

# Teaching pronunciation

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## Why teach pronunciation?

A consideration of learners' pronunciation errors and of how these can inhibit successful communication is a useful basis on which to assess why it is important to deal with pronunciation in the classroom. When a learner says, for example, *soap* in a situation such as a restaurant where they should have said *soup*, the inaccurate production of a phoneme can lead to misunderstanding (at least on the part of the waitress). A learner who consistently mispronounces a range of phonemes can be extremely difficult for a speaker from another language community to understand. This can be very frustrating for the learner who may have a good command of grammar and lexis but have difficulty in understanding and being understood by a native speaker.

The inaccurate use of suprasegmental elements, such as stress or intonation, can also cause problems. For example, the following request was made by a Turkish learner in a classroom:

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Do you mind if I Open the window?

Notice how the sentence stress is on the /əʊ/ of *open*. As it was a first request, one might have expected the first syllable of *window* to have been the most prominent, rather than the first syllable of *open*. Had the teacher not known better, the utterance could have been interpreted as being a second request (the first request perhaps not having been heard), and possibly being uttered with some impatience. In short, it could appear rude.

The intonation pattern used in the following question caused the listener to misunderstand it.

- 5 How long have you been in London?

This example was spoken by an Italian learner, as a 'getting to know you' question to a new friend. The unexpected fall of her voice on *been* led to the friend not understanding her question. (One would expect the voice to fall on the first syllable of *London*). She had to repeat the question before making herself understood.

Intonation and stress can also indicate the **function** of an utterance. The function of an utterance is what it is being used for. For example, the following sentence has the function of a 'request':

Can you help me, please?

Now consider this sentence:

- 6 a) Why don't you come to my PARTY?

As a first 'suggestion' or 'invitation', we might expect the first syllable of *party* to be stressed, as indicated with capitals, and we might expect the voice to go down at the end, as shown by the arrow. Now consider this variation:

- 7 b) WHY don't you come to my party?

When spoken in this way the question is no longer a simple invitation. It suggests instead that someone has refused the invitation and that the speaker is upset by this and needs to know why it has happened. If a student uses this stress and intonation for a straightforward invitation rather than speaking as in example (a), it is possible that there will be a misunderstanding.

The above examples all show problems caused by pronunciation errors which led to a problem of **reception**, or comprehension of the meaning or function of an utterance. But pronunciation can also affect the perceived tone or mood of an utterance. Aspects of a student's first language can interfere with the pronunciation of a second language not only in terms of accent but also in terms of mood. For example, features of certain German accents may lead to German people sounding, completely unintentionally, abrupt or impolite when speaking in English. Spanish speakers tend to use a narrower range of intonation than L1 English speakers, and as a result may sometimes sound rather bored to a native speaker. Even though these difficulties are subtle, they are very real, and worthy of investigation and remedial action in the classroom.

Not all pronunciation difficulties necessarily get in the way of communication, of course. If a German student wants to ask permission to open a window, for example, if she pronounces *window* as /'vɪndəʊ/ it is unlikely to get in the way of the message. Teachers, therefore, need to prioritise, and not correct everything. It is, however, important to recognise

that even if students are not having difficulties communicating, they often like to have their pronunciation mistakes brought to their attention.

### **Problems and approaches in pronunciation teaching**

There are two key problems with pronunciation teaching. Firstly it tends to be neglected. And secondly when it is not neglected, it tends to be reactive to a particular problem that has arisen in the classroom rather than being strategically planned.

#### **A paradox**

The fact that pronunciation tends to suffer from neglect may not be due to teachers lacking interest in the subject but rather to a feeling of doubt as to how to teach it. Many experienced teachers would admit to a lack of knowledge of the theory of pronunciation and they may therefore feel the need to improve their practical skills in pronunciation teaching. In spite of the fact that trainees and less experienced teachers may be very interested in pronunciation, their concern with grammar and vocabulary tends to take precedence. Language learners, on the other hand, often show considerable enthusiasm for pronunciation. They feel it is something that would help them to communicate better. So, paradoxically, even though both teachers and learners are keen on the subject, it is often neglected.

Teachers of pronunciation need:

- a good grounding in theoretical knowledge
- practical classroom skills
- access to good ideas for classroom activities

#### **From reactive to planned teaching**

A lot of pronunciation teaching tends to be done in response to errors which students make in the classroom. Such reactive teaching is, of course, absolutely necessary, and will always be so. Grammatical and lexical difficulties arise in the classroom too, and teachers also deal with these reactively. However, when it comes to planning a lesson or devising a timetable of work to be covered, teachers tend to make grammar their first concern. Lexis follows closely behind, with items of vocabulary and longer phrases being 'slotted in' where appropriate. A look at the contents pages of most coursebooks will show that we tend to think of the organisation of language in terms of grammatical structures, although some more recent publications claim to have a lexically arranged syllabus. Therefore, it is quite natural to make grammar the primary reference when planning lessons.

