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Contents

Developing Fluency in the Pronunciation of Iraqi Learners of English: Method and Techniques

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Abstract

Apart from accuracy, fluency is one of the issues that concern language learners and teachers on parallel grounds. Fluency is generally defined as the rapid, smooth, and effortless use of spoken language. This study aims at suggesting a method and a set of techniques that can be employed in the pronunciation classroom to work on training Iraqi learners of English to learn and use some aspects of connected speech, viz. weak forms, sentence stress, linking and elision, and accordingly developing their fluency skills in speaking English. It basically draws on using a communicative approach with the following characteristics: first, maintaining a learner-centered teaching, encouraging pair/group work, and employing practice through using activities and tasks. The suggested method involves proceeding through three stages of practice: mechanical, meaningful, and communicative. Mechanical practice is a controlled type of practice carried out through repetition and substitution activities; meaningful practice is also a controlled practice through meaningful choices of items; and the last stage, communicative practice involves using language within real communicative contexts. The suggested techniques are also set into three stages in consonance with the stages of the method.

1. Introduction:

Perspectives on language teaching and learning have changed dramatically during the last few decades. This drift in interests and concerns is due to the mode of change that characterized theories in linguistics and psychology late in the 1960s. Approaches and methods that were based on dogmas of behaviorist psychology and structural linguistics, like grammar- translation method, audiolingual method, situational-language teaching, etc. have given place to new approaches and methods which draw on perspectives of cognitive psychology, and sociolinguistic concepts like language creativity, discourse, social context, language varieties, etc. (Celce-Murcia, 1991). This has its merits and consequences on the teaching of pronunciation, which passed through a period of negligence between 1960s-1970s and, which was mostly taught by using methods drawing on behaviorist concepts like habit formation, imitation, and memorization drills (see Morley,1991: 485-6). Voices calling for the importance of pronunciation as a component in second/foreign language teaching curriculum have forcefully drawn attention to it again and language teachers and methodologists have rethought its status in the teaching curriculum Since pronunciation contributes to the meaning of the message, raising the consciousness of the learners about its importance in communicating in a foreign language is required in the classroom. Mispronunciation has thus been shown to hinder communication and create situations of misunderstanding between the interlocutors. In this respect, Hismanoglu (2006) writes: "[without] adequate pronunciation skills, the learner's ability to communicate is severely limited."(p104)

The importance of teaching pronunciation in second/foreign language learning classrooms draws on the views that language teaching should focus first and foremost on spoken language being the direct/primary means of communication. Teaching pronunciation requires providing the learners with opportunities to listen to a model and to attempt to pronounce the given material and to encourage continuous practice.

Current approaches to pronunciation teaching have raised the initiatives and objectives of concepts and expectations into high levels and view it as a multi- disciplinary process. That is to achieve success in teaching foreign language pronunciation, different disciplines can be employed, e.g. psychology, neurolinguistics, sociology, semiotics, and computer technology. (For details on this see, for example, Wremble, 2001 and Hismanoglu, 2006)

2.The Problem:

Teaching pronunciation effectively is one of the tasks that needs expending enormous efforts, employing well-constructed syllabus and using proper methods. One of the reasons for this is the difficulties associated with changing the pronunciation habits of the learners' mother tongue and introducing different pronunciation habits especially for adult learners, after puberty. It is almost axiomatic that once one reaches puberty, the ability to learn a second language, including the possibility of acquiring a native-like accent, begins to deteriorate (see Patkowski, 1990:74).

The factors that are effective in this respect are many and varied: neurological, psychomotor, cognitive and affective (Scovel, 1969). Kenworthy (1987) summarizes the factors that inhibit or enhance the acquisition of reasonable pronunciation in six points: learner's native language, learner's age, learner's exposure to the target language, learner's innate phonetic ability, learner's attitude and sense of identity, learner's motivation and concern for good pronunciation.

Traditional classroom techniques like repetition drills, recognition and discrimination tasks, transcription, etc. besides deliberate negligence to the importance of pronunciation in language teaching courses contributed to restricting success in pronunciation classrooms(1).

(1) Traditional approaches to pronunciation teaching were characterized by" [i]nstruction featured atriculatory explanations, imitation and memorization of patterns through drills and dialogues, with extensive attention to correction." (Morley, 1991:485).

Recent studies in pronunciation teaching emphasizes the prominence of pronunciation as a key to gaining full communicative competence in foreign language. Thus, it is posited that knowledge is not restricted to knowing the items of the language but the use of these in the appropriate situations.

The two-year courses taken by the students of the Department of English, in most Iraqi universities, to learn English pronunciation, during the 1st and 2nd years, mainly focus on teaching segmental (consonants and vowels and sequences of sounds) rather than supra-segmental features of English (stress, rhythm, intonation, etc.).

The chief aim in these courses is developing the students' accuracy of pronunciation rather than their fluency. The textbooks currently used for teaching English pronunciation are not designed to improve students' skills of practicing the use of the language (communicating with the language) but rather provide series of rules and instructions of pronouncing the language accurately.

Based on the experience of being a teacher of English pronunciation for sixteen years, the researcher has found that a strict usage of traditional methods based on employing imitation, substitution drills, discrimination tasks, etc. is not enough to teach English pronunciation to Iraqi learners and to mould new pronunciation habits in them. Iraqi learners need opportunities to practice and use the pronunciation rules outside the classroom and hence little benefit is achieved from the pronunciation classes they take. A shift should be made in the methodology being used by pronunciation teachers and more concentration should be paid to creating opportunities for the students inside the classroom through encouraging interaction between the students by having them involved in pair or group work. Practicing the new rules and habits will be more effective in this case. The teacher should play an influential role in this by using up-to-date methods and approaches that help improving students' abilities and skills in the foreign language; his/her role should be as a facilitator rather than a tutor, though.

