

# DEVELOPING ABILITIES TO ACHIEVE AN ACCURATE PRONUNCIATION IN THE STUDENTS OF 2<sup>ND</sup> YEAR OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

## DESARROLLAR HABILIDADES PARA LOGRAR UNA CORRECTA PRONUNCIACIÓN EN LOS ESTUDIANTES DE 2DO AÑO DE LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS

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### ABSTRACT

The new model of Foreign Languages Department from Las Tunas University for the English language teaching has among their characteristics the differentiated preparation of the students in this level. This research plans to develop abilities to achieve an accurate pronunciation in the students of 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Foreign Languages. The proposal objective is to elaborate some exercises to give solution to pronunciation problems to achieve the end in the teaching of the foreign language: communication, and therefore, to achieve an excellence social communicator taking into account the social model that society requires. The study done give us a didactic conception for the development of abilities to achieve an accurate pronunciation, with the use of a phonetic map, to become familiar the students with the realization of a sound or sequence of simulated sounds, with the visual experience that give us this teaching aid. Besides, to express recognition and production of the simulated pronunciation in the English language at the word and speech level with reproductive and productive exercises and the listening training in the specific practice; to differentiate the different ways of the English language, specially, the British and North American, thus the students have the possibilities to evaluate the diversity of cultural elements present in the same tongue in many regions of the planet.

**KEY WORDS:** pronunciation, communication, communicative competence, communicative approach

### RESUMEN

El nuevo modelo del Departamento de Lenguas Extranjeras de la Universidad de Las Tunas para la enseñanza de la lengua inglesa tiene entre sus características la preparación diferenciada de los estudiantes de este nivel. El artículo que se presenta planea desarrollar habilidades para lograr una correcta pronunciación en los estudiantes de segundo año de la carrera Lenguas Extranjeras. La investigación tiene como objetivo: elaborar ejercicios para

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dar solución a la problemática planteada, que propicien el objetivo final en la enseñanza del idioma extranjero: la comunicación, logrando de esta forma un comunicador social por excelencia en correspondencia con las exigencias del modelo social a que aspira la sociedad. El estudio realizado brinda una concepción didáctica para el desarrollo de habilidades para lograr una correcta pronunciación, con la utilización de un mapa fonético, al familiarizar a los estudiantes con la realización de un sonido o secuencia de sonidos simulados, con la experiencia visual que ofrece este medio de enseñanza. Además, expresar el reconocimiento y producción de la pronunciación simulada en la Lengua Inglesa al nivel de la palabra y del discurso con los ejercicios reproductivos y productivos y el entrenamiento auditivo en la práctica específica; diferenciar las diversas formas esenciales del idioma Inglés, especialmente, la británica y la norteamericana, para que los estudiantes tengan posibilidades valorativas de la diversidad de rasgos culturales presentes en la misma lengua en varias regiones del planeta.

**PALABRAS CLAVES:** pronunciación, comunicación, competencia comunicativa, enfoque comunicativo

Contemporary demands of the new society are necessary to prepare the students they are able to face daily practice and through their creative thought they are in conditions of contributing more and more to the social transformations.

The professor and the school have the task of favoring the formation of thought and language in a correct way in the children and youths, as the fundamental strategy to achieve they are able to face the objective reality that prosecutes them the life.

One of the less resolved problems in the English Language teaching learning process is the treatment of pronunciation. This aspect has been characterized by an attention on valued of vowels and consonants phonemes, a general way without keeping in mind the objective students' necessities. It is understood for necessities those articulatory features in which the students present difficulties to produce the oral speech.

