

**The [ɔ:] and [oʊ] Contrast as a Fossilized Pronunciation Error of Turkish
Learners of English and Solutions to the Problem**

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Abstract

The acquisition of [ɔ:] and [oʊ] vowel sounds of the English language constitutes a serious problem for Turkish learners of English. There are no pedagogically-developed specific materials or sample lesson plans in the literature to remedy the pronunciation difficulty brought about by [ɔ:] and [oʊ] vowel sounds of the English language. Therefore, this article aims at providing Turkish learners of English with pronunciation teaching material and a sample lesson on two problem causing sounds like [ɔ:] and [oʊ] by using the audio-articulation method developed by Demirezen (2003, 2004).

Key words: fossilized pronunciation error, audio-articulation method, minimal pairs, contextual clue exercises, teacher training

Özet

İngiliz dilindeki [ɔ:] ve [oʊ] ünlülerinin edinimi İngilizce öğrenen Türk öğrenciler için ciddi bir sorun oluşturur. İngilizcedeki [ɔ:] ve [oʊ] ünlülerinin sebep olduğu sesletim güçlüğüne düzeltmeye yönelik eğitsel olarak geliştirilmiş özel materyaller ya da örnek ders planları literatürde mevcut değildir. Bu yüzden, bu makale Demirezen (2003, 2004) tarafından geliştirilen *duy-seslet yöntemi* (*the audio-articulation method*) kullanarak İngilizce öğrenen Türk öğrencilerine sorun teşkil eden iki ses olan [ɔ:] ve [oʊ] ile ilgili telaffuz öğretme materyali ve bir örnek ders sağlamayı amaçlıyor.

Anahtar sözcükler: kemikleşmiş sesletim hatası, duy-seslet yöntemi, en küçük çiftler, içerik ipuçlu alıştırmalar

1. Introduction

The [ɔ:] and [oʊ] vowel sounds of the English language have always created pronunciation problems for Turkish learners of English since Turkish learners do not spend the necessary muscular effort for the accurate production of [ɔ:] and [oʊ] sounds. Phonetically speaking, the vowel [ɔ:] is a half-open mid back rounded vowel, whereas the [oʊ] vowel is a half-close mid back rounded vowel and is also known as a retracting diphthong in American English. Turkish learners of English are inclined to pronounce [oʊ] as [ɔ:] or [ɔ] disregarding the required lip rounding in articulation. The aim of this article is to rehabilitate the pronunciation errors caused by [ɔ:] and [oʊ] vowel sounds of American English to Turkish learners of English through making use of a pronunciation teaching method called *the audio-articulation method* developed by Demirezen as a fossilized pronunciation mistake breaker.

2. The concept of a fossilized pronunciation error

Fossilized pronunciation errors are chronic articulation mistakes made by language learners in the acquisition of the phonological system of the target language which continue for a long time and cannot be easily solved. The main reason why language learners make fossilized pronunciation errors is that they apply the phonological rules of their mother tongue to those of the target language. Fossilized pronunciation errors are one of the most prominent impediments to second language phonological acquisition. As Demirezen (2005:83) states, "...fossilized pronunciation problems cannot be ignored since fossilization slows down the improvement of the communicative competence and fluency, intonation advancement and other related skills.

To Turkish learners of English consonant phonemes like / θ, ð, ŋ, w, ʌ, l, r / and vowel phonemes like / ε, æ, ə, u, oʊ, ɔ: / continually bring about the realization of fossilized pronunciation errors. The underlying reason for the occurrence of these errors is that many of these sounds are non-existent as phonemes or sounds in the phonological system of the Turkish language. Thus, being under the influence of Turkish, learners tend to hear and hence pronounce some consonant and vowel

phonemes of English that do not exist in Turkish as the same as those in Turkish, which minimizes the pronunciation intelligibility of language learners. Because these learners make pronunciation errors so many times inside / outside the classroom context when interacting with native / non-native speakers of English and it is very difficult to get rid of this *bad pronunciation habit*, these pronunciation errors are accepted as fossilized errors for Turkish learners of English, the rehabilitation of which is very difficult but not impossible. In this context, the audio-articulation method, which is a potent fossilized pronunciation error cleaner, may be used by a language teacher so as to rehabilitate or reduce the pronunciation errors heard in non-native speakers' articulations of words containing the phonological features that belong to the target language.