Yet pronunciation work can, and should, be planned for too. Teachers should regard features of pronunciation as integral to language analysis and lesson planning. Any analysis of language that disregards or sidelines factors of pronunciation is incomplete. Similarly, a lesson which focuses on particular language structures or lexis needs to include features of pronunciation in order to give students the full picture, and hence a better chance of being able to communicate successfully. While planning, teachers should decide what pronunciation issues are relevant to the particular structures and lexis being dealt with in the lesson. They can also anticipate

the pronunciation difficulties their students are likely to experience, and further plan their lessons accordingly. There will still, of course, be reactive work to be done in the classroom, just as there is with grammar and lexis, but by anticipating and planning, the teacher can present a fuller analysis to learners, and give them the opportunity for fuller language practice. Integrating pronunciation teaching fully with the study of grammatical and lexical features has the further incremental benefit that learners will increasingly appreciate the significance of pronunciation in determining successful communication.

In the light of this and throughout this book, sample lessons are divided into three main types:

- **Integrated** lessons, in which pronunciation forms an essential part of the language analysis and the planning process, and the language presentation and practice within the lesson.
- **Remedial** or reactive lessons, where a pronunciation difficulty which arises in class is dealt with there and then, in order to facilitate the successful achievement of classroom tasks.
- **Practice** lessons, in which a particular feature of pronunciation is isolated and practised for its own sake, forming the main focus of a lesson period.

### **What pronunciation model to teach**

English long ago outgrew the limits of the land from which it takes its name. If we compare the languages of countries or regions where it is used as a first language, we can see that it has changed significantly. One need only think about the varieties of English used in Britain, Ireland, the USA, Australia and Canada. As the use of English spreads further in countries where it is not the first language, such development continues with ever new varieties of English emerging. The growth in the use of English, together with the ease of communication worldwide, means that English is increasingly being used as a medium of communication between speakers for whom it is not a first language.

This can raise both theoretical and practical issues for teachers. There can be disagreement over the **model** of English one should provide for one's students. The term 'model' here is used to refer to the pronunciation characteristics of the language a teacher presents to learners in the classroom.

In the past the preferred pronunciation model for teaching in Britain, or among British teachers abroad, was **Received Pronunciation** (or RP). There are many different accents within the variety known as British English, and most of these give some clue as to the regional origins of the speaker. RP is different, in that it says more about social standing than geography. It is still perceived as signifying status and education, and 'the Queen's English', or 'BBC English' are often used as synonyms. The accent was first described as 'Received Pronunciation' by dialectologist A. J. Ellis, in 1869. However, the number of people who speak with an RP accent in Britain is currently estimated at about only 3% of the population and declining. It is also falling out of favour as a teaching model because few British teachers naturally speak with this accent. However, RP has been the

basis of much modern investigation into pronunciation and so its influence persists.

As a teacher the model one uses in the classroom will usually be close to the language one uses outside the classroom. Many teachers modify their accent slightly for the benefit of their students, but few could consistently teach with an accent significantly different from their own, even if they wanted to. However, language teachers need to be aware of variations and differences, and the more knowledge one has with regard to different accents and varieties of English, the more informed one's teaching is likely to be.

As ever, it is important to consider the needs of learners. For many, RP is still the target for pronunciation, because of its traditional status, though this is slowly changing. Learners will usually have a target model in mind, whether this be British, American, Irish, Australian or any other variety of English. Targets tend to be highly personal, and on occasion rather vague. They may also vary within a class where learners aiming for British English are seated alongside others aiming for American English (perhaps because of the people they meet or work with outside the classroom). And if the teacher is Australian, what model can and should she provide? This may be a theoretical situation but, particularly in multilingual classes, one finds students who have already been taught by teachers with different accents and varieties of English. In monolingual classes too, one finds a range of personal targets for pronunciation.

There are no easy answers here, though teachers can, in catering for their students' needs, work on issues of **production** and **reception** independently, enabling students to understand a wide range of varieties, while allowing them to choose their own target model so long as it is widely comprehensible. In work on reception, teachers can, for example, focus on vowel differences between British and American English, or the rising intonation of Australian utterances in contrast to the way such utterances are completed by speakers of other English varieties. The best advice for teachers is to teach what they know and use, and be as informed as they can be about other varieties.

