AN APPROACH TO DAVID'S ABERCOMBIE'S POINT OF VIEW ON THE TEACHING OF PRONUNCIATION FOR BRAZILIAN STUDENTS.

Élida de Oliveira Barros Pessoa
Escola Técnica Federal da Paraíba
Av. 1º de Maio, 720 - Jaguaribe
58.015-430 - João Pessoa - Paraíba - Brasil
Tel.: (083) 241-2200 Ramal 283

Abstract
This paper has the objective of showing how the pronunciation teaching should be in relation to children and adults according to David Abercombie's point of view. Ten features of English Pronunciation which are important for intelligibility for Brazilian students studying the English Language are shown. The transcription used in this work is the one used by Windsor Lewis.

Key Words: Intelligibility, Pronunciation.

1. Introduction

David abercombie [1] suggests that the objective of pronunciation teaching should be limited. The students must be able to communicate, so features must be carefully chosen to give students a general view of pronunciation. There is no use learning the English vowel and consonant systems as well as intonation and rhythm because the important is a pronunciation which can be understood without much or no conscious effort on the part of the listener. We also think that intending teachers or people who are expert on the subject have to acquire a perfect pronunciation but language learners do not have to. Even native speakers make mistakes. Brazilians, for example, do not know how to speak Portuguese correctly, as a consequence they make a large number of grammar mistakes.

Learning a language at an early age is easier because children have facilities in learning strange sounds, that is why, it is easier for teachers to teach a near- perfect pronunciation to them in class through imitation. It seems that the organs of speech are not formed yet so they can adapt themselves to any sound. The author also mentions that at puberty the faculty for easy imitation is lost maybe because the organs of speech are formed. As it becomes more difficult for that person to learn a foreign language, he suggested the limited goal of pronunciation teaching explained above. As we agree with the author we point out that teachers have to be careful not to teach the wrong pronunciation to anyone. If he does so, when that child gets older and discovers the correct pronunciation, it will be very hard for him to assimilate the correct one because the first pronunciation heard is the memorized one.

2. Features of English Pronunciation which are important for Intelligibility.

2.1. The problem of clusters.

In English there is no intermediate vowel in initial nor in final position. Exs.: student / 'studənt /, books / bʊks /. As in Portuguese there are no initial or final clusters, Brazilians students have a tendency to say / ɪ'studnt /, / bʊkɪs /, (insert an initial or a final vowel).

2.2. The th sound / θ / - / ð /.

It does not exist in Portuguese so Brazilians pronounce a similar sound:

The voiced / ð / is substituted by / z / or / d / as in the car / ðə kɑˢ /.
The voiceless / θ / is substituted by / f /, / s / or / t / as in three. / θri /

2.3. The problem of pronouncing the final / s / or / z /.
In English the final / s / or / z / depends on the sound that comes before. Exs.: Looks (third person singular) , the s is pronounced / s / because of the voiceless sound / k /; Adds (third person singular) the s is pronounced / z / because of the voiced sound / d /.
In Portuguese the final / s / or / z / depends on the sound that comes afterwards. Exs.: Duas gotas the s is pronounced / z / because of the voiced sound / g / that comes after it ; Duas casas the s is pronounced / s / because of the voiceless sound / k / that comes after it.

2.4. Central vowels / ɜ / - / ə / - / ʌ /.
As they do not exist in Portuguese, the organs of speech are not prepared to pronounce certain sounds that do not exist in their mother tongue.

2.5. Problematic sounds.
The sounds which do not exist in Portuguese are substituted by similar ones.

a) / æ / / e /. Both are substituted by / e /.
Exs.: man / mæn /; men / men /.

b) / ə / is substituted by / e / or / a /.
Ex.: breakfast /ˈbrekfəst /.

c) / ŋ / is substituted by / n /.
Exs.: sing / sɪŋ /; sin / sɪŋ /.

d) / ɜ / is substituted by / e /.
Ex.: girl / gɜˢl /.

e) / ʌ / is substituted by / a /.
Ex.: but / bʌt /

2.6. / tʃ / - / dʒ / instead of / t / - / d /.
People from the south of Brazil have a tendency to say / tʃ / and / dʒ / instead of / t / and / d / because they are used as allophones.
Exs.: tear / teəʳ /, dear / dɪəʳ /.

2.7. Aspiration / p / - / t / - / k /.
The voiceless plosives / p - t - k / are distinguished from their voiced counterparts / b - d - g / through aspiration (a "puff" of air) that is why all words beginning a stressed syllable with / p - t - k / must be aspirated. As it does not occur in Portuguese, Brazilian students generally forget to aspirate them.
Ex.: pen [1] / pʰen / may be understood Ben / ben /
    [ʰ] means aspiration diacritic

2.8. / jʊ / instead of / l /.
As Brazilians do not pronounce the final / l / they change it to / jʊ / and they may be misunderstood.
Ex.: fill / fɪl / is different from few / fjʊ /.

2.9. Stress shift.
When it indicates a grammar point, nouns and adjectives must be pronounced with stress on the first syllable while verbs on the second syllable. Sometimes this problem is only saved by

65

the context.

Exs.: <u>record</u> (n) / ˈre kəˑd / <u>record</u> (v)/ rɪˈkɔˑd /;

<u>rebel</u> (adj.) / ˈrebl / <u>rebel</u> (v) / rɪˈbel /.

2.10. Words with <u>x</u>.

The letter <u>x</u> represents different sounds in different words.

a) <u>X</u> is usually pronounced / e k s / in stressed syllable. Ex.: <u>Exercise</u> /ˈe k s əˑs aɪz /.

b) <u>X</u> is usually pronounced / ɪ k s / in unstressed syllable followed by voiceless consonant. Ex.: <u>Explain</u> / ɪ kˈs p l e i n /

c) <u>X</u> is pronounced / ɪg z / in unstressed syllable followed by voiced consonant.Ex.: <u>Exact</u> / ɪ gˈz æ k t /.

Brazilian students tend to pronounce all words with <u>x</u> as / e k s /.

c) <u>X</u> is pronounced /   z / in unstressed syllable followed by voiced consonant.Ex.: <u>Exact</u>
/ .

Brazilian students tend to pronounce all words with <u>x</u> as / e k s /.

3. Conclusion

According to Abercombie's point of view, children have facilities in learning strange sounds. As it becomes difficult for adults to learn a new language, just a general view of pronunciation must be given to them so that they can communicate.
Ten features of English Pronunciation which are important for intelligibility were shown above and we realized that Brazilian students compare English to Portuguese all the time, for example, sounds that do not exist in Portuguese are substituted by similar ones.
So, we have to treat children differently from adults when teaching them a new sound system and also make them assimilate English as it really is, different from their mother tongue, Portuguese.

4. Bibliography

[1] ABERCOMBIE, D. <u>Problems and principles</u> . Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1956.
[2] LEWIS, J. W. <u>A concise pronouncing dictionary of British and American English.</u> Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1972.
[3] BYRNE, D. <u>English teaching extracts.</u> London, Longman Group Ltd, 1969.