

A Project Work on English Pronunciation

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Kim, Ki-Hwa. 1999. A Project Work on English Pronunciation. *Linguistics* 7-3, 321-339. The purpose of this paper is to present a teaching model for English pronunciation. This model is designed to develop the student's English pronunciation skill with an emphasis on the communicative interaction. The first part of this paper examines major affecting factors on the acquisition of English pronunciation, where the importance of the teacher's role is emphasized, and then proceeds to discuss the conditions of good class management. The second part of this paper discusses why an integrated approach is preferred to a linear approach and suggests a project work on English pronunciation which can be characterized as 'heuristic, student-centered, communication-centered'. (Sohae College)

1. Introduction

Nowadays the importance of English pronunciation teaching has been growing as the communicative function of English has been emphasized in the education of English. Pronunciation plays a very important role in verbal communication between human beings. Good pronunciation would not only lead to successful communication, but also give self-confidence in English. Thus the importance of the acquisition of good pronunciation can never be overemphasized in communication. Then what is the definition of good pronunciation? To what range should teachers train their students in English pronunciation teaching? The ideas of good pronunciation may cause troubles to teachers of English. This paper assumes, according to Kenworthy (1993), that the level of good pronunciation is comfortably intelligible pronunciation in terms of communicative function and that a reasonable goal of pronunciation teaching should be intelligibility and communicative efficiency for the

majority of learners, while native-like pronunciation may be a goal for particular learners. In order to produce intelligible speech, speakers should know how to pronounce consonants and vowels, how to read sentences, how to express themselves suitably for a given situation, and simultaneously how those expressions are perceived and interpreted. This is true of the perception of intelligible speech. Perception is not determined only by the physical signal that strikes the hearer's ears, but also by the hearer's knowledge of the language in which the utterance is framed.¹⁾ This paper provides a model for English pronunciation teaching. This model is designed to develop the students English pronunciation skill in class in a communicative situation to the level of comfortably intelligible pronunciation. The first part of this paper will examine the three major factors that affect the acquisition of English pronunciation, where the teacher's role is emphasized in English pronunciation teaching, and then proceed to discuss the consequences of good class management. The second part will discuss effective approaches to English pronunciation teaching in Korea and suggest a project work for English pronunciation teaching as the most effective way of English pronunciation teaching.

2. Three major factors of English pronunciation acquisition

There are various factors that affect the acquisition of pronunciation of English as a foreign language.²⁾ This chapter will discuss, in relation

1. The production and perception of the sequence of sounds depends on the speaker's and hearer's linguistic experience and knowledge. As an example, when a sequence of sounds, [gɪvɪtəmi] is presented to Koreans who have no knowledge of English, they can neither identify the words nor even tell how many words are contained in the utterance. When the identical acoustic signal is presented to native speakers of English, however, they will "hear" the four word sequence *give it to me*. As Halle and Clements (1983:1) noted, it is only by virtue of our knowledge of English that they are able to "parse" this sequence of noises into recognizable English words.

2. Kenworthy (1987: 4-9) lists learners' native language, age factor, the

to class activities, three major factors — students' attitude on pronunciation, linguistic information on English pronunciation, and approaches toward pronunciation teaching. The purpose of this section is to analyze the problems in relation to those factors and at the same time to emphasize the importance of the teacher's role in Korean students' acquisition of English pronunciation.

2.1. Korean students' attitude on English pronunciation

Most Korean students, even though they feel the importance of good pronunciation, spend less time in acquiring good English pronunciation. It is partly because they are non-native speakers of English and have little chance to use English in their daily communication, so they do not feel the necessity of practicing their English pronunciation outside the classroom. Even though they have a chance to use English, they have a restricted audience. As an example, classroom English is expected to condition and motivate students to use English because they have little chance to listen to English outside their classroom. The problem is, however, that English used in the classroom is far from authentic English. Teachers use English in class in order to communicate with their students, but they do not speak English in a normal spoken pronunciation but in a rather slow classroom style. Since they use English only with other non-native speakers or their English teachers, their pronunciation is far from authentic English. Thus divergences in pronunciation may cause a communication breakdown when they happen to speak with native speakers.