3. The phonemic features of / ɔ: / and / oʊ / sounds in English

3.1. The phonemic features of / ɔ: / sound in English

In American English, the / ɔ: / phoneme can be easily heard in the words below:

broth / brɔ:θ /	dog / dɔ:g /
cross / krɔ:s /	frosty / frɔ:sti /
froth / frɔ:θ /	loft / lɔ:ft /
moss / mɔ:s /	toss / tɔ:s /
song / sɔ:ŋ /	wrong / rɔ:ŋ /

(Cambridge Dictionary of American English 2000)

In the IPA system, the / ɔ: / phoneme in American English is written as / ɒ: / in phonetic transcriptions as seen in the words below:

broth / brɒ:θ /	dog / dɒ:g /
cross / krɒ:s /	frosty / frɒ:sti /
froth / frɒ:θ /	loft / lɒ:ft /
moss / mɒ:s /	toss / tɒ:s /
song / sɒ:ŋ /	wrong / rɒ:ŋ /

(Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2003)

Unlike the case seen in American English, the / ɔ: / phoneme takes place a bit shorter as / ɒ / in British English and this short / ɒ / sound is written as / ɒ / in phonetic transcriptions as shown in the following words:

broth / brɒθ /	dog / dɒg /
cross / krɒs /	frosty / frɒsti /
froth / frɒθ /	loft / lɒft /
moss / mɒs /	toss / tɒs /
song / sɒŋ /	wrong / rɒŋ /

(Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2003)

3. 2. The phonemic features of / ɒ / sound in English

The / ɒ / sound, a distinguishing feature of American English, causes serious pronunciation problems for Turkish learners of English due to the existence of the lip rounding quality in its articulation. Turkish learners generally mispronounce the English words including / ɒ / as / ɔ / or / ɔ: /. They substitute / ɔ / or / ɔ: / for / ɒ /, which highly reduces the comprehensibility of their articulation of words containing / ɒ / by the hearer. The following examples show how learners mispronounce / ɒ / sound as / ɔ / or / ɔ: /:

goal is pronounced as / gɔl / or / gɔ:l / instead of / gɒl /

bone is pronounced as / bɔn / or / bɔ:n / instead of / bɒn /

role is pronounced as / rɔl / or / rɔ:l / instead of / rɒl /

In American English, the / ɒ / phoneme can be easily heard in the words below:

go / gɒ /
 boat / bɒt /
 code / kɒd /
 goat / gɒt /
 post / pɒst /
 road / rɒd /
 roast / rɒst /

toast / **tou**st /

(Cambridge Dictionary of American English 2000)

Students should give importance to pronouncing the / **ou** / phoneme, which is a retracting diphthong in American English, as / **ow** / because of the fact that this diphthong is formed by the combination of the vowel / **o** / and the semi-vowel / **w** /. They should spend the required muscular effort for the accurate articulation of this complex vowel.

In the IPA system, the / **ou** / phoneme in American English is written as the same as seen in the following phonetic transcriptions of the words:

go / **gou** /
boat / **bou**t /
code / **kou**d /
goat / **gou**t /
post / **pou**st /
road / **rou**d /
roast / **rou**st /
toast / **tou**st /

(Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2003)

Unlike the case encountered in American English, the / **ou** / diphthong in American English changes into the / **əu** / diphthong in British English as seen in the following phonetic transcriptions of the words:

go / **gəu** /
boat / **bəu**t /
code / **kəu**d /
goat / **gəu**t /
post / **pəu**st /
road / **rəu**d /
roast / **rəu**st /
toast / **təu**st /

(Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2003)

4. An application of the audio-articulation method

4. 1. Warm-up and motivation

Teacher: Good morning students, how are you all today?

Students: Thank you, sir, we are fine, how about you?

Teacher: Thank you, I am fine, too.

4. 2. Reviewing the previous material

Teacher: Remember that we studied the / ɔ: / sound in our last lesson.

Who can give me the phonetic description of this sound?

