

What language teachers must know to teach pronunciation

CATESOL conference 2013 – Teaching of Pronunciation (ToP) Featured Panel

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A. Conceptual knowledge: A basic philosophy of pronunciation

1. Spoken language differs from written language.
2. Pronunciation is a physical act.
3. Awareness of vowel duration is essential.
4. Listeners of English perceive the relative importance of information based on stress, intonation, and pausing.
5. Learning how to “listen mindfully” is essential to any kind of pronunciation improvement.
6. Pronunciation can be integrated in classes for all language skills.
7. Some aspects of pronunciation are more important than others
8. Pronunciation work does not disrespect a learner’s L1, home culture, or identity.

B. Descriptive knowledge: The basic facts of pronunciation

1. The smallest building block of pronunciation is the *phoneme* (unit of sound) and its *allophones* (variations).
2. Pronunciation consists of *segmentals* (the individual phonemes) and *suprasegmentals* (stress, intonation, rhythm, and connected speech features)
3. Syllables and stress are the building blocks of rhythm and intonation.
4. Thought groups/tone units are the basis of all *prosody*/suprasegmental work.
5. Pitch change occurs on the most important word (the stressed syllable of the key word/focus word).

C. Procedural knowledge: The basic skills needed to teach pronunciation

It is important for teachers to:

1. have a working familiarity with both segmental and suprasegmental features of speech
2. perceive intonation patterns/pitch changes
3. perceive variable vowel duration that produces rhythm in English
4. teach pronunciation in connection with listening discrimination skills
5. use movement in teaching pronunciation
6. prioritize pronunciation issues for communicative purposes
7. provide useful feedback through demonstration and explanation
8. integrate pronunciation into language teaching
9. help learners develop automaticity.
10. teach compensatory strategies

ToP-IG – CATESOL's Teaching of Pronunciation interest group <http://bit.ly/top-ig>

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