

# How we should Teach Students to English

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## Abstract:

This article deals with native/competent speakers to decide what language students should learn. Should students of English speak like native English speakers? How appropriate and in what contexts does their languages use need to be? What language skills and sub skills do they need?

**Keywords:** sounds, different pronunciation, phonetic phenomena, aspiration, assimilation, palatalization, reduction, elision, linking “Rr”, lack of transparency.

*Pronunciation:* When we teach English we need to be sure that our students can understand when they speak. They need to be able to say what they want. This means that their pronunciation should be at the adequate for that purpose.

In our teaching we want to be sure that students can make various sounds that occur in the English language. We should help them to differentiate these sounds, especially where such distinctions change the meaning (“bed” [bed] and “bad” [bæd], “live” [liv] and “leave” [li:v]) and we should also help them to understand and use certain reading rules, for example, different pronunciation of the endings “-d, -ed”.

Students need to use rhythm and stress correctly if they want to be understood. We should make them be sure to say sentences with appropriate word and logical stresses and correct intonation in declarative, interrogative and exclamatory sentences. Students need to be able to recognize intonation whether the tune of someone’s voice suggests that the speaker is sure or uncertain. They need to use word order correctly in sentences like “No sooner had I arrived ...”, but not “Not sooner I had arrived ...”

In teaching any foreign language as well as English a teacher (instructor) should speak it as the natives and teach with a good English speech. Only then learners can have the opportunity to acquire the English language well.

Students should know phonetic phenomena of connected speech in order to be able to speak English as native speakers of the English language. There are the following phonetic phenomena of connected speech which enable students to speak English nicely: 1. Aspiration; 2. Assimilation; 3. Palatalization; 4. Reduction; 5. Elision; 6. Linking “Rr”.

### 1. Aspiration.

In English the consonant phonemes [b, d, g, k, p, t] should be pronounced as [b<sup>h</sup>, d<sup>h</sup>, g<sup>h</sup>, k<sup>h</sup>, p<sup>h</sup>, t<sup>h</sup>], i.e. with a slight puff of breath. This phenomenon is called aspiration which represents a great importance in connected speech.

**Note:** If two aspirated consonant phonemes come together the first of them loses its aspiration, i.e. it is pronounced without aspiration.

For example, in the word “blackboard” [ˈblæk**b**<sup>h</sup>ɔ:d<sup>h</sup>] the consonant phoneme [k<sup>h</sup>] is pronounced without aspiration.

### 2. Assimilation.

Assimilation is one of the most important phonetic phenomena of connected speech. It is a phonetic phenomenon in which the alveolar consonant phonemes [t<sup>h</sup>, d<sup>h</sup>, n] become dental ones under the influence of the interdental consonant phoneme [ð] which comes after them. For example, in the word combinations *at the* [ət ðə], *behind the* [biˈhaɪnd ðə], *but the* [bʌt ðə], *in the* [ɪn ðə], *and the* [ænd ðə], *on the* [ɒn ðə] alveolar consonant phonemes [t<sup>h</sup>, d<sup>h</sup>, n] become dental ones under the influence of the interdental consonant phoneme [ð].

### 3. Palatalization.

Palatalization is a phonetic phenomenon in which a voiced consonant phoneme becomes voiceless one at the end of the word. This phonetic phenomenon is not typical for the English language. In such words as *beds* [bedz], *pens* [penz], *girls* [gɜ:lz] one mustn't pronounce them like [beds], [pens], [gɜ:ls].

### 4. Reduction.

In English reduction may be of two types: 1. a quantitative reduction. 2. a qualitative reduction.

A *quantitative reduction* is the shortening of long vowel phonemes in connected speech. In connected speech the long vowel phonemes [i:] and [ɑ:] are shortened, i.e. they are pronounced as [i•] and [ɑ•]. For example, in speech words *she* [ʃi:], *me* [mi:], *are* [ɑ:] are pronounced as [ʃi•], [mi•] and [ɑ•].

A *qualitative reduction* is the change of quality of vowel phonemes in stressed or unstressed syllables. For example, in stressed syllables words like “can”, “have”, “has”, “am” are pronounced as [kæn], [hæv], [hæz], [æm] while in an unstressed syllables they are pronounced as [kən], [həv], [həz], [əm].

### 5. Elision.

*Elision* is the omission of a sound in connected speech. For example, in the word combinations *an 'old 'man*, and *'so* the consonant phoneme [d] is omitted, i.e. is not pronounced: [ən 'ould 'mæn], [ən 'sou].

### 6. Linking “Rr”.

The letter “Rr” at the end of words is not read. But if the next word begins with a vowel letter the letter “Rr” is pronounced. Therefore it is called linking “Rr”. For example: *My car is nice* [mai 'kɑ:r ɪz 'naɪs]. *My mother is a doctor* [mai 'mʌðə r ɪz ə 'dɒktə]. *My sister is a teacher* [mai 'sɪstə r ɪz ə 'ti:tʃə].

*Grammar:* Luckily there is a consensus about what grammar should be taught at different levels. Any experienced teacher knows that the use of “No sooner...” and other similar phrases at the beginning of sentence is a matter for advanced students whereas the correct use of the modal verb “must” is something that an elementary student should know. Our aim in teaching grammar should be to ensure that students are communicatively efficient with the grammar they have at their level. We don’t teach them the finer points of style at the intermediate level, but teachers should make them sure that they could use what they know.

When we present grammar through structural patterns we tend to give students tidy pieces of language to work with. We introduce grammar when can easily be explained and presented. There are many different ways of doing this, which do not only involve the transmission of grammar rules.

It is certainly possible to teach aspects of grammar – indeed that is what language teachers have been doing for centuries – but language is a difficult business and its speakers often use it very inventively. In order words real language use is often very untidy and cannot be automatically reduce to simple grammar patterns. Students need to be aware of all language possibilities for the importance of language awareness. Such awareness does not mean that they have to be taught each variation of linguistic twist, however. It just means that they have to be aware of language and how it is used. That is why reading and listening is so important and that is why discovery activities are so valuable.

As a teacher we should be prepared to use a variety of teaching to help our students learn and acquire grammar well. Sometimes this involves teaching grammar rules or it means allowing students to discover the rules themselves.

*Vocabulary:* Language students need to learn the lexis of the language. They need to learn what words mean and how they are used. We should ensure that our students are aware of the vocabulary they need for their level and that they can use words which they want to express their thoughts (e.g. Could you open the window?, I wonder if you open the window?, Would it be possible for you to open that window? and so on).

In deciding what language to teach when working with functions we need to bear in mind the level of difficulty, the level of transparency (is the meaning *clean*) and the level of formality. In general it seems safe to say that easy, transparent and neutral realizations of a language function are better for students at lower levels whereas difficulty, lack of transparency, extremes of formality (and informality) are more suitable for more advanced students. In other words, we should teach “Could you open the window?” before “Would it be possible for you to open the window?”

Competent users of a language are proficient in a range of language skills, though not all of them have the same range of sub-skills.

It should be our responsibility to see that the students’ language skills are transferred to the use of English correctly in their speech, because we teach them to read in English. And because they are dealing with a foreign language we need to help them with skills that they are already familiar with. We emphasize reading for gist, for example, or listening for detailed comprehension. If we concentrate on these skills and sub-skills it will help the students to approach the foreign language with more confidence and a greater expectation of success.

Of course, it is possible that some students may not be proficient at all skills in their own languages. Then our task will be twofold: to give them confidence in English and to equip them with hitherto unknown skills in their own mother tongue or English.

At lower levels our teaching skills will be general, becoming more refined as the students become more advanced. A lot will depend on students needs.

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