### **English language pronunciation and its influence in communication**

Communication is unbreakable part of the human activity. It constitutes an important aspect for the individual's development. "Communication is a process of transmission and reception of ideas, information and messages, in which are integrated knowledge, abilities and attitudes like knowledge to speak, to read, to argue, to write, to listen and interaction and to socialize with other. In the case of knowledge of a foreign language, it also influences pronunciation like an important linguistic factor in the communication". (Grill, 2014)

For Tench (1981), the teaching of pronunciation in English should not be considered as something additional, he considers it should be taught as grammar, vocabulary or any other aspect of the language. Pronunciation is a content that should not be disregarded in favor of other contents of the lesson.

In the communicative approach, pronunciation is the key to avoid mistakes, to satisfy communication necessities. Without a good pronunciation there is not an effective communication, since this can cause wrong interpretations and therefore a loss of clarity in the message. Pronunciation is an important part in the transmission and exchange of information process and it constitutes one of the fundamental problems in the students' English language learning.

At the present time this topic is considered as intrascendent for some professors of our universities. The authors of this work consider pronunciation has to be treated as a more aspect for the acquisition and construction of knowledge by the students on the foreign language. Nevertheless, it is valid to clarify that the purpose of the work with pronunciation should be only to avoid interferences in communication and to guarantee the students' communicative competence.

Keeping in mind the article is directed to the development of abilities to achieve a correct pronunciation in the English language, it responds to the political, economic, social and cultural importance of the English language in the world. In this context, it plays an important part to guarantee the relationships of Cuba with many countries and use it as international tool of communication.

It is propitiated, on one hand, the active participation of second year students in the social life; it is propose pronunciation exercises to achieve the final objective successfully in the teaching of the foreign language: communication, at the time they become better transmitters of culture.

Starting from knowledge and abilities that the professor of Foreign Languages has gone developing, He is in conditions of beginning to give a differentiated treatment his students to promote in them the maximum development of their potentialities.

The researchers detected that the preparation that exists among second year students, with relationship to a correct pronunciation is insufficient, demonstrated in the limitations from the conception when they are approaching this thematic. Limitations are valued as for: communication abilities are not developed in the students in general sense; intonation, rhythm and inadequate accent that influence in the low level of expressivity level; difficulties with sounds discrimination and inappropriate accentuation of words with lexical meaning; difficulties with the articulation of vowels and consonants. Also, they are present in them, omission of consonants and substitution of vowels and consonants. The oral speech has insufficiencies with fluency in the speech and undue pauses.

### **Main historical antecedents in the teaching learning process of pronunciation in the English Language in Cuba**

With the victory of the Cuban Revolution, in 1959, the courses that were promoted in the country went directed to teach English in a general way, with the presentation of structural patterns which impacted in the texts of different units, by means of audio-oral method used until final of 1960, and where linguistic content decreased, essentially, to the grammatical structure. The teaching of pronunciation depended on the emphasis of the professor's creativity.

With the victory of the Cuban Revolution a different educational program was established, in which methods and a wide range of courses like acquaintance were inherited like American English Series. This way, the formation of English professors began totally with non appropriate texts to respond to the changes of the country with the new objectives outlined from then on. The teaching courses offered a comprehensive base of the foreign language, but broken into fragments in each linguistic area.

Starting from the year 1969 the substitution of the old texts began for English teaching from British Alexander, and the application of a series of study plans began for the formation of

English professors as necessity of teaching the language of more international use and to the people in general. At the beginning of the 70s the Middle Level Plan was applied for the preparation of professors, and, almost parallelly, another for the five initial Pedagogic Groups, which were based on the audio-visual method of teaching of languages. In both cases, pronunciation demanded a memoristic training and fundamentally by segments.

The evolution of pronunciation teaching has been determined by the socio-cultural conditions of every period. This way, in 1977 Plan A. Specialty English Language was assumed, in the Pedagogic Superiority Institutes of the country. In their installation for the specialty, arose Phonetics and English Phonology as independent subject and the professors dedicated part of the practice classes from the language to signaling of pronunciation patterns, intonation and rhythm of the English language with structural practical of audition, supported in the pronunciation manuals.

