

PRONUNCIATION TEACHING AS PANACEA TO STUDENTS' ORAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

Pronunciation is the standard way in which words sound when spoken to reflect the exact tone despite one's cultural background. Pronunciation instruction is increasingly popular in language classrooms around the world most especially in second language and foreign language contexts. This study therefore examined how sounds are taught at the secondary school level. It also aimed at establishing the effect of teachers' qualifications in the teaching of pronunciation. Two public junior secondary schools (experimental and control groups) were selected from Ijebu Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State with the entire JSS 2 students as sample for the study. The study was a long term project conducted in a session (first, second and third terms) with four (4) self-designed instruments used for data collection: Moderated English Alphabet (MEA), Sounds and Letters of Alphabets Teaching (SLAT) Teacher's Instructional Guide (TIG) and Sound Model Evaluator (SME). Findings revealed that students exposed to the treatment utilised the opportunities of one task leading to another; the moderated English Alphabet providing the basic for sounds and letters of Alphabets and the Sound Model Evaluator assessing the processed sound production of each group. Since sounds play an important role in communication, it was concluded that sound teaching should be incorporated into language curriculum at both primary and secondary school levels. Since English Alphabet has no importance on pronunciation teaching, it was also suggested that Moderated English Alphabet (MEA) and Sounds and Letters of Alphabet (SLA) English Alphabet should be used in pronunciation teaching. Language teachers at different levels must attribute proper importance to teaching pronunciation in their classes. In order to achieve the goals of pronunciation teaching, area of specialisation should be strictly adhered to for subject allocation from primary to secondary school so that Language specialists would be the one to handle pronunciation teaching at all levels.

Keywords: Pronunciation Teaching, Oral Communication Competence, Panacea, Secondary Education, English Language.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Pronunciation is phonic or production of sounds. Famous phonetician O'Conner (1973) has pointed out that pronunciation was once a marker of social status and Kuwabara (1984) also stated that verbal signal is a complex acoustics activity and it conveys not only the content of

language, but also the information regarding the speaker's identity, personality and feelings. In the field of language learning and teaching there has been a prominent shift within with greater emphasis being put on learners and learning rather than on teachers and teaching over the last twenty years (Cook, 2008). In parallel to this new shift of interest, a move from specific linguistic competencies to broader communicative competencies has emerged as goals for teachers and students (Fasanmi, 2009). She emphasises on the need for the integration of pronunciation with oral communication, a change of emphasis from segmental to suprasegmentals, more emphasis on individual learner needs, meaningful task-based practices, and development of new teacher strategies for the teaching and introducing peer correction and group interaction were emphasized within the field of pronunciation teaching.

The teaching of Pronunciation is a prominent factor in language teaching. For successful oral communication to take place pronunciation teaching is required because it is an important ingredient of the communicative competence (Cousin, 2000). Iteogu (2005) also stipulates that no good mastery of language is achieved without a strong foundation in pronunciation. Iteogu (2005) further stresses that for learners and teachers, there is need to establish a sound foundation for effective mastery of the oral aspect of the language. Osikomaiya (2005) citing Faniyi (1998) establishes that pronunciation teaching deals with two interrelated skills: recognition or understanding the flow of speech and production of fluency in the spoken language. Speaking in English is considered to be slightly more difficult than general speaking for students (Yolanda, 2013). Students can be expected to do well in the pronunciation of English if the pronunciation class is taken out of isolation and becomes an 'integral part of the oral communication' class (Oshikomaiya, 2005).

A close scrutiny of oral communication objectives are desirable, adequate and relevant to the communication needs of students as second language learners since such objectives are meant to develop in the students the linguistic skills needed for effective oral communication in English. Interference phenomenon from the learners' mother tongue (L1), some other pedagogical problems and current methods of assessing students on oral communication in English are some of the problems encountered by learners. Awodele (2007) highlights the following as number of constraints inhibiting the effective implementation of oral communication in English curriculum.

