

**Pronunciation's contribution in teaching- learning
English grammar at secondary school**

Roland Giscard Ondzé Otouba

Université Marien N'GOUABI.

rolandondze@gmail.com

Abstract

This research paper deals with the pronunciation's contribution during the teaching and learning process of English grammar at secondary school. In Congo, the teaching of English pronunciation is well-mentioned in the official English syllabus of INRAP, but the English teaching-learning context reveals that the pronunciation lessons are neglected. As a matter of fact, this article demonstrates that it is possible to teach sounds, rhythm, intonation and the nuance between oral and writing in grammar lessons. This is possible thanks to the didactic approach which relies on the didactic transposition which allows to take off the scientific knowledge about the above teaching items in order to enhance the oral communication while teaching and learning the English grammar at secondary school.

Keywords: Pronunciation's contribution, Teaching-learning, English grammar.

Résumé

Ce Travail de recherche traite de la contribution de la prononciation au cours des processus d'enseignement et d'apprentissage de la grammaire anglaise au secondaire. Au Congo, l'enseignement de la prononciation anglaise est bien mentionné dans le programme d'anglais officiel de l'INRAP, mais le contexte enseignement-apprentissage de l'anglais révèle que les leçons de prononciation sont négligées. En fait, cet article démontre qu'il est possible d'enseigner des sons, du rythme, de l'intonation et la nuance entre oral et écrit dans

des cours de grammaire. Cela est possible grâce à l'approche didactique qui repose sur la transposition didactique qui permet d'enlever les connaissances scientifiques sur les éléments d'enseignement susmentionnés afin d'améliorer la communication orale tout en enseignant et en apprenant la grammaire anglaise au secondaire.

Mots clés: contribution de la prononciation, enseignement-apprentissage, grammaire anglaise

Introduction

This article aims at promoting the importance of pronunciation while teaching and learning English grammar at secondary school. As a matter of fact, the teaching of English grammar refers to the understanding and practice of grammatical rules in order to demonstrate the English sentence structure and other grammatical aspects during the teaching and learning process of English language in classes. However, the lack of oral communication during this process needs to associate grammar and pronunciation so as to make learners be familiar with the English sounds system, the value of rhythm and intonation and, the nuance between oral and writing in grammar lessons. Otherwise, accurate pronunciation helps learners to achieve the goal, i.e. their utterances can be understood by the audience clearly and easily and they will also be able to understand native speakers' conversations. Thus, the answer of the following question will enlighten the readers about the reasons that justify pronunciation as the key course of English language. Is it possible to teach pronunciation's items like it is done in grammar or vocabulary lessons? Therefore, the present study is designed to explore the above pronunciation's items that Congolese teachers and learners face while teaching and learning English grammar lessons at secondary school.

2- The relevance of teaching pronunciation

The importance of teaching English pronunciation at secondary school in Congo has been required in the English syllabus from the class of 6^{ème} to Terminal in order to make learners be familiar with the study of sounds, stress, rhythm and intonation. This is possible thanks the previous authors' works investigating on the relevance of teaching and learning this item, even though, some argue that it is obvious that the study of English sounds, stress, rhythm and intonation is more difficult. Whereas, by the teaching process, it is possible to "*eliminate everything difficult from language teaching and learning*" (Roach: 2009, 6), regarding the importance of these items when teaching and learning grammar, vocabulary and others. It appears that the study of the pronunciation's items plays a pivotal role in the teaching and learning English as a foreign language at the secondary school. Hence, Robert Carmen (24) writes that pronunciation lessons should be taught at the beginning of the teaching and learning process in order to help learners building new habits in English: "*If you don't know to pronounce and yet you pronounce your own way at the beginning of your learning, then you are building your habits in the wrong way. Learning words without pronunciation on the first lesson is damaging*". Carmen demonstrates that teaching a language without starting by its pronunciation's lessons is a failure. Therefore, it is a must for teachers of English to take this English language item into account at secondary school. They have to implement the pronunciation course at the beginning of each teaching activity in order not to let learners use their own habits which is essentially based on the phonological mixing of French and English. Since, the first function of learning a language is to communicate, pronunciation as well as grammar and vocabulary is one of the items that enable learners to communicate in English. Thus, its way of teaching and learning needs to be simplified in didactic process at secondary school. Here, pronunciation is considered as a practice which is used to implement confidence between a teacher and learners in the classroom. Emphasizing on the importance of pronunciation, Pourhosein (2016:1) enlightens that the study of English sounds is the best way to help learners mastering the pronunciation of English words both in isolation and in sentences:

