ВОПРОСЫ ТЕОРИИ И ПРАКТИКИ ОБУЧЕНИЯ АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ

Tricky English (Teaching pronunciation)

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The road is difficult, not because of the deep water and the high mountains that bar the way, but because we loose heart when we think of the river and the mountain.

Vietnamese saying

This information is provided to help teachers to:

- Refresh basic theoretical positions on pronunciation teaching (for this purpose a set of tasks with answers is suggested)
- Raise awareness of tools and techniques for teaching pronunciation

The importance of teaching pronunciation cannot be overestimated. As new demands have been imposed on ELT training by the Ministry of Education with the introduction of new state standard of education in 1998, which are aimed at training specialists able to teach English for communication, teaching pronunciation becomes more important than ever. The way we sound when we speak a foreign language has a strong influence on the assumptions other people make about us and the judgements they make about the sort of people we are.

Why teach pronunciation?

A learner who consistently mispronounces a range of phonemes can be extremely difficult to understand. This can be very frustrating for the learner who may have a good command of grammar and lexis but have difficulty in understanding and being understood by a native speaker.

Task 1. *Explain the problem of communication in the following examples:*

a) I asked where the boss was, but they sent me to the bus station.

b) I asked her if she was living here, and she said no, she was staying.

c) I told him I had worked a lot in the weekend, and he asked me how many miles.

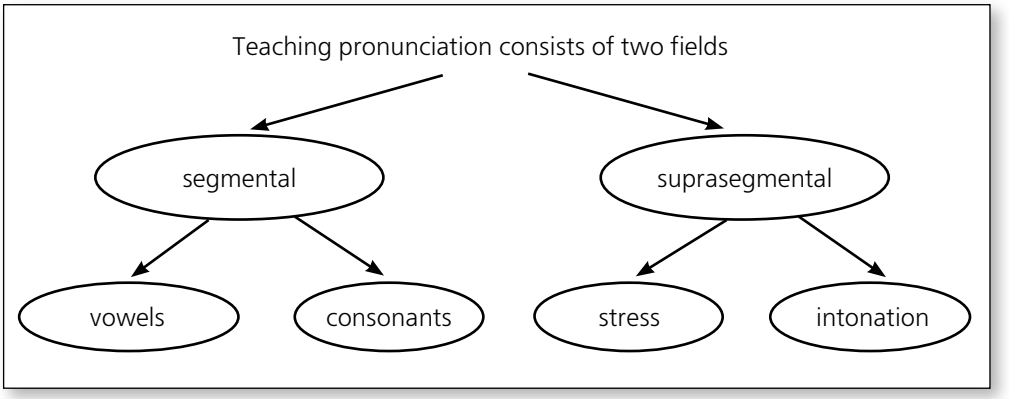
Here's one more example – a short poem, which shows a few difficulties of English pronunciation. Can you read the key words correctly?

You probably already know
Of **tough** and **bough** and **cough** and **dough**.
Some may stumble, but not you
On **hiccough**, **thorough**, **plough** and **through**.
Beware of **heard**, an awkward word:
It looks like **beard** but sounds like **"bird"**!
Watch out for **meat** and **great** and **threat**;
They rhyme with **suite** and **straight** and **debt**.
And **here** is not a match of **there**
Nor **dear** and **fear** for **bear** and **pear**.
And then there's **dose** and **rose** and **lose**,
But watch that "s" in **goose** and **choose**!
It's **cork** but **work**, and **card** but **ward**;
And **font** but **front**, and **word** but **sword**;
Come, come, I've hardly made a start.
A dreadful language, full of tricks?
I mustered it when I was six ...

Task 2. *To be sure that we are talking about the same things match the terms with their definitions.*

<u>Phonology</u> the rise and fall of the voice when speaking

Phonetics	the smallest element of sound in a language which is recognized by a native speaker as making a difference in meaning
Phoneme	a vocal sound made without the audible stopping of breath
Stress	the study of speech sounds and sound production in general
Consonant	the greater emphasis of some syllables or words over others during speech
Vowel	a sound made with audible stopping of breath
Rhythm	the study of how speech sounds are produced and used and distinguished in a specific language
Intonation	the regular repetition of stress in time



Mistakes that occur in pronunciation can lead to misunderstanding as sounds change the meaning of words that's why we should take into account all the components of pronunciation teaching.