Students' attitude on pronunciation affects their style of practicing English. Korean students have more concern for the improvement of their speaking abilities than of their listening abilities, but they neglect practicing English sounds (K.-H. Kim 1999b). They prefer reading silently and memorizing the expressions which they think would be

amount of exposure to the target language, phonetic ability, attitude and identity, motivation and concern for good pronunciation as factors that affect pronunciation learning.

essential to communicate with others in English. As a result, they fail to understand normal authentic English and their English is frequently unintelligible, although they manage to express themselves somehow. To overcome such imbalance between perception and production and ultimately to prevent a communication breakdown, students should change their attitude regarding English pronunciation. They have to spend more time to understand linguistic information on English pronunciation and to train themselves to acquire good pronunciation. On the other hand, students' attitude on English pronunciation is greatly affected by their teacher's way of teaching and testing (Kenworthy 1987: 4-9; see also K.-H. Kim 1996, 1999b). That is why teachers should emphasize the importance of good pronunciation for ease of communication and encourage students to acquire good pronunciation in class.

2.2. Linguistic information on English pronunciation

What is as important as the students' attitude in English pronunciation teaching is linguistic information on English pronunciation. It would be a difficult task to talk about details of English pronunciation unless both teachers and students share a certain technique and information for describing sounds. Understanding the concept of phonemes is essential since it makes teaching good, intelligible English much easier (Pierce 1989). If any two of those vowels or consonants are confused with each other in speech or hearing, students will misunderstand literally tens of thousands of English sentences. Our knowledge of a language goes much beyond simply understanding single sounds, however. In teaching English as a foreign language what must be taught is the nature of the phonological structure of English.

The result of the analysis of the tests tried on college students shows that English pronunciation teaching should not include only segmental phonemes but also suprasegmental ones, putting great emphasis on the differences between Korean and English phonological

structure (K.-H. Kim 1999b). In the test of sound discrimination, as an example, the students that identify 'passion' [pæʃən] and 'fashion' [fæʃən] as the same word shows that they do not recognize the difference between [p] and [f] since there are no such sounds as [θ], [ð], [f] and [v]. As another example, students' failure of discriminating between [r] and [l] can be explained by the fact that [r] is an allophone of [l] in Korean but a phoneme in English. In Korean, except in borrowed words, [r] never comes in the word initial position. Along with the distinctive function of English phonemes, the differences in the manner and place of articulation should be taught. There are phonemes in Korean and English which sound similar, but whose points of articulation are a little bit different. For example, Korean [t] is dental but English [t] is alveolar and pronounced with the tongue farther back.

In the test of recognizing syllable structures, Korean students frequently make mistakes since the syllable structure of English is more complex than that of Korean.³⁾ That is why Korean students frequently insert an unnecessary vowel [ə] after a consonant as in [sə-pə-riŋ], [fil-ləm], and [jə-sə-təl]. The inconsistency between English sound and spelling works as another major cause of poor pronunciation of English. Korean spelling patterns are simple and consistent with its sound in most cases, so that many Korean students mispronounce 'summer' as [sammə] through false analogy. What makes Korean students feel more difficulty, however, is the fact that suprasegmental phonemes play an important role in English. English is a stress-timed language. In English the stressed syllables tend to occur at regular intervals and the unstressed syllables in between are reduced and given less time, with the result that the timing of stressed and unstressed syllables gives its characteristic rhythm. As an example, the written form "I know her plan. What do you do?" is not pronounced word by word in a normal spoken pronunciation. Instead it will be pronounced as a contraction

3. The maximum syllable structure of English is C₃VGC₂, while, that of Korean is CVGC (where C is a consonant, V vowel, and G glide).

form, [ainouəplæn wəryudu:].⁴⁾ Korean students, however, expect to hear English spoken with pauses between words, just like English is written with its spaces between words. Furthermore the fact that English is characterized as a 'free-stress' language (Malmberg 1963: 81-82) works as another factor that makes Korean students feel embarrassed in the acquisition of English pronunciation.⁵⁾ If students have not mastered English stress and intonation patterns, they still will have difficulties in communication, even though some students can pronounce and recognize every English sound.