In 1982 Plan B. was implemented using the same method, but with practical-aware elements with the series of Cuban texts Integrated English Practice. With this change it was to teach English in a more integral way, but without satisfying the functional requirements of communication fully. Pronunciation lesson in this book was completely practical and structural, based on the exercises and explanations of pronunciation manuals, mainly of the writing for Prator, of which the exercises of contrasts with the couple's vowels were taken, those that tried to the prosodic elements and also the reading of transcriptions.

Plan C., since 1988, changed the English language teaching approach and the texts used by the professors. Most of the Pedagogic Superior Institutes in the country accepted like fundamental book the Spectrum, with which linguistic problems were illustrated in the communicative functions that were exemplified with conversations.

To be able to transform the teaching learning process into a process focused in enriching the quality of English language teaching, a new conception about pronunciation lesson is needed; it should become in the flexible center of the process, in which professors and students interact in the reach of the objectives and in the form of achieving them; in search of the formation from new contents, its fundamental characteristic would be to regulate all the school and social influences. The planning of pronunciation teaching learning process supposes to specify the practical necessities characteristic of the context where the students live and to elaborate the activities to satisfy them.

In the preparation of second year students, according to Yorca-Gómez (2011), the signaling of the phonetic phenomena was restricted to repetition of communicative functions structure that only gives treatment to suprasegmental units, which practice endorses as insufficient to develop the students' communicative competence. ; that is to say, intonation and other prosodic elements, where the professor should give an appropriate use to the patterns of the language to achieve a true communication, as well as rhythm and accent, and inside these, the professors should make a lot of emphasis in the accentuation of words with lexical meaning, the accentuation of tonic syllables, the vowels dimness in unstressed syllables and not to neglect in any moment the realization of blending.

### **Theoretical references about pronunciation teaching learning process in the English Language**

For Morley (1997), after World War II, and until final of the 60s, pronunciation was considered an important component in English language teaching. Pronunciation lesson gave attention

to phonemes, contrast of minimum couples, allophonic variations and combinatory rules of the phonic system and to the structural analysis of the prosodic elements [6].

At the end of the 60s and until 1980 decade a significant change took place in the English language teaching that impact in the importance toward the contextualized teaching of pronunciation.

Morley (1997) asked the question if we should teach of pronunciation like articulatory phonetics, or not to pay any attention to this component. Also, he outlines that in most of the communicative English teaching courses, the teaching of pronunciation doesn't disappear completely, although it decays its incidence dramatically and the idea is transmitted that pronunciation can be acquired spontaneously with alone to listen the foreign language.

In this respect Greenwood points out the opposite:

... in certain way we are teaching pronunciation indirectly whenever makes an oral work in the class, because our students will be hearing the professor's pronunciation, or the voices in the recorder or other electronic devices, like model of their own oral expression. However, its direct teaching has to have its moment, because, for the little time and opportunities of the class, we cannot hope the students acquire an acceptable pronunciation automatically. The explicit teaching can be made in several ways. (Greenwood, 1989)

The most outstanding authors whose works are within reach of the professors and Cuban investigators that have analyzed the development of pronunciation are: Greenwood (1989); Antich, R. (1986); Richards (2013); Abbot, G. (1989); Ellis, R. (1998); McNerney, M. (1993); Morley, J. (1997); Llisterri, J. (2012); Vernon, Sh. (2014); Tench, P. (1981); Thornbury, S. (2014); Roach, P. (2009); Sívori, R. L. (2012); Segade, A. (2012)

The main results, product of the work of these authors can be mentioned: techniques and procedures for pronunciation learning, specific characteristics of the oral language, how to give treatment to pronunciation errors, the paper of accuracy and fluency, the requirements and the typology of exercises for the oral expression and the definition that the purpose of this ability is the development of fluency, with the significance that it implies in the communicative approach.

