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APPROACHES TO THE TEACHING OF PHONOLOGY OF ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

Phonology of English has an important part in teaching-learning process of English as a second language or foreign language. However, the approaches of teaching phonology of English have not been studied and properly dealt by the teachers. Many times approaches of teaching of phonology have been neglected. The paper is an attempt to bring these approaches to the notice of the users of English, particularly teachers who have been teaching phonology of English for so many years now. Conclusively, the paper shows that despite end number of problems in teaching-learning process, pronunciation becomes the priority. It also concludes that techniques and approaches used to teach pronunciation play a significant role in the achievement of target language goals. It also concludes that teachers should be trained to be role models for the learners. To achieve this target, teachers should use appropriate approaches in pronunciation to teach more effectively by the means of recent technological developments.

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INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation has been used as an umbrella term to cover not only the sounds but also features beyond individual sounds, and forms an integral part of the language. Joan Morley in his research entitled, "The Pronunciation Component in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages" observes that the current pedagogical thinking on pronunciation maintains that "intelligible pronunciation is seen as an essential component of communicative competence." (P.481-82) Similar is the view of Otolowaski who in his article entitled, "Pronunciation: What are the expectations?" maintains that the role of pronunciation varies widely and has no connection with grammar-translation method which has been mostly used by the teachers.

"The role of pronunciation in the different schools of language teaching has varied widely from having virtually no role in the grammar-translation method to being the main focus in the audio-lingual method where emphasis is on the traditional notions of pronunciation, minimal pairs, drills and short conversations." (Web access)

Understandable Approach: Though some instructors aim for a native-like pronunciation and have expectations of near perfection, typically, there is one main approach in pronunciation teaching: understandable. The understandable approach develops a pronunciation style that is clear and

understandable to both native and non-native speakers, but not necessarily native-like. This approach does not aim for perfection, considering it too ambitious and perhaps even an unattainable goal for most learners. Despite advancements in teaching pronunciation, near native-like fluency remain elusive to most adult L2 (Second Language) learners. Though it may seem that researchers have examined every facet of language acquisition, pronunciation has fallen to the wayside and has suffered from serious neglect. Andrew Elliot in his article entitled, 'A Hierarchical Model of Approach and Avoidance Achievement Movement Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,' "Neither the Europeans nor the North Americans have devoted much time to the study of acquisitions of sound systems." (P.218) Furthermore, Elliot maintains that

"Teachers tend to view pronunciation as the least useful of the basic language skills and therefore sacrifice teaching pronunciation in order to spend valuable time on other areas of language" (P.218-232).

Ironically, language learners themselves often feel the most important aspect of learning a language is pronunciation and sounding native-like, which reflects the position that intelligible pronunciation is a fundamental element of communicative proficiency. Consequently, to serve the contemporary L2 learner's needs, the ultimate goal is not merely 'understandable', rather native-like.

Audio-Lingual Method: Current and past language programs have varied widely as to their methods of teaching

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pronunciation, and debates continue as to the most effective method of teaching pronunciation. Modern pronunciation teaching methods sprung from the classic audio-lingual method (ALM) which was a direct result of the need for foreign language proficiency in listening and speaking skills during and after World War II. Based on the principle that language learning is habit formation, it makes drilling, repetition, and habit-formation central elements of instruction. However, ALM has a tendency to focus on manipulation of the target language and to disregard content and meaning. Critics of the audio-lingual method assert that this emphasis on repetition and accuracy ultimately does not help students achieve communicative competence in the target language.

Communicative Language Teaching

The antithesis and currently,

“One of the more prevalent approaches to teaching pronunciation is communicative language teaching (CLT), which requires teaching methods and objectives that include whole-person learner involvement including three important dimensions: the learner's intellectual involvement, affective involvement, and physical involvement.” (Morley, P.482)

Teaching of pronunciation shifts from an aspect of phonological accuracy to a comprehensive conversational competence and is thought to be taught as an integral part of oral communication. It is seen as a by-product of teaching speaking and listening. The learner's involvement in the learning process as a partner with his instructor is acknowledged as an effective techniques for developing learner strategies.

“With CLT began a movement away from traditional lesson formats where the focus was on mastery of different items of grammar and practice through controlled activities such as memorization of dialogs and drills, and toward the use of pair work activities, role plays, group work activities and project work.” (Richards, P.4)

It can be seen that the teacher's role is not only to teach but to facilitate learning by monitoring and modifying English at two levels, speech production and speech performance. However, controversy persists regarding the much embraced CLT. Many argue that the claim of CLT's integral instruction is nothing but an act of marginalizing pronunciation in the belief that it is peripheral to oral communication. It superintends the critical role pronunciation plays in communication. In response, recent studies have shown some support for the superiority of suprasegmental instruction in ESL contexts. Levis quotes Jenkins in his article, ‘Changing Contexts and Shifting Paradigms in Pronunciation Teaching,’ there is the greater need of a more systematic training of prosodic features and a return to the forgotten minimal pair drills. Wider availability of curriculum and software make it more accessible to teachers and learners encourage work with these elements. (p.369-377)

Conclusion

Finally, teachers' understandings of CLT appear to vary and, thus, the manifestations of the approach in teaching pronunciation are not as effective as intended. Nazari (2007) differentiated two concepts of CLT as he investigated

teachers' CLT beliefs and practices: the narrower (vocabulary, forms, and functions) and the broader (social-cultural aspects of language use). In his study of three Iranian English teachers he contends that the teachers' implementation of CLT practice appears to be based on a narrower concept because of the institutional constraints such as student contact time, class size and prescribed curriculum and because of the “teachers' lack of distinction between the two types of communicative competence (p. 210). In regards to pronunciation teaching, though certainly laden with advantages, CLT is not necessarily a clear choice for language teachers. Regardless, CLT with its heavy emphasis on input should indirectly improve pronunciation through target language exposure. However, that improvement aims for merely understandable pronunciation.

Studies in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), or ESL/EFL education in general, have shown that to improve listening and verbal communication skills teachers' conscientious effort to teach pronunciation makes it more efficient for learners to master the language and build up self-confidence. This, in turn, greatly facilitates the level of intelligibility and effectiveness in verbal communication, particularly from the speaker's vantage point. However, insufficient literature documents learner perceptions of their own needs and the instructional content, in an input-poor EFL environment such as India. Eliciting information on learner thinking of the instructional content might be necessary in today's foreign language classrooms, where Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been critically accepted and the “*Eclectic Approach*” has been acknowledged as the mainstream in the selection of language teaching approaches (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; cf. Penner, 1995) More importantly, what pronunciation model should be the basis for classroom teaching with reference to TEFL education programmes in input-poor environments remains a question within the CLT framework. It seems that teachers make decisions according to their intuitions, and students' perceptions of the phonological models needs are not given sufficient attention.

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