Then to what range should teachers teach English pronunciation? To acquire single sounds of English and to understand English phonemes and allophones is important. To acquire suprasegmental phonemes of English is also important. However, it would not be useful unless students understand what effects such segmental and suprasegmental phonemes of English have in a real situation of communication. Therefore teachers should encourage their students to practice English pronunciation at the level of intelligibility to native speakers.

2.3. Approaches toward English pronunciation teaching

Then what is the most effective way of teaching English pronunciation? In what way can teachers help their students develop their pronunciation skill at the level of intelligibility to native speakers? Books on English pronunciation generally cover segmental and suprasegmental phonemes (S.-B. Jeon, 1992, 1998; Ladefoged 1993; Baker and Goldstein, 1995; K.-H. Kim 1999a; see also J.-K. Park 1998), but most of them are far from communication oriented. The texts used in class, teachers' manuals and lesson plans made by teachers also show that English pronunciation is treated as a part of class work. In

4. Contraction is common in speech of English since 'the actual time between the stresses would be approximately the same in spite of the difference in the number of intervening syllables (Fries 1945: 23-24).

5. Even the words which would not ordinarily be stressed can be for the purpose of emphasis: "I met *the* Julia Roberts."

fact, many Korean teachers of English tend to avoid teaching pronunciation (J.-K. Park 1998; K.-H. Kim 1999b). They agree that it is not easy to teach pronunciation of English as a foreign language. The reason may be that the teachers themselves lack confidence in their own English pronunciation or that they do not have knowledge of English pronunciation teaching.

Even though the growing necessity of oral communication in English motivates students to acquire correct pronunciation, still English pronunciation teaching is still considered as peripheral in Korea's English classes. Time allotted for English pronunciation is comparatively little in class. English pronunciation teaching is dealt with as a part of activities for understanding words and structures. This way of teaching pronunciation is focused on simply learning English sounds, stress, and intonation, where pronunciation practice usually consists of repetition, minimal pair, mechanical and substitution drills. As an example, let us suppose that this way is applied to teaching pronunciation of a sentence (1), which is chosen from the text for the purpose of pattern practice.

(1) It is fortunate /to learn to speak English /at the age of five.

(a)

(b)

(c)

First teachers may model and let their students repeat. If students fail to follow, teachers may model again, but when teachers think the sentence is too long for their students to follow, they may read the sentence backwards in a 'backward buildup' way — first (c), then (b), and after that (a). Teachers may explain the manner and place of articulation of [f] in 'fortunate'. If they think their students need further training on the English phoneme [f], teachers may let them practice discriminating sounds through minimal pair drills. When teachers feel that their students can read the whole sentence fluently, they may proceed to train their students to read the sentence by letting them substitute the given cues for some words.

This way of teaching pronunciation can be characterized as 'linear'

training in that content used for practice is far from creative and productive. English used for practice is artificial and stereotyped. Most of the models of English taken from textbooks of pronunciation drills may not be used in real communicative situations. In addition, such practice lacks communicative interaction. In order to make students speak English fluently, it is not enough just to let them learn how to speak English. It is necessary to make them have as many opportunities to practice English pronunciation in communicative situation. Teachers, if they expect their students to improve communicative competence through the acquisition of good pronunciation, should design classes for English pronunciation teaching in a communication oriented way, encourage their students to take part in communicative activities, demonstrate concern for students' pronunciation and their progress in it. Teachers themselves should be fully equipped for English pronunciation and, if necessary and asked to help, ready to model and help their students.