Macaulay (1989) identifies students' problem areas in spoken English. First, second language learners have problems with some sounds which occur in the English language but do not occur in their own mother-tongue. She goes further to say that stress and intonation patterns also constitute areas of difficulty for the students since neither stress nor intonation pattern exists in their Nigerian languages. This corroborates Fasanmi (2000) opinion which states that stress is more overly problematic because it has a bearing on word meaning and comprehension. She adds that students constantly place stress on the wrong syllables and quite often words are produced following a specific Nigeria language stress-less pattern with variations reflecting the linguistic origin of the speaker. In addition, she maintains that students have difficulty making utterances for easy flow of communication because they lack the ability to construct the required sentence quickly. She concludes that all the identified problems stem from lack of immersion in the second language. Kolawole (2003) in support of

Fasanmi (2000) observes that the English phonemes, especially those that are not part of the learners' native language, stress and intonation patterns are difficult for speakers of a particular Nigerian language. He concludes that error of rhythm, such as the tendency to stress every syllable in a sentence is common to most Nigerian speakers of English because their mother tongues are syllables-timed.

According to Otlowski, (1998), the reversal in the thinking of pronunciation exhibits there is a consensus that a learner's pronunciation in a foreign language needs to be taught in parallel to the communicative practices for the learner to be able to communicate effectively with native speakers. The impact of the discipline of psychology can be seen in the current trends of pronunciation teaching. Since pronunciation is very sensitive to emotional factors and that its nature is strongly related to students' ego, identity and the level of self-confidence, new trends in teaching pronunciation put a strong emphasis on the affective domain of learning to counterbalance the traditional focus placed exclusively on intellectual learning. An ideal receptive state of learning come into being when a student is physically relaxed, emotionally calm and mentally alert. Research findings show that a relaxed frame of mind and a degree of confidence pave the way for a correct production of target language sounds. Hence, establishing a non-threatening student-friendly environment is amongst main concerns of modern pronunciation instruction (Aiyedun, 2003).

Some researchers, like Guirora (2006), argue that the hardest part of learning a new language is pronunciation, which can result in a "foreign [accent](#)". Totally new sounds do not always pose significant problems for second-language learners, unless they are radically outside the classes of sound in the native language. The most difficult phoneme pairs to learn are often allophones of the same phoneme, as in Japanese learning to distinguish between /l/ and /r/.

This fact is neglected by many language teachers despite that, it is evident that communication is a mutual relationship between the speaker and the hearer. This means that one must comprehend what he or she hears in the target language and must produce the sounds of the language accurately. Unless the learner has sufficient knowledge of the sound patterns of the target language, he or she can neither encode a message to anybody nor decode the message sent by another person by learning the sounds of the target language (Fraser, 2000).

In many language programmes, the teaching of pronunciation was eliminated because many studies concluded "that little relationship exists between teaching pronunciation in the classroom and attained proficiency in pronunciation; the strongest factors found to affect pronunciation (i.e. native language and motivation) seem to have little to do with classroom activities" (Suter 1976, Purcell and Suter 1980). It is pertinent to note that sounds are the major ingredients of pronunciation. Pronunciation teaching is targeted at inculcating in students the ability to produce English sounds in a comprehensible way to other speakers of the language. Pronunciation teachings allow students acquire sufficiently a high standard of articulation and intonation of English, which leads itself to international intelligibility. Students would understand and acquire for use, the pattern functions of intonation in English, develop the feeling for the aesthetic value of good pronunciation, good oral delivery or oratory and the advantages that derive from such. This study therefore examined the role of pronunciation in

language teaching, how pronunciations are taught to students in schools, how best can it be taught and who are the personnel that should teach pronunciation in public schools.

Statement of the Problem

Pronunciation is phonic and its teaching is increasingly popular in language classrooms around the world in second language and foreign language contexts. The teaching of Pronunciation incorporated three out of the four basic language skills; listening, speaking and reading. It is quite sadden therefore to see that pronunciation is not taught at the various level of Nigeria educational system. The language curriculum however laid more emphasis on graphic rather than the phonic aspect of language skill from primary to secondary schools little wonder then people find it difficult to pick words correctly during listening exercise and could not pronounce words correctly either during reading or speaking. The study therefore examined the teaching of pronunciation at junior secondary school level and trace if teachers' qualifications could be a contributory factor in language teaching.

Population

Two public secondary schools from Ijebu Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State were selected for the study with the entire JSS 2 students as its target.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Two schools selected for the study out of several public Junior Secondary Schools. These schools were involved in the study, one made use of conventional method while the other was exposed to treatment. To guide against contamination of study the entire JSS 2 students in the selected public schools participated in the study.