Using a communicative approach to teaching pronunciation, characterized by providing opportunities to meaningful practice and usage of the language, helps improving the learners' pronunciation skills and facilitates learning the language as well.

Thus a communicative approach aims to create a "shift in emphasis from language knowledge to language use" (Tschirner, 1996: 1) in the classroom while fostering "a broader ability to use language appropriately in natural situations" (Whitley, 1993:138).

Traditional methods are not entirely out-of-date or unuseful, some of these, viz. repetition drills in pronunciation, substitution, etc., prove to be useful at any time. Using these methods needs redirecting the objectives and goals of the teaching process. Thus, a successful interplay between traditional methods and the currently proposed methods of teaching is strongly suggested to achieve prospective goals. This is plainly stated by Richards (2006), who posited that "[c]urrent approaches to methodology draw on earlier traditions in communicative language teaching and continue to make reference to some extent to traditional approaches" (p.23).

3.Aims of the Research:

Apart from accuracy, fluency is one of the issues that concern language learners and teachers on parallel grounds (see Richards, 2006: 8; 15f). It is believed that teaching aspects such as sentence stress, weak forms, elision and linking is extremely important because they help achieving fluency in speaking and using the learned language. These aspects are associated with connected speech and their mastery is in no way an easy task; thus it demands expending great effort from both, the teacher and the learner.

This study aims at suggesting a method and a set of techniques that can be employed in the pronunciation classroom to work on developing Iraqi learners of English fluency skills. This aim will be implemented by training 2nd year students of English to learn and use some aspects of connected speech: sentence stress, weak forms, elision, and linking. Special attention will be paid to improving students' fluency in communicating in the foreign language by using a communicative approach that builds on the following characteristics:

a. Encouraging interaction between and among the students through pair and group work.
b. Providing activities that focus on practicing the use of the aspects outlined above. Working on the creativity and brainstorming of the students.
c. Having a learner-centered teaching with the teacher as a monitor and facilitator. The learner is viewed as an active creator and not as passive recipient. (see, among others, Morley,1991, and Richards, 2006)

4.Accuracy and Fluency:

A chief aim of foreign language learners is to speak and use the foreign language correctly and fluently with the minimum traces of foreign accent. Accuracy refers to speaking/ pronouncing the learned language correctly with the least mistakes. Learners' problems in correct/ accurate pronunciation mostly arise from interference of the native language at all linguistic levels (Corder, 1973:132-3).

Apart from accuracy, which indicates the correct usage of an item, fluency is one of the issues that concern language learners and teachers on parallel grounds. Fluency, in dictionary sense, is generally defined as the ability to speak and write a language or perform an action smoothly, accurately and with ease. In some more conservative definitions, fluency is defined as the "[r]apid, smooth, and effortless use of spoken language." (Trask, 1996:147) According to Richards (2006:14) accuracy refers to "creating correct examples of the language use", whereas fluency is "natural language use occurring when a speaker engages in meaningful interaction and maintains comprehensible and ongoing communication despite limitations in his or her communication competence." From what is given above we gather that, fluency is a loose term that can generally be defined as the ability to speak and read (and even write) rapidly and to comprehend speech when listening.

Accuracy and fluency cannot be dealt with separately and working on improving learners' skills in speaking and using the foreign language should take care of both at the same time. The goal of pronunciation teaching has recently changed from attainment of "perfect" pronunciation to the more realistic goals of developing the learner's functional intelligibility, communicability, increased self-confidence, the development of self-monitoring abilities and speech modification (see Richards, 2006:14-21).

5.General Characteristics of a Communicative Approach:

In an attempt to depart from the traditional methods used in language teaching, a communicative approach has been developed during the 1970's. This approach draws on developing the communicative competence in the language learner rather than grammatical competence which was mostly associated with traditional methods based on using behaviourist notions like stimulus/response, imitation, drills and accuracy (2). The term "communicative competence" was coined by the sociolinguist Dell Hymes (1972) to include knowledge of sociolinguistic rules, or the appropriateness of an utterance, in addition to knowledge of grammar rules (see Savignon, 1987: 16).

(2) Grammatical competence involves the mastery of the rules of sentence formation in a language. The learner, however, may still be not very successful at being able to use the language for meaningful communication (Richards, 2006:3).

This term, communicative competence, has come to be used in language- teaching contexts to refer to the learner's ability to negotiate meaning, to successfully combine a knowledge of linguistic and sociolinguistic rules in communicative interactions (Savignon, 1987). Grammatical competence involves the mastery of the rules of sentence formation in a language. The learner, however, may still be not very successful at being able to use the language for meaningful communication.