3. Consequences of good class management

Good management can positively influence the way in which students participate in classroom activities and so can be expected to improve their English pronunciation, which will also lead them to intelligibility and comprehension of English. This section will discuss the conditions of good class management and then the class organization for effective class activities.

3.1. Conditions of good class management

In the previous section, the teacher's role in English pronunciation teaching has been emphasized along the analysis of three major factors that affect the acquisition of English pronunciation. It can be recapitulated as follows. Teachers first have to motivate their students to have great concern about pronunciation. Teachers also have to give

enough information on English pronunciation. Furthermore, teachers have to manage class for English pronunciation teaching, which is a matter of great significance especially in the situation that English has to be acquired as a foreign language. Class management implies all of the work that teachers have to do to teach their students in class, from planning to testing.

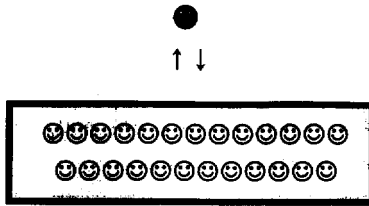
Before getting into classwork, teachers have to plan what to teach and how to teach. First, teaching materials should be considered because the content and structure of the materials should be different depending on its teaching goal and students' level and interest. Teaching material introduced for pronunciation practice should be considered. Students prefer materials like songs, poems, nursery rhymes, and chants over the contents of a plain text (K.-H. Kim 1997, 1999b). Second, the situation as well as teaching material should be realistic in order for students to easily adapt themselves to real life situations. It would be desirable that English pronunciation teaching should be done at the level of utterances. Nowadays Korean teachers of English are encouraged to use English in class. Classroom English plays an important role in the situation where there is no alternative to perception and production practice. If possible, it would be better to introduce authentic English in the classroom for the English atmosphere. Third, instructional technology should be introduced in order for students to experience authentic English pronunciation. The introduction of instructional technology may not only enable students to have more opportunities to practice authentic English, but also condition and motivate students to participate actively in pronunciation practice. It would be difficult to arrest the students' attention for more than twenty minutes. The younger the students are, the shorter that span will be. However, the use of instructional technology will help to keep students' attention for a longer time, since students prefer presentations by computers to ones by tape recorders although the content is the same (K.-H. Kim 1998). Fourth, the activities and evaluation for pronunciation practice should be done in a way that contributes to the improvement of communicative

competence. An heuristic way is recommended in pronunciation practice because students prefer student-centered work and enjoy participating in practice (K.-H. Kim 1997), where fluency should be emphasized as well as accuracy (K.-H. Kim 1993, 1996). It is not desirable that teachers expect their students to sound native-like but the effect of mispronunciation on the listener should be considered. Teachers should correct errors on the particular teaching point and on items which interfere with comprehensibility, or just in the case that students are asked to help (Paulston and Bruder 1976: 115; see also K.-H. Kim 1999b). Otherwise mistakes should be overlooked, so that students can practice English pronunciation in a relaxed situation. Consequently, what to teach and how to teach depends on teachers in charge, which implies that teachers' role in English pronunciation teaching is great significant.

