

WCES-2010

Teaching problematic consonants in English to young learners

Arif Sariçoban^a*, Albina Kuç^b

^aAssoc. Prof. Dr. Hacettepe University, Faculty of Education, Division of ELT, 06532, Ankara, Turkey

^bLecturer, Ankara, Turkey

Received October 8, 2009; revised December 17, 2009; accepted January 5, 2010

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to improve pronunciation of Turkish young learners at Jale Tezer College. It aims to show that English pronunciation can be taught and improved by using various songs and games. The research has been carried out with the 4th grade primary school students at Jale Tezer College. They had a pre-test (read aloud the passage) to assess their pronunciation. As a result of the data obtained, the experimental and the control groups have been formed. There are 9 students in the experimental group and 9 students in the control group. Pronunciation exercises (songs and games) have been practiced with the experimental group, while the students in the control group have continued learning using sentence drills an hour a week during the term and this training has lasted approximately for four months. The data obtained from the post-test have shown that there is an increase in the success of both of the groups, but the increase in the experimental group is appreciably more than the increase in the control group.

© 2010 Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Keywords: Problematic consonants; teaching English; young learners; pronunciation exercises; drills.

1. Introduction

Pronunciation is one of the components of English language teaching and should be an attainable goal for foreign language teachers. The aim is not to achieve the native-like pronunciation, but to make learners aware of the importance and usefulness of appropriate pronunciation and give it enough space during class-work. Nixon and Tomlinson (2005) report that pronunciation learning should start as early as possible because, in their formative years, young learners are much more receptive to learning sounds and pronunciation patterns. As is stressed by Kuç (2008), it is much easier to teach and correct pronunciation at an early stage in the learner's development than it is to correct time-compounded pronunciation errors later. Apart from their natural ability to imitate sounds, children in the 7-12 age group are far less self-conscious than those of 13 years and above. But after this age the ability to imitate perfectly becomes less. On the other hand, adults have great difficulty in mastering the pronunciation of foreign languages, she believes.

O'Connor (1980) emphasizes that "the main problem of English pronunciation is to build a new set of boxes corresponding to the sounds of English, and to break down the arrangement of boxes which the habits of our native language have so strongly built up. We do this by establishing new ways of hearing, new ways of using our speech organs, and 'developing' new speech habits" (p.1-3).

* Arif Sariçoban Tel.+ 90 312 297 85 86; fax: +90 312 297 61 19

E-mail address: arifs@hacettepe.edu.tr

2. Method

The purpose of this study was to test the improvement of the pronunciation through the use of songs and games. It examined the differences between a group taught pronunciation through using traditional method (sentence drills, repetition, minimal pairs, etc.) and another group taught pronunciation through songs, games, story telling, realia, and other communicative activities. The hypothesis was that students who use songs and games as a learning technique would improve significantly in the pronunciation of / w /, / v /, / n /, / ŋ /, / l /, / r /, / θ /, / ð / as opposed to the students who use sentence drills, repetition, minimal pairs, etc. The second aim was to find out if the exposure to songs and games made the class lovely for the students in the experimental group and motivated them. The regular main course teacher who followed a lesson plan prepared by the researcher taught the control group and the researcher taught the experimental group.

2.1 Participants

For the aim of this study, an experimental and a control group were formed at Jale Tezer College. Eighteen fourth grade primary school students at Jale Tezer College participated in this study. The subjects were students of one class. Eighteen students were in class 4 B. The class 4 B was divided in two parts and 9 students of this class were assigned as the experimental group and nine of them as the control group. The students were chosen randomly and they were not aware whether they belong to the experimental or the control group. They were at the age of ten. In the experimental group, the number of the male students was 4 and the number of the female students was 5. In the control group the number of male students was 4 and the number of the female students was 5.

2.2 Instruments

Since the purpose of this study was to analyze the problematic consonant sounds of the participants (young learners at Jale Tezer College), the researcher needed to record the participants' voices to determine the English consonants that constitute difficulty for them. Therefore, a reading passage was chosen to be used to elicit problematic English consonants of the participants. For that purpose, a story entitled "A Sea Story" (used by Garayeva, 2003) was chosen as the data collection instrument. It is a reading passage to diagnose the elements of English accent in non-native speakers of English. The passage consists of thirteen sentences and includes all the English phonemes in various positions in words. The other instrument used was Olympus digital voice recorder VN-1100PC.

2.3 Treatment

The pre-test (reading aloud the paragraph: "A Sea Story") was given to the students in the experimental and the control group. The purpose of the pre-test was to investigate and compare the pronunciation of the students in both groups. The post-test (the students read aloud the paragraph: "A Sea Story" again) was given to the experimental and the control groups to evaluate their pronunciation development after the treatment. Furthermore, in order to find out the students' attitudes towards the use of songs, games, story telling, realia, and other communicative activities as a pronunciation teaching aid, a questionnaire was given to the experimental group.

