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Lubelskie Materialy Neofilologiczne — 1987

Marek Piotrowski

Phonetic transfer in teaching English: towards individualized teaching of phonetics

Much recent discussion on the place of teaching phonetics within the framework of communicative approach to language learning is expressive of disappointment and frustration at the existing techniques and methods. The teaching of pronunciation at the university level is by no means free from this bitter feeling of certain futility of the teaching offered in classroom. There are some isolated views among the adherents to communicative approach to language teaching which stress that the aspect of meaning and not of form is of primary importance, and thus give low priority to teaching phonetics, but a considerable number of works assign the teaching of pronunciation a central role in languages' acquisition believing that it is not an optional luxury to be left to advanced level studies of the language at the university, but "should be an integral part of an English teaching programme from the early stages, just as the teaching of structures and vocabulary" (Hubbard et al. 1983:207). The actual practice, however, indicates that the first serious encounter with the pronunciation practice is usually made in the later stages of language instruction, often not sooner than at the university level, when the language learner is well past his/her optimal age for pronunciation acquisition (cf. Arzbski 1985), and his habits of pronunciation are usually well formed and difficult to change. The emphasis on the communicative aspect of second language

learning caused that many teachers overlooked the fact that meaning is often distorted by deviant pronunciation which impairs the message and hinders communication. The more advanced a second language speaker is and the more complex the context of communication, the more meaning hinges on a good standard of pronunciation.

"The pronunciation barrier should not be treated too lightly. We who come in contact with foreign students every day tend to forget that there is a great deal of prejudice among less language-wise members of our society who tend to concentrate more on the way something is said than on the actual content of the message" (Leahy, 1980:217).

The claim that pronunciation has been accorded a central role is contradicted by actual teaching practice. For many teachers teaching pronunciation has been a frustrating experience, and a common view is that the resulting phonetic patterns are a by-product of completely different spheres of the second language learner's activities, and that phonetic classes contribute little to students' pronunciation. "It is most frustrating to observe the contrast between the adult learner's evident ability to pronounce well and his failure to do so in actual practice" (Bowen, 1980:63). A more spontaneous use of the second language neutralizes the student's traits of pronunciation acquired in class, and consequently "...the minute his attention is diverted to the content of the messages, the pronunciation control loosens, and native-language influence reappears to produce a heavy speech accent" (Bowen, 1980:63).

One of the reasons (Palmer 1975, Bowen 1980) is essentially isolated character of pronunciation classes, unrelated to other elements of instruction. "In too many language classes, the approach used identifies pronunciation as something to be taught separately" (Bowen, 1980:64), whereas our effort should concentrate on finding a means of better integrating pronunciation teaching with other elements of language instruction.

"If a course is constructed so that a particular class or a teacher is restricted to one aspect of language such as grammar or

pronunciation, the teacher will be unable to use the full range of techniques at his disposal for stimulating his students. If he must spend an entire class period discussing and drilling phonology [...] he runs a tremendous risk of having the students lose interest and start reacting in a merely mechanical fashion. The skill they acquire in the pronunciation class may have little carry-over into other classes. If phonology is taught as an independent sound system rather than as an integral part of a system of communication" (Palmer, 1975:140).

Another factor which contributes negatively to this sad picture are the techniques utilized in teaching pronunciation. Despite massive attacks on drills and pattern practice, they still remain probably the only tool in teaching pronunciation.

"A classroom technique that has recently come under attack is pattern practice and various types of drills associated with it. The principal objection has been the lack of transference from the rigidly controlled patterns that constitute the core of the classroom activities to real communication situations. Another complaint has been directed at the uninteresting content and routine nature of the material thus presented" (Markwardt, 1975:43).

