

UNIT

7

SOUND SYSTEM AND DICTIONARY SKILLS

Introduction

Many of us have come across people who speak English quite fluently, but it is difficult to understand them. That is because they cannot produce the right kind of sounds, or use proper stress, rhythm and intonation. In other words they have problems with pronunciation. As L2 speakers of English it is not necessary for you to speak English like a native speaker, but your English must be clear and understood. You have to take care of your pronunciation.

This unit gives an overview of pronunciation, introduces the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), and teaches you how to use the dictionary for various purposes.

LESSON

1

Pronunciation: Sounds, Stress and Intonation

Objective:

After reading this lesson you will be able to work on your own pronunciation and help your students improve theirs.

1.1. Importance of Pronunciation in Language Learning

When we hear people speak, we sometimes say to ourselves– "Ah she speaks so clearly. I understand her very well, or oh no! I don't understand her. Her words are not clear." Why do we say that? That's because some people say their words clearly. They pronounce parts of the words more forcefully or boldly than others to express their meaning. If you listen to them very carefully you would feel they make clear distinction between sounds in their speech. You can tell whether the word begins with a /b/ for berry or a /v/ for very, or ends with a /p/ for leapp or /v/ for leavev. The ability to differentiate between sounds and to produce them clearly in speech is what we mean by teaching pronunciation to our students. It is also important for our students to learn proper *stress* (বাক্যে শব্দের উপর জোর দেওয়া) and *intonation* (কণ্ঠের উঠা-নামা) in order to express themselves clearly in speech. Therefore teaching pronunciation means teaching **sounds, stress and intonation**.

1.2. How to Teach Pronunciation-Techniques

You can use various techniques to help your students learn good pronunciation. Here are some. Try them in your class.

1.2.1. Teacher as a Model

The best way to teach pronunciation is by providing students with opportunities to listen to and practise good pronunciation. For this the teacher's own pronunciation must be good and intelligible (বোধগম্য). You do not have to insist on native speaker like pronunciation for that would be something difficult to achieve, and might sound funny. It is better to remain natural in your speech and be a good model to the learners.

1.2.2. Drill

You can do some pronunciation drill with your students. Let them pronounce similar words together, like:

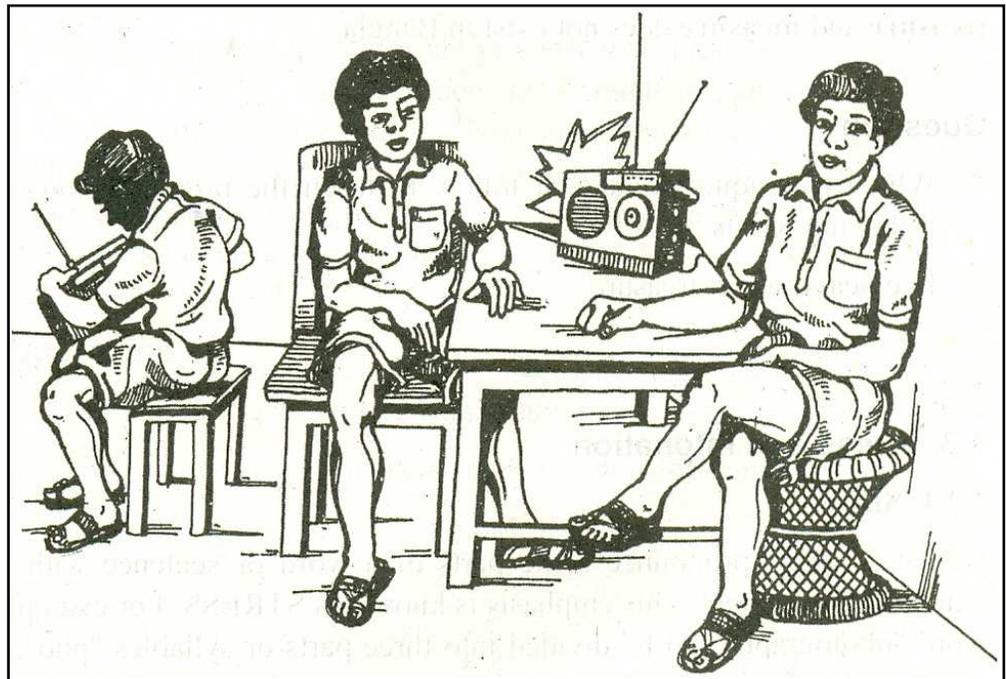
bat	pull	pool	leap	tip
mat	bull	fool	reap	ship
cat	full	rule	sheep	lip
rat		tool	cheap	sip
hat				
fat				