### Techniques and activities

Once having decided to make pronunciation an integral part of their teaching, and adopted a policy on models, what techniques and activities can teachers employ? The range is multifarious from highly focused techniques, such as drilling, to more broad-reaching activities such as getting students to notice (look out for) particular pronunciation features within listening texts. Furthermore, as indicated above, there are two key sides to pronunciation teaching – namely, the teaching of **productive** skills on the one hand and the teaching of **receptive** skills on the other. In terms of reception, students need to learn to hear the difference between phonemes, for example, particularly where such a contrast does not exist in their L1. They then need to carry that knowledge through into their production. Drills, by way of example, are useful in the development of both kinds of skill, while noticing tasks used with listening texts will be most effective in the development of receptive skills.

### Drilling

One of the main ways in which pronunciation is practised in the classroom is through drilling. In its most basic form, drilling simply involves the teacher saying a word or structure, and getting the class to repeat it. Being able to drill properly is a basic and fundamental language teaching skill. The technique has its roots in behaviourist psychological theory and 'audio-lingual' approaches to teaching; these are both now largely consigned to history, though drilling has stayed with us as a tried and tested classroom technique. Drilling aims to help students achieve better pronunciation of language items, and to help them remember new items. This is a crucial part of classroom pronunciation work, and is possibly the time in the lesson when students are most reliant on the teacher.

Drilling often follows on from the process, known as **eliciting**, of encouraging students to bring up a previously studied word, phrase or structure. The teacher generally uses prompts, pictures, mime etc, to help the process along, and can give the relevant item to the students if none of them is able to offer it. Given the complex relationships between English spelling and pronunciation, drilling is best done before students see the written form of the language. Once the item in question has arisen, teachers can then drill it in order to work on pronunciation. The teacher's main role in drilling is that of providing a model of the word, phrase or structure for the students to copy. You can hear an example of drilling on the CD. Teachers generally drill 'chorally' first of all, which means inviting the whole class to repeat the item in unison. Choral drilling can help to build confidence, and gives students the chance to practise pronouncing the drilled item relatively anonymously, without being put on the spot. It is typically followed by individual drilling, where students are invited one-by-one to repeat. This gives the teacher the chance to ascertain how well individuals are able to pronounce the item being drilled. Teachers usually select individuals more or less at random; doing so is seen to help keep students on their toes.

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**Chaining** can be used for sentences which prove difficult for students to pronounce, either because they are long, or because they include difficult words and sounds. The following examples show how the teacher isolates certain parts of the sentence, modelling them separately for students to repeat, and gradually building the sentence up until it is complete.

#### Back chain

The sentence is drilled and built up from the end, gradually adding to its length. Certain parts may be drilled separately, if they present problems. Each part of the sentence is modelled by the teacher, and the students repeat.

...told him.

...would've...

...would've told...

I would've told him.

If I'd seen him...

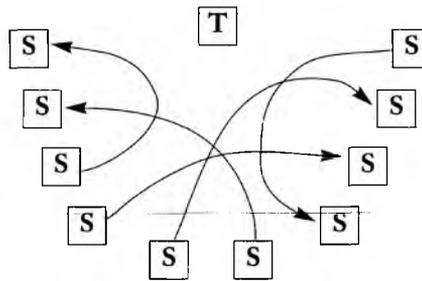
If I'd seen him, I would've told him.

**Front chain**

The sentence is drilled and built up from the start, gradually adding to its length. Certain parts may be drilled separately, if they present problems. Each part of the sentence is modelled by the teacher, and the students repeat.

If I'd seen him...  
 If I'd seen him, I would've...  
 I would've...  
 I would've told him.  
 If I'd seen him, I would've told him.

Another common variation is '**open pair**' drilling, where, for example, question and answer drills might be set up across the class, with one student (S) asking, another responding, and so on. Having drilled a question and answer chorally and individually, the teacher (T) uses prompts (for example a big letter 'Q' and a big letter 'A' written on cards) and invites students to question each other and respond in turn across the class, as shown in the following diagram.



The resulting question and answer routine might then sound like this:

Student 1: Have you ever been to Paris?  
 Student 4: Yes, I have.  
 Student 5: Have you ever been to New York?  
 Student 2: No, I haven't.  
 etc.

**Substitution drilling** is another important and useful variation. This involves drilling a structure, but substituting items of vocabulary into the sentence being dealt with, as follows:

Teacher: It's in the corner.  
 Student 1: It's in the corner.  
 Teacher: It's on the table.  
 Student 2: It's on the table.  
 Teacher: It's under the chair.  
 etc.

Drilling is also fundamental to the teaching of word stress, sentence stress and intonation. Teachers should aim to model utterances as naturally as possible, according to the context in which the language is being used. Bear in mind that slight changes in stress and intonation can have a significant impact on meaning and appropriacy, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Teachers often beat out the rhythm of the stress pattern while drilling. Some teachers beat the air with their finger, some click their fingers, some tap on a surface; teachers should choose whatever comes naturally to them, and then use the same method consistently.

