

PECULIARITIES OF TEACHING PRONUNCIATION TO ESP STUDENTS

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The content of ESP textbooks is aimed at the development of communicative language competence of students in reading, listening, speaking, and writing, as well as mastering professional terminology and language skills to formulate their thoughts in a grammatically correct and comprehensive way. At the same time, insufficient attention is paid to the development of students' pronunciation proficiency and their ability to articulate and intonate their utterances precisely and intelligibly. It is believed that phonological competence was developed at the initial stages of learning English as a foreign language. However, not all students have sufficient phonetic and phonological knowledge and skills. What is more, like any other skills, they need to be improved at each stage of learning a foreign language through systematic practice, using a series of exercises to prevent common mistakes and avoid their fossilization.

The present paper aims to identify the peculiarities of teaching pronunciation to ESP students, the problems teachers face when teaching pronunciation, and their possible solutions.

Correct pronunciation of phonemes, words, pace of speech, rhythm, and intonation (word and sentence stress, pauses, timbre, tone of speech, melody) are vital components of effective intercultural communication in a foreign language. Phonetic and phonological knowledge determine the development of receptive and reproductive pronunciation skills at the segmental (sound) level and suprasegmental (intonation) level. Pronunciation skills directly affect the speed of language learning and can significantly improve listening, reading, oral and written communication skills (Seyedabadi et al., 2015, p.76; Stetsko & Nychko, 2022).

However, students learning ESP have different levels of foreign language proficiency, and, due to insufficiently developed phonological competence, make mistakes that significantly affect the understanding of their speech. Consequently, this necessitates 1) the analysis of problems that teachers and students encounter while teaching/learning pronunciation, and 2) the search for possible solutions to these problems. The knowledge of problems and solutions can help in the development and introduction of new learning materials into the teaching process.

The main problems that ESP teachers face teaching and evaluating pronunciation proficiency are the lack of appropriate teaching materials, experience, and limited time for systematic practice and correction of pronunciation mistakes.

Difficulties in teaching pronunciation to students can also arise as a result of insufficiently developed phonemic awareness of students at the earlier stages of study, the influence of phonetic and phonological features of their native language, due to students' inability to listen and hear, to pronounce sounds that are absent in their native language, and to speak using appropriate stress, rhythm and intonation.

Given the limited hours allocated to ESP courses in technical universities, it seems impractical to devote whole lesson sequences to pronunciation. It is reasonable to learn and improve pronunciation skills while teaching new vocabulary, grammar, reading, listening, and speaking (Harmer, 2015; Stetsko & Nychko, 2022).

Harmer (2015) also believes that it is appropriate to use phonemic symbols for teaching pronunciation. Their knowledge can help students improve their pronunciation considerably and hear the difference between the individual sounds and the intonation patterns of different sentences. Students with a low level of phonological competence will benefit from a corrective computer-assisted pronunciation self-study course developed using phonetic symbols.

Designing ESP course materials for teaching pronunciation, teachers should also consider the individual needs of students, peculiarities of terminology pronunciation, common mistakes made by students, and mistakes that can be caused by the influence of their native language. Also, internationally accepted criteria for assessing phonological competence should be taken into account.

The CEFR international descriptors of linguistic communicative competencies include the criteria for assessment of phonological competence. The key indicator that establishes the difference between the levels of phonological competence is the intelligibility of speech for perception by interlocutors and successful dialogue. The higher the level of foreign language mastery, the lower the percentage of pronunciation mistakes that affect the intelligibility of speech. For example, phonological competence of level B2 is characterized by the correct pronunciation of the large number of sounds and the use of prosodic speech functions (stress, intonation, rhythm) with little influence of another language, and mistakes that are allowed at this level do not affect or have an insignificant effect on the intelligibility of speech (The CEFR illustrative descriptor scales: Communicative language competences, 2020).

Thus, phonological competence is an integral and crucial component of ESP teaching, essential for the successful development of other language competencies of students. There is an urgent need for materials for teaching pronunciation, self-assessment, and assessment of students' pronunciation proficiency. The materials should be designed based on international descriptors for assessing phonological competence, the individual needs of students, the influence of their native language,

and the specifics of terminology studied in the process of language proficiency development.

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