Engin: / ɔ: / is a half-open, mid, back, rounded, tense vowel.

Teacher: Wonderful! Who will give me some words containing the / ɔ: / sound?

Pinar: This sound can be heard in words like *call, hall, fall, talk*, etc.

Teacher: Very good, Pinar. Correct. Let's move on to today's topic.

4. 3. Introducing the today's topic

Teacher: Today, we will study the English [ɔ:] and [oʊ] vowel sounds.

(The teacher writes these two sounds with several examples on the whiteboard).

On the whiteboard:

/ ɔ: /	versus	/ oʊ /
e.g. tall		e.g. pole
bawl		boat
caught		phone

Table 1. The / ɔ: / and / oʊ / contrast

4. 4. Preparing a corpus

The teacher prepares a corpus of 70 to 100 words with [ɔ:] and [oʊ] sounds. S/he reads the words in the corpus first and then asks the students to repeat them after her/him. Whole class, group (boys / girls), individual repetitions are done

4. 4. 1. Presenting a corpus

The teacher reads the following words in the corpus and then involves the students in individual or group repetitions. S/he can give both the British and American pronunciations if necessary.

/ ɔ: / word-initially	/ ɔ: / word-medially	/ ɔ: / word-finally
all	tall	awe
awl	talk	caw
off	fall	craw
ought	salt	draw
auto	hall	gnaw
almost	call	jaw
already	pall	law
always	walk	paw
auction	vault	saw
awful	caught	slaw
often	bought	thaw
awkward	taught	raw

Table 2. Corpus on the / ɔ: / sound

/ oʊ / word-initially	/ oʊ / word-medially	/ oʊ / word-finally
oaf	boat	foe
oak	code	go
oats	hope	hoe
own	pole	joe
ocean	road	low
odor	roast	mow
omen	role	no
only	rose	row
opal	soap	sew
open	smoke	so
oval	toast	show
over	vocal	woe

Table 3. Corpus on the / oʊ / sound

4. 4. 2. Establishing the minimal pairs

The teacher takes the following minimal pairs from the words of the corpus. If there are any unknown words for the students, he handles them first in the class before the exhortations.

/ɔ:/	/oʊ/
fall /fɔ:l/	foal /foʊl/
hall /hɔ:l/	hole /hoʊl/
law /lɔ:/	low /loʊ/
pall /pɔ:l/	pole /poʊl/
call /kɔ:l/	coal /koʊl/
bawl /bɔ:l/	bowl /boʊl/
tall /tɔ:l/	toll /toʊl/
paws /pɔ:z/	pose /poʊz/
caught /kɔ:t/	coat /koʊt/
bought /bɔ:t/	boat /boʊt/
fawn /fɔ:n/	phone /foʊn/
taught /tɔ:t/	tote /toʊt/
stalk /stɔ:k/	stoke /stoʊk/
vault /vɔ:t/	volt /voʊt/

Table 4. Minimal pairs for /ɔ:/ and /oʊ/ sounds

The teacher reads them from left to right and then asks students to read in the same way. Whole class, group (boys / girls), individual repetitions are done at this stage. The teacher praises his students, saying “Well done!”, “Wonderful!”, “Great!”, etc.

4. 4. 3. Creating tongue twisters

The teacher provides the learners with tongue twisters of different size. First, he reads them. Later, he wants the learners to repeat the tongue twisters after her / him.

(1)

an officer

a law officer

call a law officer

(2)

home

going home

going home slowly

call a law officer in the hall

George's going home slowly

(3)

the door

opening the door

the officer's opening the door

the officer's opening the door of the office

(4)

the washer

overloading the washer

Poe's overloading the washer

Poe's overloading the washer with Paul

(5)

forks

forty forks

forty-four forks

Paul's forty-four forks

Paul's forty-four forks in the drawer

(6)

the ocean

over the ocean

going over the ocean

the boat going over the ocean

a goat on the boat going over the ocean

(7)

Dawn

Dawn's going

Dawn's going bowling

Dawn's often going bowling

Dawn's often going bowling with George

(8)

roses

those roses

the note on those roses

Joe's note on those roses

Joe's note in code on those roses

4. 4. 4. Doing recognition exercises

4. 4. 4. 1. Single words

Teacher: Students, if you hear the [ɔ:] vowel in the given word, say (1), but if you hear the [oʊ] sound, say (2).