The words above have a minimum of difference in pronunciation, a difference of one sound only. These words are known as minimal pairs. You can try these minimal pairs in class.

Task 1

Look around you and write down the names of all the objects you can see. Prepare a list of minimal pairs of words using at least five of the words from the list.

1.2.3. Using Radio and Television Programme



Picture 1: Listening to an English Programme.

You can encourage your students to pick up pronunciation from radio and television programme in English. There are some real good programmes in English on radio and television which will help you to improve not only your pronunciation but also vocabulary.

Task 2

Can you think of any channel/programme on radio and TV that you find particularly helpful for learning English? Write down your answer.

1.2.4. Using the Dictionary

Another way to check on your pronunciation is by using the dictionary. Look at the phonetic symbols given on one of the front pages of the dictionary. Go through the list carefully and see how each word is pronounced. Help your students pronounce the words correctly.

1.2.5. Comparing and Contrasting with L1

While teaching pronunciation you are actually helping students to produce sounds. Some of the English sounds are similar to some of the Bangla sounds, but there are some others which are different and difficult to pronounce, e.g. the / v / sound for **very** is not there in Bangla. Again the / f / sound in Bangla does not have its parallel in English and / 3 / as in **treasure** and **measure** does not exist in Bangla.

Question

1. Which technique would you follow to teach the pronunciation of the following words? Why?
Live leave sugar treasure.

1.3. Stress and Intonation

1.3.1. Stress

Native speakers pronounce some parts of a word or sentence with more emphasis than others. This emphasis is known as STRESS. For example the word "photograph" can be divided into three parts or syllables "pho", "to", and "graph". Native speakers would pronounce this word as PHOtograph with emphasis on the first syllable. When the word is "photographer" the emphasis is on the second syllable, phoTographer. Again if I say "I can SING", I am probably talking

about an ability, but if I say "I CAN sing" with emphasis on *can*, it means something more than ability. I am perhaps responding to a challenge or doubts expressed about my ability.

1.3.2. Intonation

Intonation is very close to stress. It means the rise and fall of tone during speech. In other words it is the music of speech. Intonation variation can be seen clearly in statements and questions.

Look at the rise and fall of tone in the following sentences:

1. My name's Zareen, and you?
 2. Bangladesh is a beautiful country.
 3. Excuse me. Could you please show me the way to the nearest bank?
 4. Do you mind if I use your pencil?
 5. This book is interesting!
 6. What's your mother like?
-

The statements and questions above show that questions generally end with a rising tone. The tone does not curve much in statements. Try to raise awareness among your students about stress and intonation. When you listen to native speakers on radio and television, or in real life situations follow their stress and intonation pattern and repeat after them, of course silently. Ask your students to do the same.

Questions

1. Can you now explain stress and intonation?
2. How can your help you students develop appropriate stress and intonation?

REVIEW

The teaching of pronunciation means teaching sounds, stress and intonation. Stress means emphasis given on some parts of a word or sentence, and intonation means the rise and fall of voice in speech. For teaching pronunciation you have to provide students with a good model and help them practise it. Native speakers on radio and television can serve as a good model for pronunciation.

