

Enhancing Spoken English Proficiency: The Role of Classroom Activities in Nigerian

Universities

Abstract

This paper examines the instrumentality of classroom exercises in effective teaching and learning of spoken English. In Nigeria, the curriculum of the Bachelor of Arts (English Language) program reveals that spoken English is crucial in English studies. Courses such as Spoken English, English Phonetics, Phonology of English and Suprasegmental Phonology are immersed in teaching Spoken English. Therefore, in this study, Spoken English is used as a cover-term for phonetics and phonology-related courses. The different names used as course titles are unified in terms of general objectives part of which is “to enhance non-native speakers’ proficiency in English-based communication skills”. It is therefore not surprising that such courses have related or even instances of reduplicated course contents. In Nigeria where, English studies do not achieve much of the expected goals, there is need for research on improved pedagogical approaches, and one of such approaches is the goal-driven use of classroom exercises in teaching discrete skills in spoken English. Hinging on Gruzinskaya’s System of Exercises Theory, this study concludes that classroom exercises facilitate the teaching and learning of spoken English in universities in Nigeria because of the pedagogical functions of such exercises: the exercises are organized, capture discrete skills, engage learners in productive and critical thinking; and are theory-based.

Keywords: Spoken English, Phonology, Classroom Exercises, Teaching, Learning, Gruzinskaya’s System of Exercises Theory

1. Introduction

The curriculums of English studies in Nigerian universities show clear objectives. Approaches towards achieving the objectives should be subject to appraisal and modification. In any field of knowledge, studies evolve to correct, change or promote the status-quo (Amin et al., 2024). In Nigeria where English is taught as a target language, different factors including mother tongue interference, militate against effective teaching and learning of spoken English. Alharbi (2015), cited in Gudu (2015, p.1), reports that:

there are several factors that influence the learning of speaking skills, for instance, use of mother tongue outside and inside the classroom environment, low status of English in a country, learners’ negative attitude towards English language, use of mother tongue by teachers to explain difficult concepts, use of teacher-centered methodology and passiveness of learners in classroom.

Interestingly, the instrumentality of classroom exercises in the teaching of English in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts is presently a front-burner issue. For example, Zhang (2020, p.1) submits that:

...considerable attention has been paid to a variety of classroom activities in an English-speaking class ... However, there has been evidence showing that different situations in classroom activities exert various effects on learners' English-speaking proficiency ... This fact indicates that both positive and negative effects can be made according to types and effects of classroom exercises ... communicative activities such as discussion, problem-solving and role play can develop students' English speaking proficiency... some oral activities in EFL classes such as some drill activities possibly cause the low English-speaking proficiency for students
.....

Given the day-to-day usefulness of spoken communication, a study of tips for effective teaching and learning of spoken English in universities in Nigeria, is worthy of scholarly attention. Indeed, it will fill the gaps on observed approach-based deficits.

2. Phonology of English

Phonology is concerned with studying sounds in terms of their functional patterning. Sounds that can be produced and perceived by human beings are not exhaustive. Phonology explains grammatical constraints that determine the selection, arrangement and variation of speech sounds in any human language. As a field of language study, phonology examines: how sounds function in a language; the properties of sounds; the universal properties of sounds in human languages; the systematic combination of sounds for word formation; and unconscious knowledge which speakers have about the sound patterns and systems of a language. See Czaykowska-Hogins and Dobrovolsky cited in O' Grady and Archibald (2004) for insights on the definition of phonology. Two broad classifications of phonology are: segmental phonology and suprasegmental phonology:

2.1 Segmental Phonology

Segmental phonology is the study of discrete phonemes. A phoneme is the smallest sound unit in a language. It can either be a vowel or a consonant.