The new approach focuses on developing the learner's "ability to negotiate meaning, to successfully combine a knowledge of linguistic and sociolinguistic rules in communicative interaction" (Savignon, 1987: 20; see also Elliot, 1997:95). In other words, it is aimed to create a shift from language knowledge to language use. Communicative language teaching requires the involvement of learners in the dynamic and interactive process of communication (Elliot, 1997:95; Savignon, 1987:20). The term applies to both oral and written communication, in academic as well as non- academic settings. The communicative approach has attested a depart from focusing on teaching individual words to long strings of sentences communicated meaningfully. Although this approach is not primarily designed to teach pronunciation, it " holds that oral communication is the primary use of language and should be central to the mode of instruction." (Carey, 2002: 3, as cited by Hismanoglu, 2006: 103)

From what is given above one gathers that the key principles to a communicative approach are meaningful interaction, communication practice, learner-centered teaching, etc. Meaningful interaction in the classroom is achieved through having the learners working in pairs or teams practicing their language and negotiating meaning through well-designed activities that help them use their language and learn more. Skills are integrated from the beginning; during practice a given activity might involve reading, speaking, listening and even writing (Celce-Murcia, 1991:6).

6.Aspects of Connected Speech: an Overview:

Although it is now and then proposed that segmental features are very important in learning a foreign language pronunciation, suprasegmental features are argued to be far more important and crucial for maintaining communication (see, for example, McNerney and Mendelsohn,1992:185; Elson,1992:230; and Hismanoglu, 2006: 104). Thus, it is argued that individual sounds can be inferred from the context. For example, if a student says" I cooked the meat in a pen." (meaning 'pan'), it is very easy to interpret the correct meaning. But if a student in response to a statement such as" He went on holiday.

" Says the words: "Where did he go?" with rising intonation, although his/her intention was to find out the location of the holiday (which calls for rising-falling intonation, this will be processed by native speakers as expressing surprise or requiring confirmation that he had indeed gone on holiday. The context will not help to clarify this question (McNerney and Mendelsohn ,1992:185-6) (3).

(3) Among the examples that are provided to illustrate the importance of segmental aspects in disclosing or disambiguating a message is one given by Gilbert (2005:136):
   a. Jane said, " Is that Mister Fogg? "
   b. Jane said, " Is that mist or Fog? " (see Gilbert, 2008:3)

As being highlighted earlier utmost and prior concentration was paid to segmentals (consonants and vowels) and their combinations into sequences, with suprasegmentals being given secondary or peripheral concern in traditional methods. Among the areas of difficulty for Iraqi learners of English are suprasegmental features, e.g., stress, rhythm, and intonation, in addition to sentence stress, weak forms, assimilation, and linking. These aspects form an integral part of connected speech and learning them helps learners not only better understand the language they hear but achieve fluency in speaking the foreign language as well (see Kelly, 2000:113 and Roach, 2009:89, 107). In this respect, Kelly (2000:113) writes: "..., the simple awareness of their existence can help enormously in enabling students to better understand the language they hear."

Below is a short review to these aspects to substantiate for the subsequent discussion and objectives of the study.

6.1 Linking between Words

In connected speech, native speakers of English are prone to smooth the transition between vowels in adjacent words, viz. the first word ends up in a vowel and the next begins with a vowel, by using some linking sounds. These linking sounds include: / j, w, and r /. Below is an overview to these sounds. (see among others O'Connor, 1980:100-101 and Roach, 2009:114)

1.Type 1: linking / j/

This type of linking occurs when the final sound of the first word is a high front vowel, either / I / or / i: /, or a diphthong ending in a high front vowel, namely /eI, aI, and ɔI/.

For example, "tea and coffee" /ti: ᴵ ən kɒfi: /, "May or June" /meI ᴵ ɔ: dʒu:n /.

2.Type 2: linking / w/

This type of linking occurs when the final sound of the first word is a high back vowel, either /ʊ and u: /, or a diphthong ending in a high back vowel, namely /əʊ and aʊ /.

For example, "two islands" /tu: ʷ alləndz/, "go in"/gəʊ ʷ In /.

3.Type 3: linking / r/

Linking / r/ is used in non-rhotic accents (like RP English) when a word ends in a vowel and it is originally spelt with final "r", that "r" is pronounced when the next word begins with a vowel, e.g. "four eggs" / fɔ:r egz/, or else it is not pronounced in other occasions, e.g. "four pens" /fɔ: penz/. Sometimes linking / r/ is used by native speakers even when there is no justification from the spelling. This type of linking r is distinctively termed ' intrusive / r/' (see Roach, 2009: 115). It is restrictively used when the first word ends in central and open vowels, e.g. "Africa and Asia" /æfrɪkə ʳ ən eɪʒə/.

A syllable in Arabic is never initiated with a vowel and if no other consonant is

found preceding the vowel, the glottal stop /ʔ / will occur (see Nasr, 1967:40; and Al- Ani, 1970:75; see also Abdul-Sattar, 1989 for Iraqi Arabic). But, a vowel may come at the end of words or syllables in Arabic. In accordance to this, sequences of vowels are not found in word medial position or across word boundaries in Arabic (see Anis, 2007: 150-8 for word structure in Arabic). Therefore, transition between adjacent vowels, especially across word boundaries, is rather difficult for Iraqi learners of English, and a glottal stop is mostly inserted before the second vowel. This kind of pronunciation sounds foreign to native speakers of English because it sounds like producing a short pause between the two words. Part of having fluency in speaking English is to achieve easier transition between words, especially ones ending in vowels being followed by others beginning with vowels(4).

Among the means available to native speakers are linking sounds such as the glides / j and /w/ in addition to /r/.

A simplified set of rules can be constructed to help the learners use these linking words in the appropriate contexts. Thus, when a word ending in a vowel is followed by another beginning in a vowel, insert a glide between the two vowels:

- If the first word ends in a close front vowel, / ʲ/ is inserted.