Drilling is an important tool in pronunciation work. Many teachers skimp on drilling because they feel that it is something that only needs to be done at lower levels, yet it is important at higher levels too. As students will spend a lot of time adding new words and phrases to their vocabulary, they will need to be sure of how to say them.

### Minimal pairs and related activities

In Chapter 1, the examples *rat* /ræt/ and *rot* /rɒt/ were used to show the phonemic principle in action; changing just one sound leads to a change in meaning. The same applies to words like *soap* /səʊp/ and *soup* /su:p/, and *paper* /ˈpeɪpə/ and *pepper* /ˈpepə/.

These are all examples of minimal pairs – words or utterances which differ by only one phoneme. Teachers can use minimal pairs to good advantage in the classroom as a way of focusing on sounds which have been causing difficulties for students. Here is an example for Spanish and Italian speakers:

Words	Sounds	Useful for...(e.g.)	Because...
cat /kæt/ cut /kʌt/	/æ/ /ʌ/	Spanish	/æ/ /ʌ/ and /ɑ:/ correspond roughly to one sound /a/ in Spanish
		Italian	/ʌ/ is often produced as /æ/

The ‘because’ column is very important here. There seems little advantage in practising sounds which do not cause problems for students, except to reinforce a point recently made or investigated in class. In a monolingual class the teacher can practise sounds that are likely to cause problems for their students, but would do better, as mentioned above, to concentrate on sounds which actually do. The same applies to a multilingual class. In this context the possible number of pronunciation difficulties is bigger, but it may be frustrating for students who do not have a problem with the difference between /æ/ and /ʌ/ or /ɔ:/ and /ɒ/, for example, to spend classroom time practising them.

But if half of a multilingual class do have a problem, then something needs to be done. One useful idea is multilingual peer teaching, where students help each other to work on particular sounds. This works more successfully if everyone has something they can teach to their peers, and so some planning and research is required on the part of the teacher to ensure a balance of everyone getting about as much help as they give, as far as is reasonably possible. Smaller, monolingual groups can be set up initially so that the teacher can provide some coaching. Individuals can be coached too.

Some ideas for activities based around minimal pairs are as follows:

1. Students can be given lists of words and work with a partner to decide which words have a particular sound:

**Tick the words which have the sound /ʌ/:**

cap hat bug cup hut bag

Activities like this one are a good way of gradually introducing students to the individual phonemic symbols relevant to English. Other potentially 'conflicting' sounds can be introduced too, such as the following 'minimal trio':

hat heart hut

2. Students might also listen to a succession of words, and decide how many times a particular sound is heard:

**How many times do you hear /eɪ/?**

**Underline each one you hear.**

pepper paper letter later pen pain  
wet wait get gate late let

3. Sounds can also be contrasted by appearing in close proximity. The teacher can drill these utterances chorally and individually:

Pass me the pepper and the paper.

I'll post the letter later.

They won't let us in if we're late.

4. In a similar vein, but moving slightly away from the idea of minimal pairs, teachers can also ask students to listen for the odd one out among a list of words that they are given:

cart class heart learn smart part

Although there is no shortage of variations for teachers to experiment with, the difficulty with minimal pairs exercises is that one can end up using words which are unknown to the students, and which are hence less meaningful. Fairly often used pairings such as *bag* and *bug*, *bag* and *bug*, while practising the sounds that the teacher wants to see practised, are of limited use if students don't know what a *bag* or a *bug* is, or are unlikely to have to use these words. The teacher can always teach them, of course, but this might not always be the wisest use of classroom time. It can be more useful to choose words which are recent or current in the students' learning experience, in order to show the sound in its context. If there happen to be minimal pairs available, they certainly provide a useful opportunity for focusing just on the sound in question. If not, then focusing solely on known words can at times be more productive than introducing new words simply for the sake of a minimal pairs exercise. What one loses on the *bag*, one gains on the *bug*, so to speak.

Rather than using words provided by the teacher, it can also make more sense to use the students' active vocabulary in order to practise sounds. Students can be asked to provide (or suggest) their own minimal pairs to try out on their peers.

### **Pronunciation and spelling activities**

It makes sense to tie pronunciation work closely in with spelling work, in order to investigate the different ways in which sounds can be represented on the page. Chapter 8 looks in detail at the relationships between pronunciation and spelling, but some basic ideas are outlined here.

**Homographs** and **homophones** can provide useful opportunities for such work. Homographs are words which have the same spelling, but with different pronunciations (*Why don't you read this book?* and *I've already read it*; *wind* /wind/as in weather, and *wind* /waɪnd/ as in what you do to a clock). Homophones are words which have the same pronunciation, but have different spellings (*write* and *right*, *there*, *their* and *they're*, *fair* and *fare*).

