Given that the language teaching profession changed its positions many times with respect to pronunciation teaching, it can be assumed that there have also been changes in methods and techniques used to teach the skill. In this article I would like to present an overview of the traditional and time-tested techniques as well as the new directions in pronunciation teaching.

Phonetic transcription
One of the long-used and known to all teachers technique is phonetic transcription, which is a code consisting of phonetic symbols. Each symbol describes a single sound, which is in fact different from a letter of the alphabet. True as it is, in order to use phonetic transcription one must learn the code and it takes time and effort. Although it is possible to learn the pronunciation without the code, many linguists believe it to be a valuable tool in learning the foreign sound system. One obvious advantage of learning the code is the ability to find the pronunciation of unfamiliar words in a dictionary. All good modern learners’ dictionaries use phonetic symbols to indicate pronunciation, and learners must therefore be familiar with them.

Auditory reinforcement
As A. Brown (1992) notes, there is a common assumption among teachers that perceptual and productive language skills such as listening and speaking are taught through the same medium, namely speaking and listening. As the result many of them use the traditional listen-and-repeat approach in spite of the present tendency for communicative language teaching. Techniques based on this method are often production-oriented and aim at improving students’ spoken English. Many of such techniques employ minimal pairs, which are words that have different meaning and their pronunciation differs only in one sound. Minimal pair drills were introduced during the Audiolingual era and have still been used both in isolation - at a word-level and in context - at a sentence-level. The technique is useful for making learners aware of troublesome sounds through listening and discrimination practice.

Visual reinforcement
Visual reinforcement has been connected with pronunciation teaching since the time of Silent Way were the skill was taught through the use of word charts and colour rods. Since that time many other ways of visualising pronunciation have been introduced. They may be especially useful for adult learners who undergo the process of fossilization. While children benefit from oral repetition, drills and taping themselves, adult learners find it difficult to learn the patterns of intonation, stress and rhythm. The reason may be that they simply do not know whether the patterns they produce are acceptable. Real time visual displays are to show learners the relationship between the patterns they produce and those they are required to repeat. One of the possible conventions for making the word stress visible is writing the stressed syllable in capital letters:

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FASHion, SESSION, beHAVE
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Another common way of visualising word stress is the use of dots. The large dots mark a stressed syllable in a word:

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catwalk - • •
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Tactile reinforcement
The use of the sense of touch is another frequently employed technique, though it is not discussed very often. In fact, some teachers might be taking advantage of it without even realising this. Celce-Mauricia (1996) calls this mode a visual reinforcement. One of the forms of this reinforcement includes placing fingers on the throat in order to feel the vibration of the vocal cords, and it may be useful when teaching the distinction between voiced and voiceless consonants. A different form of tactile reinforcement incorporates simple tactile descriptions given to the students: ‘When you pronounce /r/ your tongue feels liquid and your jaw is tight (Celce-Mauricia, 296).
Drama Voice Techniques

The focus of the above techniques has been generally on accuracy of sounds and stress at a word level. Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that both the ability to produce isolated sounds or recognising suprasegmental features and fluency contribute to effective communication. Today’s pronunciation curriculum which has communicative language teaching as its goal thus seeks to identify the most important features and integrate them in courses. The interactive aspect of pronunciation as well as other aspects of English can be emphasised by the use of drama techniques. In classes where these techniques are employed, they help to reduce the stress that accompanies oral production in a foreign language. They are fun, entertaining and relaxing. Moreover, they also increase learner confidence, because they help learners to speak clearer, louder and in a variety of tones. One means in which drama voice techniques can enter pronunciation classroom is for teachers to employ poetry, tongue twisters and raps.

Audio feedback

In traditional methods, which have been used for a long time now, teachers have taken the advantage of the audio medium, namely a tape recorder, for a dual purpose. First, for listening to the recorded native-speaker discourse. And second, for taping students and replaying their own production. As a matter of fact, in today’s pronunciation classroom audio feedback still plays a significant role. Most of all, learners are provided with authentic material and unlimited access to native-speaker’s discourse. They can also record written passages and ask teachers for feedback.

Multimedia enhancement

One of the major developments in the field of linguistics following the audio medium are video recorders and the use of software. These are an advance over audio tapes in that they provide visual support, which is as important in pronunciation teaching as auditory. Celce-Mauricia (1996) lists also other advantages of multimedia enhancement (313):

1. access to a wide variety of native-speaker speech samplings
2. sheltered practice sessions in which the learner can take risks without stress and fear of error.
3. opportunity for self-pacing and self-monitoring of progress
4. one-on-one contact without a teachers’ constant supervision
5. an entertaining, game like atmosphere for learning.

As for video recorders, they may serve both as a source of learning material and feedback. Students may not only view a native speakers’ production of speech but can also see and hear themselves if videotaped.

Another innovative technique, which is becoming more and more frequently used in pronunciation teaching, are computer displays. The advantages of this medium include: visual feedback, entertaining, game like quality of programs, a great amount of individual feedback and the opportunity to compare learner’s own production of speech with a native-speaker model. The only limitation of this medium that learners and teachers may come across is the availability of software, since many schools are still not equipped with large enough computer labs to meet users needs.

Bibliography: