

Pronunciation correction on reading activities in class

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Correção da pronúncia nas atividades de leitura em classe

Resumo: O presente artigo trata da importância que é dada à correção de pronúncia de inglês para aprendizes e as estratégias usadas pela professora.

Palavras-chave: linguagem; correção; pronúncia.

Abstract: This paper presents the importance given to correction in English classes, and the strategies used by the teacher.

Keywords: language; correction; pronunciation.

1. INTRODUCTION

My research question is: “What are the strategies used by a teacher to correct English pronunciation on reading activities, such as reading texts and reading dialogues aloud in a class of intermediate students? And how do students react to the strategies used?”

I am interested in this research for correction is something that the teacher is not trained for to use in class with the students, when they do not seem to have an “adequate” pronunciation (Parish, 1977:311). The only thing that a teacher knows is that s/he has to correct mistakes, and this is what s/he does all the time or most of the time.

Here, in my research, I could observe that correction in pronunciation was done without any specific strategy, I mean, the strategies varied between repetition (by the whole class, or only by that specific student who had read adequately), and writing in the blackboard comparing the sounds of words using phonemes, and asking students to repeat after the teacher the words given, making the distinction between the sounds.

This paper will present what seems to be really relevant in terms of correction in order to have an “adequate” pronunciation, and also present what is considered “adequate” in terms of pronunciation, taking into consideration that the teacher’s role is to correct and that the student’s one is to be corrected.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

When we talk about pronunciation correction, it is a complex and often problematic topic. It involves the teacher and the students as well: the teacher who speaks and the students who listen to the teacher.

What must be taken into consideration is that correction in pronunciation is a continual, on-going process, and not something only reserved for oral activities (Parish, 1977:312). The implication here is that an oral mistake done by the student in pronunciation must be seen by the teacher as a learning process, where the student begins to present some signal of learning (Moita Lopes, 1996: 113-121, chapter 7).

It is also important to say that for students to reach what Parish (1977) calls “adequate and decent” pronunciation, it is necessary a reasonable contact with the target language.

This reasonable contact with the new language can be reached in the process of learning.

According to Burt (1975), teachers must be aware about correcting mistakes in pronunciation. She says that if the speaker’s message was understood it is not necessary to correct him/her everytime s/he commits a mistake in the same sentence, for example. Besides that, both Burt (1975) and Valette (1973) agree that if a teacher corrects the students everytime they mistake it can cause an embarrassment and inhibit them to continue learning the language, and when correction is with adults been corrected in a classroom the problem is even worst, according to Burt (1975:62).

Valette (1973:415) says that what a teacher can take into close consideration is to evaluate the student in terms of participation and general comprehensibility. If the student

succeeded in these items, there is no necessity to consider his/her mistake something problematic. And she adds that, if a teacher gives immediate correction in pronunciation, it might inhibit student's desire to speak.

Finally, there are some aspects, according to Parish (1977), that are linked to pronunciation correction in a classroom, which involves the interaction among students themselves, and students with the teacher.

First, **tact in correction**. Since the language class is a social situation (Moita Lopes, 1996), it is important that the teacher be sensitive enough in order not to evaluate the student's intellect, but correct the student without impatience or asperity.

Second, **frequency of correction**. The teacher must have in mind that pronunciation is an integrated part of language control, and then it should not be overdone, any more than any other segment of the language.

Third, **intensity of correction**. Teacher must show the student that if s/he interchanges sounds causing misunderstanding to the whole meaning, s/he must know that it can damage his/her communication in a real-life situation.

Fourth, **sound/letter correspondence**. It is good to present to the student the elements that are reasonably consistent in their sound/letter correspondence in order to encourage him/her to learn the other elements, which are totally alike. For instance, the sound / / is usually written "a".

In summary, it is good to limit the number of correction in order not to affect the process of learning.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1. Collecting Data

I collected my data from a private Language course called CLC at UERJ, Maracanã, Rio de Janeiro.

A female teacher aged twenty-nine and fifteen students whose ages varied from seventeen to thirty-three.

The material used for this research were a tape recorder, a cassette and a notebook.

I observed five classes in sequence of the same group. The classes have one hour and fifty minutes each.

It is an ethnographic research (Moita Lopes, 1996, chapter 5). It is of communicative approach, with the four skills been teaching: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The classroom is arranged with students sitting next to the other forming a semi-circle, and the teacher standing most of the time.