2.1.1 Vowels

According to Jones (2006, p.549), “a vowel is the class of sounds which makes the least obstruction to the flow of air.” Syllables accommodate vowels. A vowel is a voiced sound, articulated with the vibration of the vocal cords. Vowels are classified as monophthongs (pure vowels), diphthongs and triphthongs. Monophthongs and diphthongs which are common in English have numbers that are used to refer to them as:

- | | | | | |
|---------|---------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. /i:/ | 5. /ɑ:/ | 9. /u:/ | 13. /eɪ/ | 17. /əʊ/ |
| 2. /ɪ/ | 6. /ɒ/ | 10. /ʌ/ | 14. /aɪ/ | 18. /ɪə/ |
| 3. /e/ | 7. /ɔ:/ | 11. /ɜ:/ | 15. /aʊ/ | 19. /eə/ |
| 4. /æ/ | 8. /ʊ/ | 12. /ə/ | 16. /ɔɪ/ | 20. /ʊə/ |

Examples of triphthongs include:

/eɪə/ as in layer [leɪə]

/aɪə/ as in fire [faɪə]

/əʊə/ as in mower [məʊə]

/aʊə/ as in flower [flaʊə]

/ɔɪə/ as in royal [rɔɪə]

It is worthy of note however, that the occurrence of triphthongs is problematic because according to Jones (2003), a triphthong is composed of a diphthong and a schwa /ə/ which makes it difficult for foreign learners to identify them in the speech of native speakers. The words in the examples above may for instance, be realized as disyllabic as follows:

layer [leɪ.ə]

fire [faɪ.ə]

mower [məʊ.ə]

flower [flaʊ.ə]

royal [rɔɪ.ə]

The figure below is the English vowel chart based on the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), Revised (2005).

/ə/ – open, short, central (neutral), lax

2.1.2 Consonants

A consonant is a phoneme produced with partial or complete obstruction (prevention of airstream) in the oral cavity. A typical consonant chart of RP English is presented in the figure below based on Jones (2003).

Table 1 : A typical consonant chart of RP English

MANNER	PLACE							
	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b			t d			k g	
Affricate					tʃ dʒ			
Fricative		f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ			h
Nasal	m			n			ŋ	
Lateral				l				
Approximant	w			r		j		

The consonants of English Received Pronunciation (RP) are described below:

/p/ – voiceless bilabial plosive

/b/ – voiced bilabial plosive

/t/ – voiceless alveolar plosive

/d/ – voiced alveolar plosive

/k/ – voiceless velar plosive

/g/ – voiced velar plosive

/f/ – voiceless labiodental fricative

/v/ – voiced labiodental fricative

/θ/ – voiceless dental fricative

/ð/ – voiced dental fricative

/s/ – voiceless alveolar fricative
/z/ – voiced alveolar fricative
/ʃ/ – voiceless palate-alveolar fricative
/ʒ/ – voiced palato-alveolar fricative
/h/ – voiceless glottal fricative
/m/ – voiced bilabial nasal
/n/ – voiced alveolar nasal
/ŋ/ – voiced velar nasal
/tʃ/ – voiceless palato-alveolar affricate
/dʒ/ – voiced palato-alveolar affricate
/w/ – voiced bilabial semi-vowel
/j/ – voiced palatal semi-vowel
/r/ – voiced alveolar roll
/l/ – voiced alveolar lateral

2.2 Suprasegmental Phonology

Suprasegmental phonology is the study of the prosodic features of sounds (stress, intonation, pitch and rhythm) which are produced across sound segments, syllables, words and linguistic stretches. Jones (2006, p.388) defines suprasegmental phonology as “the study of stress, rhythm and intonation.”

2.2.1 Stress:

Stress is generally used to denote the total perceived pitch, loudness and length in the production of utterances. Stress rules and patterns vary from one language to another. Davenport and Hannahs (2010, p.78) define stress as “a measure of prominence associated with the syllable.” The English syllable receives different degrees of prominence. Stress is the degree of prominence with which a syllable is uttered. Stress types include:

- a.) Primary stress: It is signified with a superscript stroke as in “‘rocky”;
- b.) Secondary stress: It is marked with a subscript stroke as in “;cruci'fixion”; and

c.) Weak stress: It is unmarked in most pronunciation dictionaries.

When a syllable is regarded as “stressed”, it is because it conveys the primary or secondary prominence in a word. A stressed syllable is salient. Consider the placement of stress in the following English words and stretches:

a.) Every English word has its fixed stress pattern;

b.) In grammatical words, primary stress is absent in connected speech, although there are exceptions to this rule.

c.) Prominent syllables do not appear in immediate succession as in the words “opportunity” and “consideration”;

d.) In some di-syllabic words, two syllables receive primary stress as in “blueprint”, “outgrow”, “July” and “crisis”. But one can be replaced by a secondary stress;

e.) Based on the notion of “fixed stress pattern”, a di-syllabic English word may have primary stress either on the first syllable or on the second.

f.) For the purpose of changing the word class of a word, there can be stress shifting as in convict (noun); convict (verb).