(The teacher writes (1) under the [ɔ:] vowel and (2) under the [oʊ] sound on the whiteboard). On the whiteboard:

[ɔ:]

versus

[oʊ]

important problem for him. However, no problem raised. George and Paul called a glazier and had the glazier replace the broken window with a new one.

4. 5. Giving the rule

Teacher: Now, listen to me very carefully. I will give you the rule. (The teacher explains how [ɔ:] and [oʊ] are made in terms of points and places of articulation, showing figure (1) and figure (2) to the students).

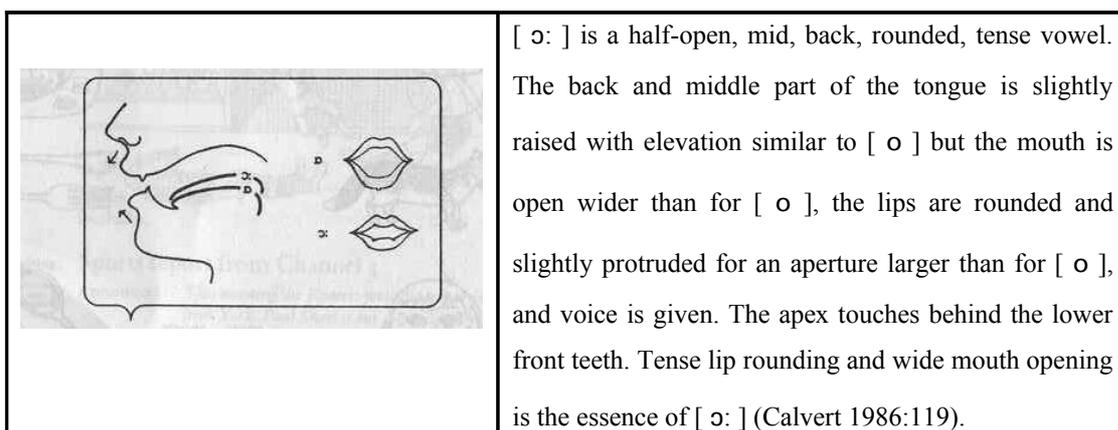


Figure 1. The position of the tongue in the production of [ɔ:]

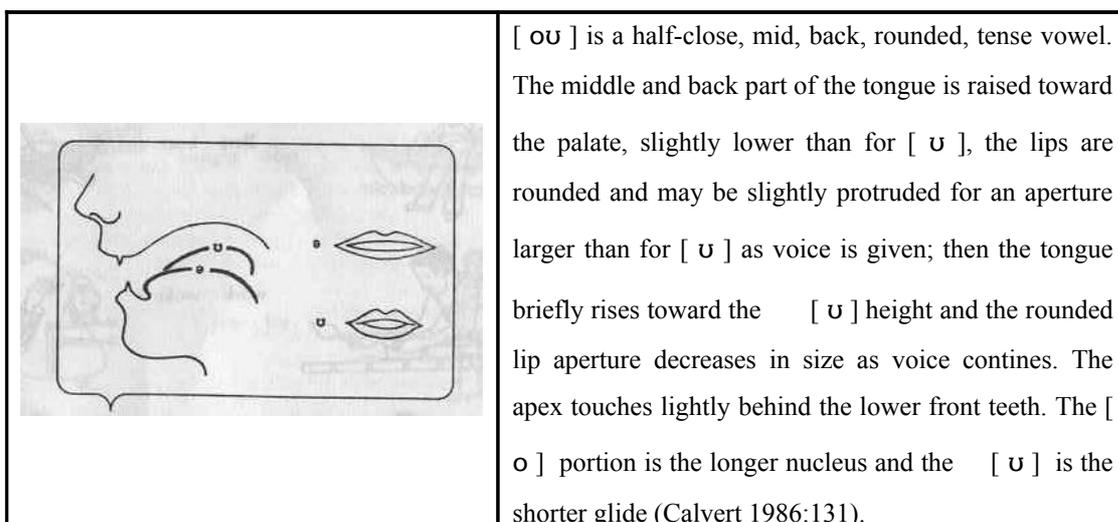


Figure 2. The position of the tongue in the production of [oʊ]

4. 6. Producing further drills

The teacher puts [ɔ:] and [oʊ] vowel contrasts into sentence related contexts so as to help students to hear and comprehend their *contrastive phonetic values*.

