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THE PROBLEM OF ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION IN KYIV-MOHYLA ACADEMY

The article says about an urgent necessity for the students of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy to correct their English pronunciation. Correct phonetics of a foreign language is not only a proof of speech culture but is also of great importance for mutual understanding. It is proposed that a three-week introductory corrective course in phonetics should be introduced at the first year of study.

The students of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy are supposed to have not only passive knowledge of the English language (ability to read and understand English texts), but also to be able to comprehend lectures delivered in English and to communicate with English-speaking people.

It is well known that while speaking a foreign language, it is rather pronouncing mistakes than grammatical ones that will hinder communication and cause misunderstanding. It is sufficient to speak mangled English when asking the way or buying food, using gestures in addition. But when, in a bustle, a person has to ask about the departure of his train, it is not enough, he may not be understood.

Correct pronunciation is especially important when a person has to speak in public because all grammatical and lexical notions of speech are conveyed by means of sounds. So, the sound aspect of a language being indispensable of all types of speaking activity of man, teaching phonetics to foreign learners is of great importance.

Most of our students come from non-specialized secondary schools where pronunciation is of no great concern (especially in villages). Therefore, their phonetics needs correction.

There are three ways of achieving it. The first is to put the person into the English-speaking environment where he will gradually learn to speak correctly, but this way is not always available. The second is to apply technical means; this can conduce to comprehension of foreign speech, but will not teach correct pronunciation. The thing is that while listening to a foreign speech we usually perceive its sounds as nearest to ours. Accordingly, we imitate foreign speech by substituting our native sounds for the foreign ones. Hence comes the distortion of the new language. For example, students commonly do not discern long and short vowels, the vowels /a3/ and /ɪ/; they substitute the native /c, ɜ/ for the English /θ/ and /ɔ/, /H/ for /i/, and they make many other phonological mistakes which cause the change of meaning.

The thing is that we can't hear our mispronunciation, it seems to us that we sound correct and we are unable to hear our errors unless we are taught how not to make them.

First of all, students should clearly discern by ear right and wrong foreign pronunciation. At the same time they should be taught how to acquire unusual movements and positions of speech organs necessary for correct pronunciation.

This task must precede other aspects of work, otherwise words and phrases will be learned in bad pronunciation. Grammatical, lexical and syntactical material can be learned by parts in succession, by increasing the quantity of words or grammar forms. Yet phonetic material must be used by students from the beginning because even a small phrase contains all the phonetic difficulties of a foreign language. If pronunciation is not mastered in practice, errors will take deep root and it will be more difficult to correct them. So, it is essential that further material should be learned with correct pronunciation.

It has also to be brought home to the learners that every speech sound can be pronounced with a slight difference due to its phonetic environment and position in the word - these are allophones or positional variants of the sound, one of these variants being the most typical which is called a phoneme. The misuse of a variant is a phonetic mistake, which will only add a foreign accent to the utterance but will not hinder understanding. Yet if a sound is perceived as a different phoneme, the meaning of the word is affected, which may cause misunderstanding. Such mistakes are phonological, they are gross mistakes and must be avoided by the learners.

And here comes a rule for the students: to some extent, foreign sounds may not be quite accurate unless they are perceived as different phonemes.

It should also be pointed out to the freshmen that, on the other hand, allophones of our native speech may turn to be different phonemes in a foreign language and change the meaning of words.

Psychologically, in all written languages there are two kinds of image - visual and auditory. These images don't usually coincide, especially in English. That is why auditory images must be supported by transcription, which presents auditory image in writing and is absolutely parallel to it, being quite inseparable from learning English phonetics. Transcription helps a student pronounce a new word correctly when he works with a dictionary.

There is another problem connected with pronunciation and transcription: many students do not know the reading rules. Such wrong reading of words as for example kind /kind/, said /seid/, know /knou/, asked /askit/, and distorted pronunciation of the sound combination /w3:/, to say nothing about wrong stresses in English words like con'sequence, 'hotel, 'magazine, deve'lopment, 'cigarette, etc., are not rare errors made by our students.

Besides, incorrect accentuation and melody of sentences makes reading difficult to understand.

One more issue that needs consideration is standard pronunciation. In the former Soviet Union as well as in European countries British Received Pronunciation was the teaching norm in educational institutions. Nowadays American influence is rather strong, and students pick up some American sounds from films and radio or television being unaware of all differences between British and American sound systems. As a result, they speak mangled English with some elements of American.

At the beginning of the academic process in Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, attempts were made to improve the students' pronunciation.

At first, a phonetician went to different groups and took half the lesson for phonetics. That proved to be inconvenient both for teachers and students.

Then, seminars for the teachers were held weekly; they were not long - just recommendations for correct articulations of sounds and correction of errors. But they soon stopped as there was no special time in the curriculum for teaching sounds.

Personally, I tried to dedicate some ten - fifteen minutes to phonetics at every lesson, but the desirable effect was not achieved, because these "corrective efforts" were dragged on for many weeks during which the effect of the first lessons was lost while the former mistakes were repeatedly pronounced.

Later on, a summer course in English phonetics was given during two years. T. S. Mishchenko, L. A. Baturaska and Y. R. Fedoriv, phoneticians of the English chair, were involved in it. Students received the notion about pronunciation and the sound system of the English language, but they couldn't acquire good pronunciation because of big groups (over twenty four persons) and lack of practice. The students admitted that if they had had such a course at the beginning of the study, but not short corrections now and then, they would have achieved a better result.

Now the problem is how to make our students sound more or less correct. Evidently, teaching pronunciation should be introduced at the beginning of the first year of study.

Although the curricula of the English language for the first two years are rather intense and do not allow for a special phonetic training, it is necessary to introduce a corrective phonetic course for at least three weeks (18 hours). Otherwise, students of our University are doomed to bad pronunciation.

It should be mentioned that corrective phonetic courses (18-22 academic hours) in three foreign languages have always been carried out at Kyiv Shevchenko University for students of non-special departments, which have good results.

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ПРОБЛЕМА АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ ВИМОВИ У КИЄВО-МОГИЛЯНСЬКІЙ АКАДЕМІЇ

У статті йдеться про потребу вдосконалення англійської вимови у студентів НаУКМА, оскільки правильне звучання іноземної мови є не тільки престижним, а й необхідним для взаєморозуміння. Пропонується ввести тритижневий вступний корективний курс фонетики англійської мови на першому році навчання.