

UDC: 37.016:81'801.612

SOME GUIDELINES ON TEACHING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION TO UKRAINIAN LEARNERS

A. A. Kalyta, L. I. Taranenko

Kyiv, National Technical University of Ukraine "Kyiv Polytechnic Institute"

kalytanewadd@gmail.com, litera@i.ua

The article is focused on an integrated approach to teaching English pronunciation to the Ukrainian learners who specialise in English as their future profession by way of emphasising the linkage between phonetic, lexical and grammatical language levels. The mentioned approach is viewed in the paper as a means of developing the English pronunciation being of primary importance in the English proficiency. The approach to teaching pronunciation advanced in this paper takes full account of the importance of context as a means for successful L2 pronunciation learning. In the article the authors explain some terminology connected with teaching English pronunciation, present information about the main differences and similarities in the English and Ukrainian articulation bases as well as give methodological guidelines on teaching pronunciation and describe types of instructions that can be integrated into L2 practical phonetics classes. The authors also report the results of their survey of typical mistakes and difficulties experienced by the Ukrainian B-level university students while mastering English pronunciation as well as provide practical recommendations and helpful guidelines on how to diagnose, correct and avoid pronunciation errors and mistakes. The paper also substantiates the expediency of further investigations of the contrasted phonological systems, contributing to more effective L2 English pronunciation learning and teaching.

Key words: articulation basis, organs of speech, teaching English pronunciation, Ukrainian learners' pronunciation of L2, typical mistakes and errors, practical phonetics.

Introduction. In the course of teaching practical English phonetics to Ukrainian students it is essential to pay special attention to two main aspects: (1) differences in the English and Ukrainian articulation bases; (2) the diagnostic evaluation of their pronunciation mistakes. Therefore, the **aim** of this paper is to outline some methodological guidelines for teaching English pronunciation to Ukrainian students who are trained as English language teachers and interpreters.

Theoretical background that frames teaching English pronunciation to Ukrainians. As a result of the authors' empirical analysis conducted with the B-level university students specialising in English, the major points of differences between the articulation bases of English and Ukrainian worth paying special attention to have been established. From the data obtained as well as from the diagnostic evaluation of students' difficulties in perception and production of English the authors were able to gain valuable information about the differences and similarities in the pronunciation of contrasted languages. They are as follows:

1) *tongue* in English is more tense and bulky than in Ukrainian and has a retracted position for the production of most of the phonemes;

2) *lips* are also more tense and less movable in English than in Ukrainian. They are mostly spread or neutral, the lower teeth being revealed (the so-called *flat articulation*), which are the essential features of English pronunciation;

3) *the number of consonants* (24 consonants in English and 32 – in Ukrainian) is another difference in the articulation bases of English and Ukrainian. Thus a special treatment should be given to:

a) *forelingual English consonants* which are articulated with the tongue-tip against the alveoli / τ , δ , σ , ζ , ν , λ , Σ , Z , $\tau\Sigma$, δZ / having *apical articulation*, or against the teeth / T , Δ /. The corresponding Ukrainian consonants are articulated with the blade of the tongue against the teeth, known as *dorsal articulation*, except for / Π , χ /, whose articulation is palatal-alveolar;

b) *all consonants* that are always hard in English (except for / Σ , Z /) and have no palatalized oppositions while the similar Ukrainian consonants have. Palatalisation so typical of Ukrainian pronunciation is regarded as a phonetic mistake in the Ukrainian students' English pronunciation in general and / Σ , Z / in particular since it hampers understanding or leads to misunderstanding;

c) *word-final voiced consonants* which in both languages must not be devocalized, compare English: *bag, rib, sad*; Ukrainian: *дуб, піг, код, віз*, etc.;

d) *the English voiceless plosives* /п, т, к/ which are pronounced with aspiration, e.g. *Kate, take the plate*. The strongest degree of aspiration is registered in the production of these consonants in word-initial position before a vowel. When the English plosives /p, t, k/ are preceded by the phoneme /s/ at the beginning of a word or syllable they are not aspirated, e.g. *speak, stake, skate*. Aspiration is not typical of the corresponding Ukrainian voiceless plosives. Though, in emotionally coloured speech aspiration might also occur in Ukrainian;