2.2.2 Intonation:

Intonation refers to the rising and falling of voice pitches during speech production. Types of intonation include: Tune I (falling tune) and Tune II (rising tune). In the literature on phonology, these tunes, and others such as: high-falling, low-falling, half-rising, full-rising, rise-fall, fall-rise and level, are represented by phonetic symbols. Various pitch boundaries can be noticed in speech production, but the falling tune I and the rising tune II will suffice in the analysis of most spoken communication.

Intonation is often used to convey statements, questions, commands and requests. In such communicative functions, appropriate tunes should be used. Rules for using intonation on linguistic stretches are as follows:

a.) The falling tune appears at the end of exclamations, although it may be used with some degree of length;

b.) The falling tune ends commands and requests;

c.) The rising tune is used to indicate pauses in sentences;

d.) A statement ends with a falling tune;

e.) A question ends with a rising tune;

- f.) The rising tune is used in question tags; and
- g.) The rising tune is used for listing items in linguistic stretches. (there is however a fall on the last item on the list).

3. English Studies in Nigeria

English is a second language in Nigeria. This position is arrived at following the criteria set out in Platt, Weber and Ho (1984, p.2.) thus:

- i. It has developed through the education system. This means that it has been taught as a subject and, in many cases, also used as a medium of instruction in regions where languages other than English were the main languages. The degree to which English is used as a medium of education for other subjects varies considerably from nation to nation and from one type of school to another.
- ii. It has developed in an area where a native variety of English was not the language spoken by most of the population. For various reasons, ... pidgin and creole languages are not considered to be native *varieties of English*.
- iii. It is used for a range of functions *among* those who speak or write it in the region where it is used. This means that the new variety is used for at least some purposes such as: in letter writing, in writing of literature, in parliament, in communication between the government and the people, in the media and sometimes for spoken communication between friends and in the family. It may be used as a lingua franca, a general language of communication among those who speak the same native language but use English because it is felt to be more appropriate for certain purposes.
- iv. It has been 'localised' or 'nativised' by adopting some language features of its own such as sounds, intonation patterns, sentence structures, words, expressions. Usually, it has also developed some different rules for using language in communication.

The foregoing description captures some, if not all of the characteristics of Nigerian English. The position of English as the language of instruction in Nigeria is informed by the Education Ordinance of 1882. This culminated in the introduction of the Certification System in which a Credit Pass in English became crucial. "International intelligibility" is partly the goal of English studies in Nigeria. Language is instrumental in the development of a country, and the English language is a credible candidate for that function. In Nigeria, the role of English in nation-building is evident in its domain functions. The nation-building

potentials of English imply that the language has to be taught towards proficiency. If literacy level in English is not satisfactory in Nigeria, it implies that: the language is poorly taught in educational institutions. This explains why language-induced poor performances abound at the work-place.

Commenting on the position of English in Nigeria, Dada (2010) observes that:

- a. English is compulsory for every Nigerian, being the de Facto official language in the bureaucracy and all tiers of formal education in Nigeria and as an international language for that matter.
- b. The utilitarian value (socially, economically and academically) of the English language vis-à-vis any of our indigenous languages is high.
- c. The overbearing status of the English language over the indigenous languages in Nigeria today makes even mother tongue learning a perfunctory exercise.

In teaching English in Nigerian universities, the basic skills to be learned are reflected in the curriculum. For example, the B.A. English Programme states the objectives of English studies as:

- a. to train students to acquire adequate communicative competence in spoken and written English;
- b. to equip students with the knowledge of the forms and features of the varieties of English used in different professions: business communication, advertising, book publishing, media, sports commentary, English for Academic Purposes, etc.;
- c. to adequately prepare the students to pursue postgraduate studies in English language and Linguistics from acquired knowledge (e.g. knowledge of theories and methods of learning and teaching English as a Second Language);
- d. to orient students towards self-employment after the acquisition of discrete skills in English language;
- e. to equip students with skills for critical thinking so that such skills can be articulated in written and spoken discourses;

- f. to make students acquire content samples of different forms and genres of Literature in English in their cultural contexts (native speakers' varieties) as well as Nigerian and other African-Caribbean varieties;
- g. to ensure that students have linguistic knowledge of English (i.e. knowledge of phonology, morphology and syntax);
- h. to enable students to achieve mastery of the basic language skills (skills in listening, speaking and writing);
- i. to make students acquire sociolinguistic knowledge of English (knowledge of pragmatics, stylistics, discourse analysis and varieties of English).