LESSON

2

International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)

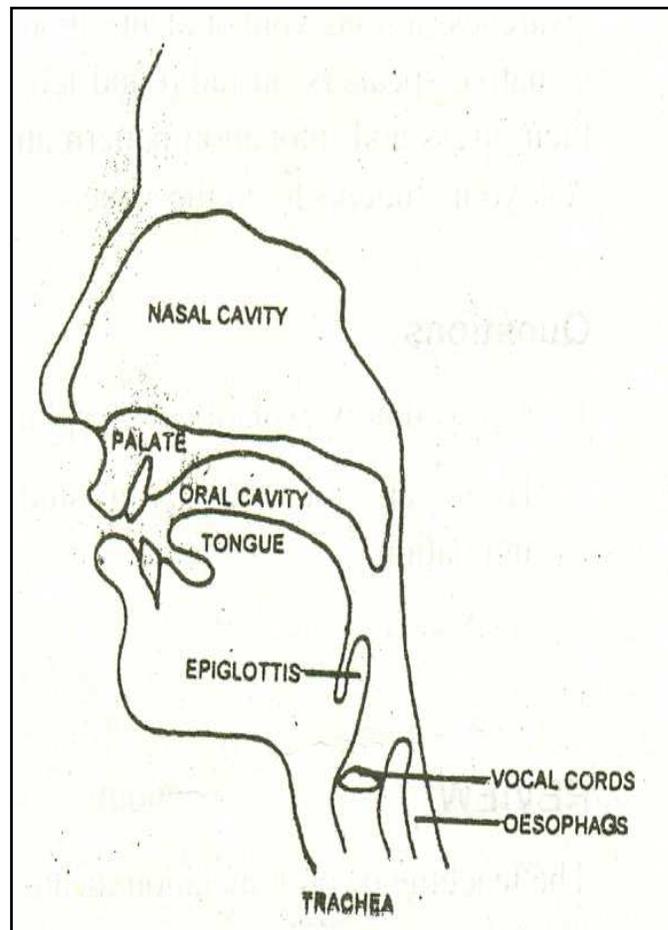
Objective:

After reading this lesson you will be able to–

- use the dictionary for checking on and improving your pronunciation.

2.1. Sound: Voiced and Voiceless

We produce sound by pumping out air from the lungs (ফুসফুস) through the mouth and the nostrils (নাকের ছিদ্রপথ). The figure below shows the different parts of the mouth and the throat involved in the production of sounds.



Picture 1: The organs of speech.

Vocal Cords – স্বরতন্ত্রী
Vibration – কম্পন

Sounds produced with the *vocal cords* vibrating are called **voiced** and those produced without the *vibration* of the vocal cords are said to be **voiceless**.

All vowel and diphthong sounds and some consonant sounds are voiced. Here are some voiced consonant sounds:

/ b / as in <i>big</i>	/ m / as in <i>man</i>
/ d / as in <i>dog</i>	/ n / as in <i>nun</i>
/ g / as in <i>game</i>	/ ŋ / as in <i>king</i>
/ v / as in <i>voice</i>	/ l / as in <i>leg</i>
/ ð / as in <i>them</i>	/ r / as in <i>ring</i>
/ z / as in <i>zip</i>	/ ʒ / as in <i>beige</i>

/ w / and / j / are called semi vowels.

The rest of the consonant sounds are voiceless.

Task 1

Reading the following words. Underline the voiced consonants only.

- (a) bird (b) hat (c) den (d) river (e) tub
(f) money (g) song (h) zebra (i) measure (j) lamp

2.2. Phonetics

Phonetics is the study of sound writing. Phoneticians of the Midlands, England formed an association called the International Phonetic Association, to help people all over the world produce the same sound for the same word. They devised a set of symbols known as the phonetic symbols which stand for individual sounds. These symbols look very much like the letters of the English alphabet and they can be used for writing the sounds of any language. These symbols are known as International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). We can use IPA to write Bangla too. One symbol stands for one sound. See page 226 for the **Key to Phonetic Symbols** as given in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary.

2.3. Vowels and Consonants

In the English alphabet there are 26 letters out of which there are five vowels and twenty one consonants. In IPA there are twenty vowel sounds, out of which eight are diphthongs, and twenty four consonant sounds. Altogether there are forty four symbols/sounds in IPA.

Obstruction – বাধা

- a. A **vowel** sound is a sound that is produced with no *obstruction* of the air stream in the mouth. The following sounds represented through phonetic symbols are all vowels:

/ i : / as in *see, key, leap*

/ æ / as in *hat* and *cat*.