This paper will present a teacher, correcting his/her students' mistake in pronunciation, which is the field of my research.

I observed the strategies used by the teacher to correct English pronunciation in reading texts and dialogues from the textbook. These reading activities are orally produced, where the teacher's role is to correct. Then, here we are going to analyse how the teacher interacts with the student(s) and how students interact among themselves.

3.2. A Brief Interview With Some Students

Firstly, I would like to say that, although I have told to the teacher that both her name and the name of the course would not appear in my paper, she did not want to comment about the way she corrects.

But, it was different with the students. I could interview two of them. I interviewed the two most participate in class. Their names won't be mentioned in the interview:

Researcher (R): What is your opinion about the way the teacher corrects you when you commit a mistake in pronunciation?

Student A (St. A): I think it is OK. I like when she corrects. I learn.

(R): But, does she correct everytime you mistake?

(St.A): Yes,... (he laughs) I mistake a lot. She says that I have British accent. I studied at (...) before studying here. Here is American accent.

(R): And you? What is your opinion about correction? Do you think that you can also learn, as your friend?

(St.B): I think so. In my opinion, the teacher does what she has to do. She corrects us when we say something wrong in pronunciation.

(R): Let me ask you two one thing: what would be your reaction if the teacher would not correct the students everytime they mistake?

(St.B): If she not correct?

(R): Yes, if she only corrects when the mistake you did affected the meaning, for example, to change "wash" for "watch", or vice-verse. Did you understand?

(St.A): Of course she must correct this.

(St.B): Yes, she must correct us when we change the sounds. But I like when she corrects. I told her about that once.

(St.A): (laugh) ... I feel ashamed sometimes, but I like when she says the word I mistake correctly and asks me to repeat. It is OK.

(R): OK. Thanks a lot. Bye!

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

I will use (T) for teacher and (St.)s for student(s).ⁱⁱⁱ

SAMPLE 1 (Extracted from the class of April 19th, 1997)

Part I:

T: OK. Now you are going to read the dialogue. There are two characters. Binho and DJ will read, OK? You can begin, please.

Binho: "... some friends from school and I **hung** / / around ..."

T: [Interrupting the reading] Pay attention. **Hung** / /. [The teacher writes in the blackboard the phonetic sounds and asks students to repeat after her].

Sts. **Hung** / /.

T: **Hang** / / is Simple Present and **hung** / / is Simple Past and Past Participle.

T: OK. Continue reading, please.

Binho: "... and I **hung** / / around with them today."

(...)

Part II:

DJ: "... I thought you said you were going to help me mow the **lawn** / / ..."

T: It is **lawn** / / . OK? Continue.

(...)

Part III:

Binho: "... I let you get away with it this time, **son** / / ..."

T: No. **Son** / / . Repeat.

Binho: **Son** / / .

T: That is the same sound of **hung** / /. OK? Continue, please. [I observed that some students repeated the word to themselves in a low voice to practice].

In the first part, the teacher shows the students the distinction between sounds in an irregular verb. I think that she could just emphasize that in this part it is important to pronounce them “correctly” in order not to affect the grammar rules of the language.ⁱⁱⁱ

In the second part, besides asking the student who was reading to repeat, she could also explain to students that the sound he pronounced means another thing. “Law” is different from “lawn”.

Correction here was important since the misunderstanding affects the whole meaning and understanding.

In the third part, the teacher only asked students to repeat the word “correctly”, and called the student’s attention to the sound that had already appeared before. It was not necessary to write the sound in the blackboard again.

SAMPLE 2 (Extracted from the class of April 26th, 1997)

T: Now, let’s read the text: “Mr. Anderson had to hurry”.

T: Bob begins, please.

Bob: “Mr. Anderson had a hard time ... and when he awoke, he realized that he had only a few minutes to get **ready** / / ?... **ready** / / ?”

T: To get **ready** / /.

Bob: So, ... read everything?

T: Yes, please.

Bob: OK. “... only a few minutes to get **ready** / / for work”.

T: OK, thanks. Please, Lu continue.

Lu: “... going to wear to work that day. After he **chose** / / ...”

T: Lu, **chose** / /.

T: You must pay attention to the verbs. You have to study irregular verbs. OK, continue.

Lu: “After he **chose** / / the suit he wanted, ...”.

T: OK, thanks a lot.

