

MASTERING THE SOUNDS OF THE LANGUAGE

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Pronunciation plays a special role in the content of language material. Pronunciation mechanism envelops three parts as hearing (acoustic), uttering (motor) and meaning (semantic). Mastering phonetic side of the language, i.e. mastering pronunciation subskill is one of the core conditions of successful communication. We need to answer a question: What does pronunciation mean in the aspect of FLT?

Current opinion in FLT methodology regarding teaching pronunciation in the English classroom has at least two generally accepted theoretical cornerstones⁴⁵. The suprasegmental features of English – stress, rhythm intonation, linking (connection of speech across words boundaries, where one ends in a vowel sound and the next begins with a consonant sound, or vice versa), reduction, and deletion – are called prosodies. These contribute more to meaning and overall listener perception of nonnative speaker fluency than do the segmentals, the individual vowel and consonant sounds. Although rules for suprasegmental use exist, these rules are broader and have much more variation than involved in learning articulation of the individual sounds. Because suprasegmentals carry more meaning and are difficult to learn, they require more focused, structured attention and more practice than the segmentals.

Second, pronunciation taught in isolation does not carry over to improved pronunciation in actual communication. This is true for both the segmental features and supra-segmental elements. Practicing sounds and prosodic elements in structure drill is important and useful, more communicative activities using connected speech are crucial in helping to build automaticity and carryover.

There a question appears – Is it possible to achieve a perfect pronunciation in English? Training specialists have the exact answer: it is difficult to achieve perfect pronunciation in teaching language at school, that's why the requirements are determined on the assumption of approximation. According to



this assumption of approximation, it is available to limit the phonetic input and it is tolerated lower quality of some sounds articulation. But both of them occur in the bounds of non-infringement of process of oral communication. At the same time it is important to achieve the high level of approximation in articulating the long – short vowel sounds in English, voiced and unvoiced consonants in the end of the word, otherwise the meaning will be changed or even lost. For example: bed – bet.

Approximated pronunciation is firstly characterized by the conditions of the secondary education, i.e. the unnatural environment of teaching English, so pronunciation is more complex than vocabulary and grammar.

The main requirement is acquiring relatively fluent English pronunciation. Firstly it provides comprehension of communicants, secondly it demands acquiring middle

speed of speech (it is known the speed of the EL speech – average pronunciation 130150 words per minute. Keeping in mind that oral speech units exist only in sound images and that pronunciation is mixed with vocabulary and grammar subskills, they are usually acquired integrally. Pronunciation sub-skill provides the expression of speech units through relevant sounds.

The issue of when to start teaching pronunciation was the reason of various discussions. It is not logical to define a certain grade or stage in methodology as mastering pronunciation goes together with development of language skills. It is necessary to realize that almost all sounds are introduced in the initial stage of education; the middle stage continues teaching new sound combinations, stress and intonation; in the middle or higher stages pronunciation sub-skills are improved. Through listening pronunciation sub-skills are developing.

2. Distribution and typology of pronunciation material

EL phonetic minimum is selected in concordance with the vocabulary and grammar minima. Language material usually consists of active and passive minima. The notions of active and passive in phonetic (pronunciation) minimum are treated differently. Active and passive pronunciation minima are learned simultaneously. They are included in the complex of the language sub-skills and appear in speaking and listening.

Active and passive minima are distinguished as follow: active minimum admits approximation, but it is not found in passive one. Active minimum works in the range of limited phonetic material and in passive it is possible to meet variants of the English language phonemes.



Pronunciation minimum is general for a certain stage, for example, for secondary schools in spite of the learners' language experience. Pronunciation minimum includes sounds, sound combinations, stress, and main types of intonation.

It is known that pronunciation units that are easy to learn are not taught in separate exercises, because they are not included into the content of teaching pronunciation. Thus, minimum doesn't consider language experience, and the content of teaching pronunciation includes only difficult for assimilation phonetic phenomena that require special time and efforts.

There is a classification that takes into account the difficulties of assimilation which groups are included in the content of teaching pronunciation (CTP): difficult phenomena referring to articulation, opposition, position and acoustics.

The phonetic material is selected in compliance with the following criteria: (1) compliance with the need of communication; (2) appropriate style and standardized pronunciation; (4) prevalence.