These may be used as the basis of many types of activity, such as when, in the case of homophones, students listen to a sentence and have to choose which from a printed list of words in front of them is the word with the correct spelling for a particular word they heard in the sentence. Classroom work can also be done which concentrates on the properties or effects of particular letters when they appear in words. For example, in a discovery type exercise, students can study pairs of words, like the ones below, and work out a rule for how the vowel sound changes when the letter *e* is added:

hat hate      kit kite      cut cute

In each instance, the answer is something like: adding the *e* makes the vowel (e.g. /æ/) sound like the name of that vowel in the alphabet (e.g. *A*).

Tendencies like these above can be used in discrimination exercises, dictated, introduced in listening or reading exercises, elicited and drilled, dealt with through crosswords, board games, etc. Teachers need to decide what is relevant to their class at a particular time.

### **Taping students' English**

Taping learners' spoken English from time to time can pay dividends. Tapes can be made while students are engaged in language practice activities, and used for all manner of language difficulties, but especially those concerned with pronunciation. If the teacher is sufficiently prepared, tapes of the completion of whole tasks can be contrasted with, for example, a group of native speakers or a higher level group of students tackling an identical task. Alternatively, students might tackle the same task on two occasions, the tape of the first 'attempt' providing the basis for pronunciation work; the subsequent performance of the task will (hopefully) be more successful, and the two attempts can then be contrasted.

Individual students can also be taped, particularly if they have a 'lingering' pronunciation difficulty which proves difficult to shake off. Sounds, stress and intonation can be contrasted with those of a native speaker, other students, or a fellow L1 speaker who doesn't have the same difficulty.

### **Listening activities**

The anticipated outcome of language teaching is for students to be more able to understand and use the language outside the classroom. Many classroom activities therefore aim to reproduce, as far as possible, the authenticity of day-to-day communication. While authentic materials (i.e. printed, broadcast or taped material not produced with the classroom in mind) are valuable, it is impractical for teachers to use such material all the time, as one not only has to find suitable materials, but also design tasks to go with them.

Listening comprehension exercises in coursebooks are often designed to sound as realistic as possible, with the participants talking at a normal speed and using natural language. These can play a key role in helping students to notice the existence of a pronunciation feature.

For example, prior to doing a listening task, students can have the meaning and the pronunciation of a particular aspect of language brought to their attention, and practise it in very controlled ways. The particular issue may be the structural and pronunciation characteristics of the third person present simple or, at a higher level, of the third conditional (*It'd've gone if I'd known*). The listening exercise can then require students to listen out for this area of language and listen out for how it is used and pronounced in the context of a narrative or, say, a conversation.

Alternatively, an extended listening stage can precede an eliciting and drilling stage. Indeed it can be argued that putting the listening exercise first might even make the pronunciation elements of the lesson more of an issue with regard to comprehension, and more likely to be noticed by the students. Students would initially have to listen out for and interpret the use of the language and related pronunciation areas selected for study, in order to complete a set of tasks; work on the pronunciation and use of the language area in question could then follow on from the listening exercise.

Either way, a teacher's choice here would be informed by his or her

knowledge of the students, their language skills, and how well he or she feels they would be able to perform the various tasks. Whatever order is chosen, the combination of pronunciation study with listening activities involves getting students to notice things about the language and its use. The concept of **noticing** is important in pronunciation work. A language item needs to be relevant to the student at a particular time in order for there to be conscious intake and before the student can use it consistently. The same applies to features of pronunciation. Language teaching attempts to help students to notice language, by making particular aspects or items of language relevant. Noticing is not only of relevance to the initial presentation of an item but is also of use in the recycling of items. Language always needs to be revised and recycled, as there is no guarantee that the features dealt with in a first presentation will be successfully remembered and used.

### **Reading activities**

In reading activities, although the medium is the written word, work on pronunciation can be successfully integrated here too. Like listening, reading is a receptive activity (i.e. students receive the language rather than produce it), and so it provides a suitable means of bringing language features to students' attention.

Many teachers stage reading activities either by having an initial exercise to allow students to get the gist of the text they are reading, or by establishing the type of text being used, followed by some more detailed work to focus on specific details when the text is read again. At some stage, when a text is read aloud either by the teacher or the students, pronunciation work can be integrated. Such texts as poems, rhymes, extracts from plays, song lyrics etc. can be used creatively in the classroom and can offer plenty of scope for pronunciation work. Depending on preference, anything from Shakespeare to Dr Seuss, from Longfellow to limericks can be used to good advantage.