e) *the English sonorants* /μ, ν, λ/ that are tenser and longer than the corresponding Ukrainian ones; they are syllabic when post-tonic and preceded by a consonant, thus the words *button* /∇βζτν/, *sudden* /∇σζδν/, *cycle* /∇σακλ/ consist of two syllables: /∇βζτ - ν/, /∇σζδ - ν/, /∇σακ - κλ/. Insertion of a schwa phoneme /≅/ between a plosive and sonorant is not desirable, though the pronunciation of such words as *bottle* and *button* is acceptable in RP if pronounced /∇βθτ[≅]λ/, /∇βζτ[≅]ν/. Word-final clusters of this type are not permissible in Ukrainian;

f) *the English consonants* /Г/, /Δ/, /N/ since there are no corresponding consonants in Ukrainian;

g) *the phoneme* /w/, though is registered in both contrasted languages, in Ukrainian it usually occurs in the word-final position, e.g.: *Кув, бачув*, etc.;

h) *the consonantal clusters* in different word positions, which demonstrate *phonotactic possibilities* of English and Ukrainian;

4) *the number of vowels* (20 vowels in English and 6 – in Ukrainian) is another difference in the articulation bases of English and Ukrainian. Such a difference leads to numerous pronunciation mistakes and errors. Since there are no one-to-one corresponding vowels in Ukrainian, special attention should be given to the pronunciation of all English vowels:

a) unlike Ukrainian, all English vowel sounds differ in *length*. In connected speech the English vowels are actualized by their positional variants: the longest when word final, e.g. *sea* /σɪ:/, half long when followed by a voiced consonant as in *sead* /σɪ:δ/ and the shortest when followed by a voiceless consonant as in *seat* /σɪ:τ/: e.g.: /σɪ:/ – /σɪ:δ/ – /σɪ:τ/, /μɛɪ/ – /μɛɪδ/ – /μɛɪτ/, respectively;

b) the most frequently occurring vowel in English is *schwa*, or the neutral vowel /≅/ having no equivalents in Ukrainian. It is the most common weak vowel in English which has no regular letter for its spelling and which never occurs under stress.

Awareness of the above mentioned main differences in the articulation bases of English and Ukrainian will definitely facilitate the process of mastering English pronunciation by Ukrainian learners.

Some methodological guidelines. While teaching pronunciation it is important that the whole class should be united by a thematic topic (e.g. *Sport*) and a phonetic topic (according to a weekly / monthly syllabus). The obligatory elements of the class include phonetic drills, subordinated to the thematic topics as well (drills, proverbs, poems to revise intonation patterns, to develop skills of pitch range, tempo and loudness imitation; contrasting nuclear tones, scales (or heads); practising potentially difficult to pronounce phonemes and their combinations in particular texts). After that the classroom time must be more or less equally divided between the four main types of speech activities (listening, reading, speaking and writing – each approximately 20 minutes), which can be redistributed between the studied texts. The significant stages of the class are: setting objectives and tasks depending on the students' language level, checking home assignment in different working modes (for instance, public presentation of the task, working in pairs, dramatization, oral or written tests, revision discussions, etc.), and final debriefing on the achieved results followed by the explanations concerning home assignment.

One more important aspect of teaching English pronunciation to Ukrainians is focusing equal attention on all main types of speech activities: listening, reading, speaking and writing, prosodic analysis, or its elements being constantly utilized. Since these activities are closely related to each other, the learning process has to be based on the integration of all speaking skills, serving for natural and simultaneous development of students' linguistic competence and their proficiency.

This means that when language items are provided, students practise them not only through one skill but also through the combination of the rest. Apart from that, the development of these speech skills has to go from simple to complex, i.e. from separate words and utterances though “there is little point in concentrating too much on single words said out of context” [3, p. 30] to passages and texts. Besides, in the early stages of teaching pronunciation short texts with familiar structures and vocabulary are preferable for “easy texts can have a role in providing direct information to serve as an input for some other task” [3, p. 56].

