

NEW METHODS IN TEACHING PRONUNCIATION

Pronunciation is the speaker's peculiar business card. Pronunciation plays a crucial role in mutual understanding during communication. So, communication is a mutual relationship between the speaker and the hearer. To achieve this one must comprehend what he hears in the target language and must produce the sounds of the language he is trying to learn accurately. Obviously it is not easy, and teaching pronunciation involves a variety of challenges. For instance, teachers often find that they do not have enough time in class to give proper attention to this aspect of English instruction. Especially, when yet many learners find pronunciation one of the most difficult aspects of English to acquire, and need explicit help from the teacher. Therefore, some sort of pronunciation instruction in class is necessary. Particularly nowadays, a great attention is paid for the authentic spoken language, and the goal for students is to be able to "communicate" effectively in English at a normal speed (as well as to read, write, and understand English). Hence, pronunciation teaching is a prominent factor for successful oral communication to take place since it is an important ingredient of the communicative competence.

One of the most difficult problems facing non-native speakers of English is pronunciation. It is usually the largest obstacle to overcome when trying to achieve fluency. Many non-native speakers have studied grammar for many years but are unable to speak like native speakers due to their inability to pronounce the sounds of words properly. Many people, especially those, who have not studied a foreign or second language, are easily irritated if they cannot quickly understand what non-native speakers are saying. This is sad but often true. The importance of good pronunciation can be easily realized by visiting a predominantly English speaking country and talking to the native speakers.

Pronunciation is a prominent factor in foreign language teaching. Since sounds play an important role in communication, foreign language teachers must

attribute proper importance to teaching pronunciation in their classes. It is evident that communication is a mutual relationship between the speaker and the hearer. This means that one must comprehend what he/she hears in the target language and must produce the sounds of the language he/she is trying to learn accurately. Unless he has sufficient knowledge of the sound patterns of the target language, he can neither encode a message to anybody nor decode the message sent by another person by learning the sounds of the target language within his mother tongue. Therefore, pronunciation instruction is of great importance for successful oral communication to take place since it is an important ingredient of the communicative competence.

Pronunciation is one area of teaching which is often neglected. The reason is that many aspects of pronunciation are difficult to teach (or at least that is the perception). Moreover, unlike a grammatical or functional area of language, it can be quite difficult to build a lesson around a pronunciation point and therefore such points are add-ons to a unit in a coursebook or a lesson in the class. In addition, teachers often feel under prepared to teach pronunciation and many seem to struggle to learn the phonemic alphabet (although this is certainly less true of many non-native-speaker teachers). Wong feels that a lack of knowledge of pronunciation even affects learners' reading and spelling.

There are two key problems with pronunciation teaching. Firstly, it tends to be neglected. And secondly when it is not neglected, it tends to be reactive to a particular problem that has arisen in the classroom rather than being strategically planned. Whenever teachers teach new language items, they try and make sure students are exposed to and get enough practice of the correct pronunciation of words and phrases. Also, in everyday classroom practice, they know that correcting students' mistakes is crucial to help them achieve acceptable pronunciation. This is what most of the teachers do at any sign of error. Such reactive teaching is, of course, necessary, and will always be so. However, teachers can get used to hearing recurrent errors that they do not notice them anymore.

Today pronunciation teaching from different modalities (i.e. auditory, visual, kinesthetic) has become very popular within the field of foreign language teaching.

To present and practice a sound from several perspectives is just basic stuff of good pronunciation teaching. Language teachers should employ a multi-modal method in the pronunciation class; that is, every sound process should be taught as a totality: visual + auditory + kinesthetic. Thus, students can have the chance to strengthen their lesser modalities. For instance, any experienced pronunciation teacher knows that to produce / r / and / l / well may require all modalities be engaged and sequenced. Students should hear the distinction, feel the difference, consciously focus on the movement of lips and tongue, and probably focus on the place(s) where the tongue comes into contact with the palate (i.e. hard or soft).

Many innovative pronunciation teachers have attempted to move towards autonomous pronunciation learning. Such teachers motivate their students to become autonomous learners. Since students cannot always find the chance to ask their language teacher for help in real life contexts, they should be stimulated to come to a stage where they can make their own decisions about their own pronunciation learning. Students can be actively involved in their own learning. If the teacher teaches the students how to transcribe words by using phonetic symbols, students become autonomous to some extent in that they may look up their monolingual dictionaries when not knowing how to pronounce a word in the target language. Moreover, motivating students to use computer-assisted pronunciation teaching programs can lead to autonomous pronunciation learning and hence may contribute to the improvement of the pronunciation of the students in the target language. However, it should not be forgotten that students are semi-autonomous pronunciation learners since it is the language teacher who selects the most appropriate computer-assisted pronunciation teaching program relevant to the needs and expectations of an individual student.

Reflective pronunciation teaching and learning, though neglected by many language teachers, has gained importance in today's pronunciation classes. The teacher's pronunciation lesson can be video-taped or audio-taped. Then, those videotaped or audio-taped pronunciation lesson can be evaluated by several colleagues. To put it another way, other colleagues criticize the pronunciation lesson

in terms of methodology used by the teacher. They give feedback to their colleague as to pros and cons of the presented lesson. They give helpful advice to their colleagues concerning better ways of presenting the same lesson. The same process can be done with students, too. Students can record their speech and they can criticize their own pronunciation learning and improvement by listening to tapes of their speech. Self-monitoring, reaction, and reflection are among characteristic features of good pronunciation learners. Some pronunciation teachers keep a pronunciation portfolio for each student in the classroom. Keeping a detailed tape or video records of students' speech, teachers can see the pronunciation development of their students. At this stage, the counseling method can be utilized. Thus, previous and subsequent pronunciation performance of the same student can be evaluated. Moreover, comparison and contrast of pre and post performances of each student with other students can be made.

In addition to the above mentioned innovations, there has been an increasing interest in the use of new technology for the teaching of pronunciation recently. Various types of computer programs have been introduced by us and the interest among language teachers and learners in the benefits of computer assisted pronunciation technology are growing rapidly.

So, it can be concluded that with careful preparation and integration, pronunciation can play an important role in supporting the learners' overall communicative power.

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