The functions of English in Nigeria are as follows:

- i. Nationism (language for smooth running of a nation),
- ii. Nationalism (language in national mobilization),
- iii. Education (language for teaching, training and documentation),
- iv. Lingua franca (language for interaction amidst many languages),
- v. International diplomacy/relations (sports, journalism),
- vi. Transaction,
- vii. Policy-making,
- viii. Administration,
- ix. Legal proceedings; and
- x. Religious worship.

4. Theoretical Framework

I. A. Gruzinskaya's System of Exercises Theory is suitable for this study because it emphasizes coverage, approach and goal (objective) in the use of classroom exercises for teaching and learning discrete skills. Zhang (ibid.) reports elaborately on the theory.

The first methodologist who paid special attention to the development of the theory of the system of exercises was Professor I. A. Gruzinskaya.

She built her system of exercises based on the goal of teaching to teach students a comprehensive mastery of the language (oral speech, reading and writing). To do this, she considered it necessary to create exercises that would cover all aspects of the language (vocabulary, grammar and phonetics) and correspond to the mental processes that occur during its assimilation – recognition, memorization, and reproduction. In accordance with this, I. A. Gruzinskaya puts forward the following requirements for the system of exercises:

- i. **Sequence of exercises:** Every new linguistic phenomenon must pass through stages of assimilation:
 - a. receptive, this offers exercises in identifying, selecting, and grouping,
 - b. semi-reproductive – ... a variety of exercises by analogy with the partial modification of the sample; and
 - c. reproductive, which is the final stage of mastering of language skills and requires the ability to arbitrarily (without prompting) reproduce a particular phenomenon of language to express his/her thoughts. The last two stages – semi-free reproduction and random reproduction – in addition to exercises aimed at consolidating certain types of language knowledge should also include all the variety of exercises aimed at creating active skills.
- ii. **Consistency in the application of various types of exercises.** For each year of study, reference type of exercise should be selected, which should be repeated from lesson to lesson ...
- iii. **Continuity of exercise types.** Along with the obligatory continuity and repeatability of some of the main types of exercises, it is necessary to steadily expand their range and modify their content. I. A. Gruzinskaya distinguishes the following four types of exercises:
 - a. phonetic spelling,
 - b. grammatical,
 - c. vocabulary; and
 - d. Exercises in creating active skills.

The objectives and features of the exercises are evident in the theorist's postulations that the exercises should:

- i. develop cognitive processes of the individual (thinking, memory, imagination).
- ii. consider the purpose, material, and method of performing exercises,
- iii. develop and ensure the assimilation of all aspects of the language and all types of language activities,
- iv. include all types and kinds of exercises, each of which should have its own specifics (irreplaceability of system elements),
- v. communicate between elements of the system according to the principle of composition and subordination; each element of the system must represent a binomial (binary) opposition; and
- vi. arrange kinds and types of exercises according to the degree of increasing difficulties. When classifying exercises, as a rule, terms with negative characteristics should not be used.

5. Methodology

The data of this study are generated from nine classroom exercises used during a semester for teaching Phonology of English. Six of the exercises (henceforth CE 1– CE 6) are selected for analysis using logical parameters: skills targeted; coverage; learner-difficulties; and ease of analysis. The parameters are germane to the thrust of the study. The selected corpora cover segmental and suprasegmental phonology of English. The analysis is integrative; insights from core and related literature give it direction.

6. Presentation and Analysis of Data

6.1 CE 1

Draw the human organs of speech. On the basis of the location of each of the parts, list two sounds that can be articulated when:

- i. there is friction between the upper and lower lips,
- ii. the tip of the tongue touches the alveolar ridge; and
- iii. the articulators are situated at the back of the tongue.