- If the 1st word ends in a rounded vowel, / ʷ/ is inserted.

- If the 1st word's spelling suggests (r), /r/ is pronounced.

(4) In connected speech, words within the same phrase or sentence often blend together. Connecting groups of words together is referred to as linking. When words are properly linked, there is a smooth transition from one word to the next. This process may involve linking consonants to consonants, consonants to vowels and vowels to vowels. For details see, for example, Avery and Ehrlich, 1992: 107-9.

6.2 Sentence Stress

English has a tendency to avoid having stresses too close together in sentences (utterances). Thus, the stresses occurring on words are sometimes redistributed when these words are part of sentences. This redistribution is usually implemented by dropping some of the stresses. For example, words such as (Mary, younger, brother, wanted, fifty, chocolate peanuts) are all initially stressed when said in isolation. But when these words occur in sentence as in ('Mary's younger 'brother wanted 'fifty chocolate 'peanuts) only "Mary, brother, fifty, peanuts" are stressed, whereas the other words are left unstressed. "As a general rule, English speakers try to avoid having stresses too close together. Very often, stresses on alternate words are dropped in sentences when they would otherwise come too near one another," (Ladefoged, 2000: 98).

English words can be divided into two groups: content words and function words. Content words are those words that express independent meaning. Included in this group are: nouns, main verbs, adverbs and adjectives. Function words, on the other hand, are words that have little or no meaning in themselves, but which can express grammatical relationships.

Function words include: articles (a, an, the); prepositions (e.g. at, to, of); pronouns (e.g. he, him, she, you, them); relative pronouns (e.g. that, who, which); auxiliaries (e.g. am, was, were, do, does, etc.). Content words are usually stressed, while function words are usually unstressed, unless they are to be given special attention. (Taken from Avery, Ehrlich, and Jull, 1992: 75; 74-76). In connected speech, some care should be given to differentiating between the new and old information; emphasis should be given to the new information. This is called contrastive stress.

One of the key aspects of using sentence stress is achieving rhythm. "... English has a number of processes that act together to maintain rhythm." The activities utilized for teaching sentence stress and differentiating between content and function words will help raising the learners' awareness about weak forms which belong to the category of function words.

6.3 Weak Forms:

A group of grammatical (function) words in English have different pronunciation forms: a strong form and one or more weak forms. When words are used in isolation, viz. out of context, at least one syllable is fully stressed and has no reduction of vowel quality. In connected speech, many changes may take place, though. Thus, some small words such as " and, to, him" may be considerably altered. They will usually be completely unstressed, the vowel may be reduced to [ə] or may disappear altogether, and one or more of the consonants   may be dropped or altered. For example, "and" in its reduced form may be pronounced as [ənd] or [ən] or [n]. (see Ladefoged, 2000: 91)

Such words are said to have two different forms of pronunciation: strong form which occurs when the word is stressed and weak form which occurs when the word is in an unstressed position (see Table 2 in Appendix). All these words are grammatical words that constitute a class of about 40 words (see Roach, 2009: Chapter 12, Wright,1973: 26-39, Ladefoged, 2000: 91-3, O'connor, 1980: 92-102, Kelly, 2000:74).

Learning the use of weak forms in connected speech helps the learner avoiding unnatural pronunciation and foreign-sounding (Roach, 2009: 89). Although this statement suggests a focus on accuracy, it should be clear that meaningful communication is the chief issue. And since pronunciation plays a significant role in disclosing the meaning of the utterance, then teaching pronunciation is of enormous value.

6.4Elision/Deletion:

There is a tendency in English to delete some sounds from words under certain circumstances (Roach,2009:113-5). Native speakers of English are prone to delete sounds in the following cases: first, weak vowels in unstressed syllables, e.g., 'potato' /pəˈteɪtəʊ/: / pˈteɪtəʊ/; 'tonight' / təˈnaɪt /: / tˈnaɪt/, etc. and second, consonants in consonant sequences to simplify their pronunciation, 'acts' /ækts /: / æks /; 'sixths' /sɪksəs /: / sɪkəs /, 'blind man' /blaɪnd mæn/: /blaɪn mæn/ etc. The deleted sounds are mostly alveolar consonants in these sequences. Students should be aware of this when they listen to English spoken by native speakers.

7.Techniques Used in Teaching Pronunciation:

Different techniques have been designed/employed during the past few decades to teach pronunciation to second- and foreign-language learners[5]. Some of them are more appropriate for improving learners' skills in pronouncing sounds and sound sequences, whereas others are adopted for teaching suprasegmentals and prosodic features. In addition, some techniques are designed to improve learners' receptive skills, whereas others are aimed to improve their productive skills. Providing the learners with opportunities to listen to a model (the teacher, recorded material, etc.)

will not only help to attune the learners' minds to the aspects or material being taught but also help them recognize and be aware of the use of these in the appropriate context (Mendelson-Burns, 1992). Listening activities may be employed to aid the learner with the knowledge and to raise his/her awareness about the material (points) under focus (see Walker, 2010).

Such activities should be given prior to production. There should be a systematic and gradual movement from listening to production. During the early stages, listening activities might be employed intensively and then during the subsequent stages more production activities can be used. By using techniques that depend on different modules learners' skills will be accordingly improved (ibid).

