

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRONUNCIATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract: English pronunciation is one of the most difficult skills to acquire and learners should spend lots of time to improve their pronunciation. This article reviews some of the important issues of English pronunciation instruction. The aims of this article are to define the term pronunciation, explain the importance of pronunciation instruction.

Key words: pronunciation, goal, importance, role, communication

Pronunciation is an inescapable part of spoken communication, and all speakers have an accent some sort. It is impossible to speak a language without pronouncing it, and it is impossible to understand other speakers without negotiating their pronunciation.

Cook defined pronunciation as the production of English sounds. Pronunciation is learnt by repeating sounds and correcting them when produced inaccurately. When learners start learning pronunciation, they make new habits and overcome the difficulties resulting from the first language.⁴⁴

According to Harmer, a lot of teachers do not pay enough attention to English pronunciation. There are different reasons for this negligence. Many learners state that they do not need to learn pronunciation and learning pronunciation is a waste of time. They state that just communication in English is enough and when they are understood, nothing else is important.

⁴⁴ Pourhosein Gilakjani, A. (2016). What Factors Influence the English Pronunciation of EFL Learners? Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods (MJLTM), 6(2), 314-326.

Harmer emphasized that the main aim of teaching and learning in any language is to enable students to communicate in the target language and if this is the case, communication is an important term to explain. Communication means to understand and be understood. Many learners think that because they can talk to their teachers and other students so they can easily communicate in English. But they make a big mistake.

There are a lot of reasons for their mistakes. Firstly, teachers can understand their students much more easily than an average person because their ears are used to ‘bad English.’ Secondly, other students are the speakers of the same language have the same pronunciation patterns and make the same mistakes so it is easy for them to understand each other. Thirdly, the classroom is not a real situation and it just takes place at school and students do not have an opportunity to talk to native speakers.⁴⁵

According to Harmer, the lack of high quality, suitable teaching and learning materials, and the lack of time to practice pronunciation are the major reasons that cause teachers not to pay enough attention to English pronunciation. Teachers think that they have too much to do and pronunciation instruction just wastes their time. Some teachers believe that their students can learn correct pronunciation without particular pronunciation instruction.

Harmer expressed that the first thing that native speakers notice during a conversation is pronunciation. Grammar and vocabulary are important elements of language and they can be useless if the speakers cannot pronounce those elements or words accurately. Native speakers can understand people, despite their grammatical errors, if they use accurate pronunciation. Communicative efficiency can be guaranteed by correct pronunciation. Pronunciation is an essential part of communication and without correct pronunciation nobody can say that he/she knows the English language perfectly.

According to Kenworthy,⁴⁶ some teachers state that pronunciation instruction cannot be useful because only a few learners will be able to get native-like

⁴⁵ Harmer, J. (2001). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. London: Longman.

⁴⁶ Kenworthy, J. (1987). *Teaching English Pronunciation*. Longman, Harlow.

pronunciation. We should know that native-like pronunciation may be an ideal goal only for some learners and not for all learners. Intelligibility is a logical aim for the majority of learners. Harmer stated that learners can rarely achieve ‘perfect’ pronunciation. Some of them do not like to pronounce like native speakers and they like to retain their foreign accent because it is a part of their identity. Native-like pronunciation may be an inappropriate goal for most learners. Understandable pronunciation should be one of the basic aims of language learners. Pronunciation instruction has some realistic aims that need to be emphasized in order to develop communicative competence. According to Wrembel, these aims are

- 1) functional intelligibility-developing spoken English that is easy to understand for listeners;
- 2) functional communicability-developing spoken language that meets communicative needs;
- 3) increased self-confidence-developing a positive self-image;
- 4) speech-monitoring abilities and speech modification strategies-that will allow students to develop intelligibility, communicability and confidence outside the classroom.⁴⁷

According to Butler-Pascoe and Wiburg, the goals of teaching pronunciation are to develop English that is easy to understand and not confusing to the listener, develop English that meets persons’ needs and that results in communicative competence, help learners feel more comfortable in using English, develop a positive self-awareness as non-native speakers in oral communication, develop speech consciousness, personal speech monitoring skills and speech adjustment strategies that help learners develop in and out of the class.⁴⁸

Teachers should familiarize their learners to both American and British English and learners should be able to understand both varieties of pronunciation.⁴⁹ Teachers

⁴⁷ Wrembel, M. (2002). New Perspectives on Pronunciation Teaching. In W. Sobkowiak and E. Waniek-Klimczak. *Dydaktyka Fonetyki Języka Obcego na Poziomie Licencjackim, Neofilologia II: Zeszyty Naukowe PWSZ w Płocku*, 173-183.

⁴⁸ Butler-Pascoe, M. E., & Wiburg, K. M. (2003). *Technology and Teaching English Language Learners*. MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

⁴⁹ Rasekhi Kolokdaragh, V. (2010). ESL/EFL Learners’ Perception of Their Pronunciation Needs and Strategies. 41st Annual State CATESOL Conference in Santa Clara, CA, April 23, 2010.

should incorporate pronunciation in other language activities because it will help learners to adapt themselves to the sound systems of a new language and overcome their affective problems related to the learning of English language.⁵⁰ Teachers should set obtainable goals that are appropriate for the communication needs of the learners. Teachers should act as the speech coach of pronunciation, give feedback to their learners, and encourage them to improve their pronunciation.⁵¹

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⁵⁰ Rasekhi Kolokdaragh, V. (2010). ESL/EFL Learners' Perception of Their Pronunciation Needs and Strategies. 41st Annual State CATESOL Conference in Santa Clara, CA, April 23, 2010.

⁵¹ Thanasoulas, D. (2002). Motivation and Motivating in the Foreign Language Classroom. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 8(11), retrieved from October 2016, <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Thanasoulas-Motivation.html>.