4. 6. 1. Practicing with minimal sentences

The teacher gives the same sentences, but the minimal pairs in them are different. First, he reads them. Later, he asks the learners to repeat after him. Whole class, group (boys / girls), individual repetitions are done at this stage.

Here are the minimal sentences:

1. The *BOWL* / *BALL* on the kitchen table belongs to my sister.
2. That was a nice *FAWN* / *PHONE*.
3. His mother *SAW* / *SEW* that for him.
4. That was a hot *CALL* / *COAL*.
5. Did the little child fall in that *HALL* / *HOLE* ?
6. I was *CALLED* / *COLD* yesterday.
7. We *WALK* / *WOKE* early in the morning.
8. Who went to the *SHOW* / *SHORE* last Saturday ?

4. 6. 2. Practicing with contextual clues

Sentences with contextual clues give real life-like contexts of the sound contrasts. The sentences below are practiced, modeled on the teacher's exhortations in the class.

1. His father *TAUGHT* him how to *TOTE* a heavy suitcase.
2. The young man *STALKED* furiously out of the room without *STOKING* up.
3. *JOE* punched him on the *JAW*.
4. *CALL* him to bring more *COAL* here.
5. He *BOUGHT* a new *BOAT* last month.
6. That *TALL* man does not know that the bridge *TOLL* is \$ 5.00.
7. There was a *SHOW* about a mile from *SHORE*.
8. She *SAW* me *SEW* up a hole in my trousers.
9. There was a *HOLE* in the *HALL*.
10. He can't play *BOWLS* with those *BALLS*.
11. Who *CAUGHT* her stealing the *COAT* ?

4. 6. 3. Practicing with problem sound-focused exercises

1. GO down the ROAD with the HOPE of finding a FLORIST.
2. PAUL TAUGHT me how to play POKER at a MOTEL in CHICAGO.
3. DON SHOWED JOAN the COAT which he BOUGHT for his DAUGHTER in ROME.
4. GORDON SHOWED PAUL how to GO to the nearest POST OFFICE on the ROAD.
5. JOE SAW the SHOW of FOUR POLISH GOATS SMOKING on the BOAT.
6. THOSE TALK SHOW PROGRAMS are ALWAYS WATCHED by the POST OFFICERS in PORTUGAL.

4. 7. Some techniques and activities for contextualization / production

4. 7. 1. Using a dialogue

Here, the students, working in pairs, try to produce the problematic consonants [ɔ:] and [ou]. Here is the dialogue:

A DINNER

George: Are you going to the sports center tomorrow evening?

Paul : No, I am not. Gloria and Gordon are coming to dinner tomorrow evening.

George: Paul, what do you plan to cook for Gloria and Gordon?

Paul : Well, I may cook roast pork for them.

As far as I know, both Gloria and Gordon like eating roast pork.

George: You are right. They like eating roast pork. How about drinks?

What do you plan to offer them to drink? Coke or water?

Paul : Coke, of course!

George: Wonderful! I am sure it will be a good dinner.

Paul : Thank you, George. If you have no programme for tomorrow, come and join us.