(5) A method can be viewed as a "set of procedures, i.e., a system that spells out rather precisely how to teach a language." A technique, on the other hand, is " a classroom device or activity… " (Celce-Murcia, 1991:3)

Below is an overview to these techniques aided with discussion about their efficiency in improving learners' skills in foreign language pronunciation. (see Avery and Ehrlich, 1992: Chapter 3 for a comprehensive survey to these techniques; see also, Richards, 2006:14-21, Gilner,2010). Different techniques are/have been used or implemented to teach the segmentals, suprasegmentals and aspects of connected speech of the language.

Among the techniques that are used to teach aspects of connected speech are: pair or group activities (like dialogues and discussions), role plays, and project work. (see Table 1) (see, among others, Avery, Ehrlich and Jull (1992:73-90); Archibald (1992:221-7); Jull (1992:207-14); McNerney & Mendelsohn (1992:185-196); Richards (2006:4)).

8.Method and Suggested Techniques:

Suggesting a method for teaching English pronunciation within the communicative approach and proposing some techniques is not an easy task. One of the key reasons for this is that no one approach can be described as the best. Practice plays a crucial role in the instructional principles of a communicative approach. Practice, as viewed by some methodologists, is not a mono-level process but rather a multi-level process. Richards (2006:16), for example, specifies three types of practice:

1.Mechanical: This is a controlled type of practice through repetition and substitution drills.

2.Meaningful: It is also controlled practice through meaningful choices of items.

3.Communicative: It involves using language within a real communicative context, describing neighbourhood

Within Morley's (1991) instructional programme, practice or training takes the form of imitative, rehearsed, and extemporaneous production activities that provide for the cognitive, psychological and performative needs of the learner (see also Gilner, 2010: 95). In an earlier study, Savignon recommended that for the adult foreign language context at least 20 percent of the available class-time should be given to communicative activities. In her later works, she provides that the proportion is higher than this (see Savignon, 1987: 20).

Within the traditional approach which was common during the first half of the 20th century is an approach known as the " Structural Situational Approach" (also known as the "Situational Language teaching"). In a typical lesson according to the situational approach, a three-phase sequence known as the P-P-P cycle was often employed: presentation, practice and production (see Richards, 2006:8). The implementation of this method will be summarized below:

- Presentation: The new grammar structure is presented, often by means of a conversation or short text. The teacher explains the new structure and checks students' comprehension of it.

- Practice: Students practice using the new structure in a controlled context, through drills or substitution exercises.

- Production: Students practice using the new structure in different contexts often using their own content or information in order to develop fluency with the new pattern.

One of the important issues in adopting the three-phase sequence is the balance of time spent at each phase. Enough time should be given to presentation to ensure that the learners understand the new grammar structure or pronunciation skill before starting the practice. The P-P-P method (lesson structure) has been widely used in language teaching materials and continues to be used today in a modified form (see Richards, 2006: 7).

Apart from the tradition used in applying this method during the 1960s and the criticism and reservation suggested, the sequence of phases used in teaching language, i.e. the p-p-p cycle, can still be used effectively in teaching pronunciation using the appropriate and well-designed syllabus and materials. (see Table 1)

Table 1: Techniques Employed for Classroom Activities in the Light of the Three-phase Sequence:

Phases	Techniques	Class- Centring	Techniques Modules
1. Presentation Phase (Mechanical Practice)	1. Modeling 2. Imitation / Shadowing 3. Listening Activities 4. Reading Activities	Teacher- centered	Less production / More listening / Reading & Writing
2. Practice Phase (Meaningful Practice)	1. Telegrams Activity 2. Information-gathering activities 3. Dialogues and Role plays 4. Games	(Decline in Teacher -centered classroom)	More production
3. Production Phase (Communicative Practice)	1. Drama Techniques 2. Free Discussion	Learner-centered	Production

There are various approaches to syllabus design, notional, functional, and communicative. The functional approach is based on teaching language functions, e.g., requesting, introducing someone, etc., whereas the notional approach is based on teaching language through teaching sets of notions, e.g., history, religion, finance, etc. Savignon (1987) comments on syllabus design by stating: "Most important for classroom teachers to understand, however, is that regardless of whether it is structurally or functionally based, a syllabus is no more than a list, a taxonomy of features to be presented. It describes the desired outcome of a second-language curriculum but says little about how that outcome is best attained."(p. 19) No one approach or syllabus can be described as the best, but all methodologists and teachers agree that a combination of one or more methodology and approach in teaching and syllabus designed helps attaining better results.

Most of the instruction used in the pronunciation classroom, in our case, inclines to be mechanical practice; no serious attempts are made to move forward (beyond this). During the first phase of practice, mechanical practice, audio-visual aids like recorded episodes of conversation, poetry, etc. and diagrams, figures, etc. can be used to help learners conceptualize the items and feature under instruction (see Gilner, 2010: 99-100). Material used can be constructed by the teacher or can be taken from phonetics and phonology textbooks.

A list of the techniques that can be employed by the teacher in the pronunciation classroom are given below, classified according to the type of practice given to the students. (see, for example, Archibald, 1992; Gilner, 2010; Jull, 1992; McNerney, and Mendelsohn,1992; Richards, 2006).

8.1Mechanical Practice

1.Modeling:

The teacher/ instructor can produce sentences or sequences of sentences in the form of a short story or conversation, or he/she can depend on a recorded material that contains the targeted features.

2.Imitation/ Shadowing:

The students may imitate/ shadow the teacher individually or chorally. This imitation and repetition will help the students in training their articulatory mechanism in producing these aspects. Shadow practice or shadow play, is described as a repetitive action mimicking a specific skill used in a particular sport.