The belief that "learning a good pronunciation is the acquisition of the motor-perceptive skills of speech" and that "these phonetic skills can be taught in isolation" (Pit Corder, 1966:12) has subsequently led to the assumption that the mechanistic drilling without either conceptualization, or meaningful context, will automatically lead to "internalization" and extension of newly acquired skill to contexts of second language use outside classroom. Bowen (1980) makes a survey of drill practice techniques and supplementary techniques meant to improve internalization, and points out that the major tool - modal imitation technique generally fails because of a simple fact - the negative transfer from the native language, which effectively blocks internalization. In turn, what he calls "repetition technique" is not effective since "This method may help some students, but many fail to respond, either because the

explanations tend to be esoteric or because students have no effective experience in controlling speech production on the basis of "instructions" (p.64). Similarly, the "practice technique" consisting in drilling sentences with an accumulation of sounds to be practised (like tongue-twisters), and other techniques, like comparison and contrast, are totally without merit for the same reasons. As Bowen (1980) points out they all fail "because the presentation has been disembodied from a meaningful context" (p.65). Consequently, he postulates that an effort should be made to contextualize pronunciation practice in classroom. The above considerations indicate that the main source of disparity between the classroom activity and actual language use is lack of communicative context in pronunciation drills.

An attempt at contextualizing pattern practice can be found in Garner & Schutz (1975) who note that "The missing link in our English instruction is a method that will adequately bridge the gap between the drill situation in the classroom and actual communication situation outside the classroom" (p.126). Pattern practice drill is a product of mass teaching techniques developed for reasons of greater efficiency (Logan, 1973); and in its unmodified form is a dreadful anachronism within the context of contemporary second language teaching.

"Pattern drill rests on the concept of language teaching as a formation of habits, and it assumes that when these habits become automatic the student will be able to cope with a series of situations far more extensive than the sentences he has practiced. Pattern drill was in essence, an attempt to generalize, to broaden and direct the process of language learning beyond the contextually fixed limits of the mimicry-memorization dialogues that were employed so extensively in the wartime language courses. The development of transformationalist theory has undercut the rationale for pattern practice" (Marckwardt, 1975:43).

Recent attempts to restore the significance of pattern practice drills (Dobson 1975, Brown 1975), and to reconcile the new theory with the old practice (Rivers 1968) are of very limited value for teaching pronunciation, and they had to admit that

contextualized pattern practice drills can be constructed and work effectively only in initial language instruction stages and may serve the formation of primary habits. For advanced students they are wholly without merit. Cosgrave (1975) notes that "The most effective communication practice is that which is built around the people, places, and things with which the students are familiar" (p.143). While this contextualization of pattern practice can be constructed for grammar or structure pattern drills, there is no way of building this context around pronunciation drills. The above points to the basis absurdity of utilizing pattern practice for teaching pronunciation - pattern practice drills are valid only so long as they carry over a communicative load; but this communicative aspect cannot be built into the pronunciation drill.

The actual reality shows, however, that it is the phonetic drill which remains the only survivor of pattern practice technique in classroom, and which is the dominant factor in the teaching of phonetics. No wonder then that an average teacher forced to use this useless, but apparently unrivalled tool may feel entirely helpless. "There is, however, one skill to which the teacher has little to contribute. This is the skill of producing speech quickly and smoothly. If the student cannot do this, his audiences will find it tiring to listen to him. Manipulative skills such as rapid production of acceptable speech are developed through repetition. The pattern-practice drill is suitable for this sort of practice, since it is a way of eliciting large amounts of controlled vocalization with immediate confirmation and evaluation of correctness. Within the total language course, pattern-practice drills find their proper place in the student's practice outside the classroom" (Palmer, 1975:140; emphasis mine, MP).