Comments

Wrong articulation of segments is partly as a result of wrong positioning of the articulators in the oral cavity (the mouth). CE 1 establishes what is meant by “place of articulation” and “manner of interference/articulation” in the description of the consonant sounds of English Received Pronunciation (RP). In the description of such consonants, the notion of “manner of interference/articulation” has to do with sound qualities produced discretely through the modification of the airstream: nasal, stop, fricative, affricate, **approximant, flap or trill.**

On the other hand, the notion “place of articulation” concerns point of the oral cavity where complete or partial obstruction occurs during the production of consonants: bilabial, labio-dental, dental, alveolar, palato-palatal, palatal, velar and glottal. By making students to be familiar with the organs of speech through pictorial representations, the biological and speech production functions of such organs are established in the minds of students. CE 1 is activity-driven and can therefore foster the teaching and learning of spoken English. Zhang (ibid.) reports that “previous research findings have identified the importance of speaking proficiency in English learning and teaching, and class activities can exert significant effects on learners’ speaking proficiency ...” Competent speaking is so vital in day-to-day human events that classroom exercises should be made quite rewarding to learners who want to explore their proficiency in English for career purposes.

Hedge (2000) rightly notes that “the need to maintain relationships and demonstrate effective communication makes competent speaking of English crucial to students.” Classroom diagrams of various kinds, including charts, are pedagogically rewarding for the teaching and learning of spoken English in Nigerian universities because cognition (understanding) interacts with pictorial representations. Nikolajeva and Scott, cited in Shafii (2015) note that “the relationship between text and illustration could be symmetrical: that is when illustration correlates with text ... The text depends on pictures for clarification; illustration enhances, elaborates text ...” In a similar vein, Ozsezer and Canbazoglu (2018, p.205) cite Piaget who opines that:

learning theories need contexts in which an individual can reason and make meaning in order to be able to develop cognitively ... seeing is an active function of the mind whereas perception is a cognitive event. This ultimately emphasizes that interpretation and meaning are integral parts of

the act of seeing. This experience is much more efficient for the individual experiencing pictorial products. It needs to be stimulated both intuitively and cognitively in order for the mind to function fully ... This allows the individual to see not only the parts but also the whole.

6.2 CE 2

Draw the vowel chart of English RP (Received Pronunciation). A correctly drawn chart shows that some words are produced when articulators “glide” from one segment to another (diphthongs). Write two examples of words that can be produced when the gliding captures three phonemes.

Comments

Many Nigerian speakers of English do not ensure that their lips glide when they pronounce certain English words that have sequence of phonemes. CE 2 familiarizes students with different instances of glide, thus promoting their ability to imagine words that are pronounced via gliding. Many of the words used in everyday conversation have pure vowels and diphthongs. This means that indeed, pictorial representations in classroom are of pedagogical relevance. When students check the English lexicon (dictionary), and find pure vowels and diphthongs in many mono-syllabic, di-syllabic, tri-syllabic and poly-syllabic words, visual impressions from classroom charts facilitate learning. Teachers of spoken English have herculean task in the transmission of knowledge because low proficiency levels are carried over by undergraduates, right from primary schools.

Experts believe that different factors are responsible for poor performance in spoken English at pre-university stage: mother tongue influence, inadequate instructional materials, poor human resources, language attitudes, among other factors. Gudu (ibid., p.55) asserts that “the problem of low communication and linguistic competence from secondary school is carried to the university where it has also been observed that some of the first-year students ... are not able to sustain class discussions in English without code-switching ...”

6.3 CE 3

Read the following sentences aloud:

- i. Ben picked Bode’s pen by bending.
- ii. Choose shoes Chioma should share.
- iii. Zet met wet nets.
- iv. Vans for video films arrived.

Comments

The English consonant can appear at word initial (beginning), word medial (middle) and word final positions (end). Classroom exercises should enable students to pronounce consonants correctly in any word positions especially when such consonants pose articulatory difficulties that are informed by notions such as “voice/voiceless counterparts” and “partial/complete obstruction” (of air). CE 3 is a kind of classroom exercise that should be extended to di-syllabic, tri-syllabic and poly-syllabic words, considering the fact that rhyme and tone interact with the concept of syllable. CE 3 drills learners in the articulation of phonemes in isolated and connected speech. This fosters their ability to mimic native speakers. Restricting learners to the production of words in isolation is not helpful. There should be adequate coverage, considering the fact that in connected speech, phonemes change their phonetic properties towards effective communication. The literature on phonology acknowledges articulatory processes: assimilation, dissimilation, deletion, etc. ¹. When the discrete aspects of skills in spoken English are captured via classroom exercises, then there is progression. Obviously, CE 3 drills learners in receptive and reproductive skills which are fundamental aspects of proficiency acknowledged in the literature.

