

AN INCREASE IN IMPORTED GOODS, IMPORTS HAVE INCREASED – THE ROLE OF TEACHING PRONUNCIATION IN AN ESP CLASSROOM*

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***Abstract:** The fact that English has become the major lingua franca of international business and economy has influenced the goal of teaching pronunciation in an ESP economics classroom: the native-like speaking skill as the ultimate goal has been superseded by a more realistic and more reasonable goal – the adoption of intelligibility and communicability skills. We argue here, however, that pronunciation skills should be included in a university level ESP economics course syllabus. We point out common pronunciation errors made by economics students due to first-language transfer, exemplifying our points with various types of exercises aiming at overcoming their pronunciation problems.*

***Keywords:** errors, ESP, exercises, pronunciation, Serbian.*

1. Introduction

The second-year undergraduate *English for Economists* course taught at the Faculty of Economics, Belgrade University, is a genre-based course. The teaching is based on the idea that just as certain lexical items have specialist meanings in specific professional genres, a number of syntactic forms may also carry genre-specific restricted values in addition to their general meanings codified in grammar books (Bhatia 1997). In other words, such an approach allows the teacher to focus on some key grammatical and lexical features which are vital for the students' future field of expertise, while simultaneously ignoring other grammatical and lexical features of little or no relevance to it. In an ESP course thus defined, teaching pronunciation may seem to play a rather insignificant role. The way it is taught to second-year economics students at the Faculty of Economics in Belgrade presupposes that English has the attribute of an international language, early defined as "one which is used by people of different nations to communicate with one another" (Smith 1976:38). Such an attitude to English as a *lingua franca* of international business and economy has influenced the goal of teaching pronunciation in an ESP classroom – the native-like speaking skill as *the* ultimate goal has been superseded by a more realistic, more desirable and more reasonable goal – the adoption of intelligibility and communicability skills. In other words, as long as the pronunciation mistakes do not impede communication and comprehension, they are not considered to be of much importance, and are usually disregarded in an ESP classroom.

Therefore, the main aim of teaching pronunciation in an ESP classroom should be to ensure mutual intelligibility of non-native speakers in their field of expertise, rather than the imitation of native speakers (Jenkins 2000). It means that “pronunciation instruction should be based on learners’ needs, directed by an understanding of the purposes for which and the context in which the language is likely to be used.” (Gilner 2006:94).

This paper deals with the ways pronunciation skills are treated in an ESP economics course attended by native speakers of Serbian, students at the Faculty of Economics, University of Belgrade. More precisely, we point out and classify some common pronunciation errors (we use terms ‘mistake’ and ‘error’ interchangeably) made by economics students, explain why they arise, and suggest ways in which students may be made aware of these mistakes, as well as the ways the mistakes can be corrected, prevented and avoided. Various types of exercises aiming at overcoming pronunciation problems are also exemplified.

2. Teaching pronunciation in an ESP economics course

As future economists and businesspeople, the students at the Faculty of Economics will face a number of situations where their pronunciation skills will be subject to careful judgement and may ultimately influence how effectively they do business. For example, they may be taking part in important negotiations where every word counts and imprecise pronunciation may lead to serious *faux pas* that can hardly be rectified later. Alternatively, they may have a need for effective communication in meetings or oral presentations, the areas which require that students be equipped with the necessary knowledge of the basics of correct pronunciation.

After having learned English for at least eight years before taking the *English for Economists* course at their second-year of studies, students at the Faculty of Economics in Belgrade are assumed to have a fairly good command of the basic pronunciation skills at segmental level. Therefore, the teaching of properties of vowel and consonant segmentals should play a secondary role in pronunciation instruction in an ESP course at university level. However, suprasegmental errors, particularly those in word stress, which have been reported to have “more serious effect on intelligibility than segmental errors” (Nakashima 2006), are prioritised in their *English for Economists* course, because “[m]ost modern writers on pronunciation teaching emphasise that it is the suprasegmental features which contribute most to a speaker’s lack of intelligibility” (Brown 1991:4), although “[e]ven the term *suprasegmentals* itself relegates these features to secondary importance” (Brown 1991:4).

