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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Theoretical foundations, selection of content and methodological principles

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Abstract. The article examines the theoretical foundations of teaching English pronunciation within the framework of English language teaching methodology. It defines pronunciation as an integrated skill consisting of hearing (acoustic), uttering (motor) and meaning (semantic) components, and discusses the concept of approximation as the realistic target of pronunciation teaching in secondary and tertiary education. Special attention is paid to the criteria for selecting the pronunciation minimum, the typology of phonetic material, the imitative and analytical methods of presenting new sounds, and the main principles of forming pronunciation skills.

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Introduction. Pronunciation occupies a special place among the components of language material, because it is the physical form in which vocabulary and grammar become audible and, therefore, communicatively effective. A learner who knows thousands of words and complex grammatical structures but cannot make them intelligible in speech is unable to take part in real communication. For this reason, the formation of phonological competence, that is, of pronunciation and intonation subskills, is regarded as one of the central aims of English language teaching at school, academic lyceum, college and university (Jalolov, Makhkamova & Ashurov, 2014).

Despite its importance, pronunciation has for a long time been treated as a secondary matter in many classrooms, and teachers often feel uncertain about what to teach, in what order and by which methods (Kenworthy, 1987; Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin, 2010). In addition, the rise of communicative approaches has shifted attention to fluency and meaning, sometimes at the expense of systematic work on sounds, stress, rhythm and intonation. The aim of this article is therefore to systematise the main methodological ideas concerning the teaching of pronunciation: its essence, the selection and distribution of phonetic material, and the ways and principles of developing pronunciation skills. The article is based on the analytical-descriptive method, comparison of theoretical sources, and the generalisation of methodological experience.

The essence of teaching pronunciation. According to Jalolov et al. (2014), pronunciation consists of three interrelated parts: hearing (acoustic), uttering (motor) and meaning (semantic). Each of these parts has its own characteristics in every language, and a learner must master all three in order to use sounds communicatively. This view is consistent with the position that perception and production are inseparable: oral utterance is constantly controlled by the hearing analyser, and an inaccurately perceived sound is very likely to be produced inaccurately (Underhill, 1994).

The components of phonological competence include individual sounds, word and sentence stress, rhythm, rhyme and intonation. The authors distinguish *pronunciation skills*, defined as habits of phonetically correct pronunciation and recognition of the studied sounds in the speech of others, from *rhythmical-intonation skills*, defined as habits of producing and understanding speech that is correct in terms of intonation and rhythm. In its syntactic function, intonation distinguishes the communicative types of sentences; in its emotional function, it conveys the speaker's attitude to the interlocutor; and in its separating function, it helps to distinguish essential information from insignificant information.

A key question in the methodology is whether perfect, native-like pronunciation is a realistic goal. Methodologists answer that, in the conditions of institutional education, learners acquire an *approximated* foreign pronunciation. The idea of approximation means that the volume of phonetic material can be limited and that the quality of some sounds may be lower than that of native speakers. At the same time, approximation is not unlimited. Where a sound performs a phonemic function, that is, where its distortion changes meaning, the highest possible degree of accuracy must be sought. For English, the most important cases are the opposition of long and short vowels (*sheep – ship*) and the opposition of voiced and voiceless consonants, especially in the final position (*eyes – ice*, *back – bag*). By contrast, some slight deviations in the articulation of sounds such as /t/, /d/, /l/, /n/, /θ/ and /r/ are admissible, since they do not usually disrupt communication (Jalolov et al., 2014). This pragmatic orientation corresponds to the modern emphasis on intelligibility rather than accent elimination as the main goal of pronunciation teaching (Jenkins, 2000; Derwing & Munro, 2015).

The English pronunciation norm taught at school is Received Pronunciation (RP). The general regularities that learners must observe include the absence of palatalisation of consonants, the absence of devoicing of voiced consonants in the final position or before voiceless consonants, the careful observation of vowel length, and the placement of two stresses in long words.

The coursebook also addresses the timing of pronunciation instruction. Since pronunciation skill develops together with other speech skills, it is not logical to attach it to a particular grade or stage. A general order is recommended instead: almost all sounds are introduced at the initial stage; new sound combinations, stress and intonation are studied at the middle stage; and all pronunciation cases are developed further at the middle and higher stages. Throughout this process, listening to vocabulary and grammar material continuously supports the development of pronunciation skill.

Selection and distribution of pronunciation material. The pronunciation minimum is selected on the basis of the vocabulary and grammar minima and consists of the sounds, sound combinations, phonetic

cases and intonation patterns that learners must master. Jalolov et al. (2014) formulate four criteria for its selection:

Relevance to the needs of communication. The minimum includes all phonemes and intonemes that differentiate meaning, but not all of their positional variants. For secondary school, four basic intonation patterns corresponding to statements, imperatives, questions and exclamations are sufficient.

Appropriate style. The basis is the full, literary or academic style of pronunciation. Although it may seem more artificial, it is more suitable for educational purposes than the colloquial style, and forms such as *gimme*, *wanna* or *ain't gonna* are therefore excluded from active teaching.

Normativity. Dialectal pronunciation must not enter the minimum; learners follow the literary standard.

Prevalence. The phonetic units that are most frequently used in speech are included first.

