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The Importance of Preliminary Approaches in Teaching Pronunciation

Abstract. The paper deals with the features of the systematic approach in teaching foreign languages, defines that systematic approach compared with the traditional methods which are still being influenced. This article also describes how to develop learners' competence using target language correctly having been informed with the primary principles of pedagogic methods in individual symbols of sounds, especially vowels according to the basic types of reading rules and some vowel reading combinations. We also follow some points of view about the pronunciation of English, two major organizing structures as rhythm, intonation and try to prove them with possible facts.

Key words: method, pronunciation, intonation, approach, letter, sound, model, skill.

Introduction

Language is one of the most useful tools we have as humans. Without language we could not imagine our thoughts expressible to others, nor could we engage in the activities that commonly take place in the societies we build for ourselves. Thanks to language, we are established access to the knowledge that is built up in books and other publications.

If we are lucky enough to acquire skills in a language beyond the one we already know, we increase our capacity to do things with our lives. Language learners of English throughout the world are aware of this fact and the special advantages that come with knowledge of an excellent language.

According to our plan, preliminary sound-drill expands over one term of the first academic year, during which period learners use no textbook, teaching is mostly accompanied with oral speech and learners do class or home exercises of a phonetic transcription prepared by the teacher himself, that's why we want to share some preliminary approaches in teaching sound knowledge of English from our year practice in our article.

Methods

Different scholars developed the phonetic method of teaching in modern foreign languages. However, what we think is new today was being done centuries ago in some part of the world. English

teachers have been bombarded with so many «new» methods, from the Direct Method, Grammar-translation Method, Audio-lingual Method, Delayed Oral Response and Silent Way Methods.

Our lexical stock is full of such terms as approach, discourse, motivation, transformational grammar and functional phonetics. The question is that they are the same terms under a different name. In our opinion, we are really doing new and different things, but we are also repeating ourselves.

To prove this a few of the methods in which we are still being influenced by the past we have to look at Herbart's five basic steps of methods written in the early 1800s and still used in some form by many teachers. 1) *Preparation*: review of familiar, relevant material; 2) *Presentation*: examples of language use and the discovery of rules by learners; 3) *Association* of new and familiar material; 4) *Systematization*: generalization: recapitulation of new material in a context; 5) *Application*: practice [1].

The starting-point for instruction according to this method is the spoken word, not the printed page, the sound, not the letter. Hence, teaching is at first exclusively oral. The task of the pupil at this stage consists in mastering the sounds of the language to the extent that he learns to recognize them when uttered in his hearing and to reproduce them according to the model of the teacher. Not until he

knows the sounds does he meet their equivalent in writing [2].

One of the primary principles of good pedagogic materials is that they should be interesting and when learning is successful in their first year studies with some experience of *sound* knowledge, we will be able to develop learners' competence using target language correctly. When the learners are considered as the main role-playing object at every stage of above-mentioned processes, it might be judged as a learner-centered approach. One of the characteristics of this approach is to teach and learn the phonetic structure of any language systematically. Unfortunately, the role of systematization in learning is not so simple. Certainly, there is a lot of phenomena and methods to use that systematization of sound knowledge plays a crucial role in the learning process.

First, we learn by fitting individual symbols of sounds to create a meaningful system externally, but the most important point here is an internally generated system. Moreover, we do not know how our mind actually goes about creating its internal system of knowledge that is why sometimes we must be careful with the mistake made by audio-lingual approach.

Main body

It is obvious that we have to learn much from history of language learning, but is also language teaching, and investigation. Year after year in research literature learning and teaching processes are developing and are progressing an ever-accelerating rate. Today, however, the most significant discoveries are not those describing methods that are new. The «really new and different things» in language teaching involve different approach to teaching. Previously it was believed that only basic tool a language teacher needed was a *sound* knowledge of the language.

Some teachers have some points of view about what it means to learn and teach the pronunciation of English [3].

Point 1. Learning the pronunciation of English means learning how to pronounce the individual vowel and consonant sounds.

