

A Simplified Way to Teach some English Consonant Sounds Taking into Account the Influence of Spanish as a Native Language.

Author:

Lic. Jorge Vázquez Santiestaban

Resumen

El presente artículo aborda algunos criterios del autor para motivar a los alumnos en el proceso de percepción y discriminación de algunos sonidos consonánticos del idioma Inglés, teniendo en cuenta, como punto de partida, la influencia de la Lengua Española como idioma materno. Se apoya fundamentalmente en las sugerencias dadas por los especialistas en la materia para enseñar y corregir las dificultades más frecuentes de los estudiantes en la adquisición de una pronunciación aceptable para la comunicación. Sugiere un conjunto de actividades para enseñar con anticipación algunos aspectos importantes del sistema fonológico del idioma Inglés, que en ocasiones, pueden ser causas de 'acento extranjero' o de incomprensión, así como para prevenir los errores de los alumnos, y para practicar y fijar los nuevos hábitos lingüísticos con el enriquecimiento del vocabulario de los estudiantes en ambos idiomas. Las actividades propuestas también tienen la intencionalidad de desarrollar un aprendizaje consciente en los estudiantes.

Palabras claves: Sonido, acento extranjero, adquisición, pronunciación, aspiración, incomprensión.

Abstract

The present article approaches the author's criteria to motivate the students in the process of perception and discrimination of some English consonant sounds taking into account the influence of Spanish tongue as a mother language as a point of departure. It is supported on the suggestions given by specialists in the field to teach and correct the students' most common difficulties in the acquisition of an acceptable pronunciation for communication. It also suggests a set of activities to pre teach some important aspects of the English Phonological System that sometimes are the cause of 'foreign accent' or misunderstanding so as to prevent the students' mistakes, as well as, to practice and fix the new linguistic habits and to enrich the word stock in both languages. The activities are intended to develop conscious learning in the students.

Key Words: Sound, foreign accent, acquisition, pronunciation, aspiration, misunderstanding.

When learning a foreign language, the brain perceives sounds on the basis of certain acoustic features which are determined by the phonological system of a given language. A foreign language learner tends to perceive language sounds on the basis of correct pronunciation of his own phonological system. This is a gradual process that starts in early childhood. The child imitates the sounds which will permit him to communicate; the elements of the system are fixed little by little, that is, by successive approximation and constant readjustment. This is very important for phonetic correction because a phoneme is not assimilated immediately as the students hear it.

An adult person has completely assimilated the phonological system of his native tongue. A new sound will bring about instant rejection; their phonological system is built to recognize their own sounds, not the new ones. Their own system is thus superimposed on the new one. There is a close relation between audition and articulation, a student repeats some sounds incorrectly mainly because he perceives it incorrectly. In the learning of a foreign language, he will face a number of difficulties. He will find that some features of the foreign language are easy for him; others will be very hard to acquire. The elements that are similar to his native language will be simple and those that are different will be very difficult to perceive.

The comparison of both languages will enable the teacher to know the student's real problems, the causes that provoke them and how to correct their difficulties. It permits to apply the right corrective technique in each case and find an effective solution to each learning problem as well as to know before hand the student's mistakes, many problems can be prevented and others can be minimized.

The main objective of this material is to provide a set of activities to teach our students how to modify and create new articulatory habits in their mother tongue in order to use them in the articulation of some English consonant sounds taking into account the influence of Spanish as a native language to improve English pronunciation and to motivate the students in building up their own learning strategy as well as to enrich their word-stock in both languages due to the use and practice of incidental vocabulary items.

The final goal will be to teach our students to learn how to learn and to learn some characteristics of the English Phonological System to help others in the articulation of English consonant sounds.

'When a student of a foreign language who has had some instruction according to the usual methods first hears the spoken language he often fails to understand what has been said. He

usually claims that the vocabulary of the utterance is too difficult for him. When a written text is placed before him he can, many times, interpret the same material correctly and react accordingly. It is not, then, only a lack of knowledge of vocabulary items which is causing the trouble. It is the inability of the student to recognize the sound of the language'.

Robert Lado. English Pronunciation, page ii.

He also suggests some aids to accurate production of sounds:

- By imitation.
- By articulator description
- By comparison with the nearest sound in the student's native language.