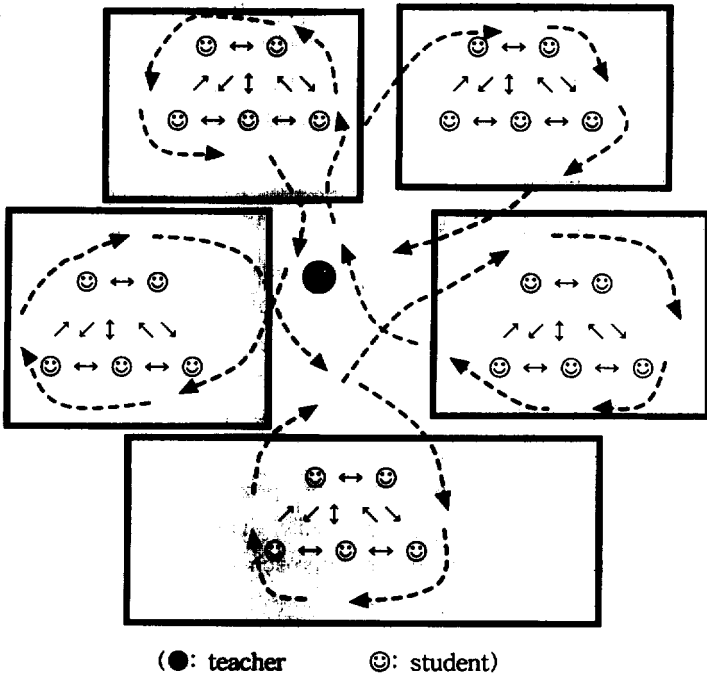
3.2. Communication oriented class organization

For effective class activities, teachers have to have a concern about class organization as well. Since the ultimate purpose of English pronunciation teaching is successful communication in English, teachers should provide their students as many opportunities to practice what they have learned as possible. In fact, Korean students, when they try to speak in English, often find themselves inhibited by the prospect of having to make what to them are strange and even comic sounds, because they have little experience to use English. In severe cases students can become so tongue-tied in front of native speakers of English that they refuse to speak at all, even though they know what to say and how to say it. One way of alleviating this problem is to give the students the opportunity to experiment with sounds, as well as talk in a secure environment from the start (Nolasco and Arthur 1994: 27). Small group work is recommendable in this case because it would give much more chance to participate in activities and to practice English sounds.

(2) a.



b.



As shown in (2b), small **group work** enables students to feel free to communicate with each other and **simultaneously** teachers to feel free to monitor and provide support for **individuals**. Thus the class organization like (2b) is suitable for **student-centered** cooperative work or activities. On the other hand, whole **group work** in (2a) is under the teacher's directions, which may be **effective** when teachers give information on English pronunciation or when students plan small **group activities** and

present what they have practiced through small group work. Individual work is also effective when students want to improve themselves in English pronunciation. Therefore teachers have to organize their class as whole group work, small group work, and individual work according to the characteristics of class activities.

4. An integrated approach to English pronunciation teaching

English pronunciation is comparatively easy to acquire because it is real and concrete as a matter of speech sounds. Pronunciation practice will be only a drill for language usage, however, if it is not developed into communication oriented activities. In fact, pronunciation has a close relation to the four language skills. Not to mention listening and speaking, reading and writing have a relation to pronunciation. Although English spelling is irregular and many aspects of pronunciation are not represented, or only minimally represented, in the writing system, writing cannot be considered apart from its sound system. In case of reading, words and letters may be 'sounded out'. It is as if reading is possible only if the symbols are heard—reading 'by ear'.⁶⁾ Therefore it would be significant to integrate pronunciation practice into the activities of the four language skills. This section will discuss the characteristics of an integrated approach and then provide a working model of an integrated approach, a project work.

4.1. Characteristics of an integrated approach

It has been suggested, according to Natural Approach, that teachers should train their students within the communicative situation in a similar way to how children acquire their mother tongue and that

6. This can be described as follows (Crystal 1994: 210-211): At first the process of visual analysis identifies letters and assigns them to a graphic code. These are then translated into an acoustic code, at which point the process links up with the processing system required for speech. The auditory patterns are then recognized as words and semantically interpreted.

perception practice should precede production practice. The principles of Natural Approach are based on the assumption that a target language can be acquired in the same way that children acquire their mother tongue. The assumption that listening and reading activities should precede speaking and writing activities is also on the basis of the observation that children do not speak until after a full span of listening in language acquisition.⁷⁾ Stark (1979) describes the development of child's sound system as follows:

The acquisition of consonant-vowel syllables precedes that of stress and intonation patterns. The first consonantal distinction to be acquired would be the nasal/oral distinction followed by labials and dentals. This constitutes the minimal consonantal system of various languages. Later, for example, children would acquire fricatives after the corresponding stops, back consonants after front ones and affricates after fricatives (Elliot 1983: 62-77).