Zhang (ibid) notes that “... G. Palmer distinguishes between receptive and reproductive exercises. The former are divided into unconscious and conscious exercises. The task of unconscious exercises is to draw students’ attention to the General content of the phrases spoken by the teacher, regardless of their form and meaning of individual words. This type of exercises also includes the execution of orders (imperative drill). Conscious exercises should focus students’ attention on specific language phenomena (phonetic, grammatical and lexical). The second type of exercises (receptive and reproductive) involves not only perception, but also reproduction of speech by students. There are three types of exercises: repetition, following the teacher/conditional conversation, in which students mainly answer questions posed by the teacher, and natural conversation on various topics of everyday life ...”

6.4 CE 4

Read the following sentences with correct tunes:

- i. “Is she a Nigerian?” the teacher asked.
- ii. John asked his friend, “Have you ever been to Lagos?”
- iii. They bought rice, palm oil, onions and fruits.

- iv. “Move out,” the policeman ordered the suspect.
- v. When you see them, run away.
- vi. He wanted to know you, not me.

Comments

Reading linguistic stretches with correct tunes presupposes the placement of stress on syllables. CE 4 is context-revealing; it captures real life communicative situations where speakers deploy communicative skills to convey attitudes, judgments, stance, message and a wide range of discourse acts. Stress and intonation are crucial in real life communicative situations. They are communicative prosodic features in statements, questions, commands, requests. CE 4 is one of the kinds of exercises that enhance learners’ prowess in impromptu speeches and a wide range of oral performance components. For effective structuring of such exercises, teachers should ensure that the exercises capture the notion of “from general to specific”. CE 4 equips learners with listening and speaking skills. The exercise is immersed in learner-intelligence drill. It spurs students to think critically and provide answers. “Thoughts” are in this regard, reflections on previous related lessons.

Dai (ibid., p.18) opines that “in the process of practice, attention should be paid to the development of students’ intelligence and ability. Students should not only master the knowledge they have learned, but also develop their intelligence and cultivate their ability. In the actual training, pay attention to cultivating students’ ability of observation, attention, thinking, memory, imagination and other psychological factors. Also pay attention to cultivating students’ listening, speaking, reading, writing and other practical operation ability².”

The functions of intonation in human communication make it a front-burner topic in the suprasegmental phonology of English. Rising intonation conveys politeness as in:

- a. Please sit here.
- b. Kindly relax in my office.

In the above sentences, the speaker is not commanding the addressee. The commanding tone of the utterances is removed by the rising tune.

6.5 CE 5

From the tape-recorder, listen to the reading of ten out of twenty paired words. A word in each pair is the actual word pronounced in the reading. Write it down:

- i. Not, north
- ii. Who, hoe
- iii. Bed, bird
- iv. Cat, cut
- v. Guns, gowns
- vi. Wheel, will
- vii. Full, fool
- viii. Could, cool
- ix. Dip, deep
- x. Lean, lin

Comments

CE 5 is a kind of exercise that learners find interesting; suitable for the good and average students because it is not complex. Arguably, classroom exercises should be interest-arousing. To make CE 5 even more interesting, a tape-recorder is used. In some instances, very low volume of music is provided at the background, thus making the teaching and learning of spoken English less stressful. Musical background in the pedagogical process is even more fascinating in the teaching and learning of suprasegmental phonology. It is an effort to guarantee situation-based teaching and learning of spoken English in tertiary institutions. CE 5 attempts the teaching of discrete vowel sounds. Given the fact that a vowel is the nucleus (peak) of the English syllable, it should be taught and learned through multiple results-oriented classroom exercises.