3. Results and Discussions

The results imply that there is *very little* difference between the pre ($m=1.94$) and post test ($m=2.2$) of the control group (t calculated = $-17.123 > t$ table 1.86, Sig. 2 tailed=0.000). However, there is *a little* difference between the pre ($m=2.25$) and post test ($m=2.61$) results of the experimental group. When we observe the difference between the control and the experimental group, the difference in the experimental group is more than the difference in the control group.

As to the analysis of the results for the experimental group, a paired samples t-test was run. The results show that the t-calculated value (-11.788 ; Sig. (2 tailed)=0.000) is bigger than the t-table value (1.86). This result implies that there is *a little difference* between the pre ($m=2.25$) and the post-test (2.61) results of the experimental group. Therefore, one can conclude that the treatment that the experimental group participants in this study received contributed to the improvement of the problematic phonemes to a certain degree.

This result may indicate that though using sentence drills, repetition, minimal pairs, etc. seems not to be a significant predictor, but has a very little contribution to the improvement of pronunciation in our case in the teaching of problematic

consonants to young learners when compared to using songs and games. As a result, it might be speculated that the young learners in the control group did not receive as many communicative activities as the experimental group did.

4. Conclusion

It is reported that there is a statistically significant difference between the control group post test results ($m=2.2$) and the experimental group post test results ($m=2.61$) with special reference to the techniques (Section 5) used to improve the problematic consonants since t -calculated value (-3.323) is bigger than t -table value (1.645). This result explains us that the average statistical value is 95 % significant.

Relying on the findings given above it can be said that the experimental group did significantly better than the control group, which implies that using songs and game like activities as a teaching technique is an effective way of teaching pronunciation to young learners. However, the control group also improved their pronunciation in the post-test to an acceptable degree, which shows that traditional teaching, using sentence drills, repetition, minimal pairs, etc. should not be ignored at all. Another significant result is that the students in the experimental group were highly motivated due to the songs and other communicative activities in the pronunciation learning. They add fun in teaching and learning a foreign language, and help the students have positive attitude towards learning the target language. Moreover, they motivate students and encourage them to go on learning a foreign language. Therefore, it can be suggested that the teachers use them as a way of teaching pronunciation to young learners.

5. Suggested Sample Activities and Exercises

5.1. Sample Activities

1. The Teaching of /w/ Sound

In this lesson the teacher teaches the children how to say the sound /w/ correctly.

The teacher asks the children to get into pairs. She asks them to skywrite on each others' back. She has them say the sound "w" while skywriting.

T: Now find a partner. Write "w" on your partner's back.

T: Your partner has to say /w/. (The first child does it for a few times.)

T: Take turns skywriting. Let your partner write on your back.

The teacher monitors each pair. She makes sure each child can say the correct sound.

a. Main-Task (Storytelling)

In this part the teacher uses the big books or writes the story on the big papers. She reminds the children of the words pointing to the picture.

T: Look at this photo. Do you remember what is it?

T: Yes, it is a window...

Teacher read the sentences.

T: Wendy worm is wet

The teacher asks the children to read after her, discusses the pictures, tells the story or plays the CD.

Wendy Worm is happy in her home. Her new home is just beside the window. She pops her head up to get some morning sun. Oh no, she gets wet! Water pours over Wendy Worm. She should have worn her raincoat.

T: Look at this photo. Do you remember what is it?

T: Yes, it is a window...

b. Singing

The teacher asks the children sit in a circle and tells them that she is going to teach them a song. The teacher plays the song on the CD and asks the children to sing the song and do the actions or to do skywriting as they sing.

Wendy Worm is wet. /w/, /w/, /w/, Wendy Worm is wet. /w/, /w/, /w/, Wendy Worm is wet. /w/, /w/, /w/, /w/ is the sound of w.

c. Post-Task

To review the sound "w" the teacher uses worksheets and activities and language games. To play a game you need to prepare cards for letters. Divide children into four groups. Give each group a set of letter cards. Say a sound. Ask children to find the corresponding letter card. Have them put the cards next to letter card on a desk, face up. Repeat this step. Have children put the cards next to one another. Monitor each group. Make sure the children have picked the correct letter cards.

5.2. Sample Exercises









In this part the teacher uses various exercises to improve the sound “w”.

a. Using Games

The teacher cuts out and pastes the pictures which begin with the sound of “w”. The teacher sticks the words which start with the sound of “w” on the board and wall. The teacher pronounces each word and the students repeat after the teacher. The teacher plays “What is Missing Game?”. The teacher asks the students to look at the flashcards. The students close their eyes or put their heads down on the desk. The teacher hides one or two cards. The students try to guess which words are missing.

b. Using Worksheets

Here the teacher asks the students to draw a line from each word to the picture it names.