3.Rules and Visual /Physical aids:

At this elementary stage the teacher may provide a set of rules in a simplified language that give the students clues about the appropriate usage and forms of these aspects, e.g., for the usage of sentence stress the following rule can be given: Sentence stress or emphasis is given to content words such as nouns, verbs, etc. but not to function words such as pronouns, prepositions, etc., as in ('Bill 'gave a 'big 'box to the 'porter.) Moreover, the activities can combine visual cues with kinesthetic cues to help students internalize sentence stress and linking, like exaggeration, tapping, waving, etc.

Visual aids such as diagrams, scales, tables, phonetic symbols, marks can be used to aid the learner conceptualizing the points under instruction. For example, to show sentence stress, content words can be marked by a small vertical line before each word, by a dark heavy dot above each, or by underlining these words:

- 'Bill 'gave a 'big 'box to the 'porter.

   ●   ●   ●   ●   ●

-   Bill gave a big box to the porter
-   Bill gave a big box to the porter

4.Listening Activities:

  a. Identification

- Students can listen to recorded speech, short conversation or the like and are instructed to identify function words, contrastive stress, weak forms, etc. in the bit of speech they listened to. Students can also depend on a table (formerly prepared by the

teacher) that summarizes the various forms of weak forms (see Table 2 in Appendix).

- The teacher may dictate pairs of similar sentences and have the students identify which sentence is being read on a worksheet. This activity can be used to train students on the use of contrastive stress. A follow up activity can be to show (give) the difference in meaning between the sentences of the pairs. The same technique can be used to train students identifying instances of elision and linking.

   b. Gap Fill:

- The teacher can prepare a list, a work sheet, of sentences with blanks for function words/weak form words. He/ she reads these sentences aloud and asks the students to supply the missing words. Below are some examples that illustrate this:

Prepositions:

1. Come (for) tea (at) four.
2. Bill flies (to) London (in) July.
   Articles:
1. (The) bus was late.
2. He wants (an) apple.
   Pronouns:
1. Give (him) two brown sweaters.
2. That's (our) car.
   Modal Auxiliary verbs:
      1.John (can) talk to you now.
      2.He (should) be here by now.

   5.*Reading Aloud Activities:*

Short texts, episodes from articles in newspapers and magazines can be used in this activity. The purpose is to train students produce the features and phonological processes aimed at in a context.

6.*Telegrams Activity:*

Students can attempt to practice the difference between content and function words and the stress patterns associated with them by completing a task where they have to send a telegram using details

given to them by the teacher. To illustrate the application of this activity an example taken from Mendelson Burns (1992:202) is used:

To: Your friend in San Francisco.

Message: My aunt will arrive on Sunday at 4:00 from Tokyo. Please meet her at the airport in Customs and translate for her

The students, working in pairs, attempt to create the shortest telegram, while still preserving the meaning of the message. These attempts can be written on the board, with a discussion of the relative merits of each pair's response. The students should come up with: *Aunt Arrive Sunday 4:00 Tokyo. Meet Airport Customs Translate.* The teacher can then read the entire (original) message aloud and have the students listen attentively. The students can be asked to focus on the difference between the words they omitted from the message and the words they left in the telegram.

8.2 Meaningful Practice

1- Dialogues and Role plays: These are activities in which students are assigned roles and they improvise a scene or exchange based on given information or clues.

Students create their own dialogues or use ones provided by the instructor. For example, a group of students carry out a role play in which they have to adopt specified roles and personalities provided for them on cue cards. These roles involve the drivers, witnesses, and the police as a collision between two cars. The language is entirely improvised by the students, though they are heavily constrained by the specified situation and characters. (Richards, 2006: 15)

2- Information-gathering activities: These involve student-conducted surveys, interviews, and searches in which students are required to collect information (Richards, 2006:19). Thus a pair of students may be assigned an activity to carry out an interview with some famous social figure and they have to improvise a list of questions and points they intend to raise or ask the guest about. The guest can be chosen from the group or can be invited by the students to play the role. For example, the students may be instructed to make an interview with a famous musician.

The list of questions prepared by the students will more or less contain weak forms, instances of elision and linking, in addition to sentence stress. This exercise or activity will show the students' usage of these aspects. Among the questions that can be listed are:

1- When did you start your career? At what age?

2- Who was the first to discover your talent?

3-Have you ever attended any academic courses?

4-Who was your ideal? What kind of music do you like most?

The responses that are supposed to be given will contain these aspects too:

1-I started at age four.

2-My father was the first to discover this.

3-No, I haven't?

4-All kinds of music, but especially classic music.

This activity may also be employed to enhance students' communicative practice since it basically depends on the language material improvised by the students according to the situation they are going through.

8.3 Communicative Practice

1.Drama-technique activities: In teaching students to communicate in a second language, drama act as a bridge between the classroom and the world. Although the usage of this technique has been restricted to conversation classes, Archibald (1992) maintains that drama techniques have a place in the pronunciation class as well. These techniques help developing the learners' talking skills through communicative activities. Among the skills that can be developed through using these techniques are learners' articulation, controlling the pitch, rate and volume of their voices, in addition to, increasing their self-confidence. Practicing any episode theatrically will raise students' consciousness about sentence stress, contrastive stress, weak forms, intonation, etc.

2-Free discussion: This activity can also be employed by the pronunciation teacher through suggesting some topics and assign the students to prepare for a free discussion on that topic, e.g. globalization, action/romance movies, fashion, etc., or any topic the students themselves choose to talk about.