/ : / as in *saw* and *raw*.

One gliding over to the other – এক শব্দ থেকে অন্য শব্দে সহজে চলে যাওয়া

- b. A **diphthong** is a combination of two vowel sounds produced in quick succession, one gliding over to the other. The following are some of the diphthongs:

/ ei / as in *page* and *rage*

/ ai / as in *five* and *pipe*

/ i / as in *join* and *coin*.

- c. **Consonants** are sounds produced with complete or partial obstruction of the airflow through the mouth, e.g.

/ p / as in *pen*

/ b / as in *bad*

/ t / as in *tea*.

Questions to think of

1. What is Phonetics?
2. What does IPA stand for?
3. How many sounds are there in IPA?
4. How would you define vowel sounds and consonant sounds?

Task 2

Choose a word from the box and put it in the space marked against each statement given below.

twenty four	IPA	consonants	phonetics	Vowels	twenty	diphthong
-------------	-----	------------	-----------	--------	--------	-----------

- When two vowel sounds are produced together as a single unit of sound we call it a _____.
- Sounds produced with complete or partial obstruction of the airflow through the mouth are called _____.
- _____ is the study of sound writing.
- _____ was devised by International Phonetic Association.
- In IPA there are _____ vowel sounds and _____ consonant sounds.
- _____ are sounds produced with no obstruction of the air stream in the mouth.

Task 3

- Practise saying the example words.
- Identify the vowel sound in the following words, and say what number it is according to the key. Write the number in the spaces provided.

apple	-	bun	-	corn	-
dim	-	egg	-	fear	-
leave	-	lip	-	care	-
moon	-	cow	-	boy	-
paw	-	cot	-	tea	-

- Write at least two more example words for each of the sounds given in the KEY.

REVIEW

In this lesson we learnt about two broad divisions of sounds: Voiced and Voiceless. We looked at the phonetic symbols and learnt to define vowels, diphthongs and consonant sounds.

LESSON**3****Sound System and Dictionary Skills**

Objective:

After reading this lesson you will be able to–

- use the dictionary for various purposes
- help students use the dictionary.

3.1. Introduction

To learn a foreign language you must listen to the language, speak it, read and write in it. In order to practise all four skills, you need to understand the language. For this you use certain strategies:

- a. **context** or situation in which the language is used, and
- b. a good **dictionary**.

Most of our learners use the English to Bangla Dictionary and never think of using an English to English Dictionary.

The Book of an English to English Dictionary frightens them. But as foreign language learners when you move from elementary level to intermediate level, then to upper intermediate and advanced levels, you have to learn using an English to English Dictionary. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary and Longman's Dictionary of Contemporary English are some good dictionaries. Let us now see why and how we can use a dictionary.

3.2. What do we use a Dictionary for?

We use a dictionary for various purposes the most common of which is looking for the meaning of a word. Here is a list of purposes for which we use a dictionary.

We use a dictionary to check

a. grammar

- whether a word is noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, etc.
- preposition

- b. **meaning** of a word.
- c. **pronunciation** (British and American)
- d. **spelling**

e. **number**

- singular or plural
- cardinal and ordinal

f. **idioms**

g. some **general knowledge** like

- names of different parts of a car, bicycle, motorway, furniture, etc.
- mathematical expressions
- measurement
- military ranks
- family relationships, etc.

3.2. How to use a Dictionary

A dictionary as you know is arranged alphabetically- *a* to *z*. When you want to look for the meaning of a word, you have to take the first letter of the word and open at the respective section in your dictionary. Sometimes you have to look for the second, third and fourth letters of the word you want to find the meaning of. If you look at the top margin of a page in your dictionary, you will see that the first word on the list is given on the top margin on your left, and the last word of the page is given on the top margin on your right. That word will guide you whether you are on section *a*, *b* or *c* etc.

When you buy a dictionary for use make sure you buy the latest edition. Read the following sections carefully to make good use of the dictionary.

1. Key to Phonetic symbols
2. Abbreviations
3. Key to Entries
4. Using the Dictionary
 - A practical guide