In view of this, it is quite natural that the approach to teaching pronunciation advanced in this paper takes full account of the importance of context as a means of successful foreign language learning [2, p. 12].

Interpretation of Ukrainian learners’ pronunciation difficulties. The analysis of Ukrainians learners’ pronunciation difficulties, obtained as a result of the interpretation of their acquisition of 15 units [1] based on the similar structure and content material, allows the authors to give some hints on how to avoid mistakes and errors in their mastering English pronunciation.

1. As compared with the Ukrainian /I/, the pronunciation of which does not differ much, the English /ɪ:/, though, is somewhat tenser. Care should be taken, however, not to make the English /ɪ:/ too long before voiceless consonants. The Ukrainian /I/ that resembles the English /ɪ:/ most of all is in the words *іва, Ігор, ідол, ізру*. In case the student replaces the English /ɪ:/ by a distinct Ukrainian /И/, he/she should be instructed to give a shade of /i/ to the end of the sound.

Very often Ukrainian learners palatalize the English consonants before /ɪ:/ and other front vowels as well as before /φ/. They make this mistake under the influence of their native language, in which a consonant regularly becomes palatalized before the sounds /Й/ and /I/. Here care should be taken not to raise the front of the tongue towards the hard palate during the retention stage in the articulation of the consonant. Thus to prevent or eliminate palatalisation the front part of the tongue must be raised towards the hard palate after the release of the preceding consonant, i.e. just after the articulation of the preceding consonant has been completed. Therefore, learners are recommended to practise the English /ɪ:/ with the continuants /μ, ν, λ, φ, ω, σ/. The substitution of the English /ɪ:/ by the Ukrainian /И/ or English /I/ causes the change of the word meaning, e.g.: *seat – sit; feel – fill; feet – fit; meal – mill*, etc.

2. As compared with the Ukrainian /И/, in the production of the English /I/ the organs of speech are a bit tenser. The Ukrainian learners often replace it by the English /ɪ:/ or the Ukrainian /I/. Such a mistake leads either to misunderstanding or it hampers understanding, compare, e.g.: *live – leave, bit – beat*, etc. To prevent mistakes in the production of the vowel /I/ the students are advised to move the tongue slightly backwards, the front of the tongue being kept lower as compared with its position for the English /ɪ:/. In other words, the Ukrainian /И/ is more close and not checked, while English /I/ is always checked before voiceless consonants. It is similar to the corresponding Ukrainian vowel /И/ in the words *му, ву*. Care should be taken not to palatalise consonants before /I/.

3. Ukrainian learners very often replace the English /ε/ by the Ukrainian /E/ which is less front, or by the English /ɨ/ which is more open. This mistake leads on to the change of the word meaning or its grammatical form, for instance: *men /μεν/ – man /μ{v/; pet /πετ/ – Pat /π{τ/*. To avoid the substitution of /ε/ by the English /ɨ/ the front of the tongue should be kept a little higher than for the production of /ɨ/. Besides the learners may also be advised not to open their mouths too wide, their lips should be kept spread a little.

4. As far as the vowel /ɨ/ is concerned, the Ukrainian learners tend to substitute it by the English /ε/, thus resulting in the change of the word meaning, e.g.: *sad /s{d/ – said /sɛd/, dad /d{d/ – dead /dɛd/*, etc. To correct this mistake the tongue should be kept lower for /ɨ/ than for the English /ε/. Sometimes the Ukrainian learners replace the English /ɨ/ by the Ukrainian /E/. To prevent this mistake, the learners are recommended to open their mouths wider than for the production of the Ukrainian /E/ and give the colouring of /A/ to the beginning of the vowel.

5. Mistakes in the production of the nucleus /ε/ of the diphthong /εI/ consist in replacing the English /ε/ by the Ukrainian /E/ which is less front, or by the English /ɨ/ which is more open.