This material will concentrate mainly in some articulatory aspects in the native language that will be the cause of 'foreign accent' in the articulation of some Spanish consonant sounds and the comparison of them with the way they are pronounced in English, the starting point will be always the place of articulation in the mother tongue. It is the intention of this material to teach our students how to learn some English consonant sounds in their natural way, using the phonemes of their native language as point of departure to establish comparison and make generalization, so that, they could apply the linguistic modifications acquired in the mother tongue to practice and use them in the English Language through the process of interference, with the purpose to prevent mistakes and motivate them in the acquisition of foreign phonemes by themselves. The process of perception and discrimination of sounds will be fulfilled through the articulation of native sounds in different shape, place of articulation or environment so as to develop in our student's conscious learning.

AIDA VILLATE AMADOR, in her book Lectures on Comparative Typology of English and Spanish refers to the process of interference as follows:

Linguistic Transfer is produced when a learner unconsciously applies the rules of his native tongue to the foreign language. It occurs at the phonetic, morphological, syntactical and lexical levels.

Positive Transfer when the patterns in the two languages are the same. It facilitates the acquisition of the new language; teachers must take advantage of them.

Ex. The sound / m / as in the word made, mother. (Phonetic level)

Give me a pencil /dame un lápiz/ (morphological level)

Negative transfer when the patterns in the native language are different from the foreign language. Teachers must diminish their effect.

Ex. / © / as in the word Washington (phonetic level)

Both types of transfers are important. Similarities will serve as basis for teaching while differences will determine the main objective to be fulfilled. The mechanism of transfer may affect any aspect of language.

- Difficulties the Spanish speaker faces in the consonantal system of English.
1. There are 24 consonant sounds in English while in Spanish there are only 19, in the Cuban variant 17.
 2. There are seven phonemes in English which don't exist in Spanish / v; z; r; θ; ©; ¯; d¯ /
 3. English is richer in fricative phonemes (9) /f, v/; /θ, ð, ʒ/; /s, z/; /©, ¯/; /h/ while Spanish has only five, the Cuban variant has only four: / f; s, ʎ, x /
 4. Difference in the phonetic value of phonetic variants. In Spanish the sound /ŋ/ is an allophone but it is a distinctive phoneme in English.
 5. Slight significant differences in the point and manner of articulation of certain sounds. Ex.
 - a. /t, d, l / dental in Spanish and alveolar in English.
 - b. /p, t, k / are aspirated in initial position in English.
 - c. /r/ is a retroflex continuant in English and a flap and alveolar in Spanish.
 6. Differences in the distribution of phonemes or allophones e.g. Spanish / ŋ / never occur in intervocalic position, while it often occurs in English, e.g. singing, ringing.
 7. Differences in the occurrence and distribution of consonant clusters, they never occur in final position in Spanish. Ex. /rd;/ /ld;/ /nt/

Dealing with these aspects M.J. Cazabón explains that it is easier for a student to learn a completely new sound in a foreign language than to identify or articulate a familiar one in a slightly different way or environment from the ones dictated by long-established habit.

It is said that the students have many pronunciation problems, in fact, they make few mistakes but the same mistake is repeated thousands of times.

Many of our students will be teacher of English in a future; other will use English in their daily communication for many reasons and some of them will have to visit an English speaking country, so they need to be conscious of the importance of an acceptable pronunciation.

The procedures suggested in this material will help the students to work independently on those most commonly consonant sounds that sometimes are the cause of misunderstanding or of a 'foreign accent'.

In the process of learning the pronunciation of a foreign language many factors take place: it includes the sounds and the prosodic elements. It is not the intention of this work to solve the problems dealing with 'foreign accent'; the main purpose is to face the students with one

event of the English Phonological System and to encourage them to go on by themselves. Prator in his classification of consonants takes into account the presence of voice, the point of articulation and he considers consonants as stops, continuants and sibilants. He also refers to the process of aspiration and concluded that all voiceless sounds are aspirated in initial position while voiced consonants are not. So a consonant is pronounced either with a puff of air or with vibration of the vocal cords at the beginning of a word and at the end of words only voiceless continuants are strongly aspirated. So the aspiration of stop consonants should be avoided in final position, the articulation of / p, t, k / requires two movements a closure and a release stages. At the end of a word only the first stage of these three sounds are pronounced, the closure is made but the voice die before the release, it would mean that the final stops would not be heard but natives distinguish the final stop sounds only by their closure stage.