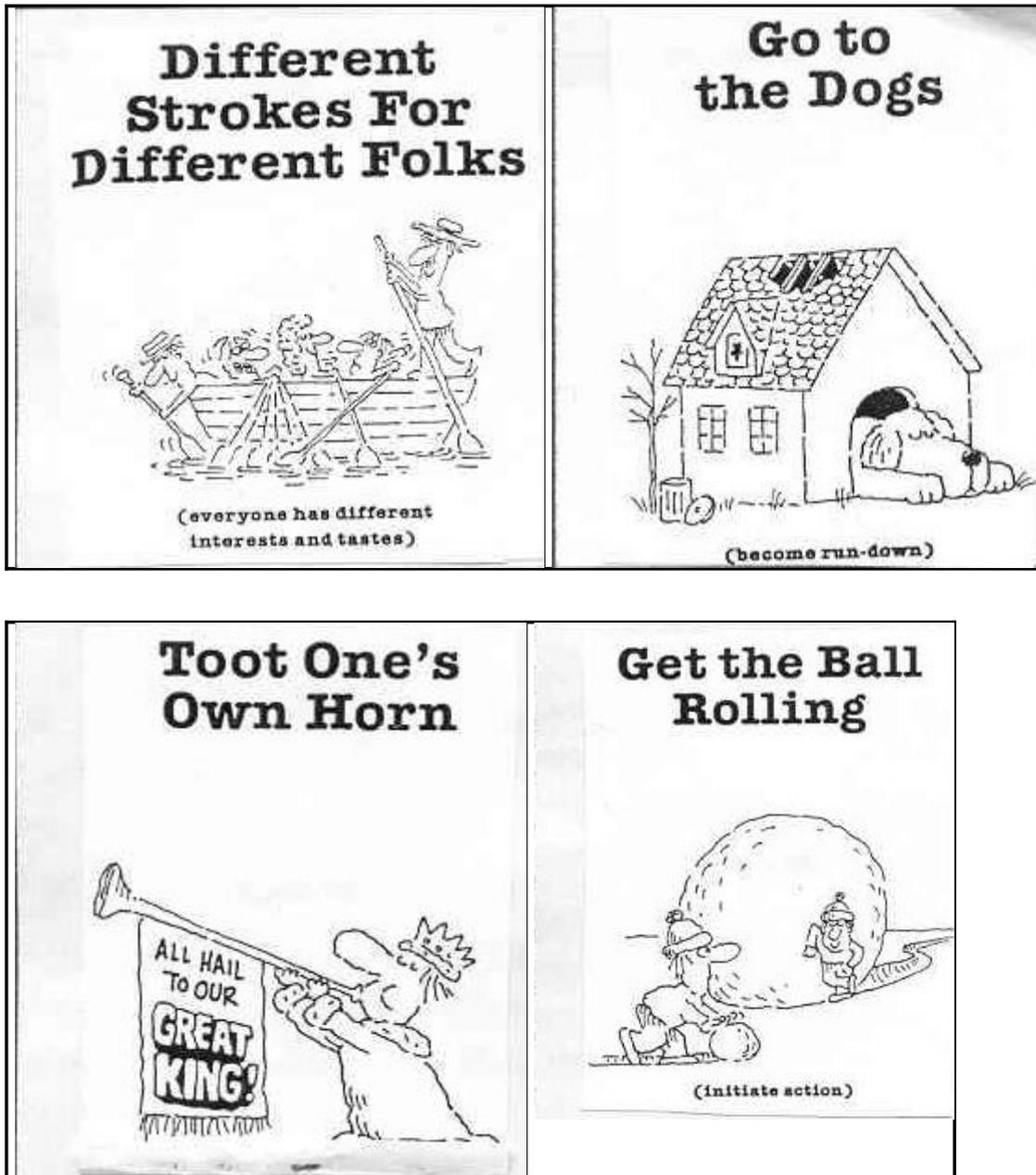
George : Oh! It is very kind of you to invite me to dinner but I have an important exam the other day. So, I need to prepare for it at home.

Paul : O.K. Good luck! See you later!

George: Thank you, Paul. See you later!

4. 7. 2. Using idioms

Here, the teacher writes several idioms with the [ɔ:] and [ou] sounds on the whiteboard and asks the students to practice these idioms orally. After that, showing the cartoons relevant to each idiom, the teacher asks the students to make guesses as to the meanings of these idioms. Students work either individually or in pairs when trying to find out what is meant in each idiom written on the board. The idioms and the related cartoons for each are as follows:



4. 7. 3. Using a song

The teacher uses Styx's song entitled "Boat on the River" to improve students' both sound perception and production abilities. Students are given the handout of the song lyric. In the handouts, the words with the problematic consonants / ɔ: / and / ou / are missing. There are blanks in the places where the problematic consonants / ɔ: / and / ou / exist. The teacher plays the recording several times. While listening to the song, students try to fill in the blanks with the words having the problematic consonant. In the first two plays, students fill in the blanks. However, in the third play of the song, they try singing; that is, they produce the problematic sound.