Reading aloud is a classroom activity which has fallen in and out of favour with teachers at various times. The main argument against it is that it can interfere with successful pronunciation; spellings can clearly affect pronunciation performance adversely. But reading aloud offers opportunities for the study of the links between spelling and pronunciation, of stress and intonation, and of the linking of sounds between words in connected speech; all of these can be highlighted and investigated further in fun and interesting ways through reading aloud.

Teachers need, however, to be clear as to the appropriacy of a text for pronunciation work. Reading aloud encyclopaedia texts, for example, might lead to a rather mechanical and monotone recitation of the words.

A final thought on pronunciation activities is that it is important to make sure that some are light-hearted. A fun way of practising the production of difficult sounds is through the use of tongue-twisters and rhymes. Most readers will be familiar with things like *Around the rugged rock the ragged rascal ran* (the problem sound here is fairly easy to ascertain!), and *She sells sea shells on the seashore...*

**Sample lessons**

Here are three sample lessons, using a range of activities and techniques, and exemplifying the three types of pronunciation lesson discussed earlier: Integrated, Remedial, and Practice. The word ‘lesson’ is used here not necessarily to indicate a complete lesson period, though it probably does in the case of an Integrated or Practice lesson, but also to include a ‘mini-lesson’ or lessons within a classroom period as is likely to be the case with a Remedial lesson.

As we have discussed, pronunciation issues need to be made integral to lesson planning. The following explanation and lesson plan show an example of an Integrated lesson, which revises simple past tense verbs, and covers the activities of Alice on a night out in town. The first part of the plan gives an overview of the lesson, and the next part gives procedural detail.

**Lesson 1: ‘Alice’: Planning an Integrated lesson (Intermediate)**

Lesson type: Integrated

Materials: Taped listening, map, pictures for eliciting, picture story

In the pronunciation of regular past tense endings, the words *walked*, *lived* and *started* all have *-ed* at the end, but all have different pronunciations (/t/, /d/ and /ɪd/ respectively). Problems which students may have with these will often become apparent when the teacher is dealing with regular past tenses or past participles. There are some ‘rules’ here which can be given to students in order to help them generate further examples:

*-ed* is pronounced as /t/ after most unvoiced consonants like /k/, as /d/ after most voiced consonants like /v/, and as /ɪd/ after /t/ or /d/. Also, if a verb ends in *-y* (as in *hurry*, *worry* or *marry*), the simple past form will end in *-ied*, and the pronunciation can be /i:ɪd/ or /ɪd/, according to personal preference or habit.

In practice, the physical difficulty of pronouncing *-ed* as /d/ after an unvoiced consonant means that the incorrect use of /d/ instead of /t/ is seldom a pronunciation problem. What does tend to happen is that many students are tempted to insert the vowel sound /e/, taking a cue from the spelling, and so they say /ˈwɔ:ked/, /ˈstɒped/, /ˈmæriəd/ and so on, amongst other possible variations. Work needs to be done here to eliminate the unnecessary vowel sound. Perhaps the most important factor to bear in mind is that such work arises out of the study of a larger grammatical area. As well as the learning of verbs and the formation of past tenses, an essential part of the analysis is the pronunciation difficulties students might have with verb endings. If these are not dealt with, then the language is not being investigated thoroughly.

Consider the lesson plan:

Lesson Plan: Overview				
Teacher: Mark Todd	Level: Intermediate	Date: 11th November	Lesson length: 60min	
Main aims of the lesson: To revise some regular simple past tense verbs.				
Other aims: To give students listening and speaking practice.				
Language to be taught and practised		Work on skills		
Structure(s):  + regular simple past verb. e.g.: Alice crossed the road, and waited for the minicab.		Which skills will the students practise? (Tick)		
		Reading	Listening	Speaking
Function: Narrating.			✓	✓
Lexis: cross, talk, look, call, miss, wait, offer (verbs) minicab (noun)		Specify sub-skills the students will practise (e.g. listening for gist, reading for specific information) Listening for gist. Listening for specific information. Story-telling.		
Pronunciation: '-ed' endings are pronounced in a variety of ways: crossed /krosɪd/ called /kɔ:ld/ waited /weɪtɪd/		How will you integrate the skills work and language work? • Initially presented and practised verbs all appear in the listening activity. • Students will devise short narratives as an extension of the listening activity.		
Potential problems students may have with the language: Students may use '-ed' as a syllable, so 'crossed' becomes 'cross-ed' /'krosɪd/.				

As can be seen from the 'language' section on the left-hand side of the plan, pronunciation here takes its place in the overall analysis of the language being practised in this lesson. The lesson itself is a revision lesson, and so (bearing in mind also the Intermediate level of the students), the grammar, lexis and pronunciation are likely to have been covered before.