The techniques listed above can be modified by the teacher to ensure that their application is achieving its set objectives. A word of note is worth giving here is that any bit of language practiced will contain, all or some of, the aspects of speech exposed in this study.

9.Conclusions

In what preceded, a method and a set of techniques have been suggested to teach some aspects of connected speech to help improving Iraqi learners' fluency in speaking English. The study focused on teaching sentence stress, weak forms, elision, and linking. The method and techniques suggested formerly can be employed to teach other aspects of connected speech and all suprasegmentals. The efficiency of this method can be assessed by having it applied in authentic pronunciation classroom.By using a communicative approach the classroom can be turned into a workshop in which the learner is busy using all the available resources he/she has to start and maintain communicating with the other partners (learners). Conversation class time can provide an extra source of practice (communicative practice) for employing features and aspects studied earlier in their language exchange with other students. Mechanical practice at the elementary stage, with well-planned listening and production exercises, is not only useful for moulding new pronunciation habits in the learners but it also helps increasing their awareness of these aspects and attune their ears to native pronunciation. Meaningful and communicative practice, which work on improving language usage skills of the learners,
can be carried out within conversation classes based on a prior coordination between the pronunciation and conversation teachers.

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Appendix
Table 2: A List of Weak Form Words and their Positional Variants (Taken from Kelly, 2000:74 with some modification).

Grammatical Category	Word	Full Form	Weak form	Example of weak form
	am	æm	m	That's what I am trying to say.
Auxiliary	are	ɑː	ə	Where are you from?

Verbs	is	Iz	əz/z/s	Where's he from?/ Where is he from?
	was	wɒz	wəz	That's where he was born.
	were	wɜ:	wə	That's where my children were born.
	do	du:	də	Where do you live?
	does	dʌz	dəz	Where does he live?
	have	hæv	əv/v	He will have left by now./ They've
	has	hæz	həz/əz/z/s	The baby has swallowed a stone./ He's
	had	hæd	həd/əd/d	He had already gone./ He'd already
	can	kæn	kən	I am not sure if I can lend it to you.
	could	kʊd	kəd	Well, what could I say?
	would	wʊd	wəd/əd	Well, what would you have done?
	should	ʃʊd	ʃəd/ ʃd	Well, what should I have said?
Personal pronouns	you	ju:	jə	How do you do?
	your	jɔ:	jə/jər	What does your boss think?
	he	hi:	hI/ I	Where does he work?
	him	hIm	Im	I'll give it to him later.
	she	ʃi:	ʃI	She's leaving tomorrow.
	her	hɜ:	hə/ə	I'll give it to her later.
	us	ʌs	əs	They'll give it to us later.
	them	ðem	ðəm	I'll give it to them later.
Prepositions	to	tu:	tə / tʊ	He's already gone to work.
	at	æt	ət	He's at work, I think.
	of	ɒv	əv	That's the last of the bread.
	for	fɔ:	fə	He's away for two weeks.
	from	frɒm	frəm	She comes from Scotland.
Conjunctions	and	ænd	ənd	She's tall and fair.
	but	bʌt	bət	She's here, but Juan isn't.
	than	ðæn	ðən	She's older than you.
Articles	a	eI	ə	He's a doctor.
	an	æn	ən	She's an architect.
	the	ði:	ðə/ðI	She's the person I told you about.
Miscellaneous	some	sʌm	səm	There's some tea in the pot.
	there	ðeə	ðə(r)	There should be a rule.
	as	æz	əz	As much as possible.

Table 3: A Model Exercise for the Three- Stage Practice on Using Sentence Stress*. (Based on Richards'(2006:17) exercise for a grammar lesson.)

I. Mechanical Practice

Sentence stress:

1. In any utterance content words take primary stress but function words do not.
    - My 'friend 'Bob is a 'funny 'person.
    - Their 'neighbour 'saved a 'child from a 'burning 'flat.
    - She is 'working at her com'puter.
    - Did you 'go to the 'movies?

2. Function words are pronounced in a reduced form.
    - They have hunted a big duck. **They / v/ hunted /ə /big duck.**
    - She was looking for a flat to rent. She /wəz/ looking /fər ə/ flat /tə/ rent.
    - There is a bird on the fence. **There is /ə/ bird on /ðə/ fence.**

3. Contrastive stress is used with the new information.
    - Where is 'Jack? Jack is at 'home. ("Jack" in the 1st sentence takes primary stress but in the 2nd sentence it does not.)
    - The 'basket was 'full of 'things to 'eat. In the basket there is some 'bread, 'apples, 'bars of 'chocolate, 'bottles of 'juice. ("basket" is repeated in the 2nd sentence so it is not stressed.)

II. Meaningful Practice

Pair work: Suppose that your friend is fond of tourism. Ask him/her about his/her last journey. (Use the questions in the cue card):

    - Where did you go last summer?
    - Were you alone or with someone? Your family, friends, relatives?
    - How many days did you spend there?
    - Did you visit any interesting places there?
    - What famous places did you visit?

(These and other questions that can be improvised by the learners themselves can be used to practice sentence stress in a situation that simulates what can happen in real life. The students can then exchange roles.)

III. Communicative Practice

Group Work: Discuss with your friends places where tourists like to go when they (or you) visit a country, e.g., theaters, zoo, museums, galleries, cafes and restaurants, etc.

