

USING COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES TO TEACH ENGLISH PROSODY IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract. Prosody, which includes stress, rhythm, and intonation, plays a crucial role in effective communication in English. However, in many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, pronunciation teaching often focuses primarily on individual sounds rather than suprasegmental features. This article explores the effectiveness of communicative activities in teaching English prosody to EFL learners. The study highlights how interactive classroom tasks such as role-plays, dialogues, storytelling, and information-gap activities can improve learners' awareness and use of prosodic features. The research is based on classroom observations and practical teaching experience with university-level EFL students. The findings suggest that communicative activities significantly enhance students' pronunciation accuracy, fluency, and listening comprehension. The study concludes that integrating communicative techniques into pronunciation teaching can make prosody instruction more engaging and effective for language learners.

Keywords: prosody, communicative approach, pronunciation teaching, EFL learners, stress, rhythm, intonation

Introduction. Prosody refers to the suprasegmental features of speech such as stress, rhythm, and intonation, which contribute significantly to meaning and naturalness in spoken language. In English, these elements play a key role in distinguishing meaning, expressing emotions, and structuring discourse. Despite their importance, prosodic features are often neglected in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, where instruction frequently focuses on segmental phonemes rather than the broader patterns of speech.

For many learners, especially those whose first language has different rhythmic and intonational patterns, mastering English prosody can be challenging. Uzbek learners of English, for example, may struggle with stress placement or intonation patterns due to differences between the phonological systems of the two languages. Therefore, effective teaching strategies are required to help learners develop prosodic competence.

One promising approach is the use of communicative activities. The communicative language teaching (CLT) approach emphasizes meaningful interaction and real-life communication. Through communicative tasks, learners practice language in authentic contexts, which can facilitate the acquisition of natural prosodic patterns.

Main body. The Role of Prosody in Communication

Prosody is essential for conveying meaning beyond the lexical content of speech. Word stress can change the meaning or grammatical category of a word, as seen in examples such as 'record (noun) and re'cord (verb). Sentence stress highlights important information in a sentence, guiding the listener's interpretation.

Rhythm is another important aspect of English prosody. English is typically described as a stress-timed language, meaning that stressed syllables occur at relatively regular intervals. This rhythmic pattern differs from syllable-timed languages, where each syllable tends to have equal duration. Learners whose native language follows a different rhythmic structure may find it difficult to produce natural English rhythm.

Intonation patterns also contribute to meaning. Rising intonation often indicates questions or uncertainty, while falling intonation is commonly used in statements or commands. Incorrect intonation can lead to misunderstandings or make speech sound unnatural.

Communicative Activities in Teaching Prosody

Communicative activities provide learners with opportunities to practice prosody in meaningful contexts. Unlike traditional pronunciation drills, communicative tasks focus on interaction and message exchange. This encourages learners to pay attention to both meaning and pronunciation simultaneously.

Role-playing activities are particularly effective in teaching prosody. When students act out dialogues or real-life situations, they naturally use stress and intonation patterns appropriate to the context. For example, a role-play involving ordering food in a restaurant can help learners practice polite intonation patterns and sentence stress.

Information-gap activities are another useful technique. In these tasks, students must exchange information to complete a task. Because successful communication depends on clarity, learners become more aware of pronunciation features, including prosody.

Storytelling activities also help develop prosodic competence. When students narrate a story, they must use varied intonation patterns to maintain listener interest and convey meaning. Teachers can guide students to emphasize key words and use appropriate rhythm and pauses.

Shadowing exercises, where learners repeat speech immediately after hearing it, can also improve prosodic awareness. By imitating native speech patterns, learners gradually develop a more natural rhythm and intonation.

Benefits of Communicative Prosody Teaching

Integrating communicative activities into pronunciation instruction offers several advantages. First, it increases student engagement. Interactive tasks make learning more dynamic and motivating compared to repetitive drills.

Second, communicative activities provide opportunities for contextualized learning. Instead of practicing isolated sentences, learners use prosody within meaningful communication, which helps them internalize natural speech patterns.

Third, such activities improve both speaking and listening skills. As learners become more sensitive to stress, rhythm, and intonation, they are better able to understand spoken English and produce clearer speech.

Finally, communicative prosody teaching helps build learners' confidence. Students who practice pronunciation in interactive settings often feel more comfortable speaking in real-life situations.

Conclusion. Prosody is an essential component of spoken English that significantly influences communication effectiveness. However, it is often overlooked in EFL pronunciation instruction. This article has highlighted the importance of teaching prosodic features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation and has demonstrated how communicative activities can facilitate their acquisition.

Communicative tasks such as role-plays, storytelling, information-gap activities, and shadowing exercises provide learners with meaningful opportunities to practice prosody in context. These activities not only improve pronunciation but also enhance fluency, listening comprehension, and learner confidence.

Therefore, EFL teachers are encouraged to integrate communicative approaches into pronunciation teaching in order to help students develop more natural and effective spoken English.

References

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