



SPEAK OUT!

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE IATEFL PRONUNCIATION SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

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The Pronunciation Special Interest Group

The Pronunciation SIG is one of IATEFL's fourteen Special Interest Groups (SIGs) and has been at the forefront of the practice and theory of pronunciation teaching for more than 20 years. We aim to give teachers the opportunity to exchange views and share ideas about methodology and materials, and to discuss theoretical matters and the interdependence of pronunciation and other areas of language learning. We have around 200 members around the world.

PronSIG members receive two issues of our highly-regarded newsletter per year. *Speak Out!* has included many seminal articles and is always at the forefront of debates, controversies and emerging issues. You are invited to contribute to this publication, sharing your ideas, experience, questions and research in the area of pronunciation. Please send your ideas to the editor, Robin Walker, <walkerrobin@wanadoo.es>. PronSIG members throughout the world are interested in learning about YOUR work, and learning from YOUR experience.

Members are invited to attend our events as speakers or as participants. We welcome suggestions for themes and venues, and especially offers to host or co-host events. We also have a day-long PronSIG Programme at each IATEFL Annual Conference.

We are always interested to hear from members who might be interested in a committee role. The committee consists of volunteer members who care enough to keep the SIG going. We would be particularly interested in hearing from members who would be keen to take responsibility in the areas of publicity, finance, sponsorship and events co-ordination.

If you have any queries or are interested in helping the SIG in some way, do get in touch with the co-ordinators:

Jonathan Marks and Dolores Ramirez
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The PronSIG Discussion Group

What is it?

The IATEFL PronSIG Discussion Group is an Internet site where people from all over the world share and discuss ideas about teaching and research in the areas of pronunciation, phonetics and phonology. It's also a good way of keeping up to date on conferences or events, making contacts with people of similar interests, and to ask for, and give, suggestions and advice on teaching or theory. It's free and easy to use.

Many of the authors of *Speak Out!* articles are involved. So, if you've been inspired by what you've read in this edition, or want to make a comment, or ask a question, or just say 'hello', sign up now and become part of the online community.

How do I join?

It's very easy. Go to the IATEFL PronSIG Homepage at <http://www.rdg.ac.uk/epu/pronsig_new.htm> and click on the link in the Discussion List section. If you already use Yahoo! for your e-mail, just sign in with your usual Username. If not, click on SIGN UP to create a Yahoo! account. In order to post messages you will need to join the group – simply click on JOIN THIS GROUP at the top right of the page.

How do I take part in discussions?

It's a friendly group so once you have set up an account and signed in, click on START TOPIC at the top right of the page and post a short message saying 'hello' and maybe something about your interests or the work you are involved in. Or, if one of the discussions you read inspires you, jump straight in – just click on REPLY, type your reply and click on SEND.

If you have any questions or difficulties in joining, send an e-mail to me at <pronsig_mod@yahoo.co.uk>.

We look forward to seeing you online!

Alex Selman
PronSIG Discussion Group Moderator



From the editor

Welcome to *Speak Out!* 41 and another varied selection of articles from around the world. Three of these give us a taste of what we missed if we were unable to be in Cardiff. Vicky Kanellou brings us the second half of her review of the status of pronunciation in current teaching manuals. Dermot Campbell gives us an insight into how technology and a speech corpus can help learners to slow speech down, and become FLUENT. Piers Messum, in contrast, takes us about as far away from technology as we can get. Starting by looking at children, he ends by suggesting we get adults to lie down and so put some stress into their lives.

The remaining articles touch upon a common theme, and one which came up in *Speak Out!* 40 – the issue of goals. In the first of these, Meredith Stephens makes an appeal for the teaching of prosody at primary levels in the hope of avoiding problems in this area at later levels of schooling in Japan. Allan James rejects the traditional concept of dialect/accents as the learners' goal, and explains how register and genre can offer goals, too. Staying with goals, Wafa Zoghbor opens a window onto the work she is doing to test the Lingua Franca Core in an Arab context, while on the other side of the world Ricardo Sili adapts the LFC to the Brazilian context. Finally, Mark Hancock focuses on the pronunciation of final 's', in the second 'At the talk face'.