If learners want to change the way of pronouncing English words, they have to change the way they think about the sounds of those words. This is true both for individual sounds and the bigger parts of the speech such as a syllable, stress patterns, and rhythm.

In fact, Pourhosein's analysis depicts that the teaching of English pronunciation helps learners to get more information about the English sounds and stress systems to improve their ways of pronouncing words or their communicative skill and to know the difference between the varieties of English spoken all over the world and the British English Received Pronunciation. Thereby, learners become autonomous while dealing with English sounds either written or orally. Concerning the methods, techniques and procedures used to teach English sounds in the secondary school, they think that the success of learners in learning these sounds is straightly linked to the teacher's creativity and audacity so as to face problems cited above. At secondary school, learners find English sounds very difficult because they are not familiarized with this language sound system. They naturally think that it is impossible to catch them up. Martinez – Flor et al. (2006), Ahaga Garcia (2007) and Yolanda Joy Calvo Benizes (2013: 4) assert that:

English pronunciation is considered to be one of the most difficult skills to acquire and develop. This may be due to a number of factors, e.g. the irregular correspondence between spelling and pronunciation and the impact of the learning process of factors such as age, motivation and amount of exposure to the L2.

Since learners are not motivated by teachers on the study of English sounds, they, unfortunately, prefer to focus on other language items such as grammar lessons, reading comprehension, for their examinations. In fact, talking about the teaching of English sounds refers to the importance of this latter on the teaching and learning process of English language in the Congolese secondary schools. For, taught and learnt as a foreign language, the study of sounds in English must be taken into account since it enables both teachers and learners to know how to pronounce English words correctly, to be familiarized with the English sound systems and avoid misunderstanding each other during the classroom interaction. This is what Hariré (2012)

quoted by Calvo Benzie (Ibid) writes that: “*The importance of sounds for effective communication means that foreign language teachers need to emphasize pronunciation teaching in their classes*”. Besides, concerning the learners’ lack of motivation towards the English course and the focus on some language items, just, for their examinations, the teaching of English sounds aims to develop the learners’ competence, confidence and improve the learners’ level of proficiency in spoken English. For this reason, Liang – chen Lin (2014: 16) states that:

Many of English language learners (ELLs) confront difficulties in learning English pronunciation. Problems in pronunciation weaken their communicative competence (...) More precisely, it is necessary that teachers develop their awareness on diverse sound structures.

In case of teaching and learning English language process, the study of English sounds helps teachers in terms of self motivation and self esteem. This is because when we want to talk in English language, the most important thing that we require is confidence. Thus, if the English teachers master how words are produced and how they are pronounced correctly, it would raise their confidence to speak in English. Besides, it would help teachers to develop their confidence level in front of their learners while they are teaching and speaking in English. Peter Roach (2009, 6) argues:

No pronunciation course that I know has ever said that learners must try to speak perfect RP ; to claim this mixes up models with goals: the model chosen is RP but the goal is normally to develop the learners’ pronunciation sufficiently to permit effective communication with native speakers.

