Title
“Phonetic classes are a real drag!”

Abstract

Phonetics has always been considered as one of the most “arduous” and “tedious” tasks for teachers and students alike.

Many reasons contribute to this feeling of frustration. However, through research and experience, we have envisaged an eclectic approach to teach English pronunciation that focuses on our learners’ needs as an immediate goal.

In this workshop, we will present our “user-friendly” view and, in doing so, highlight the role of “language” as an overall whole.

Summary

“Phonetics classes are a real drag!”

“I hate to imitate a tape like a parrot!”

“Which is the right tone, up or down?”

These could be just some of the comments many students and teachers alike might come up with when faced with the “arduous” and “tedious” task of learning and/or teaching English pronunciation.

For some years now, most teachers of English have been dealing with both the segmental and suprasegmental features of the English language as isolated fields. Little or no interdisciplinary work has been done in this area in an attempt to integrate these components of language to other disciplines of second language study. This was the case at the teacher training course in the Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata, until the year 2000 when
Phonetics and Diction II became Discurso Oral II due to a change in the Teacher Training College curriculum. Discurso Oral II is a Language course which includes the suprasegmental features of English. Its inclusion in the curriculum was our opportunity to put into practice a long cherished plan. In previous years, searching for a more social and meaningful approach to the teaching and learning of English intonation, we had come to the conclusion that the attitudinal view presented by O’Connor and Arnold was not complete enough to fulfill the objectives of the course. Therefore, we began to work with Dr Brazil’s Discourse Intonation and following a rather unorthodox criterion, not only did we adopt it but also mingled it with O’Connor and Arnold’s approach. Thus when Discurso Oral II was implemented we found ourselves, teachers and students alike, engaged in what we would later call a user-friendly view of English intonation.

This eclectic innovative approach consists of a bridged comparison between the attitudinal and the descriptive systems mentioned, always focusing on our learners’ needs as an immediate goal. In this way, students are able to cash in on their background existing knowledge of the language and select those aspects of intonation they consider useful and relevant in order to engage in purposeful communication.

The course is centered on thematic units revolving around interesting and motivating topics that provide the learners with the appropriate social context where to use both the segmental and suprasegmental features of English. Thus language becomes the leading character while the rest of the elements (sounds, stress, intonation) help contribute to the realization of different tasks.

In this workshop, we will briefly refer to how we deal with English sounds and stress and we will present you with our user-friendly approach to intonation. Later, we will demonstrate how the amalgamation of these constituent components with language itself takes place using a context of situation as a framework to perform the tasks assigned.
It is through this workshop that we would like to share with our audience this rewarding experience and, in doing so, highlight the importance and role of language as the prevailing objective for whatever meaningful activity is chosen.

Bibliography

Biographical Note

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