

## **PRONUNCIATION IS NOT JUST SOUNDS. A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO CORE ELEMENTS OF SPOKEN ENGLISH.**

Clearly, pronunciation is an important area for teaching and learning, however, it is an aspect of English instruction that is often neglected. One problem is to do with the way in which pronunciation is presented. The traditional emphasis on individual sounds often leads to discouraging results because it does not help students develop an intelligible pronunciation and communicate effectively. For this reason, it is more important that students of English can achieve:

- Intelligibility: the ability to produce clear sound sequences that are recognized and understood.
- Comprehensibility: the ability to understand the meaning of what is said.
- Interpretability: the ability to understand the purpose of what is said.

This workshop aims to present an approach to pronunciation teaching that highlights the interrelatedness of various aspects of English speech. This procedure addresses the individual elements of pronunciation but always within the framework of a larger system which connects meaningful sequences of sounds to make students' ideas clear and understandable to their listeners. The relationship that in this way is created between speaking and listening comprehension helps the development of a listener-friendly pronunciation.

Practical experience indicates that students engage successfully with pronunciation when they acquire productive and receptive skills of the sound system of the target language. This procedure allows learners to concentrate on differences between sounds and the role of rhythm and intonation in the flow of speech. The fact that pronunciation is an important aspect of both speaking and listening is unquestionably supported by Judy Gilbert in her book "Teaching Pronunciation: Using the Prosody Pyramid". She makes this observation:

*"While it may be easy to see the benefit of good pronunciation instruction for increasing intelligibility, it is just as useful for increasing listening comprehension. Students who are taught about English prosodic patterns often report improved understanding of speech on TV, in movies, and in face-to-face conversation."* (2008, 6)

In the teaching of pronunciation there are two usual procedures: the top-down process (that is, concentrating on chunks of language or thought groups) and the bottom-up process (that is, focus on segmentals or individual sounds). In the needs-based approach to pronunciation teaching, the top-down process is usually preferred because prosody is found in the overview of language. However, a bottom-up technique is also useful for focusing on difficult sounds or sound combinations as they occur in the stream of speech. The major benefit of this overall procedure is that it focuses on the "big" picture and the central aspects of both segmental and suprasegmental features are clearly identified.

When sounds are put together in speech, the prosodic elements come into action and enable learners to recognize the rhythmic effects of stressed and unstressed syllables and the intonational highlighting of meaningful terms. Having such significant information at their disposal, students can easily recognize focus words and make meaning in context. In this way, they learn pronunciation naturally in connected speech and have the opportunity to develop an intelligible pronunciation and to sharpen their listening skills, which definitely leads to effective communication. In other words, prosodically-trained students are able to perceive the suprasegmental cues during speech production to convey the intended meaning of an utterance.

Achieving this realistic level of comprehension demonstrates that pronunciation learning should be no longer focused on the attainment of “perfect” sound production and that in the light of conclusive evidence pronunciation learning should concentrate on developing functional intelligibility and communicability. Consequently, it is absolutely clear that without adequate pronunciation skills the learner's ability to communicate effectively is seriously limited. For this reason it is necessary to establish three realistic goals:

1. A comfortably intelligible pronunciation.
2. A focus on suprasegmental features, like stress, rhythm, and intonation, in addition to segmentals.
3. An emphasis on linking processes and word shape changes in connected speech.

Sounds presented in a meaning-based framework constitute a perfect setting for describing them at different levels. In fact, Adrian Underhill in the introduction to his book “Sound Foundations, considers that there are three levels of study: sounds, individual words and connected speech. The author states that: “*Each of the three levels invites a different focus of attention and each can be called on separately or in combination to meet the needs that arise at any moment in the lesson.*” (2005, xi)

The new perspective proves that pronunciation is not just sounds, but a broad term used to describe a number of aspects present in the production of sounds in the flow of speech. On these grounds, the type of practice that is required includes two well-defined categories: phonetic training, which covers sound production, sound reception and simplifications, and prosody training, which focuses on the use of meaningful combinations of sounds in connected speech.

The advantages of working with this type of practice are:

- a. Pronunciation is set in real communicative situations.
- b. Rhythm and intonation are presented as the two meaning processors of spoken English.
- c. Students’ intelligibility is greatly improved.
- d. Demotivation and frustration are considerably reduced and confidence becomes the students’ close ally.

In this session we will explore and review a variety of techniques that have been successfully integrated into EFL and ESL classrooms at every level. It is hoped that attendees will be inspired to incorporate the core elements of spoken English and thus transform their teaching experience in pronunciation.

Key Words: listener-friendly pronunciation, productive and receptive awareness, segmental and suprasegmental features.

## REFERENCES

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