Peter Roach wants to demonstrate that regardless from where the learners are coming from and what accents do they use, by learning English sounds, they will not be having difficulties in pronouncing English words. Thus, this course will give them the correct pronunciation of words by distinguishing British from American English too. For example, the words “*lieutenant*”, in which the letters “*lieu*”, in British English are pronounced [lef] whereas in American English we pronounce [lu:], “*exude*”, in which the letters “*exu*”, in British English are pronounced [ɪgzju:] whereas in American English

we pronounce [ɪgzu:], and “*extrinsic*”, in which the letter “s”, in British English is pronounced [z] but in American English we pronounce [s]. That is the reason why Ndongo Ibara (2016) proves that we could not have a good and fruitful language learning and teaching without a phonetic course since this course represents the sesame of the target language. In this connection, pronunciation course on English sound patterns and prosody should be taught the same way other English teaching items are taught to learners at secondary school. So, the pronunciation items such as sounds, stress, rhythm and intonation should be attested in English grammar lessons in order to boost the learners’ communicative abilities during the teaching and learning process of English language.

3- Pronunciation and grammar

The purpose of this section is to show the contribution of English pronunciation in teaching and learning English grammar at secondary school. This contribution is evidenced on the level of the letter “s”; the ending of ordinary verbs in the third person singular in the present simple, the letters “-ed”; the ending of regular verbs in the past and past participle and the difference between oral and writing. In fact, the pronunciation of the letter “s” in the present simple at the third person singular is illustrated by [s], [z] or [ɪz]. In order to practice this linguistic aspect in teaching and learning process, we have selected some examples basing the above sounds. As a matter of fact, the example (1) is related to the letter « s » sounded [ɪz].

(1)

- a- This man dances Rumba.
- b- This woman washes dishes.
- c- Ted watches TV.
- d- Tom kisses Jerry.
- e- Jack fixes it
- f- It buzzes
- g- John marries Janet

It is obvious to mention that in writing, the sound [ɪz] is related to the letter « -s » when the verb in infinitive ends with the letter “e” and preceded by the sound [s] in the example (2a). However, this analysis

justifies that the letter “s” cannot be pronounced with the following verbs: delete, love, write, joke... In addition, the pronunciation [ɪz] is written « -es » at the third person singular when the letters « -ch, -sh, -s, -x, -z » occur at the final position of ordinary verbs in infinitive as in (2b, 2c, 2d, 2e, 2f). Finally, the sound [ɪz] is spelt « -ies » in the present simple if the infinitive of the verb ends with the letter « y » preceded by a consonant as in (2g).

Elsewhere, the example (2) below deals with the letter « s » pronounce [z] at the third person singular in the present simple.

(2)

- a- Cynthia **does** her exercise of English.
- b- The child **enjoys** biscuits.
- c- My mother **sells** vegetables.

Obviously, there are three categories of letters that justifies the pronunciation of the letter “s” with the sound [z]. The analysis of the example (2) firstly shows that the pronunciation of the sound [z] is realized with the letters “-es” when the letter “o” occurs at the final position the selected verb in infinitive as in (3a). Secondly, the pronunciation of the sound [z] refers to the letter “-s” when the infinitive of the selected verb finishes with the letter “y” and preceded by a vowel sound as in (2b). Finally, the pronunciation of the sound [z] is possible with the ending letter “-s” when the following voiced consonants [b, d, g, v, l, m, etc.] happen at the end of the selected infinitive verbs as in the example (2c).

Whereas, the example (3) below demonstrates the pronunciation of the sound [s] spelt with the letter “s” at the third person singular in the present simple tense.

(3)

- a- He **drinks** alcohol everyday
- b- It **stops** at 7 o'clock.
- c- Sarah **eats** a mango.

The analysis of the example (3) proves that the pronunciation of the sound [s] is related to the letter “s” if the following voiceless consonants occur at the finale position of the ordinary verbs in infinitive [p, t, k].

In addition to that, the relevance of integrating English pronunciation in teaching and learning grammar at secondary school is also evidenced by the pronunciation of “-ed” in the past and past participle of regular verbs. Thus, the aim of integrating pronunciation in grammar lessons is to facilitate both teachers and learners practice this grammatical item during the oral communications in classes. As a matter of fact, the letters “-ed” are pronounced either [d], [t] or [ɪd]. The example (4) shows that the sound [ɪd] is written with the letters “ed”.