Instrumentation

Four (4) research instruments were developed and used for the study. These are;

SN	Instruments	Conventional group	Experimental group
1	Moderated English Alphabet (MEA)	No	Yes
2	Sounds and Letters of Alphabets Teaching (SLAT) i.	NO	YES
3	Teachers' Instructional Guide (TIG) and	Yes	Yes
4	Sound Model Evaluator (SME).	Yes	Yes

Method of Data Collection

The research was carried out within a session (first, second and third term) and students' responses were recorded on each task for analysis.

Procedure for Data Analysis

Recorded response were analysed using Sound Model Evaluator (SME). This model was assessed before and periodically in the process of the study. The designed in flexible way relates with the variables, feedback was given and outcome were compared at intervals to examine the extent of impact of the treatment (model) on the respondents. The findings revealed that students exposed to the treatment utilised the opportunities of one task leading to another; the moderated English Alphabet providing the basic for sounds and letters of Alphabets and the Sound Model Evaluator assessing the processed sound production of each group. This gave the precedent that sounds play an important role in communication, it was concluded that sound teaching should be incorporated into language curriculum especially at the Junior secondary school level where students are just naïve and ready to adapt to any situation they find themselves. Since English Alphabet has no importance on pronunciation teaching, it was also suggested that Moderated English Alphabet (MEA) and Sounds and Letters of Alphabet (SLA) English Alphabet should be used in pronunciation teaching.

Recommendations on Ways of Pronunciation Teaching and Conclusion

Language teachers at different levels must attribute proper importance to teaching pronunciation in their classes. In order to achieve the goals of pronunciation teaching, areas of specialisation should be strictly adhered to for subject allocation from primary to secondary schools so that Language specialists would be the one to handle pronunciation teaching at all levels. .

No wonder, in recent years, the idea of approaching pronunciation teaching from different modalities (auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and tactile) has become very popular within the field of foreign language teaching (Tarone, Elaine; Bigelow, Martha; and Hansen, Kit 2009). To present and practice a sound from several perspectives is just basic stuff of good pronunciation teaching. Language teachers should employ a multi-modal method in the pronunciation class; that is, every sound process must be taught as a totality: visual + auditory + kinesthetic + tactile (though not necessarily in that order). Thus, students can have the chance to strengthen their lesser modalities. For instance, any experienced pronunciation teacher knows that to produce / r / and / l / well may require all modalities be engaged and sequenced. students should hear the distinction, feel the difference, consciously focus on the movement of lips and tongue, and probably focus on the place(s) where the tongue comes into contact with the palate (hard or soft).

However, Multiple Intelligences Theory (MIT) has been the primary concern of some researchers. Such researchers have offered various pronunciation teaching techniques and activities related with each intelligence type included within the theory. For example, Thompson, Taylor and Gray (2001) present various pronunciation teaching techniques and activities so as to help students develop effective target language pronunciation: For example, for students with bodily / kinesthetic intelligence, techniques like tossing a ball, using a rubber band, knee bending / body language, balloon squealing, can be useful. Another example is that for students with visual / spatial intelligence, techniques like using wall charts, using a mirror, card games, can be used. Moreover, for students with musical / rhythmic intelligence, techniques like using a song, using kazoos and using musical notation may be utilized by the

teacher. In parallel to the emergence of autonomous language learning, many innovative pronunciation teachers have attempted to move towards autonomous pronunciation learning. Such teachers motivate their students to become autonomous learners. Fasanmi (2009) suggests that since students cannot always find the chance to ask their language teacher for help in real life contexts, they should be stimulated to come to a stage where they can make their own decisions about their own pronunciation learning. Pronunciation teaching emphasises the prominence of pronunciation as a key to gaining full communicative competence, and takes into account trendy views in pronunciation pedagogy like the impact of the discipline of psychology in pronunciation teaching. The idea of approaching pronunciation teaching from different modalities, the relationship between effective foreign language pronunciation teaching and Gardner's MI Theory, Autonomous pronunciation learning and teaching and the use of technology for the teaching of pronunciation. The study revealed that pupils encountered a lot of problems especially in the area of correspondence in their mother tongue and English. A large number of pupils in the conventional emulate their teachers. Yolanda (2013) states that Spanish learners of English encounter problems when learning pronunciation, she further states a limited amount of exposure of these learners to English outside the EFL classroom. Due to these problems, it would be reasonable to expect pronunciation to be emphasised in EFL teaching to Spanish native speakers at all levels of proficiency.

