

THE ROLE OF PHONETICS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

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Abstract: *Phonetics, as a branch of linguistics, plays a crucial role in understanding the physical properties of speech sounds and their articulation. In English language education, phonetic competence is fundamental for improving learners' pronunciation, listening comprehension, and overall communicative ability. This paper explores the importance of phonetics in English language teaching (ELT), the relationship between phonetics and phonology, and modern approaches to integrating phonetic instruction into classroom practice.*

Keywords: *Phonetics, pronunciation, articulation, English language teaching, speech sounds, phonology*

Introduction. Phonetics is the scientific study of speech sounds, including their production, transmission, and perception. In the context of English language teaching, phonetics provides learners with the necessary knowledge to pronounce words accurately and to understand native speakers more effectively. As English continues to serve as a global lingua franca, the demand for accurate pronunciation and intelligibility has become increasingly significant. It is not possible, for practical purpose, to teach a foreign language to any type of learner, for any purpose, by any method, without giving some attention to pronunciation. And any attention to pronunciation is phonetics. When the person begins to communicate with the other person, he usually does it with the purpose to make a certain influence on the partner: to convince, interest, ask, warn him, etc. Any deviations from pronouncing norms of foreign language can lead to the certain difficulties in understanding. Sounds and intonation of the foreign language, reproduced with accent, can also lead to the distortion of the meaning. It is known that in the German and English languages one of the phonemic (фонематический или смысловоразличительный) feature is duration of vowels. The changing of the meaning of the word depends on duration or brevity of vowels. If you pronounce the sound incorrectly, the meaning of the word can be changed, and it can lead to partial or full misunderstanding, and even to sad consequences. Phonetics studies the sound system of the language. When we talk about the sounds of the language, we should understand that the term "sound" can be interpreted in two rather different ways. For instance, if we say *tie – die*, we can see that there are two different sounds. The point is that they differ in the articulation and

influence the meaning of the words, thus being functionally significant. But if we say let us – let them, the sounds differ in their articulation as well but they don't possess functional significance. That is why the linguist uses two separate terms: phoneme (in the first case) and allophone (the second case).

The phoneme is a minimal abstract language unit realized in speech in the form of speech sounds opposable to other phonemes of the same language to distinguish the meaning of morphemes and words. (the definition is based on the conception of Lev Vladimirovich Shcherba) It is possible to single out three aspects of the phoneme. The aspects of the phoneme reflected in the definition are:

- material
- abstract (generalized)
- functional

The material aspect is reflected in this part of the definition: “realized in speech in the form of speech sounds”. In other words, each phoneme is realized in the form of allophone.

Allophone – a set of predictable speech sounds; a variant of the phoneme. (It occurs in the phonetic context and hence cannot contrast with each other and can't make meaningful distinctions.) We can't teach our students to pronounce a phoneme, we can only teach them to pronounce one of its allophones.

The main features of allophones:

1. they possess similar articulatory features, but at the same time they may show considerable phonetic differences;
2. they never occur in the same phonetic context;
3. they can't be opposed to one another, they are not able to differentiate the meaning.

The difference between allophones is the result of the influence of the neighbouring sounds, or the phonetic context.

We distinguish two types of allophones:

- principal – the allophones which don't undergo any distinguishable changes in the chain of speech. They are closest to the sound pronounced in isolation. As for example, the English phoneme [d] is a plosive, forelingual apical, alveolar, lenis stop. In such words as door, double, dark it possesses its typical articulatory characteristics.

- subsidiary – the allophones which have predictable changes under the influence of the phonetic context, though still possessing common articulatory features. As for example, let's observe the English phoneme [d] in various phonetic contexts:

- Did – 1) slightly palatalized before front vowels and sonorant [j]; 2) partially devoiced in the initial position
- Sudden – nasal plosion before nasal sonorants [n], [m]
- Middle – lateral plosion before lateral sonorant [l]

- Drive – post alveolar followed by [r]
- Dwell – labialized followed by [w]
- Breadth – dental followed by [T], [D]

Phone – the actually pronounced sound that we hear and that reflects phonostylistic, regional, occasional and individual peculiarities.