Pronunciation constitutes an essential aspect to achieve a successful performance of the oral speech. To achieve a correct pronunciation is for most of the students a challenge. According to McNerney (1993), the practical implications of this asseveration are evidenced when analyzing that oral production of the speech is only and irrepressible and it becomes indispensable to achieve an acceptable performance in an immediate way in the speech or otherwise communication would be seriously affected. In spite of pronunciation is present in all the educational activities of the English Language teaching, its learning is not achieved by means of the passive reception and later imitation of the oral speech. It is necessary that the teaching of this important aspect is planned and structured systematically.

Since in one or several pronunciation courses it would be practically impossible to embrace all that belongs possible to teach, it would be very convenient to take into account the individual character of teaching. Ellis (1998) pleads for this tendency. It will understand for individual approach of pronunciation teaching process, the attention to the students' difficulties and individual necessities. It is really important the orientation of pronunciation teaching toward each student's objective necessities; that is to say, to give to the process an

individual approach contrary to what is observed at the present time in many classrooms. Not all the students are able of reception the phonic information in a same way to reproduce it later on.

According to Ellis (1998), pronunciation teaching should transfer for the following stages: valuation of the fellow's variables, compilation and taking of samples of each student's oral speech, diagnostic and analysis of the samples and the design of educational activities.

By means of the diagnosis of the oral speech, the pronunciation teaching can be guided toward the following directions: establishment of the priorities of the group in general and of each student in particular, precise determination of the aspects that limit pronunciation and pursuit of the development of each student's discursive competence.

Once concluded the diagnosis analysis, the professor is under conditions of carrying out the most appropriate selection of activities and educational tasks that will contribute to solve the difficulties detected. The order of priority, as well as the linguistic content can be adapted of agreement with the level and the grade of the students' difficulty. Before selecting the most effective activities for the treatment of pronunciation components, the professor can exchange ideas and to discuss the proposal with the rest of the professors of the academic year.

Pronunciation teaching under an individual approach doesn't mean the lesson teaching to isolated individuals. Inside each educational activity the professor should know the most immediate necessities of his students.

For Thornbury (2014), the diagnosis offers the possibility to the professor to act in consequence and to design the suitable pronunciation program to satisfy the necessities of his students on the base of the following methodological principles: from general to particular, from perception to production and from diagnosis to design.

The researchers consider it should work the material of the third English course: University for All, Let's speak clearly!, which is designed to propitiate the development of abilities of auditory perception and correct habits of pronunciation in the English language that favor the improvement of auditory abilities understanding and oral expression in the foreign language.

To the effects of the present research, it has been considered, for its linguistic clarity and didactic utility, to assume the discursive competence. This has been taken from Canale and Swain Pattern and the content of its area has left summing up and enlarging in the practice through the application of the communicative approach.

Canale (1995) stated that before entering in the linguistic area and in the teaching of the communicative approach, generally, the acquirement of a foreign language was divided in two fundamental elements: fluency and accuracy understanding for the first one the easiness and speed for the elaboration of the oral or written text and for second one, the correction in the production of the phonics elements, lexicon-semantic and morph-syntactic of the language.

Tendency inside communicative approach, mainly in its second phase, it has been hyperbolizing fluency in detriment of accuracy, question this, which is considered, should be managed with flexibility and dialectical sense. Mainly, it must keep in mind the functional character of the communicative competence that is aspired or it requires to be formed in the student, to determine what it must prioritize.

The form in what fluency is manifested is specific for each individual and it depends of the stimulus it provokes. For that reason it is related with accuracy, for what a dichotomy should

not be created between fluency and accuracy, but on the contrary, to integrate them in a dialectical way, bringing near the concept of accuracy to that of communicative competence; in such way that accuracy presupposes among their elements and with a high hierarchy, fluency and that it is manifested it, also, with an appropriate flexibility.

Antich (1986) stated that the Pedagogic aspects are necessary in the elaboration and application of approaches for selection, graduation, integration and exercitation of the phonic material.