The fact that pronunciation tends to suffer from neglect may not be due to teachers lacking interest in the subject but rather to a feeling of doubt as to **how to teach it**.

Practical phonetics lessons can be divided into three types:

1. **Integrated lesson**, in which pronunciation forms an essential part of the language analysis and the planning process, and the language presentation and practice within the lesson.
2. **Practice lesson**, in which a particular feature of pronunciation is isolated and practised for its own sake, forming the main focus of a lesson period.
3. **Remedial or reactive lesson**, where a pronunciation difficulty, which arises in class, is dealt with there and then, in order to facilitate the successful achievement of classroom tasks.

Integrated lesson

Teaching pronunciation can be used to complement other language work, i.e. it is integrated with other aspects of language teaching.

	Pronunciation
Lexis	Phonemic transcription, word stress, weak syllables, spelling, etc
Grammar	Work on stress, weak forms, rhythm and linking, intonation in connected speech
Functions	Intonation: complaining, showing surprise, persuading, encouraging, requesting, warning someone, etc
Skills	Dictation combines listening, spelling and linking. Dialogue-building combines speaking, rhythm and linking. Looking in texts can integrate reading, word stress and spelling and so on.

Practice lessons

	FOCUS	TEACHER'S ROLE	STUDENTS'ROLE
Presentation	ACCURACY	To present new phonological items, demonstrate, explain	To listen, to recognize, discriminate
Practice	ACCURACY + FLUENCY	To control, to check understanding, to monitor, to correct	To repeat (individually, chorally; front chain, back chain), to produce correct language
Production	FLUENCY + ACCURACY	To observe, to manage the process	WHAT + HOW

Task 3. *Look through the list of techniques and say which of them are the most appropriate and useful for you? (Appendix)*

Answer key

Task 1

There is no clarity in pronunciation of sound in words b**o**ss and b**u**ss, l**i**ving and l**ea**ving, w**or**k and w**al**k.

Task 2

Phonology	the study of how speech sounds are produced and used and distinguished in a specific language
Phonetics	the study of speech sounds and sound production in general
Phoneme	the smallest element of sound in a language which is recognized by a native speaker
Stress	the greater emphasis of some syllables or words over others during speech
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Appendix

Classroom ideas for teaching pronunciation

Minimal differences

In this activity, students are exposed to closely-related sounds in words that are similar. Only the target sounds should differ from word to word, while the other sounds remain the same. The words are written on the board in two columns, A and B. For example, with the target sounds [e] and [æ] the table will look like this:

A	B
pet	pat
bet	bat
met	mat
said	sad

The teacher reads the words out one by one, varying the column each time and the students have to identify the correct column. For example:

Teacher: Pet.
Students: Column A. (etc)

Finally, the students practise the sounds with the teacher and then in pairs.

Recognition practice

The activity can be varied by getting students to distinguish between closely related sounds. The teacher writes three words on the board and numbers them, for example:

1	2	3
form	firm	farm
[ɔ:]	[ɜ:]	[ɑ:]

Then the teacher reads out the words at random. The students have to say the corresponding numbers in the same order. For instance:

Teacher: Form, farm, firm
Students: One, three, two (etc)

Later individual students can be asked to take the part of the teacher in the recognition practice.

Recognition test

Students tick the words they hear in the sentences read by the teacher or recorded on cassette.

Same or different?

In this activity, the same word lists as above can be used. This time, words are read out together in pairs. The students have to say if the words they hear are the same or different. For example:

Teacher: Bet—bat.
Students: Different.
Teacher: Mat—mat.
Students: Same.

Odd one out!

In this activity, the students have to distinguish which word in a series of four is different from the other three. Using words with a minimal difference (e.g. pet, pat), four words are read out, only one of which has a different sound. Students have to say which word in the sequence is different. For example:

Teacher: Pet, pet, pat, pet.
Students: Number three.

Repetition

Repetition of useful phrases or dialogue readings can be done by individuals, students in pairs, or, if led by the teacher, with the whole class in chorus or in large groups, with each group taking one part. It is fun to begin slowly and build up speed, to see how fast they can do it.

