Teaching EAL learners pronunciation: challenges and strategies

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3 November 2015
Learner’s poor pronunciation often spoils the impression about his/her overall language competence;

Pronunciation has been referred to as “a crucial first level hurdle” for learners to master (Iwashita, Brown, McNamara & O’Hagan, 2008, p. 44; cited by Yates et al, 2011)
What **SHOULD** be the role of pronunciation teaching at tertiary level?

What **IS** the role pronunciation teaching at MUELC?
MEB Uni

- Intro module contains only one page dedicated to pronunciation.  
  (WB p. 116)

- In the Assessment criteria - pronunciation is assessed together with pace of speech (or fluency) and non-verbal communication.  
  (Oral presentations and Tutorial Discussions)
IELTS – an example

- IELTS examinations, for instance, assess pronunciation separately from other sub-skills of speaking;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>bands</th>
<th>Fluency and coherencc</th>
<th>Lexical resourc e</th>
<th>Grammatical range and accuracy</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Uses a full range of pron features with precision and subtlety</td>
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<td>Sustains flexible use of features throughout</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Is effortless to understand</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Uses a wide range of pronunciation features</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sustains flexible use of features with only occasional lapses</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Is easy to understand throughout; L1 accent has minimal effect on intelligibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shows all the positive features of band 6 and some, but not all, of the positive features of band 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Uses a range of pronunciation features with mixed control</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Shows some effective use of features but this is not sustained</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Can generally be understood throughout, though mispronunciation of individual words or sounds reduces clarity at times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IELTS speaking assessment criteria  https://takeielts.britishcouncil.org
TOEFL – an example

- Similarly to IELTS, TOEFL assesses pronunciation separately in the “delivery” column, which includes pace, intonation, intelligibility, rhythm and articulation (TOEFL speaking rubrics).
What is pronunciation?

- The way in which a word or letter is said, or said correctly, or the way in which the language is spoken (Cambridge Dictionaries Online).
- Includes segmental (sounds, phonemes) and prosodic/suprasegmental features (tone, nasalisation, pitch, loudness, etc.)
- Competencies L2 learners must gain to communicate with intelligible pronunciation include
  - Stress (loudness, pitch and vowel length);
  - Rhythm;
  - Linking and assimilations;
  - Sounds (vowels, consonants and consonant clusters).
  (Scarcella & Oxford, 1994)
Is pronunciation teachable / learnable?

- “In order to acquire good pronunciation skills [...] , learners must take on the social and psychological characteristics of those who speak the second language” (Guiora et. al., 1972, cited in Scarcella & Oxford, 1994, p. 224);

- “it’s impossible to improve one’s pronunciation in a second language after adolescence” (Krashen et al., 1981, Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991; cited in Scarcella & Oxford, 1994, p. 224);

- Learners who arrived into the L2 country well before the age 12 spoke with a native-like pronunciation (Oyama, 1976; cited by Scarcella & Oxford, 1994);

- “Learners are incapable of acquiring native-like pronunciation skill in a second language” (Scarcella & Oxford, 1994, p. 224).
What can we do about it?

- Early diagnostics (see self- and peer assessment sheet);
- Encourage intelligibility, not native-like pronunciation;
- Integrate pronunciation with other activities;
- Relaxation strategies (Scarcella & Oxford, 1994; Celce-Murcia et al, 1996);
- Self-monitoring (students reflect on the effectiveness of their interaction with others, including the teacher);
- Self-study (students record themselves or their peers, post their recordings on Moodle, use dictation Apps, etc.);
- Any other suggestions?
Intonation teaching ideas

- Show rising intonation for yes/no questions (auditory and visual demo);

- Show falling intonation for all other sentences;

- Use of musical score (four rows going from low to high).

- What techniques are you using?
Sentence stress teaching ideas

- Explain to students that content words are stressed, function words are unstressed;

- Students hear a sentence and underline/circle stressed words (content words);

  Eg.: *He wants to be a tour guide and to live in Rome.*

- Words get stressed to convey special meaning or to emphasise certain piece of information;

  Eg.: *Are you coming tonight? Are you coming tonight?* etc.

- Loudness can be used to indicate stress:

  Eg.: *There are so many people at Vic market today!*
Rhythm

- English is considered to be a time-stressed language where spoken sentences are broken up into beats that occur regularly and fall on content words. This can be illustrated by getting students to say:

  1-2-3-4,

then by adding a weaker sound:

  a-1-a-2-a-3-a-4
  101-102-103-104.

Alternatively, students can try saying this:

  De dum, de dum, de dum, de dum, de dum.
  ba boom, ba boom, ba boom, ba boom, ba boom.
Linking and assimilation teaching ideas

- Linking is an important part of fluency. Linking occurs when a word ends in a consonant and the following words starts with a vowel:
  
  Eg.: That’s senough!
  
  Bring gan napple and da book.
  
  Sit ton nan norange crate.