(4)

- a- People needed a new president.
- b- Youngsters are not well - educated.
- c- She studied English in USA.

The analysis of the letters “-ed” in the past and past participle in the example (4) unveils two details. Firstly, the letters “-ed” are sounded [ɪd] when the infinitive of the selected verb ends with the consonants [d] and [t] as in the examples (4a) and (4b). Finally, the pronunciation of the sound [ɪd] refers to the letters “-ed” when the letter “y” at the end of a verb in infinitive is sounded [ɪ] as in (4c).

Elsewhere, the example (5) below illustrates the pronunciation of the sound [d] spelt “ed”

(5)

- a- The president flew to Paris yesterday.
- b- Children played with toys.
- c- Twelve people died in the accident.
- d- The couple next door moved away.
- e- They begged for mercy.

The sound [d] can derive from the letters “ed” regarding the following conditions. Firstly, the ending letters “-ed” are pronounced [d] when the infinitive of the selected verb finishes with a diphthong sound as in the examples (5a, 5b, 5c). In addition, the examples (5d, 5e) reveal

that the pronunciation of **[d]** is related to the letters “-ed” in the past simple and the past participle when the verb in infinitive ends with a voiced consonant. Finally, in the examples (5d, 5e), the letter “e” is not pronounced.

In the example (6), the pronunciation of the letters “ed” is sounded **[t]**.

(6)

- a- They practiced**ed** English in classes.
- b- We liked**ed** animals.
- c- She has just washed**ed** her clothes.
- d- Ted watched**ed** TV last night.
- e- Tom kissed**ed** Jerry.
- f- Jack fixed**ed** it.

The pronunciation of the sound **[t]** is illustrated by the letters “ed” according to the phonetic criteria among English consonants. In fact, the example (6) mentions the assimilation of sounds in order to harmonize the phonetic features. Thus, when the letters “ed” occur after a voiceless consonant, the letter “d” of the ending is pronounced **[t]**. That is why “ed” is pronounced **[t]** after **[s]** in (6a) and (6f), **[k]** in (6b), **[ʃ]** in (6c) and **[tʃ]** in (6d). In these examples, there is incompatibility between the letter “d” and the sounds **[s]**, **[k]**, **[ʃ]** in connection with the phonetic features. That is, a voiced sound **[d]** cannot be produced after the voiceless sounds **[s, k, ʃ]**. Accordingly, the voiced sound **[d]** is changed into its equivalent voiceless sound **[t]**.

However, it important to mention that the pronunciation of the ending « -ed » in relation with adjectives does not take into account the phonological rules used for the conjugation of regular verbs in the past simple. As a matter of fact, the example (7) deals with the pronunciation of the letters “-ed” in **[ɪd]** at the final position of the following adjectives.

(7)

- a- She has two rather aged**ed** aunts.
- b- Take that blessed**ed** cat out!
- c- They are the crooked**ed** police officers.

- d- My dog**ged** determination is evidence.
- e- My supervisor is a learned**d** professor.
- f- There's a naked**d** man on the street.
- g- Rag**ged** kids stand outside begging for money.
- h- It was a wicked**d** thing to do.
- i- The house was in a wretched**d** state.

From the example (7) only one argument can help to demonstrate the pronunciation of [ɪd] with the adjectives ending letters “-ed”. In effect, the letters “-ed” are pronounced [t], [d] or [ɪd] with regular verbs in the past simple in terms of the sound environment in the examples (4), (5) and (6). In contrast, while dealing with the pronunciation of the ending letters “-ed” of adjective derived from the past participles of verbs, prosody can help to provide explanations. That is, the combination of letters “-ed” is pronounced [ɪd] when it occurs in the unstressed syllable of adjectives derived from English verbs.