Point 2. It is difficult for students to hear and pronounce some sounds, such as the difference between the vowel sound in *ship* and the vowel sound in *sheep*. Therefore, it is useless to spend time on pronunciation.

Point 3. Pronunciation instruction is boring.

Point 4. Nonnative speakers of English cannot teach pronunciation.

Therefore, what are the facts for the teaching the pronunciation concerning these points?

Fact 1. There is much more to the pronunciation of than its individual sounds. How these sounds are organized plays a greater role in communication than the sounds themselves. Two major organizing structures are *rhythm* and *intonation*.

Speech rhythm is defined as a regular occurrence of stressed syllables in a speech continuum. English is a stress-timed language. In such languages, rhythm is based on a larger unit than syllable, the rhythmic group. The stressed syllables in the rhythmic group form peaks of prominence. Speech rhythm is regulated by the style of speech. Rhythm performs the functions of delimitation and integration, aesthetic and pragmatic functions.

Phonetics studies the sound system of the language, i.e. segmental phonemes, word stress, syllabic structure and intonation [4].

The intonation pattern is the basic unit of intonation. It serves to actualize syntagms into intonation groups. *The nuclear tone* is the most important part of the intonation pattern. The tail may follow the nuclear tone. The two other components of the intonation pattern, *the head* and *the prehead* form its pre nuclear part.

Intonation is a powerful means of communication. *The communicative function* of intonation embraces all its numerous uses, which can be grouped into the following functions: distinctive or phonological; organizing; pragmatic; rhetorical; social; stylistic.

Performing its *distinctive function* intonation can differentiate the syntactic

(communicative) types of sentences, attitudinal meanings, the actual meaning of sentences.

Therefore, intonation is a term used to refer to *the distinctive use of different*

patterns of pitch that carry meaningful information.

Pitch is the *rate* of vibration of the vocal folds. When we speak, normally the pitch of our voice is constantly changing. We describe pitch in terms of *high* and *low*.

Question: What is the difference in the way the following two sentences sound?

A. *He is going tomorrow.*

B. *He is going tomorrow?*

Answer: The 'melodies' of the two sentences are different:

- The melody of sentence A *drops* at the end, making it a statement.

- The melody of sentence B *rises* at the end, making it a question.

In languages like English, we call these sentence melodies intonations.

All spoken languages have intonations. In general, definitions of researchers intonation can be compared as a pointer so that instead of using a finger we use our voices to draw attention to important words in the sentence. So two underlined words given above are the ones that the speaker wants the listener to pay attention to some kind of things. The fall (*tomorrow.*) and rise (*tomorrow?*) in pitch of speakers voice are the characteristics of intonation.

It is also proved that functional words as articles, prepositions and auxiliaries are not those words where pitch changes take place to convey new information.

So stressing syllables in pitch changes are also as important as stressing them. This is also true for words in sentences with the modal verb *can* and *can't*. We know from grammar structure of English that *can* is never followed by *to* and it doesn't change with person and number. In the knowledge of spoken language we mostly do not pay our attention to the pronunciation of these words that's why we have to let our language learners hear the difference between *can* and *can't* before using them in sentences. In order to practice different pronunciations of *can* we should have to take three types of statements as example sentences separately. So the pronunciations of *can* and *cannot* depends on the stress or lack of stress put on the word. *Can* is unstressed in the positive statements and the vowel *a* is pronounced as a 'schwa- neutral vowel' – [ə]. It is stressed in the negative sentences and the vowel of 'can't' *a* is pronounced as a 'short' – [æ]. The same pronunciation of *can* in questions is also stressed. We also have to draw learners' attention to the derivation of the contraction from 'cannot' to 'can't'.