Listen and complete

Team or pairs write a list of useful phrases or sentences. One learner says half or a little more of each item. The first team or pair to complete it successfully gets a point. Or you can play a recording and press the pause button in mid-phrase – which team or pair can continue. Don't give the answer yourself but, after several attempts, play the tape and let the class identify who was correct (allow four or five seconds – if no one can do it, you get the point).

Gapped examples

Learners (individually or in pairs) write out a list of five or ten useful phrases or sentences from the text or transcript, omitting one word or phrase from each one. They exchange lists with a partner or another pair, who has to complete them from memory, and keep a note of their scores. Or they can read them out to the whole class for completion. They can also be written on OHP transparencies and done with whole class in teams.

Musical soundabout

This is a mingling activity with music. Split the class into four teams and give each one a different coloured board pen. Divide the board into columns and write a phoneme at the head of each one. One member from team has to walk around the room while the music is playing. When the music stops, these students run to the board and write as many words as they can in the columns. The words they write must contain the phoneme at the head of each column. When the music starts again, the pen is passed to another team member and the game continues. At the end of the game, distinguishing by pen colour, count up the number of correct words for each team to see who is the winner.

Noughts and crosses

[ɑ:]	[ ]	[ ]
[e]	[a]	[ ]
[ɜ:]	[ɒ]	[u:]

This game is played like the traditional noughts and crosses. Divide the class into two teams and draw the following diagram on the board.

A member of the first team comes to the board, selects a phoneme and gives an example of a word containing the same phoneme. If the example is correct, the student puts a cross in the appropriate square for a correct suggestion. The second team then has its turn, putting a nought for a correct suggestion. If the suggested word is not correct, the opposing team is offered the chance to suggest a correct example. The first team to complete a line on the board wins a point. The game can be played again and again with new sounds.

Tongue twisters

These can be amusing and effective in helping learners to produce problematic sounds or distinguish between closely related sounds. Start slowly and then build up speed to make it more challenging. Students can practise in pairs or at home. Some examples might be:

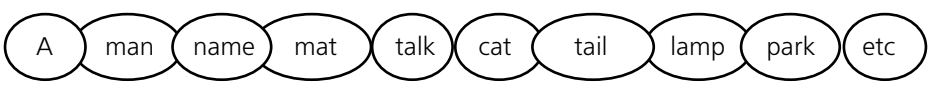
[ɜ:] – 'The early bird catches the worm.'
[ɔ:] – 'It's the fourth door on the forty-fourth floor.'
[ɜ:] vs [ɔ:] – 'Thirty-four workmen walked through the door.'
[ɔ:] vs [ɜ:] and [ɑ:] – 'I walk to work because I can't park my car.'
[ ] vs [e] – 'Pat Black has a red setter that gets on his lap.'

Phonemic tombola

This is a quick game for revising vocabulary and can be used as a warmer at the start of a class. Write out the words you want to revise in phonemic script on small pieces of paper, which you then place in a box or a hat. Split the class into teams. A member of the first team draws out a piece of paper and says what the word is; if it is correct, the team is awarded a point; if it is wrong the word goes back into the hat. The game continues until all the words have been guessed, and the team with the most points wins the game.

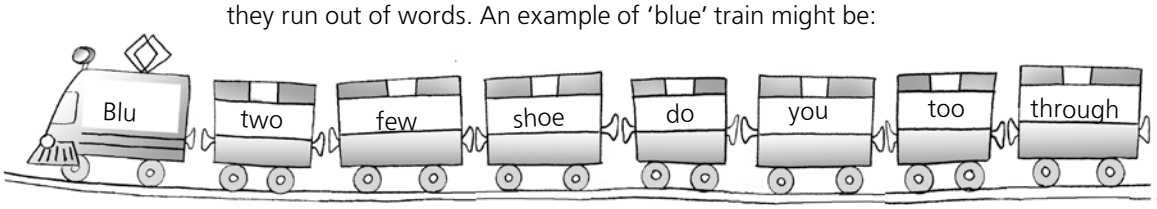
Spelling caterpillar

This activity can be used to focus on how the pronunciation of letters changes as they are combined with other letters. Split the class into two teams and draw the caterpillar on the board. Choose a target letter (e.g. the letter 'a') and write a word containing the letter at the beginning of the caterpillar. The idea of the game is that the teams take it in turns to add a word containing the target letter, but every new word must start with the final sound of the previous word (this means discarding silent letters such as 'e' in *tape*). A point is awarded for each correct word and the game continues until students run out of words. An example of a spelling caterpillar might be:



