

PRONUNCIATION DRILLS VS PHONETICS

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Through years teachers and students have been aware of the complexity that entails the process of foreign language teaching. This fact lies on the great variety of elements to take into consideration along the process the different abilities : listening, speaking, reading and writing; and other elements like pronunciation, vocabulary usage, grammar rules and their usage, style, etc. which has to be analyzed as a whole and/or apart depending on the moment, since they all function as a system in anything you say. If one of this elements is wrongly used, the teacher has to discriminate and correct it at once. To do this task properly teacher trainers have to be fast and effective not to lose the concentration of the students and to abstract the wrong item and correct it tactfully.

Accuracy is a goal that every teacher seeks and looks forward to. but accuracy in pronunciation is very hard to get and demands constant effort on both sides that on the teacher's and the student's.

Problems in pronunciation are detected at once because people notice them before other problems, which are sometimes disregarded because they follow the context. But when pronunciation is not as accurate as it needs to be, that is the listener has to make an effort to decode the sounds, the message is hindered with the subsequent break in the line of communication.

Paul Tench stated that: "The learner needs to imitate the teacher's pronunciation of whole utterances in context, imitating not only the features of consonants, vowels and diphthongs, but rhythm and intonation too. He also needs specific practice for certain pronunciation items which he finds awkward and difficult..."

In order to carry out drills to correct errors, efforts have to be made to motivate the students since willingness is very important because the students with problems in the production of sounds will have to work overtime and exert effort. On the other hand, teachers have to clear out the importance of a good command of the phonological system being intelligible or getting to be a model depending on the objectives of the course. In our particular case, teacher trainers have to be careful and demand from the students an accurate pronunciation as close as that of a cultivated English speaker since they will have to teach the language to others.

The science of phonetics is closely related to the teaching of English as a foreign language. Teacher trainers are expected to know how to describe, classify, and analyze the sound system of the language in question. Phonetics provides for the development of these abilities.

Having these factors in mind, it can be said that there is an important premise teachers in charge have to master when dealing with TEFL and it is through the knowledge of the phonological system and the basic principles of phonetic correction (error analysis). These two factors should function as one because when trying to achieve accuracy in pronunciation (which should be done during the elementary stage so as to save time to devote it later to develop abilities or other aspects of the language in question) the teacher has to bear in mind that the majority of the mistakes are to be produced and expected at the beginning and that it is the task of the teacher to correct them following the standards of the pronunciation involved or the objectives proposed.

Paul Tench expressed that: "If pronunciation is not dealt with first of all, it is possible that a pronunciation matter might interfere with the practice of a new feature, and the teacher has two problems on his hands, simultaneously the new feature and the new pronunciation problem."

In reality, sometimes the process of error correction is not effective because the teachers of English as foreign language do not know how to balance the two premises aforementioned. It is the objective of this article to help somehow on this matter.

It is obvious that teacher trainers on FLT are familiar with the phonological system of the language involved, but it so happens that the system of corrective phonetics is not consciously applied because they may not know how to carry out the process of error correction productively using the tools of corrective phonetics.

It is true that teachers of EFL have their time scheduled and have to keep in mind many facts which are not only about the language, but also about methodological and psychological (mainly motivational) aspects or activities.

Correcting a student can be disturbing for him and for the normal pace of the class. There is also the question of when correction can be made: **on the spot?**

At the end? Outside the classroom? That is for the teacher to decide. But there is a serious problem. Sometimes for the sake of doing things on time and follow the steps of the lesson without interruption, etc., teachers do pay due attention to problems in pronunciation which unfortunately will be fixed and consequently there might be no solution later on: the wrong pattern will stay forever in the pronunciation of the students.

Steven H. Mc Donough said: "At each stage the teacher's decision will be influenced by a number of considerations, such as the importance of the error, its frequency in the class, whether the correct version is in fact known to the students, possible loss of face by the student, or undesirable gloating by other students. All these decisions have to be taken fast in order not to interrupt the flow of the lesson."

Sometimes the process of correcting mistakes gets to be too individualized because there is only one student with a certain problem. So the teaching process gets to be too private leaving the rest of the students by themselves. But pronunciation drills for error correction, individual or collective, should be carried out for the sake of the quality of the pronunciation of our students. If the teacher trainer has to leave the rest of the students on their own for too long, then he can stop the correction and continue later on. **When?**

The answer accounts for flexibility: inside the classroom or outside, whenever or wherever the teacher or the student might feel comfortable. When pronunciation problems are not generalized it is better to work with them outside for several reasons:

The normal pace of the class is not altered.

The students with pronunciation problems will not have to put up with a “difficult moment in front of their classmates.

The teacher has more time to assess the problem in detail and find a proper solution.

The students have more time to adjust to the solution and practice the language.

This suffices the question of **when**, but **how**?

Firstly, the teacher should know what the mistake is about, what the cause is and decide if it is too disruptive or repetitive that might form a wrong model. Secondly, depending on what was said before, the teacher should decide when the correction can be carried out and in what way.

The description, explanation and correction of mistakes in pronunciation can be effected through two different ways: correction from the side of the teacher, and self-correction within the group of students. The latter springs from the former, that is, through familiarizing the students with error correction the teacher indirectly develops abilities and habits of self-correction.

Teachers should develop abilities of self-correction within the group. It is quite useful because it is one of the ways of centering the attention of the group when one of the students is making use of the language, for they will not only be attentive to the content but also to the form. This gives them the opportunity to express their doubts about ways of expression that might not be familiar to them.

In our particular case, this technique prepare the students on their future work on error correction once they become English teachers. What is more, there are cases when there is a supposed mistake in pronunciation when in fact there is not. On the other hand, The responsibility of error correction does not fall entirely upon the shoulders of the teacher, which may be a positive psychological factor because the students will be corrected by their fellow classmates, and it is up to a certain extent a compromise with his peers. When teaching a foreign language teachers have to pay attention to many aspects related to the language, so there might be the case that he might miss any, but if the students are well trained, one of them at least might detect it and call attention upon it.

With this type of correction a sort of competence is established, that is, one student is able to correct another one, it will mean that the one to make the mistake is supposed to know already because the other one does. So this particular student will get conscious that he has to do something about it. It may motivate him to work harder and pay more attention. It also serves as self-evaluation.

When the correction is made completely on the party of the teacher, the student may think that the teacher may use any particular part of the language because he knows already and has experience. He is still learning, so he will expect the teacher to be forgiving and not demand too much from him. He will have more time to work later on to solve the problem which might never happen. The motivation to solve the problem might not be as strong as when it comes from one of his classmates.

When the correction is made on the part of the teacher there are different steps to follow in order to solve the problem productively:

- Assess the mistake.

- Establish the cause.

- Determine the objective or objectives.

- Choose the appropriate corrective technique or techniques.

- Decide where to make the correction and/or if the students will participate in the process.

The process of phonetic correction has to be fast in order to be expedient and effective. Besides, it demands expertise because the teacher has to discriminate pronunciation problems among a myriad of other elements and abilities.

Fortunately, corrective phonetics offers a system of techniques to improve the quality of pronunciation in EFL students. The first possible step is that teachers get familiar with it and put it into practice.

Steven H. Mc. Donough said: "(...) It is clear that avoidance of error is impossible; tolerance of error may be unproductive, but prediction and diagnoses of error may be all-important."

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