In order to deal with this error, the exercise will take the following shape: wed — red, wag — rag, witch — rich, wipe — ripe, yet — let, yes — less, etc.

Practice of shifts. E.g. /mime — mimic/, /photo — photography/.

Rhythmic exercises develop rhythm of utterance:

This *thimble is thick* for a *thin finger*.

This *thimble is thin* for a *thick finger*.

A thick thimble for a *thick finger*.

A thin thimble for a *thin finger*.

Thick for thick. Thin for thin.

Rhythm reinforcement may take the form of jazz chants.

E.g. Where's the cat? — It's on the mat. — On the mat? — Yes, on the mat. - Why on the mat? — It's so fat, it can't stand and sat on the mat.

Jazz chants are based on the repetition of phrases: Eat your salad! — I don't like it. I hate it. I loathe it...

✓ The next exploratory task: Shifts of stress can be practiced with the nursery rhymes that have a typical pattern or rhythm. Could you think of the rhythm pattern to the rhyme below?

Mary, Mary,
Quite contrary,
How does your garden grow?
With silver bells,
And cockle shells,
And pretty maids all in a row.

In the rhyme that follows first try and produce a rhythmic pattern of your own (the given pattern should be masked) and then compare it with the one given to the right of the poem.

Little Jack Horner -..-.
Sat in a corner, -..-.
Eating his Christmas pie; -..-.-
He stuck in his thumb, .-.-
And pulled out a plum, .-.-
And said "What a good boy am I." ..---.-

Recitations. Passages are given to the learners for practice and recitation with the focus on stress, timing and intonation. This techniques may or may not involve memorization of the text.

✓ The next exploratory task: Analyze the following "jazz chant" and predict the phonetic difficulties it may cause.

E.g. Sorry. I wasn't in class.
I said, I'm sorry I wasn't in class.
I had the flu.
My cat got sick.
My car broke down.

I lost my keys.

Sorry I wasn't in the class.

I said, I so sorry I missed your class.

I overslept.

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.

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