The Ukrainian learners should remember that the opening between the jaws in the production of the nucleus of the diphthong /εI/ is a bit wider than that of for the phoneme /ε/ and a bit narrower than for the production of the phoneme /ɨ/. Mistakes in the pronunciation of the glide /I/ lie in dropping the glide and thus replacing the diphthong by the monophthong /ε/, which is sometimes lengthened /ε:/. This mistake may lead on to the change of word meaning, e.g.: /met/ (the Past Simple of *meet*) instead of *mate* /μεIt/. Another mistake in the pronunciation of the glide of the diphthong /εI/ consists in replacing the glide /I/ by the Ukrainian phoneme /Й/, e.g. /hεЙ/ instead of /hεI/. To prevent or correct this mistake, the glide movement of the tongue should be stopped before the tongue reaches the position necessary for the production of the sound /Й/. The substitution of the glide /I/ in the diphthong /εI/ is also observed in the pronunciation of other I-gliding diphthongs, namely: /αI/, /OI/. Thus, the advice as for the correction of this mistake in the pronunciation of the glide /I/ in these diphthongs is the same as for the diphthong /εI/.

6. The Ukrainian learners are apt to replace the nucleus /α/ of the English diphthong /αI/ by the fully back phoneme /A:/ as in the word /lα:It/ instead of /lαIt/. To correct this mistake, the bulk of the tongue in the production of the nucleus of /αI/ should be moved to occupy the front retracted position in the mouth cavity.

7. The English /t, d/ are often substituted by the corresponding Ukrainian consonants /Т/ and /Д/ pronounced with the blade of the tongue touching the upper teeth, the tip being passive and lowered. The difference between the English /t, d/ and the Ukrainian /Т/ and /Д/ lies in the position of the tongue-tip: in the production of the English /t, d/ the tip of the tongue occupies apico-alveolar position, while in the pronunciation of the corresponding Ukrainian sounds the tip of the tongue has a dorsal position. To eliminate these mistakes the learner should know where the alveolar ridge is and remember to slightly press the tip of the tongue against it.

8. The English voiceless plosive consonants /p/, /t/, /k/ may be pronounced without aspiration by the Ukrainian learners. In order to pronounce a voiceless plosive with aspiration it is necessary to let a puff of breath out of the mouth immediately after a quick separation of the articulating organs and just before the beginning of the vowel that follows the plosive consonant. The air-pressure against the complete obstruction should be strong, but muscular tension at the place of articulation is weak. It is advisable not to pronounce the Ukrainian sound /X/ instead of the puff of air, or aspiration. Very often the Ukrainian learners pronounce voiceless plosives /p/, /t/, /k/ with aspiration when preceded by /s/ as in *speak, skate, splash*, etc., which should be avoided.

9. Neither /m/, nor /n/ causes much difficulty to most Ukrainian learners. In Ukrainian /H/ is made with the tongue-tip on the teeth themselves rather than on the alveolar ridge as in the production of English /n/. To achieve correctness in pronouncing these sounds dorsal articulation should be avoided in English. Besides, learners have to make /m/ and /n/ sound prolong when preceded by a short vowel, e.g.: *Tim* /τIμμμ/, *dim* /δIμμμ/, etc. When preceded by a long vowel or a voiced consonant, /m/ and /n/ don't sound prolong, e.g.: *seem* /σI:μ/, *seen* /σI:v/, etc. The consonants /m/ and /n/ sound short when they are followed by a voiceless consonant, e.g.: *pint* /παIvτ/, *camp* /κξμπ/, *lamp* /λξμπ/, *rent* /ρεντ/, *can't* /κA:vτ/, etc.

10. The consonants /Т/, /Δ/ are particularly difficult for Ukrainians since there are no similar sounds in the Ukrainian phonological system. When they occur near the sounds /s/, /z/ the students are recommended to practise carefully such phrases as *this is the thing; the sixth street, the eighth zone, is thin, who's that*, etc., making the previous consonant at the junctures /s, z + Т, Δ/ or /Т, Δ + s, z/ sound prolong. For instance, in the utterance /^ΔIσ Iζζζ Δ≅ \TIN/, the learner passes to the pronunciation of /Δ/ only when he/she is sure that the phoneme /ζ/ is articulated correctly. Special attention should be given not to insert a vowel between them.