Such a suprasegmental-oriented instruction (Nakashima 2006) aims at overcoming the problems which arise as a consequence of the fact that students tend to transfer native (Serbian)-language stress patterns to English. Most currently available ESP textbooks, unfortunately, tend to “deal exclusively with segmental pronunciation of vowels and consonants, rather than the suprasegmental features of stress, rhythm, intonation, voice quality, etc.”, or start “with the description of vowel or consonant segments, only later progressing to the suprasegmentals” (Brown 1991:4). Unlike those who study Linguistics, students of Economics are not generally interested in technical details of the English sound

system. Therefore, instead of teaching the formal aspects of English pronunciation and giving detailed description of the English vowel and consonant system, which would be highly uneconomical, time-consuming and inefficient, teachers should prioritize and focus on those genre-based problematic areas of pronunciation which may cause potential misunderstanding, embarrassment and eventual business failures, and concentrate on the *correction* of the segmental and particularly suprasegmental errors characteristic of economics discourse.

3. Common pronunciation errors of Serbian economics students

Using the source of errors as the standard for categorising, pronunciation errors may thus be divided into *interlingual* errors, i.e. those errors that can occur due to first language interference, and *intralingual* errors, which are found to be committed by second language learners irrespective of their first language (Richards 1971, James 1998, Brown 1994). Every language has its own set of “phonological concepts” (such as, phonemes, syllables, tones, long and short vowels, stressed and unstressed parts, hard and soft consonants, etc.) (Fraser 2001:24) which, in turn, may explain the difficulties that Serbian learners experience when they learn English. In other words, common problems in pronunciation vary across countries (and cultures), which means that the native tongue of learners is the key factor in predicting problematic areas in which errors are likely to occur. Unfortunately, “students’ first languages colour their production and perception of English in many ways, and the pronunciation is the one area of language in which [...] first-language transfer can play a major role.” (Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin 1996:323).

In our case, therefore, the pronunciation syllabus should be determined according to linguistic factors – the similarities and differences between English and Serbian, and the ways these similarities and differences tend to pose problems for the students of Economics with regard to their correct pronunciation. That such a contrastive analysis approach is ideal for students who share a first-language background has been suggested by a number of authors (see e.g. Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin 1996: 324). A pedagogical implication of a contrastive approach to the teaching of pronunciation is that the syllabus should incorporate those features of pronunciation which are likely to arise from the similarities and differences between English and Serbian. Such a syllabus should aim at overcoming detrimental effects of the first-language transfer. Therefore, “[t]he learner, instead of being taken systematically through each English vowel and consonant, and later, if there is time, through the complexities of intonation and rhythm, would have presented to him certain carefully chosen features on which to concentrate, the rest of his pronunciation being left to no more than a general supervision.” (Abercrombie 1991:93).

In the next part of the paper we present the most common pronunciation errors of economics students whose native tongue is Serbian, made at segmental and suprasegmental levels. We sort the errors out into several categories and explain the reasons why they are made in light of the first-language transfer which impedes the correct pronunciation of Serbian economics students. We also point out some intralingual pronunciation errors, both at segmental and suprasegmental level, and identify the areas in which they most frequently arise.

3.1. Pronunciation mistakes made at segmental level

3.1.1. Intralingual mistakes

The students of Economics at the Faculty of Economics, University of Belgrade, whose native tongue is Serbian, make the following recurrent mistakes, not influenced by the differences between English and Serbian, but mainly motivated by some other factors:

(a) The first type of pronunciation mistakes is when pronunciation is according to the root or a perceived root word in a compound or a false compound, e.g.: international (pronounced according to *nation*), purchase (pronounced according to *chase*), profitable (pronounced according to *able*), climate (pronounced according to *ate*), etc.

(b) Another distinctive type of words which poses a problem is the words with a silent letter, many of them being genre-specific in economic science, e.g.: debt, indebted, indebtedness; answer; receipt; foreign; campaign; whistleblowing; mortgage; climb, etc.

(c) Mistakes in pronouncing easily confused words, e.g.: rise (rose, risen) vs. arise (arose, arisen) vs. raise (raised, raised); affect vs. effect; sell vs. sale vs. seller; lie vs. lay, etc.