ADA JONES MENÉNDEZ in her book Lectures on English Phonetics and Phonology considers the degree of breath and muscular effort involved in the articulation as another important aspect to classify consonant sounds, she states that Voiceless sounds are articulated with a strong energy so they are Fortis and voiced sounds are articulated with a weak energy so they are Lenis.

Many authors suggest minimal pair to discriminate voiceless-voiced sounds and place of articulation in order to develop in our students the process of perception. Regarding this point, this material will suggest Spanish and English words that the students will provide by themselves according to the activities suggested as independent work.

It is stated that correction should be done first on the prosodic elements and those mistakes that don't affect communication and that are only the cause of 'foreign accent' do not need correction.

Regarding this point, the activities suggested in this material are not to correct the students' mistakes. They are to prevent those difficulties by teaching before hand how to do well with some English consonant sounds in order to develop a conscious learning in our students. They will motivate the students to improve their new habit of articulation and modify the ones they already possess so as to develop the process of perception, the better they perceive, the better they articulate and vice verse. They are prepared on the function of our students, for them to discriminate and compare sounds in both languages and for self-correction, so that, they could generalize rules and apply them consciously to other situation.

Methodologists agree that a foreign language should be taught for communication and it

implies an acceptable pronunciation, intonation and rhythm.

Regarding this aspect, Donn Byrne in his book *Teaching Oral English* says that language should be used with accuracy by means of mastering the language system and it should be used with fluency by means of using it for communication. He also adds that communication in the classroom is not the same as 'real life' and learning about the system is a mean for communication. He also says that teaching a foreign language is difficult because we are attempting to teach in the classroom what is normally and best learned outside it.

- GENERAL EXPLANATION ABOUT THE ACTIVITIES

The following activities are suggested mainly for seventh grader students (12-13 years old). They will be applied in unit 1, 2 and 3. The whole work will be developed in different stages but only the most suitable lessons for stage one will be analyzed.

In stage one the students will practice four sounds that are the cause of 'foreign accent' due to their different place of articulation; three of them are aspirated in initial position, they also will learn to articulate five new sounds that cause misunderstanding.

For the purpose of this stage allophones and vowel distinction will be not considered (they will be introduced later on when the students master the fundamental elements of consonants in initial position). The teacher will explain and demonstrate the instructions suggested using the Spanish language with simple words without complicated terms. Only one aspect is analyzed in a lesson, the teacher will only need at about two minutes in every lesson either to give instructions or practice; the rest will be done as independent work. A new element will be introduced after the objective of the previous one has been fulfilled. The activities are organized in such a way that one aspect will help to understand the other that follows.

Lesson one: to motivate the students, the teacher will tell them that with the learning of English they will learn new sounds that do not exist in Spanish and they will also learn to articulate others in different way as they are pronounced in Spanish; for that, they only have to place the tongue in different positions within the mouth, use lip-rounding or articulate sounds with stronger muscular effort.

As independent work they will find some Spanish words and they will pronounce them taken into account the above suggestions (this activity will be very amusing)

Step One: a place of articulation as a cause of 'foreign accent'.

Lesson two: sound /d / Spanish key word DEDO. This sound is only a cause of 'foreign accent' with a dental articulation in Spanish and an alveolar one in English.

1. The teacher will tell the student to pronounce the word *dedo* very slowly to observe the

position of the tongue.

2. The teacher will tell them to pronounce it placing the tongue a little backward. They will perceive the difference in the quality of the sound, it will sound rare to their ears, the teacher will explain that this is a cause of 'foreign accent'; if a Spanish native speaker listens to a word articulated in a different way he will perceive it as foreign and the same happens to an English native.
3. To practice and fix the articulation of the sound they will repeat the following syllables in different positions

Da, de, di, do, du. Du, do, di, de, da.

4. The students will form Spanish and English words using a combination of those syllables. The teacher will help them with the spelling and meaning of English words. He will give them time enough to practice and fix the new habit. The teacher could use one minute in every lesson to practice the syllables, the rest will be done independently outside the classroom. They could form these words.

Spanish: dado, duda, dudé, di.

English: daddy, do, daw, dew.

5. The students will teach this aspect to some members of their family and they will ask for help to other people. Whenever possible they will use those words in their daily activity in the classroom, later on, they will use the words in sentences. (*These activities will be done with the rest of the sounds*).

