

DIFFICULTIES ROMANIAN SPEAKERS ENCOUNTER IN LEARNING ENGLISH CONSONANTS

Olimpia CARACAS, lector superior

Rezumat

În acest articol se abordează unele dificultăți întâlnite la vorbitorii de limbă română, la pronunțarea unor consoane englezești și pune accent pe unele indicații ce pot să le ajute să înfrunte aceste dificultăți.

In English, by means of a process of communication, twenty four consonantal units have been distinguished from the point of view of their function (they have a marginal position in the syllable) and of their phonetic nature (their articulation involves an obstruction or a narrowing of the passage of the air stream having as a result a noise component) [2, p. 148].

Some consonants may be articulated with a total closure, others with a stricture causing friction, while some others are articulated with a partial closure or an unimpeded oral or nasal escape of air.

In the paragraphs below a summary of the main difficulties for pronunciation of consonants for Romanian speakers is offered.

The distinction between fortis and lenis consonants in English does not operate in Romanian and so Romanian find it difficult to make this distinction, especially in word final position. Romanians should also take into account the fact that English fortis consonants are aspirated in initial accented position, and they reduce the length of a preceding vowel or diphthong. Aspiration accompanies only the Romanian voiceless consonants in final position.

In English there are only two dental consonants [θ, ð] while in Romanian there are seven [t, d, s, z, n, l, r]. There are no equivalent Romanian sounds for the English [θ, ð], and frequently Romanians replace them by sounds like [s, z, t, d].

Romanians should be advised to place the tip of the tongue between the teeth and not against the alveolar ridge.

Romanians speakers have difficulties in pronouncing these consonants especially when they are followed by other fricatives.

Care should be taken to render correctly the English alveolar consonants [t, d, z, s, n] which are dental in Romanian.

In Romanian there are only two nasal consonants [m, n], [ŋ] does not exist as a phoneme, but only as an allophone of [n] in words like: *Anca, lângă* and they are not syllabic.

The consonant [l] is dental in Romanian, while in English it is alveolar; in English this sound has three allophones: *clear, dark* and *devoiced*, which occur in different phonetic contexts. The consonant [l] has syllabic function in English.

The consonant [r] in English has several allophones, while in Romanian it is a dental, fricative, voiced consonant, produced by repeated taps, made by the tongue against the upper teeth. In English the tongue should not touch the palatal or the alveolar ridge; it must not roll or trill and its tip must be slightly retroflex in the production of [r].

In both languages [l] and [r] are liquid consonants.

Romanian learners of English can face some difficulties in pronouncing the English glottal stop which is a plosive, glottal, fortis consonant.

Although the glottal stop is not a significant sound in RP, it serves as a syllable boundary marker, when the second syllable begins with a vowel, for example „*reaction*” [2, p. 152].

As Romanians do not have this sound, they may pronounce it without being aware of it. Sometimes they insert this sound in the middle of a word before a stressed vowel.

Interesting things should be remembered concerning the pronunciation of affricate consonants. Most frequently the affricates of English are considered to be phonemic entities [tʃ, dʒ, tr, dr, ts, dz, tʃ, dʒ]. [7, p. 52].

As far as we know English people do not palatalize affricate consonants while the Romanian consonants are pronounced with palatalization. In the Romanian words *raci*, *fulgi* the affricates [c, g] can be followed only by [e, i], while the English ones may be followed by other vowels too.

As for the articulation of the affricate [tr, dr] Romanian learners should take care to achieve a correct place of articulation and to avoid a lingual roll.

The Romanian [tʃ] is produced with an obstruction for [t] and a constriction for [ʃ] which is considered to be one articulatory unit. [dz] does not exist in Romanian.

The first impact of any language comes from the spoken word. The basis of all languages is sound. Words are merely combinations of sounds. It is in these sound sequences that the ideas are contained. Listening is the first experience; the attempt to understand accompanies it.

The acquisition of good pronunciation depends, to a great extent, on the learners; ability of listening with care and discrimination. One of the tasks of the language teaching consists in devising ways to help the learners “aud” the unfamiliar sounds. The hearing of a given word calls for the acoustic image of that word from which a meaning is obtained. Therefore, Pronunciation Teaching is of great importance in developing students’ hearing and speaking habits and skills [1, p. 92].

Pronunciation is of no less importance in developing reading and writing habits and skills, since writing is a graphic presentation of sound sequences. In reading the visual images become acoustic images. These are combined with kinesthetic images, resulting in inner speech.

Wrong pronunciation often leads to misunderstanding. When a speaker or a reader replaces one phoneme with another, he/she unintentionally uses quite a different word in this way altering the sense of what he/she wanted to say, e.g., *vet* instead of *wet*, *taught* instead of *thought*.

Bibliography

1. BOGDAN, M., *Fonetica limbii engleze*, Bucuresti, 1962.
2. GOGALNICEANU, C., *Introduction to Linguistics*, Iasi, 2003.
3. JONES, D., *An Outline of English Phonetics*, Cambridge, 1932.
4. LEONTYIEVA, S., *A Theoretical Course of English Phonetics*, Moscow, 1988.
5. PARLOG, H., *English Phonetics and Phonology*, Bucuresti, 1997.
6. *Practical English Phonetics*, Moscow, 1982.
7. ROACH, P., *English Phonetics and Phonology*, University Press, Cambridge, 1992.
8. Vassilyev, V., *English Phonetics, a Theoretical Course*, Moscow, 1970.