Works in the field of language interference and language transfer (Flege 1981, Selinker 1965, Bowen 1980) have shown that there may be no significant change in the accent of students undergoing even intensive pronunciation pattern practice drilling, and there are two basic factors underlying this phenomenon. One is a mistaken belief that unconscious, uncontextualized repetition

may change the underlying structure of one's second language pronunciation (Pit Corder 1966), while it should be stressed that in contradistinction to other components of the second language learning where unconscious internalization of vocabulary and structure (through memorization, analogy, induction, etc.) may take place, the level of pronunciation is the main level at which maximum awareness and conscious effort is needed to acquire an ability to produce second language in a more native manner. The other, which is closely related to the first, is that it is often assumed that phonetics is an entity that can be taught with no reference to previous knowledge or experience, or in other words does not need to be related to any conceptual clues. "It is possible to have a good pronunciation without any corresponding ability to speak or understand a language" (Pit Corder 1966:12).

The above statement runs contrary to an observation by the same author in the same book (Pit Corder 1966:4): "It is all too easy for information to be supplied to the learner which he cannot relate to his own experience or to the knowledge he has so far acquired. He may then acquire the linguistic forms (usually lexical) without the concepts with which they should be associated, that is which give them meaning. This is called verbalism and is characterized by the learner's using language which he does not himself fully understand, in other words, it results in parrot-learning". The above, incidentally, obtains also for teaching pronunciation - pronunciation drills are futile in principle. If the critical period hypothesis is correct (cf. Flege 1981, Arabski 1985), the adult learner is no longer subject to "osmotic" learning and it seems that all his learning including phonetics must be at least partly subject to an "intellectual" stage of acquisition. Teaching experience shows that phonetic drills have little carry-over not only in the improvement of pronunciation patterns, but even in the formation of receptive skills. The improvement of the recognition of phoneme contrasts through sound recognition drills is more than often not reflected in the improvement of listening comprehension. One of the possible sources of this situation is the fact that the order of progress

assumed for phonetic practice in most teaching materials is that from the segment, through combination of segments, word, word stress, and finally down to connected speech, incorporating such features as sentence stress, rhythm and intonation. Although this progress may be logical in terms of study of the theory of phonetics, it is not in terms of teaching practice (Hubbard et al., 1983). Most of these works omit the fact that suprasegmental features and minute allophonic details are crucial for proper intelligibility in natural speech. "If other aspects of pronunciation are dealt with efficiently, then sounds do not present such a problem" (John Hayercraft, *An Introduction to English Language Teaching*, Longman, p.56). Brita Hayercraft (*The Teaching of Pronunciation*, Longman, p.4) notes that the most stimulating order is from sentence stress, basic intonation, and then help with the difficult and important sounds.

Problems with sound formation often arise because of distorted exaggerated stress patterns. The resulting [ˈɡiv / ɪt / tu / ˈhɪm] instead of [ˈɡɪvɪt hɪm] are caused by too slow unnatural rendition of speech in pronunciation drills in terms of juncture (Hubbard et al, 1983). Most of the recent manuals of phonetics, however, not only cling to the traditionally established order of progress, but still advocate and use drilling as their main tool, taking for granted that there is no other way of teaching this aspect of language.

In spite of many attacks and criticism, language laboratory still remains the main and often the only scene of pronunciation instruction. It does not only cause the loss of the personal pupil-teacher contact, which is presumably one of the conditions of successful learning (Markwardt, 1975), but it also does away with a very important aspect of the visual component of teaching (see below). In the context where drills have no significant impact on the improvement of pronunciation, and receptive skills are better developed by listening comprehension exercises, there should be no place for language laboratory, unless a different approach is taken towards teaching phonetics.

Since the teaching of phonetics is an area where two

contradictory forces must be reconciled - the communicative need as opposed to mechanical patterning of form, a reverse trend can be detected: an assumption is made that once students have learnt the theoretical foundations of phonetics, they will be able to build on their knowledge in their pronunciation. The results must again be contrary to expectations - except for highly motivated students, there have been no detectable signs of improvement in the pronunciation of students who either know the description and theory of sound production, or are able to use phonetic transcription (or both). Phonetic transcription is totally irrelevant in pronunciation, as it is not indicative of the basic facts of allophony and of the phonological rules that apply to given forms. In turn, allophonic transcription is too much of a burden on students, and its knowledge does not guarantee correct pronunciation either, by the simple truth that students speak using sounds and not graphs or letters.

