

TEACHING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION AND INTONATION THROUGH COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES

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Abstract. Pronunciation and intonation are essential elements of effective oral communication in English. However, in many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, pronunciation is still taught mainly through repetition, drilling, and isolated word practice. Although these techniques can improve learners' accuracy, they may not provide sufficient opportunities to apply pronunciation and intonation in meaningful communication. This article examines the importance of teaching English pronunciation and intonation through communicative activities. It discusses the relationship between pronunciation, intonation, speaking fluency, and communicative competence and explores practical classroom activities such as role-playing, information-gap tasks, dialogues, interviews, problem-solving activities, presentations, and pronunciation games. The article argues that communicative pronunciation instruction can help learners develop not only accurate sound production but also appropriate stress, rhythm, pitch, and intonation. When pronunciation practice is connected with meaningful interaction, learners can become more confident, intelligible, and effective English speakers.

Keywords: pronunciation, intonation, communicative activities, EFL, speaking skills, communicative competence, stress, rhythm, fluency, intelligibility, English language teaching.

Introduction

Pronunciation is a fundamental component of spoken language. Learners may possess extensive vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, but inaccurate pronunciation can prevent them from communicating effectively. Similarly, inappropriate intonation can change the meaning or emotional interpretation of an utterance. Therefore, pronunciation and intonation should be considered essential parts of English language instruction.

Traditional pronunciation teaching has often emphasized repetition, imitation, and mechanical drills. These activities can be useful for developing basic accuracy, particularly when learners are introduced to unfamiliar sounds. However, learners also need opportunities to use pronunciation features while communicating with other people. In real communication, speakers do not produce isolated sounds; they combine sounds into words, phrases, and sentences while simultaneously using stress, rhythm, and intonation to express meaning.

Communicative activities provide an opportunity to connect pronunciation practice with authentic language use. Through pair work, group discussions, role-plays, interviews,

and problem-solving tasks, learners can practice pronunciation and intonation in meaningful contexts.

The Importance of Pronunciation in Communication

Pronunciation refers to the production and organization of speech sounds. It includes individual vowels and consonants as well as syllables, word stress, sentence stress, rhythm, and connected speech.

The primary goal of pronunciation instruction should be intelligibility rather than the complete elimination of a learner's accent. Learners need to produce English clearly enough for other speakers to understand them without unnecessary difficulty.

For example, differences between the following words can create communication problems:

- *ship – sheep*
- *live – leave*
- *rice – rise*
- *fan – van*

Communicative activities allow students to practice these distinctions in meaningful situations rather than simply repeating words after the teacher.

The Role of Intonation

Intonation refers to variations in pitch during speech. It plays an important role in expressing meaning, emotion, attitude, and communicative intention.

Consider:

You finished. ↘

You finished? ↗

The words are identical, but the intonation changes the communicative function. The first example may express confirmation or a statement, while the second may express surprise or a request for confirmation.

Intonation is also important for expressing attitudes such as enthusiasm, politeness, uncertainty, surprise, disagreement, and disappointment. Consequently, learners need to practice intonation in situations where these meanings are relevant.

Communicative Pronunciation Teaching

Communicative pronunciation teaching focuses on using pronunciation features for meaningful interaction. Instead of asking students to repeat a sound dozens of times without context, teachers can create situations in which accurate pronunciation is necessary to communicate a message.

For example, students can participate in an information-gap activity where one learner has information that another learner needs. If pronunciation is unclear, the message may not be understood. This creates a natural reason for learners to pay attention to pronunciation.

A communicative approach can therefore follow the progression:

Notice → Practice → Interact → Receive Feedback → Communicate

This approach connects pronunciation accuracy with practical language use.

Effective Communicative Activities

1. Role-Playing

Role-playing is one of the most effective activities for practicing pronunciation and intonation. Students can act out situations such as ordering food, visiting a doctor, attending a job interview, making a complaint, or asking for directions.

For example, students can practice different intonation patterns when making requests:

Could you help me? ↗

Yes, of course. ↘

The teacher can focus learners' attention on polite intonation and sentence stress.

2. Information-Gap Activities

In information-gap tasks, students receive different pieces of information and must communicate with one another to complete a task.

For example, Student A has a train timetable while Student B has information about ticket prices. They need to ask and answer questions to complete the schedule.

Such activities encourage students to speak spontaneously while practicing pronunciation in context.

3. Dialogue Practice

Short dialogues can be used to practice stress, rhythm, linking, and intonation.

Students first listen to a model dialogue, identify stressed words and intonation patterns, and then practice the dialogue in pairs. After controlled practice, they can modify the dialogue and create their own conversation.

4. Interviews

Interview activities provide opportunities for students to use natural questions and answers. Students can interview classmates about hobbies, education, travel, future plans, or personal interests.

Teachers can focus on question intonation, particularly the difference between rising and falling patterns.

5. Problem-Solving Activities

Problem-solving tasks require learners to exchange ideas and reach a decision. For example, students may be asked to plan a school event, choose a holiday destination, or decide how to solve an environmental problem.

These activities are useful because learners must communicate meaning rather than simply repeat predetermined sentences.

6. Pronunciation Games

Games can make pronunciation practice more engaging. Teachers can use minimal-pair competitions, pronunciation bingo, sound identification games, stress challenges, and intonation guessing games.

For example, one student says a sentence using a particular intonation pattern, while another student identifies whether the speaker is expressing surprise, uncertainty, agreement, or a question.