The criterion of selection of the material that should stand out for their exercitation, as well as it stops their graduation, it will hierarchize prosodic elements, sounds and combinations of sounds that are necessary for pronunciation.

In the preparation of pronunciation exercises it should be kept in mind the mother tongue of the students so that they can carry out activities of typological analysis between Spanish's phonetic and phonological systems and the English language, although in the teaching of pronunciation it is evident that it cannot repeat the same learning process of the mother tongue; it is necessary to find a brief and rational way that allows to take advantage of the students' potentialities and the conditions in which they learn. This requires applying the following basic knowledge: audition of certain phonetic material, extracted from linguistic context of the lesson, orientation of the attention toward the phenomena that will train, it can consist on the simple mention, in the description of its articulation; exercitation for imitation, basic exercise of pronunciation and phonetic correction.

With the combination of these procedures we can achieve an automated acquirement of the phonetic material in form of recognition habits and production of the speech. To have a correct pronunciation, the students must have a correct audition first, they should be allowed to listen the most typical elements in a sentence given to which their hearings are more sensitive that are generally the elements of a similar sound in their mother tongue.

The importance of the teaching of pronunciation in the English Language learning resides in the system conception that it is necessary to transmit to the student on all the plans and linguistic levels that conform a language. Being the language a system of oral communication in which the sounds, as minimum units of meaning, are integrated to transmit a message, the acquirement of pronunciation constitutes the main way to be made understand orally.

It is important to point out that for the setting in practice pronunciation exercises should be considered the levels of help, three levels: a first level, consistent in the orientation, reorientation and attraction of the attention (it is repeated to the student, emphasizing under the conditions of the task); a second level, related with questions of help and stimulus; and a third level, for the demonstration of the activity (it doesn't consist on solving the student's task, but putting it under conditions of appropriating of the essence through the professor's own demonstration).

The linguistic foundations are important for the elaboration of pronunciation exercises, to contain theories, principles and categories related with communication that constitute rector objective for the English language teaching learning process. The theoretical foundations part of the precepts of the linguistics of the speech.

Concepts of developer teaching, developer learning and learning strategies constitute basic

theoretical foundations for pronunciation exercises to develop abilities and to achieve a correct pronunciation in the English language.

Sociological precepts influence in a direct way in the didactic conception of the exercises, for what its concretion is very important from the methodological point of view.

### **Methodological demands for the elaboration of pronunciation exercises**

The general didactic demands cannot reflect all the requirements of the exercises to develop abilities that allow a correct pronunciation in the English language in the second year students, According to Antich (1986). It is necessary to consider principles of the English language methodology and in particular for pronunciation, they are derived of the laws of the teaching and the learning of the foreign languages. These are:

- To consider the integral communicative competence, communicative functions and context like rector objectives of the English language teaching learning process.
- Practical orientation of the objectives, guided to the development of pronunciation, in unit with affective-motivational aspects.
- Consideration of the students' mother tongue.
- Recognition of the primacy of the oral language.
- Thematic-situational presentation of the didactic material.
- Errors like logical process for the appropriation of the integral communicative competence and the use of information and communication technologies, present in the career, to reinforce the professor's instructive and educational work and the student's cognitive independence

As consequence of the insufficiencies related with pronunciation in the English language learning in the second year students, some exercises to give solution to this problem are given. To implement pronunciation exercises and the students develop abilities in the phonic level, it becomes necessary:

- To express the recognition and production of simulated pronunciation in the English language at the word level and of speech with reproductive and productive exercises and the auditory training in the specific practice.
- To differentiate English's diverse essential forms, especially, British and North American, so that the students have possibilities to evaluate the diversity of cultural features present in the same language in several regions of the planet.
- The professor will prosecute incorrect habits of pronunciation critically, with emphasis on the pronunciation of individual sounds and prosodic elements of speech affected for the clear realization of the English language.
- To familiarize the students with the realization of a sound or sequence of sounds, with the visual experience that phonetic map offers.