The suggested principle on the teaching procedure is that teaching should be done step by step. It seems, however, unreasonable to apply the detailed procedure of children's language acquisition to the pronunciation teaching of English as a foreign language. In fact, adults of any language can speak their mother tongues and know a great deal about their language that they were never taught. In addition, every language has in common what are called universal features.⁸⁾ Thus the

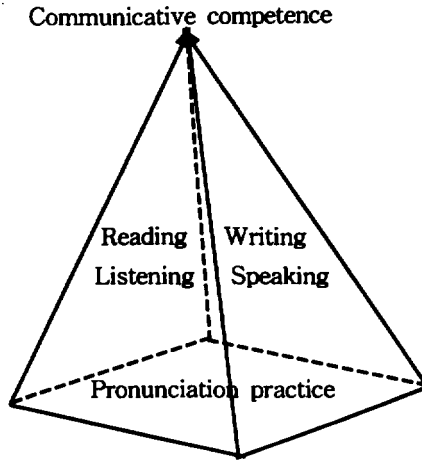
7. Jakobson (1968) emphasized that perception was frequently in advance of production, but saw the latter as being constrained into a sequence of development which reflected the phonological complexity of the target phonemes. He predicted that children's mispronunciation would happen as the result of substituting one which was phonologically less complex.

8. Experiments conducted by Peter Olmas (1971) at Brown University have established that the ability to discriminate voiced from nonvoiced speech sounds is present in children practically at birth. The suggestion that the ability to determine the feature composition of speech sounds is innate has, therefore, a certain amount of experimental support. (Halle 1978: 302)

'step by step' procedure would be meaningless in adult education. As an alternative, this paper proposes as an integrated approach for English pronunciation teaching.

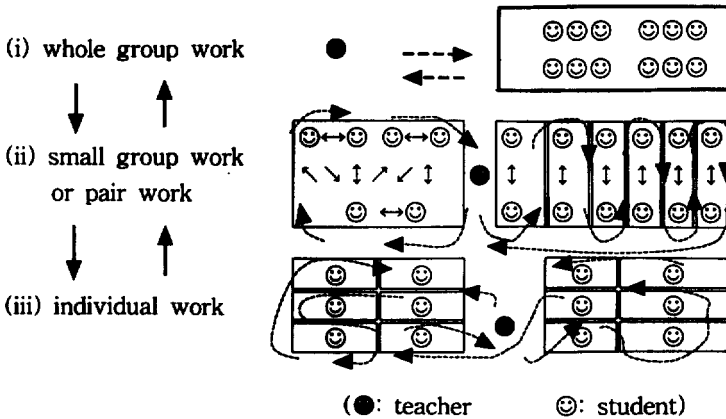
One of the characteristics of the integrated approach is communication oriented, where the four language skills are designed to be integrated into pronunciation practice as shown in (3).

(3)



Also the integrated approach includes an individual work as well as various communicative activities in a relaxed group situation in the form of whole or small groups as in (4), so that it allows students more opportunities to practice English sounds within a limited time than the linear approach where pronunciation practice mainly consists of mechanical drills and where students may practice English pronunciation by imitation and repetition in a whole group situation. Besides, the integrated approach places emphasis on human interaction, the use of authentic English, and the introduction of instructional technology.

(4)



4.2. A project work as an integrated approach

As an effective working model of an integrated approach for English pronunciation this paper proposes project work. According to Thorp (1997: 14), project work is a theme and task-centered mode of teaching and learning which results from a joint process of negotiation between all participants that allows ample opportunity for learner autonomy and provides a dynamic balance between process and product such that the product is owned by the learners. The project work that this paper proposes for English pronunciation practice consists of three steps: pre-work, on-work, and post-work. At the stage of pre-work, students are encouraged to set a goal of their work and to choose material for their work under the teacher's direction. Teachers let the students decide materials they would like to study. Students may choose a fairy tale, story, song, or nursery rhyme. Teachers then prepare the material considering their students' level. The goal and material for project work may be different depending on the level of each group, so that teachers should take it into consideration in preparing materials for project work.