7. Presentations

Short presentations can help learners practice pronunciation at the discourse level. Students can prepare a two- or three-minute presentation and receive feedback on pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation.

Teachers should encourage students to emphasize key words rather than pronounce every word with equal force.

Teaching Stress Through Communication

Stress is an important part of English pronunciation. Learners need to understand both word stress and sentence stress.

For example:

I wanted a NEW phone.

I WANTED a new phone.

Changing the stressed word changes the information being emphasized.

Teachers can incorporate this feature into communicative activities. Students can repeat the same sentence with different stressed words and ask their partners to explain how the meaning or emphasis changes.

This demonstrates that stress is not merely a pronunciation feature; it is also a tool for communicating information.

Teaching Rhythm and Connected Speech

Natural English speech includes rhythm and connected speech. Words are often linked together, and unstressed words may be pronounced more weakly than stressed words.

Learners who pronounce every word separately may sound unnatural and may also experience difficulties understanding fluent speakers.

Teachers can use short dialogues to demonstrate linking and reductions. Students can first listen, then mark connected speech features, and finally practice the dialogue naturally.

For example:

Did you eat yet?

In natural speech, the words may be connected and pronounced more smoothly than in careful classroom speech.

Communicative activities give learners a reason to use these features naturally.

Feedback and Error Correction

Feedback is an important component of pronunciation teaching. However, teachers should avoid interrupting students every time they make a pronunciation error, particularly during fluency activities.

A useful distinction can be made between:

- **accuracy activities**, where immediate correction may be appropriate;
- **fluency activities**, where teachers can record errors and provide feedback afterward.

Teachers should prioritize errors that significantly affect intelligibility. Feedback should be constructive and specific.

Instead of saying:

“Your pronunciation is wrong.”

the teacher can say:

“Listen to the vowel in this word and compare it with the model.”

This approach encourages learners to notice and correct their own pronunciation.

The Role of Pair and Group Work

Pair and group activities provide more speaking opportunities than teacher-centered instruction. In a traditional classroom, one student may speak while many others listen. Communicative pair work allows several learners to practice simultaneously.

Students can:

- practice dialogues;
- conduct interviews;
- exchange information;
- solve problems;
- perform role-plays;
- give peer feedback.

These activities increase the amount of time learners spend producing English and therefore create more opportunities for pronunciation development.

Technology-Assisted Communicative Activities

Technology can further support communicative pronunciation instruction. Students can use smartphones and digital recording tools to record conversations, presentations, or role-plays.

Teachers can also use pronunciation applications, online dictionaries, podcasts, video clips, and speech-recognition tools.

A useful activity is to ask students to record a short conversation, listen to it, identify pronunciation problems, and record a second version. This process promotes learner autonomy and self-monitoring.

Benefits of Communicative Pronunciation Instruction

Teaching pronunciation and intonation through communicative activities provides several benefits.

Improved Intelligibility

Learners become more aware of sounds, stress, rhythm, and intonation that influence how easily others understand them.

Greater Speaking Fluency

Regular interaction helps learners move from controlled pronunciation practice to spontaneous communication.

Increased Confidence

Students become less afraid of pronunciation errors when they practice in supportive pair and group activities.

Better Listening Skills

Pronunciation instruction also improves listening because learners become more sensitive to stress, rhythm, reductions, and intonation.

Stronger Communicative Competence

Learners develop the ability to use pronunciation features not only accurately but appropriately according to the communicative situation.

Challenges

Despite its advantages, communicative pronunciation teaching can present several challenges. Large classes may make individual feedback difficult. Some learners may also feel embarrassed when performing pronunciation activities in front of classmates.

Teachers can address these problems by beginning with pair work and gradually moving toward larger group activities. Clear instructions, supportive classroom environments, and positive feedback can also reduce anxiety.

Another challenge is limited classroom time. Teachers do not necessarily need separate pronunciation lessons. Short pronunciation activities can be integrated into existing speaking, listening, vocabulary, and grammar lessons.

A Suggested Lesson Procedure

A communicative pronunciation lesson can follow these stages:

- 1. Warm-up:** Introduce the target sound, stress, or intonation pattern.
- 2. Awareness:** Students listen to examples and identify the target feature.
- 3. Controlled practice:** Students practice the feature through short phrases.
- 4. Guided communication:** Students complete a dialogue or information-gap task.
- 5. Free communication:** Students participate in a role-play, discussion, or problem-solving task.
- 6. Feedback:** The teacher discusses common pronunciation difficulties.
- 7. Reflection:** Students identify one pronunciation feature they need to improve.

This structure combines accuracy and fluency while maintaining a clear communicative purpose.

Conclusion

Pronunciation and intonation are essential for effective English communication. Although traditional drilling and repetition can help learners develop basic pronunciation accuracy, communicative activities provide the additional opportunity to apply these skills in realistic interaction.

Role-playing, information-gap tasks, dialogues, interviews, problem-solving activities, pronunciation games, presentations, and technology-assisted tasks can help learners practice sounds, stress, rhythm, and intonation while communicating meaningful messages. Such activities also increase speaking opportunities, learner motivation, confidence, and communicative competence.

The most effective pronunciation classroom is therefore not one in which learners simply repeat sounds after the teacher. It is one in which learners understand how pronunciation contributes to meaning and have regular opportunities to use it in real communication. Integrating pronunciation and intonation into communicative activities can help EFL learners progress from accurate production toward clear, confident, and natural English speech.

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