In our practice of teaching English at the early stage, we introduce all the letters of the alphabet in the forms of speaking, spelling and transcribing. Here for the further discussion and decision-making we want to ask ourselves: «How can the sound knowledge of the language be improved in the course of introductory phonetics?» Eventually we want our learners to be able to pronounce the alphabet correctly because the native language of the learners does not have a similar Roman-based alphabet and they have not been exposed to English before. Therefore, we may have to have a preliminary lesson in forming the letters before they can actually begin writing (speaking, reading and listening).

There are many ways of teaching and recognizing the letters as repeating each letter one by one, in groups etc. As they have progress we should ask questions for information in the form of dialogue by acting the part of a person – their names from

smaller groups or individual students. Then as one spells his name, we should write it ourselves and after that, we let them do this activity themselves. Having established the knowledge of the alphabet correctly we should make cards of the alphabet in a mixed order and ask them to spell various words as names of their friends, family members, topical vocabulary of the unit etc. This activity helps us to develop language learners' spelling, speaking, writing skills and also check and enrich their vocabulary.

For beginning to write in English we may also use a registration form by explaining the information that it gives and they understand what the form asks for, sometimes they do not know the words printed on the form as 'Ms'. So we should explain that 'Ms' is used with the name of a woman without any indication as to whether or not she is married and also give some information concerning its etymology as a relatively new word. Then we ask them to pronounce by saying individual letters [em,es] and sounds [miz] as to the rhyme 'his' or 'is'.

Here we want to mention that our students are not only language learners, they are also language users therefore during the period of such activity we will be able to develop their alphabet reading skills correctly because there is an important link between pronunciation and reading which also increases familiarity with the sounds of each letter and then step by step we have to turn to teach the correct pronunciation of reading rules of all English vowels and consonants.

As English is taught to language learners with three different levels in the world practice, our practice material is intended for language learners with little or no previous instruction in English or for First Level or Elementary learners. At all levels each skill must be presented systematically. In our First Level, listening and speaking receive greater emphasis; later, reading and writing become more prominent.

World English basic program recommends these following steps of instruction for the presentation of each sound:

Modeling the New Sound: Show your students how to produce each sound by modeling it yourself. Give the sound in isolation at this point, without the example words.

Having the students make the sound: Provide some coaching and correction as your students try to make the sound themselves. This also should involve the sound isolation.

Presenting the Sound in Context: Give your students practice in recognizing the sound in context

by modeling the example words «as in land». These examples are common words that represent the way the sound is typically spoken.

Having the students Say the Example Words: Again correcting as necessary, ask your students to say the example words.

Showing How the Sound Is Spelled: Present the example words in written form, to show how the sound is represented in spelling [5].

All of these steps should be carried out for each new sound to some extent. The degree of representing each sound can also vary according to your students' needs cognitively in the lesson and in order to realize above mentioned steps we should set out some of the ways in which our learners can be involved. One of the simplest way is writing the new phonetic symbol on the board or use your ready-made cards and presentations then model the sound several times for your students. After giving time them to generate a new sound ask individual students to imitate how you model the sound, here different imitations are reflected in their responses. It is natural they may make mistakes in the exercises that involve finding words which have the new sound. If you want to get a productive result, you should have to act as a coach because they carefully watch as you make the sound and let them learn from one another's mistake.

Further practice in the mastery of the new sound is to present example words in written form and ask students to find the letters that have the sound [æ] or read a sentence and also ask to say in which words the sound [æ] is represented or how many times it is appeared. Getting students to find the new sound in

a list of words or in a line of sentences gives a stronger motivation to proceed to the next step of the lesson. Having done so, the one thing that will occupy their minds is finding out whether the letter «a» is pronounced as the sound [æ]. One more particularly way of keeping on the alphabet is writing spellings of each letter given as example words because they are among the most spellings for each sound. Here our purpose is also to consolidate the skill of matching sounds and letters. In order to match sounds and letters we should introduce with the common reading rules for the letter «a» as [ei]-name, [æ]-bad, [a:]-car, [ɛə]-fare. They can see and hear that the letter «a» sounds differently in various types of reading rules by which each sound is required to take into consideration, that is why we have to modify above-mentioned recommended steps of world English instruction for each new sound. The next step is devoted to the same types of reading rules of the letter «a» with the combinations and proceedings of other letters as **ay, ai** [ei] – aim, day; **a** [æ] – have, **a+s, n, f, th** [a:] ask, last, dance, after, bath; **are** [ɛə] – bare. We concluded from the needs of language learners the following exercises that made a wide use of practice in spelling of the letters, reading and writing sounds correctly.