Closely related to this problem is the question of motivation in students who assign low prestige to pronunciation classes, primarily on account of drilling as the main technique utilized. They find mechanistic repetition boring and unrewarding, and they cannot see how exaggerated unnatural speech is to bring about better reception and production of natural-speed utterances. Their main interest is efficient communication in the second language, which language laboratory does not offer. The context of language laboratory alienates the teacher from the students and adds to their decrease in interest. Since there are no objective measures of evaluation of the students' progress, language learners have a tendency to believe that they will get away with their level of pronunciation relying on the habits they have already acquired. So long as they feel they can communicate and be understood, they feel no need to engage in the subtleties of allophony and juncture in their speech.

"A student will not realize the importance of developing good pronunciation unless he sees how it "makes the language work" outside the context of a pronunciation drill. If he learns to be aware of phonological mistakes in others' speech at the same time

as he is concentrating on other things, such as meaning and grammar, he will be more conscious of his own pronunciation as it affects intelligibility" (Palmer, 1975:140).

Bowen (1980) gives an example of a Basque-speaking girl who went into a drugstore and asked for aspicine and was served rice pudding. She was then strongly motivated to improve her pronunciation by a context that demonstrated that she could be misunderstood. "How can we build a similar motivation into our classroom?" (p.65) One of possible reasons for lack of motivation and consequently poor effects in teaching pronunciation lies in the character of language laboratory devised for mass teaching and therefore ignoring individual needs of students. "Students have different abilities; they have different modes of learning; they have different interests in content; they need and want different emphasis on oral and written skills, reading, conversation" (Logan, 1973:2). They learn at different speed and need different pace of learning; finally they start from different positions. These differences are particularly evident in the case of teaching pronunciation, where very few of the problems are common to even the majority of the students (Henrichsen 1980). The need to break up the "lock-step" procedure, individualize the pace of instruction, methods, content and objectives; to assign different learning contracts according to individual abilities and secure continuous progress (Valette and Dick 1972, Via 1975) is particularly acute in the case of pronunciation practice, where often remedial courses have to be devised to help less successful students. Individualization and small-group work may be an ideal way of escaping the gruesome reality of language laboratory drills. Despite many objections which may be raised at this point, the institution of teacher aides is an extremely tempting solution for several reasons (after Logan, 1973):

1. Students have more chance in interacting in the foreign language, and in circumstances different than those of a student-teacher evaluation process;
2. The aides themselves have the repeated chances to reinforce previously learned skills under circumstances that they find more

3. Insecure students have student models to look up to, who are not competitors in the classroom;
4. Students reluctant to seek the teacher's assistance will more likely come up to fellow students;
5. Student-to-student tutoring is often more effective;
6. The technique is an excellent in-practice for future language teachers.

This approach of course presupposes several coexisting factors, one of them being high motivation of students, and their attitude of active and conscious participation in the project.

Another step towards improvement of teaching pronunciation is inclusion of visual clues in instruction. Pronunciation practice is a sphere which most severely suffers from lack of conceptualization. "Nihil in intellectu quod non fuit prius in sensu" (Aristotle) - nothing is found in the mind that has not first gone through the senses: the saying is applicable to learning phonetics just as it is to other aspects of learning. And although pronunciation is said to be acquired basically through the aural channel, it cannot be denied that the visual element is fundamental in forming correct concepts about the outside world. Visual means like diagrams, maps, charts, graphs or models are in many cases far more effective than language (Pit Corcoran, 1966). It has been proved that visual feedback can be useful in pronunciation and intonation learning (de Bot and Mailfert, 1982). However, the process of speech production is dynamic and cannot be adequately represented in static terms. The technique of video, with its infinite possibilities should be an ideal tool in providing visual clues for teaching pronunciation and reflecting the dynamic nature of spoken language. Learners need more visual element than native speakers - video motivates students, bringing real life into classroom, and enabling students to experience authentic language in a controlled environment (Willis, 1983b). Most language students find video tape easier to understand than audio tape. Audio-materials producers compensate for the lack of