<p>1.</p>  <p>← Swim</p>  <p>penguin →</p>	<p>2.</p>  <p>wash</p>  <p>quiet</p>
<p>3.</p>  <p>whisper</p>  <p>swing</p>	
<p>4.</p>  <p>wind</p>  <p>subway</p>	

c. Using Realia

Find pictures of the items or actions which begin with the sound of W, print them, color them, paste them on 3"x5" note-cards and laminate or cover with clear contact paper. Put them in a shoe box and use them to practice the sounds. Or find the real objects and collect them into a "w" bag. Remember to give lots of tactile cues.

watch	wing	walk	window
watermelon	weep	watch	wipe
water	wolf	worm	

These range from common names like Wesley or Wanda to nonsense names like Wiply or Woogie. We make name tags and wear them all day long, calling each other by our W names. In addition, we wiggle whenever we hear the /w/ sound. The kids begin to connect the /w/ sound with the SIGHT of W, they tune in to the sound (they all enjoy wiggling), they rack their brains to find words containing the sound so they can wiggle, and they come to the point where they no longer confuse the sound with the name of the letter. At the beginning of the day, half will tell you that W makes a /d/ sound. After a day of wiggling, they can see the letter W and identify the sound correctly.

e. A Sample Story

It's a wonder (wiggle) to behold!

Wee Willy Williams was a wiggler His parents didn't know what they should do 'Cause Willy'd start to wiggle Whenever he would hear A word with the letter W His Mom would say, "Willy" And he'd wiggle She'd offer his some water And he'd wiggle He couldn't eat a waffle 'Cause he wiggled at the thought And poor little Willy even wiggled when he walked Well, it got worse when Willy started reading His teacher didn't know what she should do 'Cause Willy'd start to wiggle Whenever he would read A word with the letter W He'd read "whistle" or "wonderful" And wiggle He'd read

"waterfall" or "Wednesday" And he'd wiggle Well, he couldn't sit still no matter how he tried It seemed that every other word had a W inside Then one day a great idea occurred to Willy He would channel all that wiggling to his toes And they could wiggle in his shoes When he encountered W's And Willy'd be the only one to know Now his parents, they're so proud of little Willy He's stopped wiggling at the sound of W But they're still a bit confused By the holes in Willy's shoes Willy Williams and the letter W.

One Wet Windy Wednesday

Wendy went walking with Wally one Wednesday, Woo, woo, one wet Wednesday, Wendy went walking with Wally one Wednesday, One wet windy Wednesday.

Willy was watching Walt wade in the water, Woo, woo, Walt wade in the water, Willy was watching Walt wade in the water, One wet windy Wednesday.

Winifred Wagner was wiggling and waving, Woo, woo, was wiggling and waving, Winifred Wagner was wiggling and waving, One wet windy Wednesday.

6. Suggestions for Further Studies

This study can help the teachers who want to use songs to teach pronunciation to young learners. An important fact that teachers should take into consideration is the choice of songs. The songs should be so simple that the students can understand them without difficulties and memorize them in a short period of time. In order to add fun in the lesson the songs should be action songs so that the students can join the songs dancing. They need to be supported with other teaching aids like realia. This way of learning helps students learn a foreign language in a natural and enjoyable way without stress. The students feel more confident, relaxed and willing to learn a foreign language. Needless to say, songs highly motivate students and help them improve their pronunciation of the target language.

Another implication is the selection of the teaching materials. Teachers should develop pronunciation materials suitable for those young learners. The material should attract the attention of the students. Songs, games, crosswords, using pictures and realia, short traditional stories, projects are the activities which help the students be involved in the lesson and follow it with grate interest.

The third implication is that teachers should employ not only songs as a teaching pronunciation technique, but also some traditional pronunciation teaching technique like minimal pairs, sentence drills, listen and repeat as well. These activities are not very enjoyable for the teaching of young learners, but as the results of the control group show this way of teaching is also useful and should not be ignored at all.

The fourth implication is that teachers should use only one consistent dialect (not accented one) in their lessons. Teachers should never use a mixture of dialects in the classroom because such an attitude can confuse students and give harm to realization of intelligible pronunciation in the students.

Furthermore, teachers should keep a pronunciation portfolio for each student in the classroom. The students' voices should be taped or video recorded so that teacher can see the development of the students and use it for the evaluation as well. The track or video of recorded voices can be given to the students so that they can listen and follow their own development.

Moreover, since pronunciation needs a long time to improve, teachers should design a study with a longer period of time.

References

- Garayeva, M. (2003). *English Pronunciation*. Sivas: Cumhuriyet University Publications.
- Kuç, A. (2008). "Problematic Consonant Sounds for Young Learners at Jale Tezer College." An Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Hacettepe University, the Institute of Social Sciences.
- Nixon C, Tomlinson M. (2005). *Primary Reading Box: Reading Activities and Puzzles for Younger Learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Connor, J. D. (1980). *Better English Pronunciation*. 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.150.