a) Transcribe them: a) with the first type of syllable (open syllable), b) with the second type of syllable (closed syllable), c) with the third type of syllable (vowel +r), d) with the fourth type of syllable (vowel +re).

b) Read the following words and arrange them in columns above according to the corresponding type of reading rules:

Type of syllables Vowels	Open syllable I	Closed syllable II	Vowel +r III	Vowel +re IV
A a [ei]	[ei] name	[æ] man	[a:] car	[ɛə] care
balm, grasp, they, snail, stay, fast, fair, plant, stair, faint, sail, draft, path, stable, flay, answer				

The readings of the letter «a» indicated here are not only applied according to the four types of reading rules but also *out of reading rules* keeping the same soundings. We also have other *out of reading rules* which do not keep the same soundings as in the letter combinations: **a+lk** [ɔ:] – chalk, **a+ll** [ɔ:l]

– small, **al** [ɔ:l] – salt, **aw** [ɔ:] – law, **au** [ɔ:] – cause, a [e] – many, **au + ght** [ɔ:] – daughter. So the vocabulary list practiced in the unit must include the reading rules of not only the letter «a» but letters «e, o, u, y and i» in detail. When the tongue is in the front part of the mouth and the front part of the tongue is

raised to the hard palate *a front vowel* is pronounced. They are – [i: e æ]. So the teacher should also give some necessary theoretical background about the articulation system of vowels.

Vowels are normally made with the air stream that meets no obstruction in the mouth, pharyngeal and nasal cavities. On the articulatory level, the description of vowels notes changes: a) in the stability of articulation; b) in the tongue position; c) in the lip position; d) in their length. All English vowels are divided into 3 groups: *monophthongs, diphthongs, and diphthongoids*. [6]

Difference in the articulation bases of English, Kazakh and Russian, reflected in the system of vowels is as follows:

The positions and movements of the lips are very peculiar. On the one hand, when an English is silent, his lips occupy the so-called flat-type position, they are more or less tense and the corners are raised as in a smile. A Russian and a Kazakh keep the lips rather lax with the corners of the lips lowered. Spreading of the lips for front vowels is rather typical of English. In Russian and Kazakh, the lip position for unrounded vowels is neutral. On the other hand, in the production of the Russian vowels /o, y/ and the Kazakh /o, e, y, ʏ, ʏ/ the lips are considerably protruded. In English such protrusion does not take place, as in /o, o:, u, u:/.

In the production of English vowels the bulk of the tongue is more often at the back of the mouth;

in the production of Russian and Kazakh vowels the tongue is mostly in the front part of the mouth. Besides, the tongue may occupy more positions when articulating English vowels than in Russian or Kazakh vowel production.

English and Kazakh vowels are more tense than Russian. This is especially

felt in unstressed syllables. In English and Kazakh, an unstressed vowel does not always differ greatly from a stressed one. In Russian, it is always short, lax and reduced. In English there are short and long vowels which are different both in

quality and quantity. There are no such phonemic oppositions in the Russian and Kazakh languages.

Conclusion

In concision, we may say that a preliminary approach in acquaintance with phonetic principles can be the base of good pronunciation and communication.

Our own experience in the use of vowel sound-symbols with the First Level learners has been limited to allow our readers to form the full opinion on pronunciation. But in any case we have used these approaches to ordinary spelling, sounding which may be done without difficulties for further continuation of other letters and sounds. So well taught basis of articulation dependent upon the speech-characteristics of any tongue. It is known that pronunciation is an integral part of language learning.

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