Let us look at the actual procedure of the lesson (see facing page).

This is a reasonably standard plan, with the kind of detail expected from teachers undergoing initial or in-service training. Looking through the lesson, we can see that pronunciation is an integral feature. New (or revised) words and verb forms are practised, students listen out for the practised forms in the listening exercises (which also test their understanding of the meaning), and are then given the opportunity to further practise the forms in an extended speaking activity. The teacher also leaves time for correction at the end, where the lesson (including pronunciations of *-ed* endings) can be recapped, and further pronunciation work can be done if necessary.

Aims	Procedure: who does what?
To set context	Teacher (T) shows map of town, and picture of Alice. T tells students (Ss) they will hear story about Alice's evening out. Brainstorm ideas for going out (cinema, club, etc.) Teach 'minicab'.
To elicit/practise vocabulary	T describes the story of Alice's evening. T elicits verbs along the way. T uses pictures, mime as necessary for each verb. T checks concepts as necessary. As verb is elicited, T asks Ss to put it into past tense. T drills past tense of each verb chorally and individually. T drills past tense of each verb in sentences, as in story. T corrects as necessary. NB: Watch pronunciation of '-ed' endings!
Listen for gist	Ss listen to tape x1, and do gist task at same time. (Tape is Alice recounting story, task is to ascertain whether it's the same story we've already been through; also ask if there was a 'happy ending' or not). Ss check answers in pairs. Class feedback.
Listening for specific information	Ss listen to tape for 2nd time, and do specific info. task. (Task is to put pictures in correct order.) Ss check answers in pairs. Class feedback. T plays tape again if necessary. T corrects pronunciation of '-ed' verbs as relevant.
Give further practice of '-ed' verb forms	T gives groups of Ss picture prompts of similar story. Groups devise own version. Form new groups to relate stories. Vote on best one.
Correction phase	Time to recap lesson; do remedial correction and drilling as necessary.

The above Integrated lesson shows pronunciation teaching taking a full role in all stages of a lesson, from planning through to enactment. The next lesson shows how pronunciation work can be slipped into a lesson, when appropriate, in a Remedial or reactive lesson.

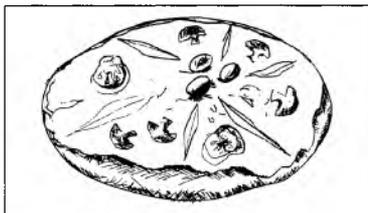
### Lesson 2: 'Organising a party': Remedial lessons (Pre-Intermediate)

Lesson type: Remedial

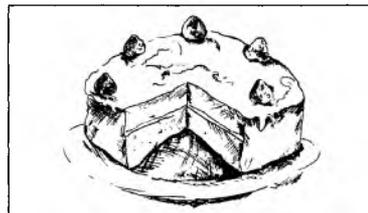
Materials: Flashcards of food and drink

The teacher has set up the context of planning a party (for example by showing students a party invitation). She has used picture prompts of food and drink to elicit ideas for things which people might take to the party. She then tells the students that they are invited, and asks a few of them what they might bring along with them, eliciting the sentence *I'll bring x*, where the *x* can be any item of food or drink. The sentence is drilled both chorally and individually, using one of the items of vocabulary (e.g. *I'll bring some*

*pizza*). The teacher then uses her flashcards to elicit the sentence pattern again with other items of vocabulary in turn. Each sentence is again drilled chorally and individually:



I'll bring some pizza.



I'll bring some cake.



I'll bring some salad.



I'll bring some wine.

As a subsequent practice activity, students have been given the task of planning their own party. This gives them the opportunity to use the sentences which have been practised so far, as well as the chance to add other relevant language (e.g. *I'll bring some CDs*, or *I'll write the invitations*).

In the course of this activity some of the students have had difficulty in pronouncing new items, and so a major role for the teacher is in providing Remedial correction. This is an inevitable and necessary part of the processes of both teaching and learning a language. For example, during the drilling stage, a student mispronounces *wine* as /vain/ (i.e. he repeats the sentence as *I'll bring some /vain/*). The teacher encourages the student to have another go, by saying *I'll bring some...*, leaving the sentence open for completion. It is always a good idea to allow students the opportunity to correct themselves. It may be that the student can pronounce the word correctly, but this is simply a slip of the tongue. Let's imagine that the student again repeats the word as /vain/. The teacher then invites the other students to provide a correction (for example by asking *Can anyone help?*). Not only does this ensure the whole class is involved, but it also helps the teacher to decide if this pronunciation problem is particular to the original student, or if others are having difficulty with it too. If other students cannot provide the correct pronunciation, then the teacher knows that it is necessary to work on that word again at class level, through remedial drilling.