3.1.2. Interlingual mistakes

Most mistakes students of Economics make, however, arise from the transfer of Serbian pronunciation to English pronunciation patterns. In Serbian, there is a strict one-to-one correspondence between sounds and letters, non-existent in English. As economics as a science abounds in internationalisms, words which are spelt and pronounced quite similarly in English and Serbian, this could be a potential source of error making. These pairs of words may be regarded as *phonological false friends* in these two languages. We illustrate this source of errors by several examples of word pairs in English and Serbian:

(a) Mistakes in consonant pronunciation – the English consonant is pronounced the way it is spelt, i.e. the way it is spelt and pronounced in the corresponding Serbian word: legitimate_{ENG} – legitiman_{SER} (English *g* pronounced as /g/); homogeneous_{ENG} – homogen_{SER} (English *g* pronounced as /g/); jurisdiction_{ENG} – jurisdikcija_{SER} (English *j* pronounced as /j/); digital_{ENG} – digitalan_{SER} (English *g* pronounced as /g/); leasing_{ENG} – lizing_{SER} (English *s* pronounced as /z/), etc.

(b) A distinctive group of words in English which may cause confusion is the one which contains a two-consonant cluster, *ch*. Unfortunately, these words, being mainly internationalisms, exist in Serbian as well. However, in Serbian *ch* is replaced by *h* only, and its pronunciation differs from the way it is pronounced in the counterpart words in English, meaning that the influence of Serbian is to blame in such cases. Therefore, Economics students tend to pronounce *ch* as /h/ instead of /k/ in some English words such as these (the Serbian counterpart is also given): mechanism_{ENG} – mehanizam_{SER}; technique_{ENG} – tehnika_{SER}; technology_{ENG} – tehnologija_{SER}; chemical_{ENG} – hemijski_{SER}, etc.

(c) Mistakes in the pronunciation of words of Latin and Greek origin are common. Due to their international recognition, Economics as a science extensively uses Latin or Greek words instead of their English equivalents. Therefore, students need to become familiar with some basic terms used in economics which are of Latin or Greek origin in order to be able to

understand and interpret them within economics texts. It is also made sure that such foreign words are correctly pronounced, since their pronunciation in English largely differs from the way they are pronounced by Serbian native speakers, which is another source of pronunciation errors. This group of words comprises words of Latin or Greek origin in English, with the English vowel being pronounced as it is written, e.g.: *criteria*_{ENG} is pronounced as /krɪ'teəriə/ according to *kriterijum*_{SER}; *media*_{ENG} is pronounced as /'mediə/ according to *mediji*_{SER}; *median*_{ENG} is pronounced as /'mediən/ according to *medijana*_{SER}; *thesis*_{ENG} is pronounced as /'θeɪsɪs/ according to *teza*_{SER}; *micro*_{ENG}- (as a prefix in words such as *microeconomics*) is pronounced as /'mɪkrəʊ/(economics) according to *mikro(ekonomija)*_{SER}; etc.

(d) Mistakes in vowel pronunciation as a result of transferring Serbian pronunciation to English: *deposit*_{ENG} is pronounced as /'depɒzɪt/ according to *depozit*_{SER}; *primary*_{ENG} is pronounced as /'prɪməri/ according to *primaran*_{SER}; *industry*_{ENG} is pronounced as /'ɪndʌstri/ according to *industrija*_{SER}; *result*_{ENG} is pronounced as /re'zʌlt/ according to *rezultat*_{SER}; *resources*_{ENG} is pronounced as /'resɒsɪz/ according to *resursi*_{SER}; *company*_{ENG} is pronounced as /'kɒmpəni/ according to *kompanija*_{SER}; *product*_{ENG} is pronounced as /'prɒdʌkt/ according to *produkt*_{SER}; *monetary*_{ENG} is pronounced as /'mɒnetəri/ according to *monetarni*_{SER}, etc.

(e) Acronyms, as pronounceable words formed from components (letters, usually initial, or syllables), can also create difficulties as regards pronunciation. Students tend to pronounce English acronyms the way they are pronounced in Serbian, owing to the great similarity of both pronunciation and spelling of these words in both languages: *NATO*_{ENG} is pronounced as /'nato/ according to *NATO*_{SER}; *OPEC*_{ENG} is pronounced as /'ɒpek/ according to *OPEK*_{SER}; *NAFTA*_{ENG} is pronounced as /'nafta/ according to *NAFTA*_{SER}; etc.