*If students read and practice aloud the sentences (utterances) in I, this constitutes mechanical practice. Exercise given in II can be regarded as meaningful practice since students now answer the questions using their own language and their information. The exercise given in III is an example of communicative practice since it is a free discussion on a certain topic that depicts what may happen in real life.

تطوير الطلاقة في تلفظ الطلبة العراقيين المتعلمين للغة الانكليزية: طريقة وتقنيات

الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى اقتراح طريقة ومجموعة من التقنيات يمكن توظيفها في دروس التلفظ لتدريب الطلبة العراقيين المتعلمين للغة الانكليزية على تعلم استخدام عدد من مظاهر الكلام المتصل مثل: نبر الجملة والاشكال الضعيفة من الكلمات الوظيفية والربط والحذف والتي تساعد الطالب المتعلم على تحقيق الطلاقة في كلامه. وتقوم الدراسة على استخدام المنهج التواصلي في تدريس هذه المظاهر والذي يتمثل بالخصائص التالية: الالتزام بمحورية الطالب في الدرس وتشجيع العمل الثنائي والجماعي بين الطلبة و توظيف التمرين والممارسة باستخدام فعاليات ووظائف منهجة. تتضمن الطريقة المقترحة العمل على ثلاث مراحل من التمرين: الميكانيكي وذو المعنى والتواصلي. التمرين الميكانيكي هو عبارة عن تمرين يتحكم به المدرس ويعتمد على فعاليات الاعادة والاستعاضة والتمرين الآخر. ذو المعنى، هو ايضا تمرين يتحكم به المدرس ولكن بدرجة اقل من سابقه والتمرين التواصلي والذي يكون بالاستخدام التلقائي والعفوي للغة من خلال مواقف تكلمي ما يحدث في الحياة اليومية. تنقسم التقنيات المستخدمة الى ثلاث مجاميع، تتوافق كل مجموعة مع نوع التمرين المستخدم.

مجلة جامعة كركوك
الدراسات الإنسانية

مجـلة علمية محكمة
تصـدر عـن جـامعـة كركـوك
كركوك / العراق

المجلد ١٢   العدد ٢   السنة ٢٠١٧

گۆڤاری زانکۆی کەرکوك

بۆ تویژینەوە مرۆڤایەتییەکان

گۆڤاریکی زانستی تۆکمەیە
لە لایەن زانکۆی کەرکوکەوە دەردەچیت
کەرکوك / عیراق

بەرگی 12   ژماره 2   ساڵی 2017

هيئة تحرير المجلة

الهيئة الاستشارية

تعليمات النشر

• تهدف المجلة إلى نشر البحوث العلمية الرصينة ذات المستوى المتميز والتي لم يسبق نشـرها فـي مختلف حقول المعرفة.

• يقدم الباحث ثلاث نسخ من بحثه على ورق A4 إضافة إلى قرص (CD) .

• يجب ان لا يزيد عـــدد صفحات البحـث عن (٢٥) عشرين صفحـة وإذا زادت تستقطع من الباحث مبلغ قدره ألف دينار عن كل صفحة

• يتوسط عنوان البحث الصفحة الأولى , ويكون اسم الباحث على الجهة اليسرى العليـا من الصفحة الأولى للبحث , و إذا كان البحث لشخصين يكتب الاسم الثاني على الجهة اليمنى العليا مع كتابة اللقب العلمي و الجامعة والكلية .

• يتوجب تقديم خلاصة باللغة العربية والإنكليزية لكل بحث و بحدود (١٥٠_٢٠٠) كلمة يوضــح فيهـا الهدف من البحث والنتائج و التوصيات .

• يكون طبع الصور والمخططات و الجداول بأوراق منفصلة وتعطى أرقام منفصلة يشار إليهـا ويحـدد موقعها في متن البحث .

- المنهجية العلمية المتبعة

أ – التقيم : يرسل الى مقيمين اثنين احدهما داخل الجامعة والآخر خارج الجامعة وبسرية تامة وضمن الاختصاص .

ب – النشر : تنشر البحوث حسب الاقدمية وبما يوازن بين الاختصاصات .

*التخصصات العلمية ، ان المجلة باسم مجلة جامعة كركوك للدراسات الانسانية لذلك تنشر فقط البحـوث الانسانية .

- اللغة المعتمدة : اللغة العربية هي اللغة المعتمدة في المجلة واللغات الاخـرى مثـل الانكليزيـة والكوردية والتركية وحسب الاختصاص .
- تكتب المصادر والهوامش في نهاية البحث وحسب ترتيب الحروف الالفبائية العربية

- الحقوق القانونية والعلمية للباحثين
- ١- ينشر البحث باسم الباحث ويزود بمستل من البحث .
- ٢- للباحث الحق في تقديم بحوثه للترقية العلمية او الاشارة اليها في بحوث اخرى

- المدة الزمنية بين تقديم البحث وقبول البحث للنشر
- ١- ثلاثة اشهر اذا كانت نتيجة التقييم للمقيمين ايجابية او سلبية كلاهما .
- ٢- في حالة تأخر الاجابة تمدد شهر واحد للتأكيد .
- ٣- في حالة رفض اعتذار احد المقيمن تمدد المدة الى ستة اشهر .

- اجور النشر
- ١- حامل لقب استاذ (١٠٠,٠٠٠) مائة الف دينار
- ٢- حامل لقب استاذ مساعد (٧٥,٠٠٠) خمسة وسبعون الف دينار
- ٣- حامل لقب المدرس فما دون (٦٠,٠٠٠) ستون الف دينار

المحتويات