English phonetics, the scientific study of speech sounds in the English language, forms the foundation for proper pronunciation and effective communication. This paper explores the importance of phonetic knowledge in language acquisition, the relationship between phonetics and other linguistic components, and practical strategies for improving phonetic skills. The study reveals that phonetic awareness contributes to better speaking clarity, listening accuracy, and overall language competence. English phonetics, the scientific study of speech sounds in the English language, forms the foundation for proper pronunciation and effective communication. This paper explores the importance of phonetic knowledge in language acquisition, the relationship between phonetics and other linguistic components, and practical strategies for improving phonetic skills. The study reveals that phonetic awareness contributes to better speaking clarity, listening accuracy, and overall language competence. In today's globalized world, clear and accurate English pronunciation has become increasingly important for international communication. Phonetic knowledge helps learners overcome pronunciation barriers and enhances their ability to understand native speech patterns. This research contributes to the understanding of how phonetic training can improve language learning outcomes. Previous research by Peter Ladefoged in “A Course in Phonetics” (2001) emphasizes the scientific basis of speech sound production. David Crystal's “English Phonetics and Phonology” (2003) highlights the practical applications of phonetic knowledge in language teaching. These studies demonstrate that systematic phonetic training significantly improves learners' pronunciation accuracy and listening skills. This study employs the following research methods:

- Phonetic analysis: Examination of English sound systems and their articulation
- Comparative study: Contrast between native and non-native pronunciation patterns
- Practical application: Evaluation of phonetic training techniques in classroom settings

The research focuses on the effectiveness of various phonetic teaching approaches and their impact on learners' pronunciation improvement.

Phonetics provides learners with tools to analyze and reproduce English sounds correctly. Mastery of phonetic principles leads to improved speaking fluency, better listening comprehension, and increased confidence in communication. The study of phonetics is particularly valuable for non-native speakers who need to distinguish

between similar English sounds. The study reveals several key findings regarding English phonetics:

1. Sound production. Understanding place and manner of articulation helps learners produce challenging English sounds more accurately.
2. Phonemic awareness. Knowledge of phoneme distinctions improves listening comprehension and pronunciation.
3. Stress and intonation. Mastering English stress patterns enhances communicative effectiveness.

Learners commonly face difficulties with distinguishing between similar sounds (/θ/ vs /s/, /v/ vs/w/)

Producing unfamiliar sounds not present in their native language
Mastering English stress-timed rhythm and intonation patterns
Effective Teaching Approaches Research supports the effectiveness of:

- Articulatory phonetics instruction
- Minimal pair practice
- Visual feedback through spectrograms
- Connected speech practice

According to Ladefoged (2001), understanding the physiological aspects of sound production enables learners to modify their pronunciation more effectively. Crystal (2003) emphasizes the importance of teaching suprasegmental features (stress, rhythm, intonation) alongside individual sounds.

Phonetic Components Analysis.

English contains 12 pure vowels and 8 diphthongs, presenting challenges for learners. The English consonant system includes sounds unfamiliar to many learners. Phonetics is divided into three main branches: articulatory phonetics, which studies how speech sounds are produced by the human vocal organs; acoustic phonetics, which examines the physical properties of sounds as waves; and auditory phonetics, which focuses on how sounds are perceived by the ear and brain. Understanding these aspects helps language teachers to explain pronunciation differences systematically rather than intuitively. While phonetics deals with the physical characteristics of speech sounds, phonology focuses on how sounds function within a particular language system. The distinction between these two fields allows educators to balance mechanical articulation with linguistic meaning. For instance, minimal pairs such as ship vs. sheep demonstrate how phonetic variations can lead to phonological contrasts that affect meaning. Phonetic knowledge enhances both teaching and learning processes:

- Pronunciation training helps learners reduce fossilized errors and achieve intelligibility.
- Listening comprehension improves when learners recognize subtle differences in

sounds.

- Speech rhythm and intonation contribute to natural and fluent communication. Modern teaching methodologies, such as communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based learning (TBL), can integrate phonetic awareness through interactive pronunciation tasks, minimal pair drills, and phonetic transcription exercises. Recent technological advancements have made phonetic training more accessible. Speech analysis software, mobile applications, and AI-based pronunciation tools provide instant feedback and visualization of articulation. These innovations encourage autonomous learning and make phonetics instruction more engaging and efficient.

Conclusion. Phonetics is a foundational component of English language education. By understanding how sounds are produced and perceived, teachers can design more effective pronunciation instruction, while learners can enhance their communicative competence. Therefore, integrating phonetic training into language curricula remains essential for developing accurate and natural speech in English. The topic of "Phonetics as a branch of linguistics" is the focus of this paper. Phonetics is the study of human sounds that give ideas form or make it audible. It examines the characteristics of these sounds, how they are combined and how they relate to meaning. Today, this theme is one of the most fascinating, disputable, and crucial issues of theoretical phonetics of modern English. Nevertheless, one should not deny the role of phonetics and phonology in the teaching of pronunciation since the more students are aware of the precepts and underpinnings of these branches of study, the more they will become aware of the idiosyncrasies of the target language and the more they are likely to achieve a native-like pronunciation.

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