

RECOGNITION AND PRODUCTION EXERCISES IN PRONUNCIATION

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There are three kinds of students in foreign languages. First, those who describe foreign languages; second, those who teach foreign languages; third, those who learn to speak foreign languages. The first group must know about the foreign language but need not speak it. The third group must speak the foreign language but need not know about it. The second group should know about and speak the foreign language and the students' native language. This short article concerns primarily those of the second group. It aims to show how the language teacher who speaks both languages has an important advantage over the one who does not in pronunciation exercises.

A teacher of pronunciation must know the sound system and other pronunciation features in both the students' native language and the foreign language. He must be able to predict what pronunciation problems his students are going to have and how to help them to recognize such problems so that they can overcome the difficulties.

There are two major kinds of pronunciation difficulties. First, two phonetically similar items are used to distinguish meaning in the foreign language but are grasped by the student as equivalents because they are not used to distinguish meaning in his native language.¹ The problem is phonemic. The student must learn to produce the two separate items. Second, the student substitutes an item in the foreign language by a different item from his native language.² This substitution is unsatisfactory. Our question is what the teacher could do to achieve satisfactory pronunciation.

¹For example, /i/ and /ɪ/ are separate phonemes in English, while they are variants or allophones of a single phoneme in Mandarin Chinese, i. e. [i~ɪ]. The Chinese here is given in phonetic transcription to bring out the phonetic nature of the pronunciation problems more clearly. The English referred to here is upper Mid-western American English.

²For example, the Mandarin Chinese speaker produces [æi] for the English /aɪ/ [aɪ] as in *I*.

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Language teachers all know that if a person does not hear the difference between two contrasting items, he cannot produce the difference. If he hears the difference but does not have the opportunity to practice the difference, he cannot be said to have mastered the difference. If he can hear the difference and practices the difference but cannot control the difference, he cannot always produce the difference. Thus each time in a living situation when one of the two items is called for, his production can be a hit-or-miss game. A linguistic situation in actual life must be a hit-and-not-miss game. Since in the end one must be able to produce, he must be able to hear from the beginning.

To help the students attain recognition, two kinds of exercises are provided according to the two major kinds of difficulties. The first kind of recognition exercise is made up of two contrasting items not only for recognition but also for production, because the two items are used in the foreign language to distinguish meaning. Examples from English used to illustrate this first kind of pronunciation exercises are: the /i/ as in /fil/ *feel* contrasted with /I/ as in /fil/ *fill*, and the 2-4 falling intonation as in Is he a teacher contrasted with

the 3-2 rising intonation as in Is he a teacher. Both /i/ and /I/ must be recognized and produced; both the 2-4 falling intonation and the 3-2 rising intonation must be recognized and produced. The material used in such recognition exercises is the same as that of the production exercises.

The second kind of recognition exercise is different from the first kind in that the two items in contrast are both for recognition but only one item is for conscious production.⁴ This is where the bilingual teacher comes in. Two examples showing the difference between Mandarin Chinese and English are given below:

³See Charles C. Fries and Research Staff, *English Pronunciation*, (Ann Arbor, 1954) and Charles C. Fries and Yao Shen, *An Intensive Course in English for Chinese Students*, (Ann Arbor, 1946).

⁴See Charles C. Fries and Yao Shen, *Mandarin Chinese for English Speakers, an Oral Approach*, (Ann Arbor, 1950).

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|----------|--------|----------|-----|
| Chinese: | | English: | |
| [æi] | love | /aɪ/ | I |
| [tiēn] | heaven | /tɛn/ | ten |

These examples illustrate how the Mandarin Chinese speaker learning English can be helped by his bilingual teacher to produce the English /aɪ/ and the English /ɛn/. The student substitutes the Chinese [æi] for the English /aɪ/ and the Chinese [iɛn] for the English /ɛn/, and he says [æi hæif tiɛn piɛns] for /aɪ hæv tɛn pɛnz/ *I have ten pens*.⁵ In Chinese, there are no contrasts between [aɪ] and [æi] and between [ɛn] and [iɛn]. However, the Chinese speaker is accustomed to produce [æi] and [iɛn]. When he is learning to speak English, he automatically substitutes the Chinese [æi] for the English /aɪ/ and the Chinese [iɛn] for the English /ɛn/. In such a situation, the bilingual teacher can produce the Chinese [æi] and the English /aɪ/ as a pair of contrasts and the Chinese [iɛn] and the English /ɛn/ as another pair of contrasts for the students to recognize the difference. The student will detect immediately the one in each pair that is not like his native language. Once he recognizes the difference, he is drilled to produce the items in the foreign language.

Two examples showing the difference between English and Mandarin Chinese, and the student's substitutions are given below:

| | | |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| English: | Chinese: | (Substitution) |
| /ʃru/ shrew | [ʃu] book | /ʃru/ |
| /ʃu/ shoe | | /ʃu/ |
| <u>Do you want to go</u> | ni yau chyū ma | |
| <u>Do you want to go</u> | | ni yau chyū ma |

⁵In Mandarin Chinese, [æi] is always followed by [i] thus forming [æi]; [a] is not followed by [i]. The English /aɪ/ is thus pronounced [æi]. There is no [v]; there is [f]. The English /hæv/ is thus pronounced [hæif]. [ɛn] is always preceded by [i] to form [iɛn]. The English /tɛn/ is thus pronounced [tiɛn]. There is no [z]; there is [s]. The English /pɛnz/ is thus pronounced [piɛns].

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These examples illustrate how the bilingual teacher can help the English speaker learning Chinese to produce the Chinese items. In the first example, the Chinese [ʃ̥] sound as in [ʃ̥ū] *book* is often replaced by either the /ʃr/ as in /ʃru/ *shrew* or the /ʃ/ as in /ʃu/ *shoe*. In Chinese, the [ʃ̥] in [ʃ̥ū] is retroflexed; that is, it is pronounced with the [ʃ̥] and the [r] articulated simultaneously. In English, the /ʃ/ and the /r/ in /ʃru/ are consecutive and the /ʃ/ in /ʃu/ does not have retroflexion. If the bilingual teacher illustrates the difference among the three, the English speaker can quickly recognize the difference between [ʃ̥ū] and /ʃru/ and between [ʃ̥ū] and /ʃu/. The production drill is on [ʃ̥ū] alone.

The second example illustrates how the English speaker often carries the 3-2 rising intonation of his native language to the Chinese question. There is no contrast between the 2-4 falling intonation and the 3-2 rising intonation patterns in Chinese. Thus the contrast has to be between the native pattern and the foreign pattern. One pair of contrasting examples is usually enough for the student to recognize the difference. He knows quickly what is not in his own language although he is not always able to and is definitely not expected to be able to describe the difference.

To establish a new habit is always difficult. Continuous drill on what the students are trying very hard to master can be fatiguing, tiresome, and discouraging if they keep on slipping into their native habits. To give them an opportunity to be aware of the native habit they must avoid is often advantageous. Nevertheless, recognition exercises of the second kind should be used only as a touchstone. Maximum amount of class time should be spent with the students listening to and producing the foreign language, and the use of the students' native language should be kept to the minimum if used at all. The function of such exercises is to save time by working from the known to the unknown. It is an efficient means to an essential end. And this means can help to achieve the end effectively when the teacher is bilingual.