6.6 CE 6

Pick from the above words (a – c), the one that has the same rhyme as the underlined word:

- i. Fork: farm, pork, pack
- ii. Pain: tell, lane, pan
- iii. Bled: fled, said, fried
- iv. Tea: try, bee, dread

Comments

CE 6 captures rhyme/rhythm which is a crucial aspect of the suprasegmental phonology of English. The time-based distribution of speech production is referred to as “rhythm”. Osisanwo (2020) defines speech rhythm as “a regular succession of one type of sound feature or the other used in achieving melody and sometimes, meaning in a human

language.” CE 6 reveals that via exercises, learning components are taught with organized structure of presentation. When exercises are not well presented, the teaching or learning of spoken English is made much more abstract and difficult. This is particularly so in cases where English is learned as a foreign language or in English as a Second Language (ESL) context. When learning components are organized, the skills to be learned are revealed in exercises. Students are able to see their individual weaknesses and the purpose of the exercises structured by the teacher. Therefore, spoken English should be taught by experienced (qualified) teachers. This is a major way of achieving maximum results. CE 6 is in recognition of the significance of sounds (segments/phonemes) in the learning of words and language in general. Dai (ibid, p.20) avers that “... good spoken English cannot be acquired without a good pronunciation. Pronunciation is an umbrella term covering ... sounds, stress, and intonation. It is important to teach students phonics or the ... international phonetic symbols before teaching them words. In this way, students can recognize the words they can’t read, just as they can look up the dictionary ...”

7. Discussion

The goals of teaching spoken English is not necessarily to make ESL learners of spoken English speak exactly the way native speakers do. Rather, it is to produce non-native speakers with a native-like control of spoken English. Spoken English is best learned via conscious learner-efforts. Practice and imitation of good speakers are therefore very helpful. The exercises examined in this study are potent in enhancing the spoken English of students at individual and group-performance levels. When teaching is made teacher-centered, crucial skills are hardly learned in the classroom. The ability to perform effectively at group level is essentially an evidence of learners’ confidence level in the use of English in varied communicative situations. Classroom exercises are ordered instruments for effective teaching of spoken English in universities in Nigeria. B. Eggert’s exercise-based postulations cited in Zhang (ibid, p.1) are therefore worthy of scholarly attention: “... B. Eggert established a number of regularities, of which the following are still, of the greatest interest today”:

- a. The nature of the exercises should match the acquired skills, i.e. to teach the student the comprehension skills you need to offer him appropriate special exercises, for teaching speaking – exercises for speaking and so on ...
- b. The meaning and use of language forms is best learned in the course of activities and in appropriate situations that are close to students and arouse their interest.

- c. Global assimilation of language forms should be accompanied by an analysis of their components.
- d. Any new linguistic phenomenon is better understood if it is placed in different contexts.
- e. When learning a language, the main role belongs to oral exercises ...

Given the objectives of the receptive and productive skill-based exercises examined in this study, it is clear why they are systematically related. Zhang (ibid, p.3) reports that "... a system of exercises for teaching a foreign language should be understood as a set of types and kinds of exercises that are related to each other by purpose, material, and method of their implementation ..."

8. Conclusion

The exercises examined in this study accentuate the fact that good spoken English presupposes conscious efforts on the part of learners, to practice and explore articulatory processes. Knowledge of sounds (phonemes) will not suffice if rules concerning suprasegmental phonology are ignored in classroom and in real life communicative situations. For example, pure vowels have their phonetic properties changed when they are pronounced in connected speech rather than being pronounced in isolation. In connected speech, speakers explore discrete articulatory processes. The corpora of English spoken by graduates of English should be equivalent to what can be regarded as Standard Nigerian English.

This study establishes the features of classroom exercises – features which pungently establish the pedagogical relevance of such exercises. The exercises are: systematic instructional instruments; they are focused on teaching objectives; they promote learners' interest in learning; they enhance performance in spoken English at different levels and they are theoretically rooted.

Notes

¹ In phonology, common phonological processes include:

- a.) Assimilation: It explains the influence of neighboring sound(s) on a segment (e.g. voicing assimilation, devoicing, flapping);

b.) Dissimilation: In this kind of articulatory process, two sounds become less phonetically similar; and

c.) Deletion: It occurs in rapid speech, and involves deleting phonemes in certain contexts.

². Benter Oseno Gudu (ibid, p.57) posits that “practice is a crucial link in classroom teaching. How to improve students’ practice is an important problem that teachers should pay attention to in teaching.”

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