

ERROR CORRECTION IN TEACHING PRONUNCIATION

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Rezumat

Învățarea unei limbi străine depinde în mod obligatoriu de o pronunție clară și coerentă a sunetelor. În acest articol este menționată necesitatea cunoașterii în profunzime a principalelor probleme în pronunție, cu care se confruntă studenții, ce duc la comiterea greșelilor. De asemenea sunt analizate cauzele lor și propune sugestii de remediere a acestora.

Proper English pronunciation can be a big problem for some ESL learners and more difficult for some students than for others. A student's native language determines, for the most part, the degree of difficulty and the types of difficulties students will have. As far as we know, ESL students whose native language is Romanian have some difficulties in pronouncing some English sounds which do not exist in their native language, and the Romanian learners of English make a lot of mistakes in their pronunciation. So, here, in this article, I am going not only to mention which are the commonest mistakes, but also how to help our students overcome them.

Many teachers abstain from correcting the learners' mistakes because: they believe it destroys the learners' confidence in their spoken English; they are scared to do it due to their lack of skills and knowledge to carry the learner through the problem-solving process. They're afraid that if they point out a certain mistake to the learner, he or she may want to know more and start seeking answers that they do not have.

Now, in order to correct the student's pronunciation mistakes, the teacher has to possess a good knowledge of phonetics and phonology. He/she has to know how the sounds are formed and produced, how the speech organs behave and how we use the intonation to convey meanings and feelings. The teacher also needs not only to be quite knowledgeable in the area of speech production but also in the area of speech perception. In speech perception, the teachers focus on how the students perceive or hear the sounds.

The interrelationship between speech production and speech perception has been extensively investigated by scholars [2, p.634]. When the teacher pronounces the sound, for example, the sound [r], he has to understand how the students hear it. It should be pointed out the fact that the skill of error correction is enormously valuable for ESL teachers and when properly applied, it does wonders not only to the students' speaking skills, as always presumed, but also to their listening skills, which often lead to greater vocabulary retention. Many undermine the importance of clear pronunciation in confidence building and learners ought to understand that the only way to achieve an advanced level in their oral communication is by building a new muscle memory and eventually forming new speaking habits and that, requires intensive error correction. We all have a mother tongue which functions as a filter for what sounds we are able to distinguish. When we learn a foreign language, we have to understand that it uses a different set of sounds and different orthographic rules than our mother tongue.

What learners often do is that they try to approximate the sounds by the ones they are already familiar with and read words as if they were written in their native language. For example, **ps** at the beginning of a word is pronounced just as [s], such as in "psychology" [saɪ'kɒlədʒi] **pn** at the beginning of a word is pronounced as [n], as in "pneumatic" [nju:'mæɪɪk], **kn** at the beginning of a word is pronounced as [n], e.g. "know" [nəʊ], **x** at the beginning of a word is pronounced as [z], not as [ks], as in "xenophobia" ['zɛnə'fɒbiə]; **w** is never pronounced as **v**. The students have to remember that to say "w", they have to make a narrow "slit" with their mouth with lips not touching the teeth; **e** is often not pronounced as [e] (pet) – "e" in unstressed syllables is often pronounced as [ɪ] especially in words beginning with "de-", such as "detention" [dɪ'ten-En]. When "de-" is stressed, it is usually pronounced as [de], e.g. "decorate" ['dekə'reɪt]; **th** in English is pronounced either as [θ] or [ð]. The former is pronounced similarly as [t] and the latter similarly as [d], but the tongue touches the back side of upper

teeth, not just the upper palate. They are not pronounced as “s” and “z”. These interdental sounds are pronounced differently by the Romanian learners because there are no such sounds in Romanian [5, p.157].

Another common problem is the pronunciation of the letter “o”. It is usually pronounced as [əʊ] in open stressed syllables (e.g. go, note) or [ɒ] in closed stressed syllables (e.g. pot). There is, another pronunciation of “o”, which is [ʌ]. For example the word “come” is pronounced [kʌm]; the [ʌ] is the same sound as in “nut” [nʌt]. A lot of students mispronounce the words “love”, “front”, replacing the sound [ʌ] with the sound [ɒ] which is a wrong pronunciation.

Taking into account the above mentioned we can say that speaking and writing with mistakes can damage our English. Let us analyse how it works in the case of pronunciation. For example our students take a guess in pronouncing the word “determine” because they think it rhymes with “mine”. That is a mistake, the student goes on practicing a wrong pronunciation, until it becomes natural for him, so in this way develops a “bad habit”. We have to point out that English pronunciation is unpredictable and guessing is a terrible strategy. It often leads to errors, which lead to bad habits. If you guess, you can teach yourself the wrong pronunciation of hundreds of words. Many students think that when they make mistakes, somebody will correct them, so in this case they won’t form a bad habit. But in reality, they can’t count on that. Correcting someone’s mistakes takes time and effort. It’s really hard to find someone who would be willing to correct all your written and spoken sentences.

The students have to recognize all the English sounds and learn their IPA symbols. Recognition is important because it lets you learn the pronunciations of words from spoken English. We can’t learn English pronunciation if we do not know the difference between English sounds, just like we can’t learn spelling if we do not know the difference between letters [4, p.62]. Our students also have to get in the habit of checking the pronunciation of English words in a dictionary. When you are speaking and you are not 100% sure how to pronounce something, do not guess the pronunciation of the word, but check the correct pronunciation before you say it. Not to make mistakes in pronunciation our students have to listen a lot and to notice. (TV, movies, podcasts, recordings in dictionaries). When listening, they have to pay attention to how sounds and words are pronounced, and think about what sounds they hear.

So your first goal in learning English pronunciation should be to “get it right in your head”. First, learn to recognize all the English sounds. Second, learn which sounds occur in which words, even if you can’t pronounce them very well yourself. If your knowledge is right, your physical skills will surely follow.

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