Many Ukrainian learners replace the English /Т/, /Δ/ by /s/, /z/, or /f/, /v/ or /t/, /d/. To correct this mistake they may learn to acquire /Т/, /Δ/ by starting with an exaggerated form of it, placing the tongue-tip so that it projects out between the upper and lower teeth. When the tongue is in this position they must blow so that a stream of air passes out between the tongue-tip and the edge of the upper teeth. The lower teeth are revealed when practising these sounds. It should be observed that in making /Т/, /Δ/ the teeth are separated a bit wider than in the articulation of /s/, /z/.

In case /T/, /Δ/ are substituted by /f/, /v/ the learners are recommended to reveal their lower teeth. When the sounds /T/, /Δ/ are replaced by /t/, /d/ they are advised to put the tongue-tip between the teeth and not against the alveoli.

Conclusions. Although we have focused on some differences between English and Ukrainian articulation bases, we do not mean to imply that the methodological guidelines outlined in the paper are only of this kind. We rather tried to come up with a systemic integrated approach to teaching pronunciation through a diagnostic evaluation of the Ukrainian learners' pronunciation mistakes and errors.

The implementation of the offered approach to teaching English pronunciation resulted in the possibility to systematize typical mistakes and difficulties experienced by the Ukrainian learners while working on English pronunciation as well as necessitated the elaboration of practical recommendations and guidelines on how to diagnose, correct and overcome them while working in class, on their own or in the language laboratory.

We hope that the ideas advanced in this paper will encourage further contrasted investigations of English and Ukrainian phonological systems, contributing to more effective L2 English pronunciation learning and teaching.

REFERENCES

1. Калита А.А. Посібник для самостійної роботи з англійської мови (I курс) (англ. мовою) / The Self-Study Guide in English (1st year) / А.А. Калита, Л.І. Тараненко. – Тернопіль: Підручники і посібники, 2011. – 80 с.
2. Bruton A. Are we Talking about Grammar or Politics / A. Bruton // IATEFL Issues. – 1998. – August-September. – P. 12-13.
3. Rexon Sh. Developing Listening Skills / Sh. Rexon. – L.: Modern English Publications, 1991. – 136 p.

REFERENCES

1. Kalyta, A.A. & Taranenko L.I. (2011). Posibnyk dlja samostijnoi' roboty z anglijs'koi' movy (I kurs) (angl. movoju) [The Self-Study Guide in English (1st year)]. Ternopil, Ukraine: Pidruchnyky i posibnyky [in English].
2. Bruton, A. (1998). Are we Talking about Grammar or Politics. In IATEFL Issues, August – September, 12–13.
3. Rexon, Sh. (1991). Developing Listening Skills. London: Modern English Publications.

А. А. Калита, Л. І. Тараненко. Методичні рекомендації щодо навчання українських студентів англійської мови.

У статті викладено комплексний підхід до навчання українських студентів-майбутніх перекладачів англійської мови. В ній наголошується на необхідності реалізації на заняттях з практики англійської мови зв'язку між фонетичними, лексичними та граматичними мовними явищами. Автори статті шляхом пояснення фонетичної термінології, пов'язаної з набуттям студентами артикуляційних навичок, узагальнюють і систематизують вимовні помилки, притаманні англійському мовленню українських студентів, та наводять практичні рекомендації щодо їхньої діагностики та корекції.

Ключові слова: артикуляційна база, органи мовлення, навчання англійської мови, L2 вимова українських студентів, типові похибки та помилки, практична фонетика.

А. А. Калита, Л. И. Тараненко. Методические рекомендации по обучению украинских студентов английскому произношению.

В статье изложен комплексный подход к обучению украинских студентов-будущих переводчиков английскому произношению. В ней акцентируется внимание на необходимости реализации на занятиях по практике английского языка связи между фонетическими, лексическими и грамматическими языковыми явлениями. Авторы статьи, объясняя фонетическую терминологию, связанную с приобретением студентами артикуляционных навыков, обобщают и систематизируют произносительные ошибки, присущие английской речи украинских студентов, а также дают практические рекомендации по их диагностике и коррекции.

Ключевые слова: артикуляционная база, органы речи, обучение английскому произношению, L2 произношение украинских студентов, типичные погрешности и ошибки, практическая фонетика.