3.2. Pronunciation mistakes made at suprasegmental level

3.2.1. Intralingual mistakes

(a) When it comes to mistakes at suprasegmental level, students' attention should be drawn to the fact that in two-syllable words in English stress is random. Shifting stress from one syllable to another in the words which are spelt in the same way often changes grammatical functions of words, thus rendering differences in meaning. Here are some examples relevant to an ESP economics course taught to Serbian students: *contrast* (v.) – *CON*trast (n.); *decrease* (v.) – *DE*crease (n.); *export* (v.) – *EX*port (n.); *import* (v.) – *IM*port (n.); *object* (v.) – *OB*ject (n.); *produce* (v.) – *PRO*duce (n.); *progress* (v.) – *PRO*gress (n.); *project* (v.) – *PRO*ject (n.); *to prospect* (v.) – *PRO*spect (n.); *to record* (v.) – *RE*cord (n.); *to survey* (v.) – *SUR*vey (n.), etc.

(b) The most problematic area, as far as intralingual mistakes at suprasegmental level are concerned, seems to be that many students of economics make mistakes, both in writing and speaking, when they attempt to use the noun/verb which is pronounced with the stress on a different syllable compared to the words derived from them. For example, the pronunciation of *economy* or *economise*, differs from the pronunciation of *economics* or *economic* or *economist*. Here are some other examples of similar word families: *monopolise* (v.) – *monopoly* (n.) – *monopolist* (n.) – *monopolistic* (adj.); *advertise* (v.) – *advertising* (n.) –

advertiser (n.) – advertisement (n.); analyse (v.) – analysis (n.) – analytic (adj.) – analyst (n.); etc.

3.2.2. Interlingual mistakes

(a) At suprasegmental level, native-language transfer is much more outstanding with economics students. Thus, mistakes made in word stress as a result of transferring Serbian stress patterns or pronunciation to English, may be termed as *Serbian pronunciation of English words*, since these are internationalisms which tend to be pronounced similarly across languages, e.g.: comPOnent/ kompoNENta; dePOsit/ DEpozit; INdustry/ inDUstria; VArIable/ variJAbila; eFFECT/ Efekat; perCENT/ PROcenat; CONsequence/ konseKVEncija; perSPEctive/ perspekTIva; etc.

4. Some remedial exercises

As “[p]ronunciation teaching involves the process of deconditioning the student from his native language habits and reconditioning him to those of the language being learnt, where the latter differs from the former” (Brown 1991: 2), we may be justified to say that “much of pronunciation teaching is remedial in nature.” (Brown 1991:2). Therefore, in order to enable the students to identify and correct the pronunciation mistakes they make, we provide some remedial exercises which may be used to deal with the pronunciation problems encountered in ESP economics students whose native tongue is Serbian. They should help to raise the students’ awareness of the correct pronunciation and word stress and their importance for using English in their future field of expertise.

4.1. Remedial exercises for intralingual errors made at segmental level

- Divide the following words into two groups, regarding the way the ending *-ate* is pronounced: adequate, climate, evaluate, delicate, generate, innovate, motivate, navigate, private, simulate.
- Cross out any consonant that is not pronounced in these words, and underline the main stress: Wednesday, debt, company, whistleblowing, foreign, interesting, business, receipt.
- Match the underlined words with their correct pronunciation.

<u>/ˈraɪzɪŋ/</u>	<u>/raɪz/</u>	<u>/reɪz/</u>	<u>/reɪzd/</u>	<u>/raɪz/</u>	<u>/ˈraɪzɪŋ/</u>
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The Unions state that because the cost of living rose by 8% last year, management should raise wages by an equivalent amount. However, such a rise means that the prices of the company’s products would have to be raised in order to maintain adequate profit margins. It should be clear that the Union’s demands give rise to an inflationary spiral of rising costs, rising prices and further wage claims, ultimately to nobody’s satisfaction.

4.2. Remedial exercises for interlingual errors made at segmental level

- Single out the words in which *g* is NOT pronounced as /dz/.

legitimate agronomy agenda homogeneous oligopoly heterogeneous hygiene

- Substitute the underlined Serbian words in the following sentences with their English counterparts and then read them aloud.

