

CHALLENGES OF PRONUNCIATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract: Pronunciation plays a crucial role in effective communication, yet it remains one of the most challenging aspects for English language learners. Despite mastering grammar and vocabulary, learners often struggle with phonemes, stress patterns, rhythm, and intonation. These challenges can hinder intelligibility, fluency, and confidence. This article explores the key difficulties in pronunciation, factors contributing to these issues such as native language interference, lack of phonological awareness, and affective barriers. The study further outlines pedagogical strategies for improving pronunciation in the classroom. The paper emphasizes the importance of incorporating explicit pronunciation training into language curricula to enhance learners' oral communication skills and global intelligibility.

Keywords: pronunciation challenges, English language learners, phonology, accent, intelligibility, L1 interference, phonological awareness, fluency

Pronunciation is a fundamental component of speaking and listening skills. While grammar and vocabulary can be taught systematically, pronunciation involves the coordination of complex auditory and motor skills. In today's globalized world, intelligible English pronunciation is essential for academic, professional, and social communication. Despite its importance, pronunciation is often neglected or superficially addressed in language classrooms. Learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds encounter unique challenges depending on their native language's phonetic system.

Common Pronunciation Challenges

a. **Phonemic Difficulties:** Learners frequently struggle with unfamiliar phonemes. For instance:

- Japanese learners may find it hard to differentiate /l/ and /r/ sounds.
- Arabic speakers often struggle with /p/ and /b/.
- Uzbek learners may find the /θ/ and /ð/ sounds difficult, as in think or this.

b. **Stress, Rhythm, and Intonation:** English is a stress-timed language, while many languages are syllable-timed. This contrast leads to issues in:

- Stressing the correct syllables (e.g., 'present' as a noun vs. 'present' as a verb).
- Incorrect intonation patterns, especially in questions or expressing emotions.
- Misplaced stress can alter meaning or make speech sound unnatural.

c. Connected Speech: Natural spoken English often includes:

- Linking: go on → /gəʊ wɒn/
- Assimilation: good boy → /gʊb bɔɪ/
- Elision: next day → /nek deɪ/ These features are rarely taught explicitly, leading to listening and speaking difficulties.

d. Accent and Intelligibility: Many learners are preoccupied with achieving a “native-like” accent, which is not always necessary. The goal should be intelligibility — being understood by others — rather than accent elimination.

Causes of Pronunciation Problems

- a. First Language (L1) Interference: The influence of the learner’s native language is the most significant factor.
- b. Lack of Phonological Awareness: Many learners are unaware of how sounds are produced. This lack of awareness prevents self-correction.
- c. Insufficient Instruction: Traditional EFL courses often focus on grammar and writing while neglecting pronunciation.
- d. Affective Factors: Emotional and psychological factors like fear and anxiety can limit speaking practice.

4. Strategies for Improvement

- a. Explicit Phonetic Instruction: - Teach IPA and minimal pairs to improve sound recognition and production.
- b. Integrated Listening and Speaking Activities: - Use dictation, shadowing, and songs to enhance rhythm and fluency.
- c. Use of Technology: - Apps and speech recognition tools provide immediate feedback.
- d. Teacher Feedback and Peer Correction: - Offer regular feedback and facilitate peer correction in groups.
- e. Pronunciation Journals: - Encourage reflection and self-monitoring through pronunciation logs.

Implications for Teachers

- Pronunciation should be integrated into daily lessons.
- Teachers must be trained in phonology and effective methods.
- Activities should be communicative and engaging.

Mastering pronunciation is essential for successful communication in English. While learners face challenges from L1 interference and affective barriers, structured and engaging instruction can improve their oral skills. Teachers must provide tools, feedback, and ample practice opportunities to build learner confidence and fluency.

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