Before getting into the stage of on-work, teachers have to give information on English pronunciation required for project work by the introduction of instructional technology and, if possible, in authentic

English. Teachers may let the students listen over and over for perception practice, where teachers, if asked, would help students. In case that the students experience difficulties in perception, however, teachers should not help them directly. Instead, they have to ask some questions to help their perception and to give tips for their perception by inducing one of the students to answer correctly. Teachers have to help students to recognize English sounds by themselves to the best of their ability throughout project work.

At the stage of on-work, students are encouraged to take part in English pronunciation practice actively in a relaxed group situation. The organization of class and the types of activities can be subject to its goal and material. Teachers may let the students form groups of four or five and cooperate with each other, but individual work can also be introduced. For articulation practice, activities such as "Look and speak, Listen and speak, and Listen and record" may be introduced (see Nolasco and Arthur 1994: 27-30). As an example, teachers may let one of each group listen to the tape recorder and speak what he or she have heard to another member of the group, who in turn speak it to a third member and so on. After that, teachers let the students record what they have heard and compare it with the original sounds. As a third example, teachers may let their students listen to the tape recorder in groups or individually until they complete their work and write down what they have heard. Project work may not be done within an hour, but may last more than a month or over a semester.

At the stage of post-work, teachers may let their students present their work in front of the class, which will be part of production practice, where teachers may let their students compare with a model and analyze their errors. For a student's better understanding of English pronunciation, teachers should give an explanation for the principles of pronunciation. In addition, teachers should let students practice shadow reading since it would help students to build up their confidence (Nolasco and Arthur 1994: 30). Shadow reading would be more effective to practice by the introduction of instructional technology like

multimedia aids and by the introduction of authentic English.

The expected effects of the project work on English pronunciation can be recapitulated as follows. First, it is designed for students to acquire communicative skills with English pronunciation. Pronunciation practice is integrated into the four language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, so that students can easily adapt what they have practiced to the real life situation. Second, it is designed to encourage students to take part in pronunciation practice actively and to practice English pronunciation in a heuristic way in a relaxed atmosphere. Also it is, in most cases, done in the form of small group work so that it can maximize the opportunities to practice English sounds through active human interaction. Third, it places emphasis on the use of authentic English pronunciation by the introduction of instructional technology, which will contribute to attract students' interest and attention and at the same time to give more opportunities to listen to and experience real English.

5. Conclusion

Good pronunciation would give students self confidence and motivate them to participate in class activities actively. Good pronunciation would also improve students' learning by helping them recognize clearly and remember what they learn for a longer time. On the other hand, lack of linguistic information on English phonetics and phonology and the interference of Korean are major causes of Korean students' poor pronunciation. Here is the importance of the acquisition of good pronunciation. This paper has discussed how to improve Korean students' English pronunciation skills in expectation of the improvement of their communicative competence. The first part of this paper has examined major factors that affect students' acquisition of English pronunciation and proceeded to discuss how to manage class for English pronunciation teaching. The second part of this paper provided an integrated model for English pronunciation teaching, where the concept

of a project work was introduced and adapted for English pronunciation teaching. Along with the model, this paper has suggested some ideas for the effectiveness of English pronunciation teaching. However, it would be unrealistic to claim that the suggestions made here will, by themselves, automatically enable our students to communicate in English fluently. In addition to phonological information and articulation practice on English pronunciation, other things are also necessary for good communication. Students have to master many grammatical structures, develop an adequate vocabulary, and understand American and English cultures. Otherwise, they may understand the sounds they hear but still not understand the meaning of these sounds.

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