1. It is not necessary that any new tehnika be invented.
2. Tehnologija, information and time can also be regarded as resursi.
3. Mikroekonomija concerns the komponente of a system.
4. Full employment is a primaran goal of any economic society for obvious reasons.
5. Opportunity cost is the direct rezultat of the scarcity of resursa.
6. Medijana is the point in a group of numbers at which half are higher and half are lower.
7. The new syllabi will be drawn according to different kriterijumima.

- Which of these acronyms can be said like *words*, e.g. NATO /'neɪtəʊ/?

VIP; NASDAQ; OPEC; WHO; CAD; CAM; EFTA; IMF; LIBOR; CEO; OECD; PIN; IT

4.3. Remedial exercises for intralingual errors made at suprasegmental level

- In many cases in English the same word is used as a noun and verb, but they are stressed on a different syllable. Stress the underlined words on the correct syllables.

1. We can only increase our sales if there is an increase in production.
2. There has been a decrease in sales. Sales have decreased.
3. There was a rise in the prices of imported goods. Imports have risen.
4. The Government will help to finance an increase in exports.
5. There has been an increase in imports.
6. There has been an increase in imported goods.
7. Imports have increased.
8. It is forecast that permit will not be issued for many kinds of manufactured goods.
9. The new advertisement ought to increase our share of the market, but only if we produce more.
10. The farm was used to produce the produce.
11. We should produce more products if we want to make a profit.

- How would you pronounce the underlined words?

1. I've been delegated to organise the weekly meetings. How many delegates does each state have?
2. Government officials visited the earthquake zone to co-ordinate the relief effort. A coordinate graph is a grid with x and y axes crossing through the center.
3. Superiors are regularly evaluated by their subordinates. He was both willing and able to subordinate all else to this aim.

4. They were able to give us a rough estimate. Officials estimate that supply has exceeded demand by £7.5 billion since the beginning of 1998.

5. The company is looking for a graduate engineer with the ability to learn and motivate a team of four people. He graduated from the University of California with a degree in mathematics. (Examples in this exercise are taken from the dictionaries listed in the References section).

- Find one word whose stress differs from the stress of the other words in the same group.

monopolise	economise	advertise
monopoly	economics	advertisement
monopolist	economy	advertising
monopolistic	economist	advertiser

- Mark the correct stress in these words.

1. general	generality	generalization
2. legal	legality	legalise
3. national	nationality	nationalization
4. personal	personality	personalize
5. stable	stability	stabilisation

4.4. Remedial exercises for *interlingual errors made at suprasegmental level*

As the only common-sense solution to teaching word stress in a class consisting of students who share a first language background seems to be the contrastive approach (cf. Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin 1996: 324), the following exercise focuses on the differences in the pronunciation of similarly spelt English and Serbian words:

- Put the accent on the right syllable in the Serbian and English word. Note and remember the difference in stress!

SERBIAN: komponenta; monopolista; ekonomista; depozit; perspektiva; varijabla; procenat; mašinerija; licenca; resursi.

ENGLISH: component; monopolist; economist; deposit; perspective; variable; percent; machinery; licence; resources.

5. Conclusion

With English being a *lingua franca* of international business and economy, thus having more non-native speakers in the world than native speakers, there is a need for setting more realistic goals in teaching pronunciation in an ESP classroom – comfortable intelligibility (Kenworthy 1987) and communicability skills. We have argued here that by replacing native-speaker pronunciation concept with intelligible pronunciation concept in line with English understood as an international language, and by viewing the students' first language not as an obstacle but as an access to gaining better insights into the nature of

pronunciation problems, teaching and learning pronunciation becomes grounded on more achievable goals, resulting in a considerable reduction in the workload on behalf of both teachers and students. Devising exercises which will tap into the most problematic (intralingual and interlingual) segmental and suprasegmental errors should help raise students' awareness of the necessity to discriminate between correct and incorrect pronunciation in order to not only become more confident speakers but also be better understood in their prospective professional setting. In this paper an attempt has been made to illustrate how these goals may be achieved in an economics ESP classroom. With slight adaptations, the approach we have adopted in our work and the exercises we have provided in our textbook (Silaški and Đurović 2009) may also be used in some other ESP courses, regardless of the subject matter and the native tongue of students.

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