- Assimilation happens when the last sound of the word changes under the influence of the next word’s sound:

  Eg.: Goog girl!
  Goob boy!
  Sem Paul’s cathedral

Sometimes both sounds change to a make a third one:
Would you like some tea?
What students should know about the sounds of English

- Vowel reduction happens in unstressed positions, commonly reducing to the schwa- sound [ə]: *about, synthesis, harmony, medium, decimal, syringe.*
## Language differences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Mandarin/Vietnamese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uses alphabet to make up words</td>
<td>Logographic system of writing (symbols represent a concept rather than a sound)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 written vowels 15 spoken vowels</td>
<td>Only about 9 spoken sounds with hardly any distinction between long and short sounds, and hardly any diphthongs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/l/ and /r/ are separate phonemes</td>
<td>No difference between /l/ and /r/, or between /l/ and /n/ for the Southern Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex grammar</td>
<td>Simplified grammar (eg.: no copula, no auxiliary verbs, no subjunctive mood, no inflections, no verb changes in different tenses)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://esl.fis.edu/grammar/langdiff/chinese.htm
Chinese vowels
English sounds
## Language differences continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Chinese/Vietnamese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spoken words often end with a consonant sound</td>
<td>Spoken words generally end in a vowel. So the word ‘hill’ can be pronounced without the double ll or as rhyming with ‘killer’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitch is used to express emotion or a grammatical function</td>
<td>Uses pitch of a phoneme to distinguish meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definite/indefinite articles</td>
<td>No articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phrasal verbs</td>
<td>No phrasal verbs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Apps to practise pron

Google/Android

English Pronunciation

K&J Jessica Education
Unrated
English Pronunciation

KEPHAM  Education

3+

Offers in-app purchases

Install
For Apple

Sounds: The Pronunciation App FREE
By Macmillan Education
Open iTunes to buy and download apps.

Description
The ultimate mobile English pronunciation aid, for both students AND teachers. Sounds helps you study, practise and play with pronunciation wherever you are.

Macmillan Education Web Site › Sounds: The Pronunciation App FREE Support ›

What's New in Version 3.3
IOS8 compatible!
Initiative Wordlists added!

Free
Category: Education
Updated: 27 September 2015
Version: 3.3
Size: 4.6 MB
Language: English

Monash University English Language Centre
November 3, 2015  |  21
References


Common pronunciation problems of Vietnamese learners of English

Monash University
English Language Centre
- Overview of pronunciation problems of Vietnamese students
- Common mistakes and challenges
- Recommendations
Listen to the recording and discuss the following question with someone near you:

*Which aspects of pronunciation do you think the student has found difficult or what mistakes he has made in pronunciation?*
While all living things need sunlight, too much of it can be oppressive, even damaging. Any overheated dog or cat can appreciate the relief provided by a mature shade tree on a sunny day. The densest foliage, and so the densest shade, is found under the broad leaves of deciduous trees like oaks and maples. The narrower leaves of trees like willows and mimosa provide a dappled shade, which may be more beneficial to lawn and garden plants. By cooling the surrounding air, the shade from trees reduces the demand for air conditioning in nearby homes. This translates into reduced emissions of carbon dioxide from oil- or coal-fired electrical generators.
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Overview of pronunciation problems of Vietnamese students

Lack of listening in language programs
Students do not listen enough in their language courses
Strong focus on productive skills
Listening skills account for less than 10% of class time (Graceffo, 2010)
Differences between Vietnamese & English sounds

- The sound systems of Vietnamese and English have very little in common (Ha, 1999)
- Vietnamese is a rich language having three varieties while English has single uniform structure
- Sound patterns: Some exist in both languages, some do not exist in Vietnamese (th in ‘thank’, ‘that’), some exist in Vietnamese in initial but not final position (v,f in ‘beef’, ‘believe’)
- Vietnamese system is a modified Roman alphabet: Letters are the same in both languages, but the sound they represent are different
- Vietnamese is monosyllabic language: one-on-one correspondence between letter and sound
- English is multisyllabic language: one sound follows the other according to different positions of speech organs (Nation & Newton, 2009)
- Vietnamese language has no consonant clusters. Vietnamese learners find English consonant clusters real tongue twisters.
Differences in intonation patterns

- Vietnamese is a tonal language: Every word is associated with its tone of voice.
- The same combination of words produce different meanings depending on the pitch patterns:
  E.g.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hài [hook above]:</th>
<th>Sea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hài [grave accent]</td>
<td>Comedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hại [drop bellow]</td>
<td>Harm / damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hai [level tone]</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hái [acute accent]</td>
<td>Pick up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hãi [tilde]</td>
<td>Scare</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- English has intonation patterns, but they are associated with the whole sentence.
- English is stress-timed language while Vietnamese is syllable-timed language.
- While intonation and stress play major roles in English, they are of limited use in Vietnamese.
Grammar aspects

- In English final consonants convey meaning
- Many words differ only in their coda
- They play an important role in grammar: singular vs. plural form; verb tenses and aspects
- Verbs in Vietnamese do not have aspects or tenses
- Nouns in Vietnamese do not have plural and singular forms
- Vietnamese students are often not able to produce exact word final consonants that reflect grammar aspects (Honey, 2007)
Common problems: Sound omission

