

WHY DO WE TEACH PHONETIC ALPHABET?

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If a second language learner (L₂ Learner) knows the phonetic alphabet, it is like having a teacher by his side to assist him with his pronunciation. The discrepancy between spelling and sounds in English makes it necessary to teach the phonetic alphabet. Obviously; it is particularly useful for those who do not have "a teacher at hand", only a dictionary. For teaching pronunciation, a "good teacher" is essential; but if there is not a "good teacher" or no teacher at all, his "good teacher" will be a dictionary with a phonetic transcription.

PROBLEM SOUNDS

All languages are composed of speech sounds with different properties. Some sounds may not be common to every language, hence the difficulty some second language learners experience. For instance, for Turkish learners of English, the interdental sounds / θ / and / ð / cause problems because they do not occur in Turkish. For this reason, EFL (Turkish English as a Foreign Language) students tend to replace them with the alveolar sounds / t / and / d /. With the help of the phonetic alphabet, those four sounds may be easily differentiated.

English affords a great headache for the L₂ learners as it is not phonetic like some languages, e.g., Turkish for the following reasons:

1. *In English different letters may represent the same sound:*

ply /plai /, high / hai /, tide / taid /

bee / bi /, key / ki /, people / pipal /, speak / spik /

2. *The same letters may represent different sounds:*

cough / kof /

through / θru /

enough / inʌf /

drought / draʊt /

hiccough / hikʌp /

bough / baʊ /

dough / daʊ /

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3. Two or more letters occurring together may represent a single sound:

shine / ʃ / , hitch / tʃ / , going / ŋ /

4. Some letters are silent (not pronounced at all)

knife / naɪf / , climb / claɪm / , comb / kɒm /

5. Combination of the same letters may represent different sounds:

thin / θ / , the / ð /

In the light of this, a knowledge of the phonetic alphabet enables the student to accurately pronounce any given word in English language provided, of course, that the dictionary he uses gives the phonetic transcription.

HOW DO WE TEACH IT?

a. Which Phonetic Alphabet should be preferred?

Usually, the phonetic alphabet developed by International Phonetic Association (IPA) in 1888 is taken as the basic phonetic alphabet for the languages whose phonetic script is based on the Roman letters. Besides that, some of the well-known dictionaries use the authorized symbols of IPA. For this reason, I would suggest using the IPA symbols.

b. Some Suggestions for Teaching It.

Due to the limited scope of this article, I will not be examining all the phonetic symbols. Instead, I will concentrate on a few key examples covering consonants, vowels and diphthongs. But a full list which includes all the symbols and key words can be given to the students.

consonants

The sound

dʒ

ŋ

θ

keywords

judge, jake, bridges

finger, king, pang

both, clothes, theory

vowels

The sound

æ

ʌ

ð

keywords

man, hat, and

cup, duck, up

mother, the, there

diphthongs

The sound

aʊ

ɔɪ

eɪ

key words

go, alone, open

boy, enjoy, oil

day, aim, same

The first step is to give one symbol at a time and three or more key words containing that sound. If possible, one of the words should have this sound occurring at the beginning, another in the middle and a third at the end. I suggest that each key word should be pointed out on the board and pronounced several times in isolation and the students repeat what the teacher says. The problem sounds can thoroughly be investigated by following this procedure.

The next step is for the teacher to present some short sentences where a contrastive study may be carried out for neighbouring sounds, that is, sounds which the second language learner finds hard to differentiate. For instance, / θ / and / ð / are sounds which are close to one another;

Her **f**ather and **m**other **b**ought her some new shoes:

This can be followed by further exercise. One such exercise is for the teacher to pronounce a sound and get the students to write it down in symbol form. When the students are proficient at this stage, the teacher can then go on to speaking out whole words, then whole sentences, and ending up with complete paragraphs. Alternatively, the teacher can give the students a written list of words, sentences and short paragraphs and then ask the students to write them in the phonetic alphabet.

The whole process can be reversed. Phonetic transcription of words, sentences and short paragraphs can be given for the students to write down in regular English spelling.

This process can be made especially interesting with the inclusion of entertaining texts such as riddles, proverbs and jokes.