Lesson five: sound /t / Spanish key word TODO. After the students have practiced and fixed sound /d /. Only its place of articulation will be analyzed to generalize one aspect of 'foreign accent'.

1. The teacher will tell the students to repeat the word todo placing the tongue in the position they did for the previous sound.
2. They will repeat at random the syllables:

Ta, te, ti, to, tu. Ti, ta, tu; to, te.

They will do the same procedures as they did with the previous sound (activity 4 and 5)

They could form the following words:

Spanish: té (infusion): te, tu, tú. (Pronouns)

English: tea, to, too, tattoo, two.

Step Two: aspiration another aspect of 'foreign accent'

Lesson eight: sound /t / Spanish key word TODO. By now the students have practiced a lot

and they have fixed the articulation of / d / and / t / as alveolar. Aspiration only needs explanation and practice.

The teacher will explain the process of aspiration. They could place their finger near their mouth to feel the little puff of air as they articulate the sound. They will practice with the previous syllables, words and activities.

The teacher will sum up that sound / t / has two difficulties; the place of articulation and in initial position it needs a little puff of air.

Lesson ten: sounds / p / and / k /. These two sounds only need practice to generalize aspiration as a cause of 'foreign accent'. The teacher will do the same activities he did with the previous sounds.

They could form the following words:

Spanish: papa, papa, pipa.

English: paw, pea, poppy, paddy, papaw.

Spanish: coca, coco.

English: key, caw, coo, cookie, cuckoo.

Step Three: voicing: a cause of misunderstanding.

Lesson twelve: to motivate the students and to introduce this aspect it is suggested to use continuant consonant sounds.

1. The teacher will tell the students to articulate the sound / n / and prolong it / nnn /. At the same time they will cover their ears with the palms of their hands and press them slightly. They will hear the noise of the sound as the vocal cords vibrate.
2. As independent work they will try to articulate other consonant sounds and they will be asked if they could find another consonant that is pronounced without that noise.

Lesson thirteen: sound / v / Spanish key word VIDA. This sound is new for the students but they know / f /, so they only have to learn how to produce a voiced sound in the same position.

1. The teacher will tell the students to repeat the sound / f / in a sequence / f /, / f /, / f / or to prolong it / f f f f / and at the same time they will cover their ears with the palms of their hands and press them slightly. (No noise is heard).
2. The teacher will guide them to observe the contact of lower lips with the upper teeth as place of articulation.
3. The teacher will guide them to articulate the sound and to try to produce the noise they did with / n /. They could begin with / n / and change the position of lips to pronounce / f /

to obtain in this way / v /.

4. They will repeat the word vida to practice the new sound and reinforce / d /.

5. They will repeat the syllables: va, ve, vi, vo, vu.

Spanish word: viva: vivo:

English: no English word is formed with the combination of these syllables.

Lesson fifteen and sixteen: to practice voicing in other situation after they have acquired / f / and / v /.

1. The teacher will tell them that / f / and / v / are articulated in the same position; / f / has no noise in its articulation. The teacher will ask if they could find another sound which is articulated with no noise. If they find that / s / is a voiceless sound, it means that they have understood voicing.
2. The teacher will tell them that / t / and / d / are articulated in the same place as they already know and will ask if they could find the difference between them. If they can do it, they are able to generalize the aspect of voicing.
3. The teacher will tell them that / p / is articulated with the two lips as they learned before and he will ask them if they could find another sound in the same position and if they could find the difference.
4. The teacher will tell them that / k / has a similar situation and he will motivate the students to discover it. If they can find / b / and / g / it means they could generalize and apply the aspect of voicing to other situation, so they are able to master this content and will develop the habit of perception and discrimination between voiceless and voiced sounds, this will help the students to learn and work on:

/ ½, ʌ, /: / ©, ˀ /: /t©, dˀ /.

Step Four: two consonants that require lips-rounding

Lesson seventeen: sound /© / no Spanish key word. It is a new sound for our students.

It will be easy to learn because in Spanish a similar sound is produced to tell people 'to be quiet.

1. The teacher will tell the students to use that gesture and to observe the lip-rounding required.
2. The teacher will guide them to produce the sound in a sequence / © /, /© /, / © / and to prolong it / ©©©©©© / . They will form syllables with it: sha, she, shi, sho, shu.

English words: they could find only two words with this combination: she, shoe.

Lesson nineteen: sound /r / Spanish key word RATO.