The researchers recognize they should work in how to develop abilities to achieve a correct pronunciation in the English language. Also, it facilitates that the typological analysis between mother tongue and foreigner responds to the improvement of speech and the study habits are developed starting from the orderly practice that intends all the necessary aspects for the communicative competence.

The proposal of pronunciation exercises has as objective: to develop especially in the students the called phonemics ear that consists on the recognition of English language sounds system and the identification of the meaning of each sound that it allows them the possibility to be expressed on topics of the daily life, as for pronunciation, specially, prosodic elements, paying attention to dialogued and monologue speech, that is to say, conversation and exhibition.

The proposed pronunciation exercises are the following: discrimination of sounds, imitation, repetition and expressive reading.

### **Suggestions to develop pronunciation in English's lessons**

When the students learning English it is natural they make errors of any nature, but none interferes so much in communication as pronunciation errors. Pronunciation is mainly a phenomenon, in which we produce sounds when we are speaking. Therefore, it should be pronounced in a way that, without pronunciation is perfect, the message or information arrives without interference to the receiver or the receivers. Pronunciation becomes indispensable so much, to understand like to speak and to be made understand.

To achieve an effective communication, the professor should apply strategies that guarantee student be able to communicate. These strategies are based fundamentally on the use of linguistic resources as paraphrase, expressions and pantomimes to help to the understanding information and to allow communication flows. Communicative approach guarantees that the students are placed in different situations and they can understand and to use a group of communicative functions, and, at the same time, interaction with other so that they become a competent professional in the use of the English language. For what is recommended to develop pronunciation simultaneously in class with different linguistic aspects, be already grammatical rules, vocabulary, style, communicative functions and speech, among others.

For Tench (1981), the basic strategy in the pronunciation teaching is imitation for beginners or advanced students. The student needs to have the ability to imitate the professor's pronunciation with the sentences in their context, so that rhythm and intonation.

In design terms for the preparation of the lesson should be kept in mind the main sounds that originate interference processes. The students should be trained in the audition and to differentiate these sounds consistently. The sounds should not be presented in an isolated way but integrated in the speech. It is suggested to treat pronunciation in an integrated way, that is to say, like a part of the grammar's teaching and the vocabulary or oral expression and the auditory understanding, according to the students' communicative competence level. For the practice it is recommended to select the dialogues or texts that lexicon and grammar of frequent use contain and they support the communicative functions, because English's phonic system is closely related with the use of vocabulary and grammar. When it becomes necessary the attention to pronunciation this should be integrated like a more phase of the teaching learning process.

Nevertheless, when pronunciation problems exist and for the sake of that the student is aware of the difference among the sounds, the most appropriate techniques are demonstration, association and explanation. It is suggested that pronunciation becomes trained in an alone isolated way to practice certain sounds, using different types of exercises like repetition or imitation of words, phrases or sentences that contain the sounds, in such way that the student makes a contrast among sounds and be able to identify the difference among the same

ones, later the students will practice by means of combination or integration exercises and, lastly, to produce the sounds in a correct or acceptable way and then pronunciation and communication will speak oneself language.

The dialectical treatment of the approaches which are part of the theoretical foundations allows considering that with the application of the communicative approach in the English language teaching learning process, in contextualized communicative functions, the potentialities will be enlarged for the development of abilities to achieve a correct pronunciation.

Pronunciation teaching learning process is essential for an effective communication, if the students don't produce the sounds in a clear way, they won't be able to communicate or they will make it with difficulties, what will bring interferences in the communication. This suggests that the pronunciation teaching has to be integrated with the other aspects and linguistic abilities for the sake of achieving the students' communicative competence. Pronunciation teaching needs with urgency to be implied with more dynamism in the development, formation and the students' growth; for it, the developer practical is needed.

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