Elsewhere, the relevant of dealing with English pronunciation when teaching some grammatical items is also a didactic method used by Wong () in the following terms: “*pronunciation can convey grammatical information*”. Thus, the example (8) illustrates:

(8)

- a- *I'm sorry. You can't come with us.*
- b- *I'm sorry you can't come with us.*

The realization of the example (8a) reveals that *rhythm* and *intonation* are located on the words “sorry” and “come”. Here, the listener can decode that “*I'm **sorry**.*” is an idea and, “*You can't **come** with us*” is another one which indicates the “negation”. But, the pronunciation of the example (8b) unveils that *rhythm* and *intonation* are only focused on the word “come”. This process enables interlocutors to depict that “negation” in the sentence “*I'm sorry you can't **come** with us*” expresses only one idea.

As a matter of fact, from the above examples, Wong demonstrates that the teaching of pronunciation is not only limited on the study of English vowels and consonants, but also on the study of stress, rhythm and intonation through different sentences according to grammatical structures. Thus, Wong (idem) writes that “*this example shows how*

rhythm and intonation can perform grammatical functions.” In fact, if “punctuation” and “capitalization” enables to analyze grammatical structures through different sentences in writing, “rhythm” and “intonation” are needed in the oral communication.

The above analysis mentions the importance of pronunciation in the teaching of English grammar. Pronunciation reinforces the “speaking” ability while teaching and learning the grammatical rules in classes. Emphasizing on the importance of the speaking ability, Cripwell (op.cit:16) writes that the oral communication makes vital classes. *“La base des travaux écrits est toujours la langue orale que les élèves ont entendue et utilisée. Quelquefois, ce sont des résumés de lecture. Dans les deux cas, l’élève revient à la langue parlée. La parole remplit la classe.”* Note that even if two verbs share the same ending letters, they are not presupposed to be pronounced the same way too as in *“stops vs digs”*, *“goes vs kisses”* in the present simple and *“worked vs wanted”* in the past simple with regular verbs. In that case, Carmen (op.cit:32) writes that *“it is the sound that is important, not the letter or spelling”*. Otherwise, the letter is not capital, but the sound is in the speaking of any language. In fact, Carmen’s sentence unveils the complexity of learning or speaking English language in African francophone countries if the teaching of English pronunciation is not included in the teaching and learning process in schools. Thus, the contribution of pronunciation while learning grammar enables learners to grasp both the understanding of grammatical rules and ability to use these rules in speaking or communication.

Elsewhere, the interest of pronunciation when dealing with English grammar is also illustrated in the difference between the writing and the oral production in the following grammatical structures in the example (9).

(9)

- a- I’m writing a paper. **vs** Yes, I am.
- b- You do not play tennis. **vs** You don’t speak English.

The analysis of the example (9) reveals two cases to explain the difference between the full form and the contracted one in the grammatical structures. In fact, the example (9a) mentions that the auxiliary “be” has got two spelling forms. In the first part, the use of

“be” in the contracted form expresses the oral production since it is followed by an ordinary verb. Whereas, in the last part, it is impossible to use the contracted form because “be” is used in a grammatical structure: S+V. Similarly, the example (9b) shows that the full form is used in writing while the contracted one illustrates the oral production.

Conclusion

This paper has been concerned with the way grammar lessons are taught in connection with English pronunciation items in order to enhance learners to communicate easily in English language at secondary school. It has been based firstly on the ending of the third person singular in the present simple which is spelt with “s”, “es” and “ies” and pronounced either [s], [z] or [ɪz] regarding the environment of each spelling. Secondly, this paper has dealt with the ending of the past simple with regular verbs and past participle written “-ed” and pronounced either [d], [t] or [ɪd] according to the infinitive of each category of English verbs. Thirdly, this work has demonstrated that rhythm, stress and intonation can be used while teaching grammar lessons to replace punctuation and capitalization to enhance the learners’ oral abilities. Finally, the pronunciation’s implications in grammar lessons have been mentioned on the use of full form in writing and contracted form in oral when dealing with the English grammatical structures. Elsewhere, this paper shows a new way to teach English language in francophone countries. It offers new perspectives to researchers in didactics to implement this teaching item in order to identify the specific problems of each region about the teaching-learning English sounds at schools.

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