A multi-coloured rhyme train

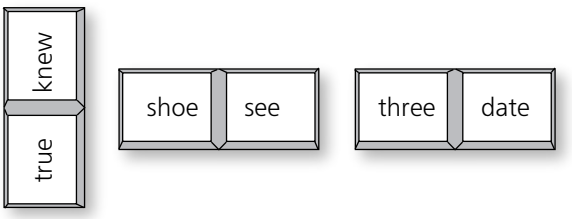
This is a team game for the whole class. Split the class into two teams and draw a picture of a train on the board. Decide on a starting colour (e.g. 'blue') and write it inside the train. The teams take it in turns to shout out a word that rhymes with the colour in the train, which you add to the train. They get a point for each correct word and the game continues until they run out of words. An example of 'blue' train might be:



Other possible colour rhymes might be 'green' (mean, been, seen, queen, dream, team, etc); 'red' (bed, head, said, bread, led, etc); and so on.

Rhyming dominoes

This game is played in exactly the same way as traditional dominoes, except that rhyming words are used instead of numbers. Lay the dominoes face down on the table and ask each player to take three (or four) dominoes, which they keep concealed from the other players. The new game begins with one player (the quickest) placing a double domino in the middle of the table face up. The next player has to follow by adding a domino with a word that rhymes. If the player cannot add a domino then he or she must pass or pick up an extra domino from ones left over at the beginning of the game. Monitor to make sure that students are making the right matches. The game continues round the players and the first person to get rid of all his or her dominoes is the winner. The beginning of the game might look like this:



Stress groups

This is a walkabout activity that can be used to revise a vocabulary set. First, select some words with different stress patterns. For example:

●	● •	●• •	• ● •
nurse	teacher	architect	policeman
vet	doctor	editor	mechanic
clerk	dentist	journalist	director

Write one word on a piece of card and hand one to each student. The idea of the activity is for the students to group themselves according to the stress pattern of their word. They do this by going round saying their word until they find their 'colleagues'. By the end of the game you should have four distinct groups standing in different parts of the classroom.

Tapping it out

This activity helps students to count the syllables and to recognize stress and weak syllables. First, select a group of words that the class knows and get them to count the syllables and mark the stress on the words. Make sure you choose words with different stress patterns and different numbers of syllables. Write the words on the board and explain that each tap represents a syllable, with a strong tap for the stress of the word. Tap out some examples with a board pen on your desk, as shown in the examples:

postman	electrician	architect
TAP-tap	tap-tap-TAP-tap	TAP-tap-tap

The students have to guess which word you are tapping. The activity can then be extended into a team game either with the class or in groups.

Word pairs

This activity focuses on words that are spelt in the same way but have different stress patterns according to their grammatical function. Some examples are:

●•	•●
export (n)	export (v)
import	import
increase	increase
insult	insult
record	record
present	present

Write the words in two columns on the board and read them out one by one. Ask students where the stress is on the each word and establish how the pattern works. Then dictate one of the words from each pair, and ask the students to write "noun" or "verb" as they hear them. When you have finished, get students to compare their answers before going through them together. Students can then try this activity in small groups in order to practise the different stress placement.

Starting out and finishing off

This activity practises intonation in subordinate and main clauses. It can be used to revise certain structures at the same time as intonation. First, give the class a list of half-sentences on a worksheet, like the ones below, and ask them to complete them with their own ideas.

If animals could speak,...
If the sun never came out,...
If everything was made of chocolate,...

When this has been done, elicit some examples from the class and practise the intonation. Once the class is confident with this, the activity can be done in small groups.

Choices

This activity makes a good icebreaker at the start of a course. Students practise rising and falling tones when asking about two alternatives. For example: Do you prefer pop music or classical music?

Write the following cues on the board:

tea	coffee
a lazy holiday	an active holiday
rugby	football
books	magazines
swimming	running
television	radio
pop music	classical music
dogs	cats
getting up early	getting up late
staying in	going out

Write an example question on the board and get the students to practise the intonation pattern. When they feel confident with it, they can then take it in turns to go through the cues and put questions to you. Answer in a natural way and do not correct their intonation at this point, as it spoils the fun! Finally, get the class to ask each other the questions in pairs.

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