visual clues by making the spoken message more verbally explicit than necessary or by deliberately exaggerating stress and intonation (Willis 1983a), which additionally makes audio-tapes unnatural. When the visual element is lacking, the aural channel becomes overloaded - most audio-tapes tend to use more verbally explicit language than is usual in real life. The same may be true about the materials devised for teaching pronunciation - mere sound without visual element is a very poor input to students who often switch off for lack of visual reinforcement and thus block also the perception on the aural level. This problem is quite distinct with suprasegmental features of tone, pitch, stress and rhythm, which are often impossible to perceive only through the aural channel.

The fundamental task of a pronunciation practice is to increase the awareness of the speech mechanism and the ability to control own speech production. "To communicate effectively in a second language, the speaker must be skilled in evaluating and criticizing his own speech" (Falmer 1975:138).

Contrary to the findings of Sainker (1965) on language transfer, who recognizes one interlanguage mediated between L1 and L2, and arrived at through negative or positive transfer, it seems that speakers of the second language, and advanced speakers in particular, have a continuum of phonetic interlanguages, which they are able to manipulate according to the purpose and the context of their utterances. Their ability to control their own speech is obviously subject to many limitations, like the level of control over the content of the utterance, attitude, emotion, kind of addressee, and of course strictly physical parameters like tiredness, exhaustion, length of the utterance. In this sense they have at their disposal an equalizing device (cf. Janicki 1985) with which they can at least try to keep up specific parameters of their speech as high as possible. This can be illustrated by an example of a speaker lecturing in his second language who will start his lecture in a near-native accent, or his maximally correct interlanguage, but who will gradually slip into more and more L1-like pronunciation standard, due to the limitations

mentioned above, which cause that the "controls" of his device wear out.

This phenomenon sheds more light on the processes of learning pronunciation. There seem to be primarily two processes involved in the acquisition of L2 accents:

1. an ability to produce at a certain level;
2. an ability to sustain this standard of pronunciation over a period of time.

Once the ability to produce patterns approximating the model has been acquired, the task is to train the speaker to keep the optimal interlanguage in natural discourse for a longer period of time. This can be accomplished, if we acknowledge the fact that also the native language can be represented as a continuum of interlanguages. Simple tests will prove that this is the case with many speakers - they are often unable to attain the level of a certain interlanguage in their own language. The reason is again the same - the speaker is generally unaware of the working of his speech mechanism in his language, and is frequently unable to produce native tongue-twisters or more extensive pieces of rapid speech. He needs quite a lot of instruction to attain the standards represented by TV or radio announcers, or in some cases he cannot even approximate these models. Therefore the mechanism is in both cases similar - we might then venture to say that second language pronunciation model may be treated as an extremely distant interlanguage of students' native language. From this point there is only one step to utilizing native language in foreign/second language teaching. As has been demonstrated by Marek (1983), the learner's native pronunciation habits, instead of being only a negative, destructive factor, can be employed as a background against which even the most minute allophonic peculiarities of English may be immediately picked up by his "phonological" ear, with full and acute awareness of the strangeness of the alien sound in the native environment. In this way by putting individual segments in the context of the native language utterances the learner can be made fully aware of the differences in pronunciation.

In an interesting study of the sources of foreign accent and the teaching of pronunciation Esling & Wong (1983) point out that different accents derive from different voice quality settings understood as the long-term postures of the larynx, pharynx, the tongue, velopharyngeal system and lips, and laryngeal configurations, which thus linguistically identify language, dialect, or a social group; paralinguistically identify mood and emotion; and extralinguistically individual speakers.

