TEACHING PRONUNCIATION WITH INNOVATIVE METHODS IN FLT

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Annotation: This paper mainly focuses on basic approaches to teach pronunciation and methods that are useful in teaching pronunciation in the communication based class room environment.

Key words: Pronunciation, phoneme, spelling, phonemic pairs

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.

Why? Is it because we don't need to teach pronunciation or because it cannot be taught?

Certainly, we need to teach pronunciation. There is a big difference between a ship and a sheep and a pear and a bear! When teaching any language as a foreign or second language, our first goal for our students is basic communication, and that can't happen if no one can understand what they are saying.

How NOT to Teach Pronunciation

When teachers decide to focus on pronunciation practise 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.

This brings us back to the question of whether pronunciation can be effectively taught at all? The answer is yes, of course it can be taught, it's just that the way many textbooks tell us to teach it is actually one of the least effective.

Most textbooks will have you drill pronunciation with repetition of the vocabulary. Some of the better ones will have you work on it with spelling, which is an important skill, especially in English with its many irregularities and exceptions. Very few will start you and your students where you need to start, however, and that is at the level of the phoneme.

Start with Phonemes (but not necessarily phonetic script)

The dictionary defines "phoneme" as "any of the perceptually distinct units of sound in a specified language that distinguish one word from another, for example p, b, d, and t in the English words pad, pat, bad, and bat." This definition highlights one of the key reasons that we must, as language teachers, start our pronunciation instruction at the level of the phoneme. If a phoneme is a "perceptually distinct unit of sound" then we have to realize that before students can consistently produce a given phoneme, they must be able to hear it. Thus, the first lessons in pronunciation should involve your students listening and identifying, rather than speaking. [7,85]

Introduce your phonemes in contrasting pairs like /t/ and /d/. Repeat the phonemes in words as well as in isolation and ask the students to identify them. In order to visually represent the differences, they are listening for, you may want to draw pronunciation diagrams for each sound showing the placement of the tongue and lips.

You might also consider teaching your students the necessary symbols from the phonetic alphabet, because although T and D are written differently in English, the TH in "there" and the TH in "thanks" are written exactly the same, despite the difference in pronunciation. This isn't essential, and really works best with adults rather than children, but it is worth it for any students who are highly visual or analytical learners.

You can play all sorts of matching games with this material to make the drills more fun and less stressful. You can have students play with nonsense sounds and focus on the tiny differences between contrasted phonemic pairs, the key being to get them to hear the phoneme.

Being teachers of English, we use various methods in classrooms to teach pronunciation which includes:

Naturalistic method. In this method, learners are exposed to the language for some time. They don't have the pressure to imitate; they just listen to the sounds without any stress. After sometime, they are asked to repeat those sounds in the same pattern. This method is similar to that of the natural acquisition of a language. Speech shadowing is one of the famous techniques used in this method.

Phonetic transcription method. This is an age old and time tested method to teach pronunciation. In this, the L2 learners are given the detailed escription of the standard phonetic alphabet and the other rules of pronunciation. It requires a lot of attention nd hard work from the students, as learning the code is not so easy. This method has one advantage in which if the learner once becomes aware of the phonetic alphabet, he can learn the pronunciation of the new words also by referring to a standard dictionary.

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