# Lecture 2

**TEACHING PRONUNCIATION:**

1. The importance of correct pronunciation in language learning
2. The difficulties in English pronunciation

The first impact of any language comes from the spoken word. The basis of all languages is sound. Words are merely combinations of sounds. It is in these sound sequences that the ideas are contained. Listening is the first experience; the attempt to understand accompanies it. The acquisition of good pronunciation depends to a great extent on the learner’s ability of listening with care and discrimination. The hearing of a given word calls forth the acoustic image of that word from which a meaning is obtained. Therefore teaching pronunciation is of great importance in the developing of pupils’ hearing and speaking habits and skills.

Teaching pronunciation is of no less importance in the developing of reading and writing habits and skills, since writing (or what is written) is a graphic representation of sound sequences. In reading the visual images become acoustic images. These are combined with kinesthetic images, resulting in inner speech.

Wrong pronunciation often leads to misunderstanding. For example, when a speaker or a reader replaces one phoneme with another he unintentionally uses quite a different word, in this way altering the sense of what he wanted to say. For example, white instead of wide; it instead of eat; pot instead of port, etc.

Every teacher must understand how important the teaching of correct pronunciation is.

1. **The difficulties in English pronunciation**

Any language has its specific phonic system. This is true for English as well. The sounds of English are not the same as the sounds of Russian, though there are, of course, some sounds which occur both in English and in Russian.

There are many difficult sounds in English for Russian learners, [w], [ð], [θ], [r], [ə:], [ou], [εə] for example. To Russian-speaking pupils the combination of sounds [θs], [ðz] which occurs in English at the end of a word (months, clothes) is strange and they find great difficulty in pronouncing a word with this sound combination. The same may be said about the sound [ŋ]. In English it comes in the middle or at the end of many words: English, think, song, sitting, longer and presents a lot of trouble to pupils to produce it correctly as there is no sound like this in the Russian language.

The sounds of English may be arranged in three groups: vowels, double vowels or diphthongs, and consonants. There are twelve vowel sounds in English: [ı], [e], [æ], [o], [u], [ʌ] and [ə] may be considered as short, but their actual lengths vary to a limited extent in the same way as those of [i:], [a], etc. For instance, the vowels of [bit] bit, [let] let, [fut] foot are shorter than those of [bid] bid, [led] led, lead, [wud] wood. There is a modern tendency in South-Eastern English to lengthen some or all of the traditionally short vowels [ı], [e], [æ], [o], [u], and [ʌ] in many situations. Words like fit and feet, cot and caught, wood and wooed are, or may be, distinguished by vowel quality only, instead of by a complex of duration and quality.

“Some authorities, writes D. Jones, consider the state of tension of the tongue to be an important factor in the production of various vowel qualities, and they distinguish tense vowels from lax vowels; the [li:] of [li:p] leap has a tenser articulation than the [1] of lip, and that the [u:] of [bu:t] boot has a tenser articulation than the [u] of [fut] foot. This can be tested by placing the finger against the outside of the throat about half way between the chin and the larynx. When pronouncing the vowel of [lip] this part feels loose, but when pronouncing the vowel of [li:p], it becomes tenser and is pushed forward.”

Therefore such opposites as [i:] — [i]; [u:] — [u]; [ə:] — [ə] are different in quality, not only in length.

Long sounds are fully long only when final — far, sea, saw, two, fur; when a voiced consonant follows and the syllable is final in a sentence — feed, spoon, bird, farm, pause, and when they are said by themselves. In other cases the traditionally long vowels are pronounced short. D. Jones says that the length of vowels is determined in most cases by the phonetic context, and in few cases differences of length without accompanying differences of quality distinguish one word from another. Hence in teaching English vowels the quality of sounds should be emphasized and not their duration.

Thereare double vowels and diphthongs in English. Some of these diphthongs are strange to Russian-speaking pupils because they do not appear in their native language: [ou], [εə], [ıə], [oə], [juə]. Pupils are tempted to substitute for them English monophthongs or sounds from their own language. The following vowel sounds have been found to be particularly difficult for Russian-speaking pupils: [æ] which is often confused with [e]; [a:] which is substituted by Russian [a]; [ə:] which is replaced by [o:].

English consonants also present some trouble to Russian pupils, first because there are sounds which are quite strange to pupils, for example, [ð], [θ], [w], [h], then because their pronunciation changes depending on the position in the words. In final position voiceless consonants have strong articulation (white), voiced consonants — weak articulation (wide). Therefore in teaching pupils how to pronounce consonants in final position the teacher should emphasize the strength of articulation and tensity of voiceless consonants and weakness of voiced consonants. For example, in Did you...? the second [d] differs from the first [d] in the weakness of articulation. The sound is hardly pronounced and heard.

Consonants may vary in length. In this connection D. Jones writes that when final they may be observed to be longer after short vowels than they are after long vowels... The [n] in bent is much shorter than that in bend; the [1] in gulp is shorter than that in bulb. The teacher of English should know this to be able to help his pupils in pronouncing words as close to the pattern as possible.

The pronunciation of words is not only a matter of sounds, but also of stress or accent. Some words have the heavier stress on the first part of the word: sorry, evening, morning, answer, and other words have the heavier stress on the second part: begin, mistake, about, reduce, result, occur, effect. Stress is very important to the assimilation of English pronunciation. Foreigners often find it difficult to understand an Englishman’s speech and ask him to speak more slowly, because in quick speech the accented syllables are so strong that they almost drown the others.

The pronunciation of sentence patterns includes also variations of musical tones: rise and fall. English tone patterns differ from those of Russian, that is why pupils find it difficult to use adequate tone patterns in conversation or while reading aloud. Sometimes Russian people speaking English use wrong intonation because of the interference of the mother tongue. That often leads to misunderstanding and impoliteness. For example, ‘Will you ‘wait for me here? (Подаждитеменяздесь.)is not only a wrong tone-pattern, but is impolite in its form.

In teaching English pronunciation the teacher should bear in mind that the difficulties he will meet with — and they occur throughout the course — are sounds, stress, and musical tones strange to Russian-speaking pupils. He should know what they are and how to teach pupils to overcome these difficulties.