Later on in the 'party' lesson, the drilling stage was followed up by groupwork or pairwork, where students were given the opportunity to further practise the structure and vocabulary. The teacher's main role during

such an activity is usually to monitor what is going on, making a note of any difficulties the students might have. These difficulties might be with the structure (e.g. a student might say *I bring...*, or *I bringing...*), with vocabulary (e.g. a student might forget a word, or use the wrong word), or with pronunciation (e.g. *I'll bring some /vaim/*, or *I'll /brinj/ some wine*).

Intervention at this stage by the teacher is not usually necessary, unless for some reason there is a breakdown in communication. In many instances it is pronunciation which leads to a breakdown, making it necessary for the teacher to intervene in order to get the students back on track. The teacher may, in such instances, need to do some remedial 'on the spot' drilling with a student or a small group of students, so as to make the task achievable once more.

It is always useful to save some time at the end of the lesson in order to both recap what has been covered in a lesson, and to do some Remedial correction. The pronunciation difficulties noted while monitoring earlier on can be dealt with here. This stage can, of course, also cover any other aspects of the lesson which may have given students difficulties.

Progress in language learning tends to be a matter of two steps forward and one step back, and so it is useful to drill again anyway. It is also worth noting that the students' pronunciation during the later activities may not be as accurate as during earlier drilling as they will not have been concentrating so hard on just that aspect of the language.

Generally, Remedial pronunciation work prompted by what has been going on in a class, can be very motivating for students. I can remember the satisfaction of the Japanese learner who finally mastered *I'd like to rent a flat*, and the group of Italian learners who coached each other in saying *He'll have a half pint of Heineken*. Both of these opportunities for working on difficult sounds arose from exchanges in the classroom. Teachers should always be on the lookout for opportunities like these; a student-generated suggestion is more likely to be useful than something provided in good faith by the teacher.

The previous two lessons described the integration of pronunciation work into teaching, the first in a planned way, the second reactively; the next example lesson describes how to base a class period around particular aspects of pronunciation.

The next description shows how a teacher made a specific pronunciation issue the main focus of the class period, thus creating a Practice lesson.

### **Lesson 3: Minimal pairs: A Practice lesson (Elementary+)**

Lesson type: Practice

Materials: Taped listening (optional)

The teacher has noticed that the sounds /æ/ and /ʌ/ cause difficulty for many of the students in his class. They appear to have difficulty in hearing a difference between the two sounds, and also seem to produce neither sound accurately, tending instead to produce a sound which seems to be halfway between the two. The teacher decides therefore to work on these two sounds in a practice activity.

The teacher uses flashcards or draws pictures on the board, to elicit one or two minimal pairs (for example *cat, cut, hat, hut*). These pairs are drilled chorally and individually, to give students plenty of opportunity to listen out for differences, and practise saying them. The teacher then writes the two phonemes on the board, and drills the sounds. He then holds up his pictures, or points to his drawings, asking the students to give the sound for each one.

Students are then given a list of five to ten minimal pairs, which form the basis of the subsequent activity. The teacher asks the students to look through the pairs, and try saying each word to themselves, predicting which sound the words will have. The teacher can then either use a tape recording, or simply say sentences like *It's quite a big cat, Whose is that hut?* etc. For each sentence, the students have to circle the word in their list that they have heard in the sentence. The sentences can be repeated twice, to give the students an opportunity to consider their answers. Students then compare their answers with their neighbours, before feedback is conducted at the class level. The sentences can be repeated again at this stage, if necessary for clarification.

**Conclusions** In this chapter we have:.....

- considered the reasons for teaching pronunciation, with regard to the errors that learners can make and the impact of these errors on successful communication.
- looked at the fact that pronunciation tends to be neglected in classes, and that when it is addressed this is often only done in reaction to specific problems that occur in class.
- asserted that pronunciation needs to be treated as an integral part of language analysis and lesson planning.
- described three kinds of pronunciation lesson: Integrated, Remedial and Practice lessons.
- considered the issue of pronunciation models for students, and suggested that teachers should give models that are natural to them but should also make their students aware of a range of language varieties.
- described various techniques and activities that can be used in class to foster productive and receptive pronunciation skills.
- exemplified these techniques and activities in use in the three different types of pronunciation lesson, showing in the first lesson example how pronunciation issues can be planned into a lesson.

**Looking ahead** Having looked at Integrated, Remedial and Practice lesson types, and how pronunciation can be worked on in the classroom, we will now start to consider the various features of pronunciation in more depth. The next two chapters investigate the nature of the English vowel and consonant sounds. We will also look at how they can be taught in an Integrated way, Practised and worked on Remedially.