"Knowledge of voice quality settings of English as well as those of other languages provides a useful tool in improving pronunciation performance" (p.93). They suggest that instead of practicing segmental contrasts and search for clues in the intricacies of phonetic transcription and theory, students should be made sensitive to different voice settings both in their native as well as foreign language. "It follows that if the learner can be taught the relatively small number of higher-level features that constitute settings, then the pronunciation of the lower-level segmental features captured within the generalized setting should improve as a result" (93). Students can learn to imitate different voice settings of actors, announcers, etc., as well as target language speakers by assuming specific voice settings which serve as models of pronunciation.

In the production of speech hundreds of muscles take part, and change their configuration with great speed. This fact is not easily reflected in phonetic description of pronunciation, let alone expressed in pattern drills. If the considerations presented above are true, then foreign accent may be attributed to physical properties of speech mechanism in a particular language, and be subject to elimination through quasi-physical exercises - similar to those used by actors and TV/radio announcers, facilitating speech production, proficiency in rapid pronunciation and ability to switch to a higher phonetic interlanguage. Consequently, a typical pronunciation class may become a workshop of speakers and actors aware of their tasks and their abilities, and familiar with the material they are to shape. In this context of work similar to that in a drama group or theatre workshop, it may be that phonetic

drill may again be restored to its fully legitimate status as it now receives a new dimension in language learning.

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STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł jest krytycznym przeglądem technik i metod nauczania fonetyki języka angielskiego ze zwróceniem szczególnej uwagi na dydaktykę nauczania fonetyki studentów na poziomie zaawansowanym. Na podstawie literatury oraz własnego doświadczenia autor stwierdza, iż pomimo postępu w dziedzinie nauczania języków obcych i coraz większego wpływu podejścia kognitywnego oraz granatki transformacyjnej, techniki nauczania fonetyki pozostały jawnym anachronizmem i stanowią jaskrawy przejaw rozdźwięku pomiędzy atrakcyjną teorią a przestarzałą praktyką. W związku z tym postulowane jest nowe podejście do tego aspektu nauczania języka, wykorzystujące techniki i metody stosowane w teatrze i w nauce "drills" and "pattern practice".

Jerzy Żmudzki

Das Gelingen und Erfolgsergebnisse der Sprechhandlung  
und die sprachlich-kommunikative Norm

Die Problematik der sprachlich-kommunikativen Norm, insbesondere ihrer Wirksamkeit, wurde bislang unter vielen Aspekten untersucht. In meinem Beitrag versuche ich zu überprüfen, wie sich diese uns interessierende Erscheinung u. a. in den zwei sprachhandlungstheoretischen Kategorien, dem Gelingen und Erfolgsergebnisse einer Sprechhandlung, abbildet. Diese zwei Begriffe habe ich der Sprechhandlungstheorie von D. Wunderlich (Studien zur Sprechakttheorie" 1976) entnommen und zu einer Bezugsbasis für die spezielle Betrachtung der Norm-Erscheinung im Bereich der Sprache erhoben. Mein Anliegen geht dahin, daß ich mich erstens damit auseinandersetzen will, wie die Norm in einer Gesellschaft existiert und wie sie im allgemeinen den Vollzug von Sprechhandlungen determiniert, d. h. einerseits hinsichtlich ihrer stratischen Verwendung als Realisierungen von Tätigkeiten und andererseits als speziell beschaffene Produkte resp. Resultate von Operationen im Rahmen der Korrespondenz sprachlichen Handelns.

I. Das Verständnis des Sinns der Sprechhandlung beruht auf der ermittelten Tatsache, daß die Sprechhandlung, nach der Redeweise von Wunderlich - der Sprechakt, spezielle und unterschiedliche Veränderungen in der Menge der Interaktionsbedingungen bewirkt, die als an den Führer gerichtete Obligationen zu interpretieren sind. Ein Sprechakt ist daher nach Wunderlich dann erfolgreich (S. 58), "wenn die durch ihn eingetruhten Interaktionsbedingungen im weiteren Ablauf der Interaktion erfüllt werden." Den Begriff des Gelingens dagegen definiert er folgendermaßen (S. 58): "gelingen