An important distinction is made between active and passive minima. The active minimum, which learners use in speaking, admits approximation and works with a limited range of phonetic material, whereas in the passive minimum, which is needed for listening, learners may meet variants of English phonemes and must be able to recognise them. Unlike vocabulary and grammar, however, active and passive pronunciation units are not acquired one after another but simultaneously, because inner speech accompanies listening and outer speech accompanies utterance. The distribution of phonetic material follows two criteria, speech orientation and the distribution of difficulties, and it is predetermined by the lexical and grammatical distribution adopted in the textbook.

The methodological typology of phonetic material is intended to help the teacher choose rational techniques. Two approaches are described. In the first, all units of the minimum are divided into easy and difficult ones. In the second, only the difficult units, which form the *content of teaching pronunciation* (CTP), are classified, and they are divided into four groups: difficulties of articulation, of opposition, of position and of acoustics. Easy units, which learners acquire without special effort, are not practised through separate exercises. This principle saves time and concentrates the teacher's and the students' efforts on genuine problems. For Uzbek-speaking learners, such problems typically include diphthongs, which are foreign to their native phonetic system, the length contrast in vowels, and the voiced–voiceless contrast in word-final consonants (Jalolov et al., 2014).

Ways and principles of developing pronunciation skills. The smallest methodological notion is the *unit of pronunciation*, which covers a sound, a sound combination, a phonetic case and intonation. A *phonetic case* describes the position of a sound in a word or syllable, for example a voiced consonant at the end of a word, or the opposition of sounds, for example long versus short vowels. The widest notion is the *phonetic system*, which includes the phonetic systems of the mother tongue and of the second and foreign languages that the learner knows.

New pronunciation material is normally presented by the teacher's utterance of a phonetic unit and the learners' listening. Two ways of presentation are distinguished. The **imitative method** is natural and simple, but it relies on unconscious acquisition: the teacher must provide accurate models, and the learners need a sharp ear. It can be used independently when the learners' existing skills have a positive influence on the new sound. The **analytical method**, on the contrary, involves conscious work; learners understand how a sound is formed (the position of the tongue, lips and jaw, the role of the vocal cords), compare it with similar sounds and then reproduce it. This method develops logical thinking and is always accompanied by imitation. In practice, therefore, the two methods complement each other rather than compete (Kenworthy, 1987; Celce-Murcia et al., 2010).

Phonetic exercises are the main tool for turning knowledge into a skill. An exercise is a mental action directed at repetition, acquisition and improvement of ways of doing something. Typical exercises include listening discrimination of minimal pairs, repetition after the teacher or a recording, reading aloud, chants and rhymes, intonation drills with dialogues, and communicative tasks in which accurate pronunciation is needed for successful understanding.

Jalolov et al. (2014) formulate six principles for the teaching of pronunciation:

Use of comparative analysis of the phonetic systems of English and the learners' native language(s). The stable pronunciation habits of the native language often interfere with the acquisition of new

units, and comparison reveals similarities and differences. This corresponds to the contrastive tradition in applied linguistics (Lado, 1957).

Simultaneous formation of speech action and auditory images. Hearing and speech action form an inseparable unit.

Use of rational methods. Since only a limited number of units require the analytical approach, imitation is usually recommended as the main method.

Consideration of the specific features of the foreign language. The teacher must know both the learners' language experience and the phonetic norms of English.

Wide use of technical means. Learners should hear not only the live speech of the teacher but also recordings and the speech of other speakers.

Differentiated presentation. Depending on difficulty, a unit is presented in a sentence, in a word or in isolation.

The fifth principle has gained special importance in the digital age. Audio and video materials, speech-recognition applications and online dictionaries with audio models allow learners to practise independently, to compare their own speech with authentic models and to receive immediate feedback. According to the coursebook, audio and video means help students to perceive intonation and pronunciation more easily, and watching films or documentaries gives them the chance to hear native speakers (Jalolov et al., 2014). Technology, however, supplements and does not replace the teacher, who remains responsible for diagnosing difficulties and for motivating learners.

Discussion and practical recommendations. The analysis shows that the Uzbek methodological approach to teaching pronunciation is consistent with the main international ideas: the priority of intelligibility, the integration of perception and production, the contrastive analysis of languages, and the combination of imitation with conscious analysis. Several recommendations for classroom practice follow from this.

First, teachers should plan pronunciation work systematically, selecting from the pronunciation minimum those units that really cause difficulty, instead of drilling everything equally. Second, priority should be given to features that affect meaning, namely vowel length, final voicing, word stress and the basic intonation patterns. Third, pronunciation should be integrated into lessons on vocabulary, grammar, listening and speaking, since the skills are acquired together. Fourth, short, regular practice is more effective than occasional long drills. Fifth, feedback should be positive and focused: instead of correcting every mistake, the teacher should concentrate on errors that hinder understanding. Finally, teachers should use audio-visual and digital resources to provide learners with varied models of speech, while serving as accurate models themselves.

Conclusion. Teaching pronunciation is a complex methodological task because pronunciation is a unity of hearing, motor and semantic components that is closely connected with vocabulary and grammar. The realistic goal of instruction in an educational setting is approximated, intelligible pronunciation, with the highest accuracy required in cases where a sound distinguishes meaning. The selection of the pronunciation minimum according to the criteria of communicative need, style, normativity and prevalence, the typology of phonetic material, the balanced use of imitative and analytical methods, and the observance of the principles of comparative analysis, rational methods and the use of technical means create a scientific basis for effective teaching. Further research may focus on the empirical testing of specific sets of exercises for Uzbek-speaking learners and on the use of digital technologies in developing their phonological competence.

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