Here is the song lyric:

BOAT ON THE RIVER

By Styx

Take me back to my ...(1)... on the river
I need to ... (2).... down, I need to come down
Take me back to my....(3).... on the river
And I ...(4)... cry out any more
Time stands still as I gaze In her(5)...
She eases me down, touching me gently
With the(6).... that(7)... past my boat on the river
So I don't cry out(8)...

Oh the river is wide
The river it touches my life like the waves on the sand
And all ...(9)... lead to Tranquillity Base
Where the ...(10)... on my face disappears
Take me down to my ..(11)... on the river
And I won't cry out ...(12)....

Oh the river is deep
The river it touches my life like the waves on the sand
And all ...(13).... lead to Tranquillity Base
Where the ...(14)... on my face disappears
Take me down to my ...(15)... on the river
I need to ...(16).... down, with you let me ...(17).... down
Take me back to my ...(18).... on the river
And I ...(19)... cry out anymore
And I won't cry out ...(20).....
And I(21)..... cry out anymore

4. 8. Making a summary

(Summary must be made before the bell rings). Here, the teacher repeats the rule given in (5). S/he can reinforce the prominence of the rule via inductive and deductive questionings. (S/he answers and clarifies all of the blurred confusions relevant to the rule).

4. 9. Giving assignments to the students

Teacher: O.K., students, prepare the following questions. I will collect them in our next lesson. Be serious because this assignment will be added to your final exam points.

Assuming that there are 10 groups (i.e. each group consisting of three or four members) in class, the teacher asks each group to prepare the following questions:

1. Each group will find out 15 minimal pairs from the English-English dictionaries on [ɔ:] and [oʊ] vowel sounds
2. Each group will prepare 15 tongue twisters modeled on the ones given in 4.3 and practice them together.
3. Each group will prepare a dialogue including words with [ɔ:] and [oʊ] vowel sounds
4. Each group will prepare 10 minimal sentences as seen in 6.1 and make a photocopy of this material so as to share it with other group members.
5. Each group will prepare 10 sentences with contextual clues as seen in 6.2 and make a photocopy of this material so as to share it with other group members.

(**Teacher:** Class, do you have any questions on today's topic? I see that you don't have any questions. Then, you are off.)

5. Conclusion

Pronunciation is an important factor in communicating with native / non-native speakers of the English language successfully. Every non-native learner of English should have intelligible pronunciation standard in that intelligible pronunciation is an essential component of communicative competence. Intelligibility does not mean having a pronunciation inseparable from that of a native speaker of English. However, it

refers to being understood by a listener at a given time in a given communicative situation (Kenworthy 1987:13).

The mother tongue constantly produces magnetic attraction in attempt to articulate the sounds of the target language. There is always a negative pushback in the process of articulation in trying to achieve fluency and accuracy. At this juncture, a logical and realistic goal is to enable learners to surpass the threshold level so that their pronunciation will not detract from their ability to communicate (Hişmanoğlu 2004:62)

Turkish learners of English have difficulty in pronouncing the [oʊ] sound of American English because of not paying attention to the required lip rounding in articulation. However, it is possible to cure this chronic pronunciation error of Turkish learners of English through using minimal sentences, contextual sentences and problem-concentrated exercises placed in a communicative context.

The audio-articulation method, which is a real fossilized pronunciation mistake eraser, may be utilized by teachers who are sensitive to developing students' phonetic competence, communicative fluency and articulatory accuracy in the target language. This method contributes to beautifying the articulations of non-native speakers of English by providing them with a lively, colorful and motivating pronunciation lesson. In this method, the teacher explains how to produce a problematic sound by using the technique of exhortation. That is, s/he gives clear-cut examples orally in class and uses charts and diagrams when explaining how a particular sound is made in English. Students try to mimic after the teacher. Especially, problem causing individual consonants like / θ, ð, ŋ, w, ʌ, l, r / and vowel phonemes like / ε, æ, ə, u, oʊ, ɔ: / may be taught effectively through using this technique.

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