Henderson, Frost, Tergujeff, Kautzsch, and Curnick, L. (2012, 2013) took into account EFL teachers' views in seven European countries, including Spain. Amongst what was discovered were lack of laboratories, inadequate exposure of both the teacher and the students, time allotted to the teaching, mode of assessment and focusing on the RP model of English for both receptive and productive work. Similarly, Nowacka (2012) carried out a survey-based study of the views of EFL university students of three European countries (Italy, Poland and Spain). According to her results, students believe it is important to have a good pronunciation and wish to sound native-like; that their pronunciation has improved after listening to authentic English, practical phonetics instruction, and imitating authentic speech as well as through contacts with native speakers (Nowacka 2012). These students studied pronunciation on their own by reading aloud, imitating authentic speech from different media, listening to and watching programmes, drilling and using material such as books, tapes and dictionaries.

Efficient ways of reducing stress related with pronunciation practice and dealing more efficiently with learners' emotions are based on the use of drama techniques. It is through drama techniques that learners become more expressive and more willing to experiment with sounds or intonation patterns. A commonly used strategy involves assuming an English or American identity and putting on a strong native accent, as if becoming a different dramatic persona (Wrembel, 2001).

Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) is another perspective frequently advocated by innovative pronunciation teachers since it deals efficiently with affective factors concerning learning pronunciation and facilitates an accurate production of target language sounds. NLP is a collection of patterns and strategies based on a series of underlying understandings of how the mind works and how people act and react. NLP's main concern is neurological

processes called states. According to NLP perspective, a desired state of mind, when learning occurs naturally, it could be induced through relaxation techniques such as breathing exercises or autogenic training (guided imagery activities), which render learners emotionally calm and mentally alert and, at the same time, help break down their ego boundaries. The NLP perspective gives much prominence to the role of interpersonal relationships between the teacher and the learner. This meta-communication rapport, linkage and authority, is believed to be especially conducive to success in pronunciation learning. The process of learning pronunciation of a second language has been demonstrated to be especially sensitive to suggestion. Sometimes referred to as educational hypnosis, suggestion is one of key priorities in NLP. It can be defined as a desire to constantly suggest internal representations that lead someone to facilitative states. Thus, the way teachers talk about acquiring good pronunciation and the messages sent consciously or subconsciously to students include significant suggestive communication patterns. NLP contributes to use language more efficiently so that through sending positive messages and suggestions of success we can generate intended responses (Wrembel, 2001).

Students can be actively involved in their own learning. If the teacher teaches the students how to transcribe words by using phonetic symbols, students become autonomous to some extent in that they may look up their monolingual dictionaries when not knowing how to pronounce a word in the target language. Awodele (2003) in his article complains the slow procedure of measuring pronunciation accuracy in comparison to different areas of language such as: grammar, reading, writing and listening comprehension; and he recommends several computerized techniques which measure pronunciation accuracy and he also mentions some advantages of these modern techniques.

In a study by Font and Black (2001), they used a dictionary of proper names and results showed that including ethnic origin words in a statistical model can improve pronunciation results. Levis (2005), describes ten different levels of proficiency in the United States: "Four of themselves (Advanced Mid, Advanced Low, Intermediate High and Novice Mid) do not mention pronunciation, while three others (Intermediate Mid and Low, Novice High) suggest that pronunciation may be important as evidence of L1 influence and thus, it appears, lower levels of proficiency. Another level, Advanced High, mentions only precise vocabulary and intonation" (Levis, 2005).

Accuracy in pronunciation does not mean to pronounce like natives, but it is a sub-category of intelligibility and we can say that it is a kind of mastery in speech production. Another significance of accuracy is in EIL (English as an International Language), that it is related to distinct and fluent pronunciation of different consonants and vowels. Van den Doel (2007), in his article explains that an efficient EIL is the one that speakers attempt to make themselves understood to non-native and even native speakers. A speech perception research by Trudgill (2005) that non-natives find it harder than natives to understand other speakers of English- especially nonnative speech containing far less of the crucial phonological information. "Native speakers are better able to use contextual information, whereas non-native speakers of English find it tougher to process another speaker merging minimal pairs.

Moreover, motivating students to use computer-assisted pronunciation teaching programs can lead to autonomous pronunciation learning and hence may contribute to the improvement of the pronunciation of the students in the target language. However, it should not be forgotten that students are semi-autonomous pronunciation learners since it is the language teacher who selects the most appropriate computer-assisted pronunciation teaching program relevant to the needs and expectations of an individual student (Hismanoglu, 2004).

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