The teacher, in the first example, did not make the distinction of the sounds **ready** / / (adjective), and **read** / / (irregular verb). She could tell the students that

different sounds interfere in the meaning. Besides that, the teacher could ask students to repeat the word just to help memorization.

In the second example, the teacher just repeated the verb in a “correct” way, and she did not ask the student to repeat it. Here, the teacher could ask the student to repeat the verb to make the distinction between the present and the simple past tense.

SAMPLE 3 (Extracted from the class of May 3rd, 1997)

T: OK, thanks. Kaká continue, please.

Kaká: “... and Claudia watched the **cheer** / /-leaders more than the game.”

T: OK. Brenda.

Brenda: “...in the school colors. The [Looking to the teacher] **cheer** / /-leaders stood in front of the students...”

T: OK, thanks.

In this sample, the first student reads **cheer** / /-leaders while the second reads **cheer** / /-leaders. The teacher did not correct the student, since it did not interfere in the meaning.

The distance between the target sound and the sound produced by the student did not damage the whole meaning and understanding of the sentence.

In this sample, I could observe that some students looked to each other and to the teacher when she did not correct the second student. Even the student who was reading looked to the teacher the moment of reading, to check by the teachers’s face, that if what she was reading was correct.

It seemed to me that students like to be corrected by the teacher.

SAMPLE 4 (Extracted from the class of May 10th, 1997)

T: OK. Now Karen, please.

Karen: “...and spreading suburbs. He has already **written** / /...”

T: [Interrupting] **Written** / /.

Karen: Ah, OK. “... has already **written** / / to a hotel for a reservation”.

T: OK. Thank you.

In this sample, the teacher just read the “correct” pronunciation of the verb. She did not show the students(s) that misunderstanding the sounds interfere in the grammar rules of the language.

SAMPLE 5 (Extracted from the class of May 17th, 1997)

T: Will you please begin reading the dialogue?

Binho: OK. “... Good evening / / ...”.

T: Look. Evening / /. Repeat.

Binho: OK. Evening / /.

[Some students repeat to themselves in a low voice]

Binho: “ Good evening. Have you people...”.

T: Thanks a lot.

This time only repetition was after the teacher pronounced the “correct” sound.

SAMPLE 6 (Extracted from the class of May 24th, 1997)

Kaká: “... they have seen and done. She says / / that ...”.

T: [Interrupts] Kaká, says / /. To say / /, and says / /, OK?

Continue, please.

Kaká: “... She says / / that she has been ...”.

T: OK, thanks. Lu continue, please.

Lu: “... and he has the phone now. He says / / ... [The student looked to the teacher, to check if what she was saying was correct] ... he has been practicing baseball ...”.

In this sample, the first student was corrected. The teacher pronounced the sound of the verb in the infinitive form and in the third person singular in order to show the difference between them.

The second student, however, was prepared to the sound to be produced to make sure that if the sound she was producing was right.

SAMPLE 7 (Extracted from the class of May 31st, 1997)

T: Karen: "I like them all. A while back I began / / [Some students look to each other, and Karen herself looks to the teacher too] liking cauliflower. Before,..."

T: OK. Thanks. DJ continue reading.

In this sample, the teacher did not correct the student's pronunciation of the verb. I think it is all right since the meaning of the sentence was not damaged.

Samples divided in labels:

- 1) Using phonemes to distinguish sounds (Sample 1, part 1).
- 2) The teacher did not show that different sounds produced different meanings. She uses repetition of the "correct" sound to help memorization (Sample 1, part 2).
- 3) The teacher does not correct, for it does not interfere in the meaning/understanding (Sample 3, 6 and 7).
- 4) The teacher just repeat the word "correctly" without making any observation (Samples 2, 4 and 5).

5. CONCLUSION

I think that what the teacher did was right when she made the distinction between the sounds using phonemes. I also agree with her when she asked students to repeat after her. It is a kind of "feedback" in relation to the student. And I also agree with the teacher when she did not correct students' mistakes when it did not interfere in the meaning. It is to show the student that misunderstanding sounds interfere in the meaning. "*Correcting all errors is not necessary*" (Burt, 1975:62).

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ⁱ The names of the teacher and the students will be preserved.

ⁱⁱ The book of the students is the same of the teacher. It has ten lessons: five lessons to dialogue and five lessons to readings.

ⁱⁱⁱ When I put "correctly" means that an EFL class is not real, i.e., it's not a native language for the student, and sometimes, for the teacher as well.