- Omission of final consonants:
  - /z/: rose, advise, flags, tables
  - /s/: advice, glass, rice, assess
  - /t/: right, eight, create, plate, start
  - /f/: beef, scarf, belief, tough
  - /v/: love, believe, drive, grave, Steve
  - /k/: look, book, cook
  - /ks/: six, books, lakes, cooks
  - /dʒ/: manage, orange, bridge, engage
  - /ʈʃ/: approach, entrench, teach

- Omission of medial sounds:
  - /s/: master, plaster, Easter, Eastern, peaceful, graceful
  - /ks/: mixer, vaccine, export, expectation
  - /dʒ/: virgin, pledger, origin, angel, emergence
Sound mismatch: Consonants

- Confusing /tr/ for /ʧ/ and vice versa:
  /tr/: transport, transition, hatred, try
  /ʧ/: coach, approach, punch, peach

- Confusing /ð/ for /d/ or /z/
  Weather, this, then, rather, these, them

- Confusing /θ/ for /t/ or /s/
  /θ/: both, Ruth, math, thick, thin, bath
  /t/: boat, root, mat, tick, tin, bat
  /θ/: path, faith, thought, forth, growth, thank
  /s/: pass, face, sought, force, gross, sank

- Confusing /ʃ/ for /s/ and vice versa
  /s/: muscle, person, peace, percent, mouse, rice
  /ʃ/ (initial): shower, shine, sheet, shake, shallot
  /ʃ/ (final): reddish, selfish, cash, push, punish, Spanish

- Confusing /j/ for /z/
  /j/: yes, young, yellow, yeast, jell

- Confusing /s/ for /z/
  /s/: peace, advice, rice, racing
  /z/: peas, advise, rise, raising, because, Wednesday, president
Sound mismatch: Vowels

- Confusing /ɪ/ for /iː/
  
  /iː/: need, read, leave, beat, wheel, seat, sheep
  /ɪ/: knit, rid, live, bit, will, sit, ship

- Confusing /ʊ/ for /uː/
  
  /uː/: room, tooth, food, mood, rude, wood
  /ʊ/: book, put, foot, could, would
Addition of extra sound & consonant clusters

- **Sound redundancy:**
  Adding extra /s/ or /z/ or other sounds:
  *Wednesday, island, honest, psychology, knit, salmon, asthma, debt*

- **Consonant cluster**
  /pr/: *problem, practice, present, pronounce*
  /pl/: *place, plane, please, plumber*
  /kr/: *crane, crime, cream, cross*
  /kl/: *climb, claim, cloud, clear, cluster*
  /fl/: *fly, flow, flirt, flower*
  /ks/: *lacks, takes, spikes, seeks*
  /sk/: *ask, task, risky, rascal, mask*
  /st/: *must, rusty, festival, crystal, best*
  /ts/: *mates, flights, boots, seats, hits*
Problems with grammatical ending

- **Past tense verbs**
  - May not have noticed that past tense verbs with an –ed ending are pronounced in three different ways: /t/, /d/, /ɪd/
  - Voiceless sounds /p, k, θ, f, s, ʃ, tʃ/: *Popped, walked, frothed, laughed, kissed, washed, reached*
  - Voiced sounds /b, g, ð, v, z, dʒ, m, n, ŋ, r, l/: *Bobbed, begged, breathed, loved, raised, bridged, claimed, banned, banged, cleared, rolled*
  - Sounds /t/ or /d/: *Decided, ended, wanted, voted*

- **Plural forms of nouns**
  - Three sounds of plural S: /s/, /z/, and /ɪz/
  - Voiceless sounds: *maps, weeks, bits*
  - Voiced sounds: *webs, bags, bells, jars, straws, fans, delays*
  - Add extra syllable (/ɪz/) for /tʃ/, dʒ, s, z/: *Watches, bridges, slices, blazes*
Word stress and tones

- Cannot vocalize stress by tone in English
- Cannot distinguish stressed syllables
- Problems with timing of stressed words in a sentence

Dogs chase cats
The dogs chase cats
The dogs chase the cats
The dogs will chase the cats
The dogs will be chasing the cats
Recommendations

- Focus on listening to help students recognize sounds
- Produce pronunciation models whenever introducing a new sound which students find difficult to make
- Teach intonation and rhythm
- Tackle one problem at a time
- Do not interrupt fluency practice
- Prioritize problems that cause misunderstanding
- Consider individual students’ learning goals
- Positive attitude towards mistakes
- Introduce online resources for students to practice in their own time
Specific techniques

- Refer students to the phonetic chart
- Teacher model mouth position
- Show/draw a picture or a mouth diagram
- Explain how it differs from a Vietnamese sound
- Write the word in phonetic script
- Drill the whole word
- Write the word and mark the stress
- Divide the word into syllables, drill sound by sound to build up the word
- Ask the class for words with the same stress pattern
- Clap the stress pattern with the class
- Write the intonation pattern on the board
- Explain the rising and falling tendencies of intonation in WH- and Yes/No questions, statements, and tag questions
References


