

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING PRONUNCIATION AND INTONATION TO ESL (ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE) STUDENTS

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Annotation: To communicate clear in English, the pronunciation and intonation plays crucial role. However, nowadays all around the world including Asia, English pronunciation is still abandoned in ESL classrooms. One of the apparent reason is lack of English pronunciation teaching strategies and techniques to teachers. This article outlines several strategies to improve pronunciation and intonation, supported by research and best practices in language instruction.

Key words: ESL, pronunciation, intonation, phonetic training, teaching strategies

Introduction

Teaching pronunciation and intonation is crucial in ESL education, as these elements significantly influence intelligibility and conveyance of meaning. This study aims to evaluate effective strategies that can enhance learners' pronunciation and intonation skills. To improve students' English pronunciation, they must comprehend what native speakers of the language say and ensure that their pronunciation is easily understood by others around them. As commonly seen nowadays, there are a lot of conversations going on in English between native speakers, and non-native speakers who use English as a second language. Therefore, it is essential to have sufficient proficiency in pronouncing English to achieve appropriate fluency in spoken communication. However, when it comes to learning English, the majority of students who aren't native English speakers still face challenges including mispronouncing words, stressing syllables incorrectly, wrong word stress, and using incorrect sentence intonation patterns. According to Bakers, A. (2010) [1] One of the first steps in teaching pronunciation is helping ESL students master the individual sounds of English. This involves articulatory exercises that focus on the physical production of sounds. Many learners face difficulty with sounds that do not exist in their native languages. For instance, the English "th" sound (as in "think" or "that") can be challenging for students whose first languages do not feature this sound. Teachers can employ the following strategies:

Minimal Pairs Practice: Using minimal pairs (words that differ by only one sound, e.g., "bat" and "pat") helps students distinguish between similar sounds.

Mouth Positioning: Visual aids, such as diagrams showing the tongue and lip positions for particular sounds, can be effective in teaching articulation.

Repetition and Drills: Regular practice and repetition help students internalize the correct tongue movements for difficult sounds.

Intonation refers to the rise and fall of pitch in speech and plays a key role in conveying meaning, emotion, and emphasis in English. According to Jenkins, J. (2000) [2] Intonation patterns can significantly alter the meaning of a sentence (e.g., rising intonation can indicate a question). To teach intonation effectively:

- **Pitch Contours:** Teachers can use pitch contours, where students are taught to recognize and produce the natural rise and fall of pitch patterns in statements, questions, and commands.
- **Stress and Rhythm Practice:** Teaching the stress-timed nature of English helps students to grasp the rhythm of speech. Exercises such as clapping syllables or using metronomes can help ESL learners develop a more native-like rhythm.
- **Songs and Music:** Using songs is an enjoyable and effective way to teach intonation patterns, as the melodies naturally mirror English intonation contours. This approach engages learners and provides a fun, repetitive practice environment.

In addition to teaching through practice and drills, explicit instruction about the rules of English intonation is crucial for helping learners understand why certain patterns occur. For example:

- **Rising Intonation in Yes/No Questions:** “Are you coming?”
- **Falling Intonation in Wh-Questions:** “What time is it?”
- **Fall-Rise for Uncertainty:** “I think she might be here.”

Teaching these patterns explicitly allows students to internalize intonation rules, which will improve both their speaking and listening comprehension.

According to Levis, J. M. (2005) [3] Technology plays a significant role in modern language teaching and can be leveraged to enhance the teaching of pronunciation and intonation. The following tools are particularly useful:

- **Speech Recognition Software:** Tools such as Google’s voice search or language learning apps like Duolingo provide instant feedback on pronunciation. Students can use these tools to practice speaking and receive immediate corrections.

- **Pronunciation Apps:** Apps like Elsa Speak or SpeechAce give learners a chance to practice specific sounds and receive targeted feedback. These apps often include animated models to demonstrate proper articulation.
- **Recording and Playback:** Allowing students to record their voices and listen back helps them compare their pronunciation with native speakers, identify errors, and track their progress over time.

According to Saito, K. (2012) [5] Peer feedback is a valuable strategy for improving pronunciation and intonation. Group activities, such as role-plays or dialogues, allow students to practice in a social context and provide mutual support. In peer feedback, students can identify common issues, share strategies, and offer constructive criticism. This collaborative approach helps reinforce learning and boosts students' confidence.

According to McCarthy, M., & O'Keeffe, A. (2004) [4] Pronunciation and intonation are culturally bound, and some aspects of English pronunciation may be particularly challenging or unfamiliar to students from different cultural backgrounds. Teachers must be mindful of the following:

- **Awareness of L1 Influence:** Understanding how a student's first language (L1) influences their pronunciation and intonation in English is key to tailoring instruction.
- **Encouraging Natural Accents:** Teachers should foster an environment where diverse accents are respected. The goal should not be to erase the student's accent but to help them be more intelligible and confident in their communication.

Conclusion

In conclusion, teaching pronunciation and intonation to ESL students requires a multifaceted approach that integrates articulation exercises, explicit instruction, the use of technology, and peer feedback. By focusing on both the segmental and suprasegmental aspects of speech, educators can help students become more confident, comprehensible, and effective communicators in English. The key is to provide students with both the tools and the environment necessary for practicing and refining these skills, ensuring that pronunciation and intonation become strengths rather than barriers to effective communication.

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