Students may be enticed to become thoroughly conversant with the phonetic alphabet if the teacher uses his imagination in establishing a regular news letter which can be posted up on the wall of the classroom. This new letter will be entirely in the phonetic script-even its title- and will contain every kind of article.

Early on, the phonetic properties of sounds (i. e., place of articulation, manner of articulation, etc.) should be explained.

HOW TO TEST IT?

As testing is an integral part of teaching, reinforcing what has already been learned, special care and wisdom need to be given.

For testing whether the students have understood the phonetic alphabet, I would like to suggest three main types of exercises:

a. Exercises for Discrimination

1. For a contrastive study of two problem sounds, first listen to the teacher three times and then underline the sound you hear on your sheet and write the phonetic symbol underneath them.

e.g., /**ʊ**/

pull, pool; full, fool; foot, food

ʊ u **ʊ** u **ʊ** u

2. To discriminate between / **ʌ** / and / **a** / sounds, listen to the following sentence three times (either pronounced by the teacher or said on the tape recorder) and then underline the parts which contain these sounds and write the phonetic symbols underneath them.

e.g.,

My brother parked the car just in front of the bus.

^ a ^ ^ ^ ^ ^

3. To discriminate between / **tʃ** / and / **dʒ** / sounds, listen to each word twice in isolation and then categorize the words which have / **tʃ** / sound into group A, and / **dʒ** / sound into group B.

badge, jeer, joke, chest, gin, jest, chin, choke, itch, age.

A	B
chest	jeer
chin	joke
choke	gin
itch	jest
	badge
	age

4. Below are listed ten 'nonsense' words. Some of them might be English words that is, they do, at least, follow the English sound system, but others sound definitely foreign. Tick the ones you think may be foreign.

- | | |
|-------------|--------------|
| i. folarat | vi. θæmarat |
| ii. skwit | vii. dʒrudki |
| iii. tligit | viii. splæd |
| iv. kænp | ix. trigan |
| v. mlop | x. ʒoli |

b. Exercises for Listening and Writing Production

1. Listen to the 'nonsense' words you are going to hear three times in isolation and then write down what you hear in phonetic alphabet.

e. g. , kæ mpsɪ

2. Write the following sentence in the phonetic alphabet:

"Look before you leap"

3. Define the following sounds with one or two of their phonetic properties (i.e., place of articulation, manner of articulation, etc.)

e. g. , /ŋ / nasal, voiced.

4. Write the following words in the phonetic alphabet.

e. g. , theocracy / θiokrasi /

5. Write the following words in regular English spelling.

e. g. , / pɹɪdɔmənəns / predominance

6. Write the phonetic symbols for the sounds in bold types.

e. g. , cloth / θ /

7. Write a common word for each of the following phonetic symbols.

e. g. , / aʊ / bow

8. Write the phonetic symbols for the bold type sounds only.

e. g. , food / fud /

9. Write the phonetic symbols for the vowel sounds only in each of the following words.

e. g. , maize / eɪ /

c. Multiple Choice Type Exercises

1. Which word contains the sound given?

e. g. , / ʃ /

A. seat B. ocean C. scissors D. chair

2. Which two sounds are contrasted in the following sentences?

e. g. , "Please eat this piece of meat"

A. / θ / / t / B. / θ / / t / C. / i / / ɪ / D. / i / / eɪ /

3. Choose the correct transcription of the following word.

e. g. , fixation

A. /fɪkseiʃn/ B. /fɪkseʃn/ C. /fɪkseiʃn/ D. /fɪkseiʃn/

4. How can the following word in the phonetic alphabet be written in regular English spelling?

e. g. , /maɪstʃa (r)

5. Choose the phonetic symbols for the first sounds in the following pair.

e. g. , cheer - jeer

A. /tʃ / /dʒ / B. /dʒ / /tʃ / C. /j / /dʒ / D. /t / /ʃ /

6. Choose the phonetic symbols for the vowel sounds in the following pair.

e. g. , coat - saw

A. /aʊ / /ɔ / B. /aʊ / /o / C. /o / /o / D. /aʊ / /ɑʊ /

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