

## TEACHING PRONUNCIATION AND ACCENT AWARENESS OF SECOND-YEAR STUDENTS

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### **Abstract**

Pronunciation is a fundamental component of second language acquisition and plays a decisive role in learners' communicative competence. For second-year university students, pronunciation instruction requires a more systematic and analytical approach than at the beginner level. At this stage, learners already possess foundational grammatical and lexical knowledge; however, persistent pronunciation difficulties may hinder intelligibility and confidence. This article explores theoretical perspectives and practical strategies for teaching pronunciation and developing accent awareness among second-year students. Particular attention is paid to suprasegmental features, communicative intelligibility, learner autonomy, and the integration of technology. The article argues that pronunciation teaching should aim not at eliminating learners' accents but at improving clarity, flexibility, and awareness of global English varieties.

### **Key words**

pronunciation teaching, accent awareness, second language acquisition, intelligibility, suprasegmental features, communicative competence, phonological competence.

### **Introduction**

In modern foreign language education, pronunciation has regained importance as educators recognize its central role in effective communication. While grammar and vocabulary provide the structural foundation of language, pronunciation ensures that speech is comprehensible and socially appropriate. For second-year students—typically at an intermediate level—pronunciation instruction becomes especially critical because fossilization of errors may begin to occur if corrective intervention is not provided.

At this stage, students are capable of participating in discussions, delivering short presentations, and engaging in academic tasks. However, inaccurate stress patterns, monotone intonation, vowel length confusion, or consonant cluster

simplification may reduce intelligibility. Therefore, systematic pronunciation instruction and accent awareness training are essential to refine learners' phonological competence and build communicative confidence.

### **Theoretical Foundations of Pronunciation Teaching**

Historically, pronunciation instruction has evolved from mechanical repetition to communicative and awareness-based approaches. Early methods such as the Grammar-Translation Method largely neglected pronunciation, while the Audio-Lingual Method emphasized drilling and mimicry. Contemporary approaches integrate pronunciation into communicative competence.

The concept of communicative competence introduced by Dell Hymes emphasizes that effective communication involves not only grammatical knowledge but also sociolinguistic and phonological appropriateness. Pronunciation is therefore not an isolated skill but an integral part of communicative performance. Modern scholars argue that the primary goal of pronunciation teaching is intelligibility rather than native-like accuracy. As Joan Morley suggests, learners should aim for clear, understandable speech rather than perfect imitation of native speakers. This perspective is particularly relevant in today's globalized world, where English functions as an international lingua franca.

#### **Pronunciation competence includes two major components:**

- a) Segmental features – individual vowel and consonant sounds.
- b) Suprasegmental features – stress, rhythm, intonation, connected speech.

Research indicates that suprasegmental features have a stronger impact on intelligibility than isolated sound errors. Therefore, second-year instruction should increasingly focus on stress patterns, rhythmical timing, and intonation contours.

#### **The Importance of Accent Awareness**

Accent awareness is a pedagogical concept that promotes understanding of how pronunciation varies across speakers and regions. It does not seek to eliminate a learner's native accent but encourages awareness of variation and intelligibility. English is spoken worldwide and exists in multiple recognized varieties. For instance, Received Pronunciation is traditionally associated with the United Kingdom, while General American predominates in the United States. Exposure to different accents prepares students for authentic international communication.

#### **Accent awareness includes:**

- a) Recognizing phonological differences between varieties.
- b) Understanding first-language interference.
- c) Developing tolerance toward diverse accents.
- d) Building confidence in one's own speech identity.

When students understand that accent diversity is natural, anxiety decreases, and motivation increases. This psychological aspect is crucial for second-year learners who may compare themselves to native speakers and feel discouraged.

### **Common Pronunciation Challenges of Second-Year Students:**

- a) Second-year learners often experience specific pronunciation difficulties:
- b) Vowel length contrasts (e.g., ship vs. sheep).
- c) Consonant clusters (e.g., “strengths,” “texts”).
- d) Word stress misplacement (e.g., in academic vocabulary).
- e) Sentence stress and rhythm problems.
- f) Flat or inappropriate intonation patterns.
- g) Connected speech phenomena, such as linking and assimilation.