By now the students have learned the sound /© / that requires a certain lip-rounding.

1. The teacher will tell the students to repeat the word rato using the same lip-rounding they did with the previous sound and using a tongue movement backward without touching the roof of the mouth.
2. They will repeat the syllables: ra, re, ri, ro, ru.

Spanish word: raro, rara.

English word: raw.

Step Five: two consonants pronounced with stronger muscular effort.

Lesson twenty-one: sound / t© / Spanish key word CHACHACHÁ (A Cuban dance)

This sound only requires a tenser articulation. Initial position favors tenseness.

1. The teacher will tell the students to repeat the word with a stronger muscular effort.
2. They will repeat the syllables at random to practice the articulation; cha, che, chi, cho, chu.

Spanish words: chacha, chichi, chocha (a kind of bird) chocho, chucho.

English word: chew.

Lesson twenty-four: sound / d⁻ / Spanish key word YO

Once the students learn to articulate sound / t© / tenser than in Spanish, it would be easier to get sound / d⁻ /.

1. The teacher will ask them to cover their ears with the palms of their hands while they articulate the sound / t© /, they will perceive the friction produced as the air goes out due to the approximation of the tongue toward the roof of the mouth.
2. The teacher will explain the difference between the friction characteristic of sounds /©, t© / and the noise produced by the vibration of the vocal cords as they learned with previous sounds.
3. The teacher will tell the students to repeat the sound /t©/ and make the noise they learned before with sounds / n / so as to obtain the sound / d⁻ /.
4. They will repeat the Cuban word yo with stronger muscular effort.
5. They will repeat the syllables: ya, ye, yi, yo, yu.

Spanish word: ya.

English word: jaw, Jew.

Step Six: a place of articulation as a cause of misunderstanding.

Lesson twenty-six: sound / ½ / Spanish key word SEDA. This is a new sound for the students and they confuse it with / s /. They are asked to insert their tongue between their teeth to

articulate it. They make an unneeded long-tongue insertion that sometimes causes difficulties for the articulation, so it is suggested to analyze first the sound /, /.

Sound /, / Spanish key word SEDA. This sound exists in Spanish as an allophone of /d / in intervocalic position.

1. The student will repeat this word very slowly to observe the position of their tongue as they pronounce the last syllable.
2. They will notice a slight tongue insertion between the teeth as the tongue articulates with the upper teeth.
3. They will keep their tongue in that position as they articulate the syllables: tha, the, thi, tho, thu. They will contrast that articulation with: da, de, di, do, du.

Spanish word: No word with these graphemes in Spanish to practice.

English word; the, thee.

Lesson twenty-eight: sound / ½ / Spanish key word SEDA. After they have learned to articulate sound /, / it will be easy to learn / ½ /.

1. The students will repeat the syllable tha (learned and practiced before).
2. The teacher will tell them to articulate and prolong it without the vowel sound / ,,,, /.
3. They will be asked to articulate it without noise, as they learned to do in previous lessons, so as to obtain sound / ½ /.
4. They will repeat the syllables: tha, the, thi, tho, thu. They will contrast it alternating the sounds /, / and / ½ /. They could contrast with: sa, se, si, so, su.
5. They will notice that both sounds are represented by the same graphemes.

Spanish word: No word with these graphemes in Spanish to practice.

English word; thaw.

Note: lessons not mentioned here are to practice the previous elements.

When pronunciation point has been perceived and learners can produce an acceptable version, we can go to practice: consolidating and establishing the habits of acceptable pronunciation through exercises that provide repetition and reinforcement.

With the development of these activities:

- The students will reinforce orthographical habits in both languages.
- They will be conscious about different aspects of articulation of sounds to be used either in English or Spanish.
- The students will get familiar with the handling of dictionary in both languages since they will have to look up words with a given characteristic.

- They will develop habits of investigation and independent work.
- The activities will help them to enrich their cultural background.
- The words they use in these activities will remain for a long time, so they will improve memory.
- The conscious development of the activities will permit to enrich their word stock.
- These aspects will not be objects of evaluation in the classroom, so they will feel more secure in handling the language freely without taking into account their mistakes because they are working on them to improve language learning.
- Time needed in the classroom is minimum; most of the work will be done independently.
- They will be motivated to learn new sounds and different manner and place of articulation and will try to teach other people how to handle with this phenomenon.
- They will have time enough to practice and fix the new linguistic habits.

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