

CHAPTER 13

Teaching the Pronunciation of English

English is used as an adopted lingua franca.

LINGUA FRANCA → a language which is used in communication between speakers who have no native language in common.

In teaching pronunciation, we should think of the following questions:

- What form of pronunciation is to be taken as model?
- What level of performance is to be aimed at?
- Can the difficulties of English pronunciation be ordered?
- What general principles should underlie the teaching of pronunciation?

British or American pronunciations can be taken as model. However, the Received Pronunciation (e.g. British RP) is an important candidate as a basic model which has considerable prestige and is already taught throughout the world.

The model should have three requisites:

- It should be at least as easy for the foreign student to learn as any natural model.
- It should be readily intelligible to most native speakers of English.
- It should provide a base for the learner who has acquired it to understand the major natural varieties of English.

The level of the performance depends closely at:

- the learner's age
- the learner's natural ability
- the learner's motivation to learn that language

If the aim of learning English is the ability to communicate, the mastery of English pronunciation and the understanding of a variety of English accents will not be enough. The learners must also expect to have a comprehensive command of syntax, including everyday elliptical structures, a wide-ranging vocabulary and a deep acquaintance with English culture.

The various elements of English pronunciation will offer differing degrees of difficulty according to the linguistic background of the learner.

Characteristics of English pronunciation:

- **Accentuation**
The stress-timed rhythm of the English utterance.
- **Segmental system**
The identification of acoustic or articulatory change-points.
- **Sounds in context**
English has its own assimilation and elision.
- **Intonation**
The tendency to use falling and rising tunes.

In choosing a teaching method, we ask the following questions:

- Are the learners children or adults?
- Are they learning in class with a teacher or by themselves with the help of recordings or broadcast lessons?
- Are they to learn English pronunciation as part of a course extending perhaps over several years or are they attempting to acquire the essentials in a much more limited time?

In teaching pronunciation, we are concerned with imparting motor and auditory skills.

The acquisition of a foreign language's pronunciation becomes increasingly difficult after early adolescence. Ideally it is desirable to teach pronunciation as soon as possible.

CRITICAL AGE HYPOTHESIS → before a child reaches maturity (before the age of 12), a child is an expert in learning any language.

Before attempting to produce English sounds, accentual or intonation patterns, it is advisable to teach and establish certain basic discriminatory skills (the learner must be able to distinguish with certainty between features of his own language and those of English and to distinguish between the contrastive features of English).

Auditory discrimination drills is important to practise pronunciation. These drills usually make use of minimal pairs.

Learners with different linguistic background will experience different difficulties in appreciating the distinctive elements of English.



So that's why a teacher should be aware of the phonetic and phonological characteristics of the mother tongue of his/her students.



By contrasting the features of the two languages, he will be able to predict the problems which will arise and on which he should concentrate his drills.

Adequacy in the reception of more than one style of RP is essential if communicating with native speakers is to be efficient.

Practice in reception and comprehension can be through radio or television programmes.

The assesment of pronunciation can be done through giving dictations and reading aloud.