At this stage, some errors become habitual. Without corrective guidance, these errors may fossilize and persist into advanced proficiency levels.

### **Effective Teaching Strategies**

#### **1. Diagnostic Assessment**

The first step in effective pronunciation instruction is identifying learners’ needs. Teachers may record students’ oral presentations and analyze common patterns of mispronunciation. A diagnostic approach ensures targeted instruction rather than generalized drilling.

#### **2. Raising Phonological Awareness**

Second-year students benefit from explicit instruction in phonetic symbols and sound articulation. Teaching the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) enhances learners’ independence in using dictionaries and pronunciation guides.

Articulation diagrams, mirror practice, and mouth positioning explanations help students understand how sounds are physically produced.

#### **3. Minimal Pairs and Contrastive Analysis**

Minimal pair exercises are effective for improving sound discrimination. However, for intermediate learners, such exercises should be contextualized within dialogues and communicative tasks rather than isolated repetition.

Contrastive analysis between the native language and English can clarify typical interference patterns.

#### **4. Teaching Suprasegmental Features**

Greater emphasis should be placed on:

Word stress in academic vocabulary.

Sentence stress in discourse.

Intonation in questions, statements, and attitudes.

Rhythm practice through chants and dialogues.

Students may practice marking stress patterns in texts and reading aloud with guided modeling.

#### 5. Integrating Pronunciation into Speaking Activities

Pronunciation should not be treated as a separate lesson component. Instead, it should be integrated into:

Debates, Role-plays, Academic presentations, Group discussions.

Teachers can provide focused feedback on stress, rhythm, and clarity during communicative tasks.

#### 6. Technology-Enhanced Learning

Digital tools significantly support pronunciation practice. These include:

Speech recognition software.

Online pronunciation dictionaries.

Video materials featuring authentic speakers.

Listening to diverse speakers from different English-speaking countries promotes accent awareness and listening flexibility.

Students may record themselves and compare their speech with model pronunciations. Self-assessment fosters learner autonomy.

#### **Psychological and Motivational Aspects**

Pronunciation learning is closely connected with identity and self-confidence. Some students fear losing their cultural identity if they change their accent. Others feel embarrassed by strong foreign accents.

Teachers should emphasize that having an accent is natural and does not indicate incompetence. The objective is clarity, not imitation. Encouraging peer support and constructive feedback creates a safe learning environment.

Positive reinforcement plays a key role in reducing anxiety and increasing willingness to speak.

#### **The Teacher's Role in Developing Accent Awareness**

a) The teacher acts as:

b) A model of intelligible speech.

c) A facilitator of reflection.

d) A provider of structured feedback.

e) A cultural mediator.

Corrective feedback should be specific and supportive. Instead of interrupting constantly, teachers may note recurring issues and address them after the speaking activity. Workshops on accent diversity and listening comprehension tasks using different English varieties broaden students' perspective.

#### **Assessment of Pronunciation**

Assessment criteria for second-year students may include:

- 1)Intelligibility
- 2)Appropriate stress placement
- 3)Natural rhythm
- 4)Effective intonation
- 5)Clarity in connected speech

Rubrics should prioritize communicative clarity over native-like perfection.

Continuous assessment through presentations, recorded tasks, and reflective journals encourages progress monitoring.

### **Conclusion**

Teaching pronunciation and accent awareness to second-year students is an essential aspect of language education. At this intermediate stage, learners require structured attention to both segmental and suprasegmental features in order to prevent fossilization and enhance communicative competence.

The goal of pronunciation instruction is not accent elimination but intelligibility, confidence, and flexibility in global communication contexts. Through diagnostic assessment, communicative practice, technological integration, and positive feedback, teachers can significantly improve students' phonological competence.

Developing accent awareness also fosters respect for linguistic diversity and prepares students for interaction in an international environment where English functions as a global language. Therefore, pronunciation teaching should be systematic, communicative, and learner-centered, ensuring long-term effectiveness and professional relevance.

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