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The place of pronunciation in current ELT manuals: a review

Vasiliki Kanellou

What is the place of pronunciation in English language teaching (ELT) today? And, what is its role in the development of learners' listening and speaking skills? In an attempt to provide answers to these questions I will examine the treatment of pronunciation in 26 ELT manuals and handbooks and 11 book chapters that have been published within the last decade.

Introduction

Pronunciation has occupied a peculiar position throughout the history of foreign and second language teaching; for example, 'the mastery of the L2 sound system was considered the first priority for language teaching and learning during the middle of the twentieth century' (Saville-Troike, 2006: 142) and became the 'aspect upon which least time is spent in most language courses' (Fraser, 2000: 8) towards the end of the twentieth century. Indeed, the status of pronunciation has varied considerably over the years; i.e. the twentieth century witnessed the rise and fall of pronunciation in the language curriculum, as manifested by different language teaching methods. There is not enough space here to explore the reasons behind the rise and fall of pronunciation but I would like to say, very briefly, that pronunciation was elevated to the most important area of language teaching in the 1950s due to the application of the principles advocated by the proponents of the late nineteenth century Reform Movement, which led to the development of oral-based language teaching methods (Howatt, 1984). Then, pronunciation became the least important area of language teaching in the 1970s due to the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (Jones, 2002). In the second half of the twentieth century, attention was shifted from teaching the language system to teaching language as communication, and developing fluency rather than accuracy became the focus of the language classroom. As Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) grew to dominate the scene of language teaching in the 1970s and 1980s, students' textbooks and teachers' manuals dealt with

pronunciation contingently, at best, and ceased to contain any material on pronunciation work, at worst. Fraser (2000) considers the effect that CLT has had on the place of pronunciation in language teaching and describes the issues that have arisen very eloquently:

In the 1960s, there was a huge focus on pronunciation – in the form of behaviourist drilling of sound contrasts and word pairs, with a strong emphasis on the articulation of individual sounds, and little attention to rhythm and intonation, the construction of useful sentences, or the practice of realistic conversations... in the 1970s with the development of communicative methods... the focus was on communication and the use of language in real situations. This was in general a good thing, but it had one unfortunate side-effect – the almost complete ignoring of pronunciation. Pronunciation was so strongly associated with the 'drill and kill' methods that it was deliberately downplayed, rather than being incorporated in the communicative method. The result was that few if any 'communicative pronunciation' methods were developed.

Fraser, 2000: 33

The close link between CLT and the reduction in the status of pronunciation has also been pointed out by other writers (Seidlhofer, 2001; Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Now, moving on to the twenty-first century it is important to consider whether or not CLT is still the dominant methodological approach in language teaching. To this day, a huge range of course books and other teaching resources are based on the principles of CLT (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 174). Indeed, CLT still persists in different parts of the world (Hismanoglou, 2006; Hajati, 2006) and most teachers claim to practise CLT in their classrooms (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005 or Kanellou, 2004). So, what about pronunciation? Is it still ignored? Or, have things changed?

In order to understand the current place and status of pronunciation in ELT, I have searched the TEFL market (mainly from 2000 onwards) to discover the amount of attention that pronunciation receives in comparison to other areas of language knowledge and the extent to which pronunciation is addressed in the development of 'speaking' and 'listening' skills. Since the priorities that the language profession accords to specific issues and practices at a specific point in time are manifested in contemporary language teaching handbooks, looking at the place of pronunciation in current ELT manuals made a lot of sense. Overall, I have examined 26 handbooks and 11 book chapters and divided them into three categories: those that are dedicated to the skill of listening, those that are dedicated to the skill of speaking and those that deal with a wide range of language teaching issues. A complete list of all the books and books chapter I have examined can be

DIT's Dynamic Speech Corpus

**Campbell, D., McDonnell, C.,
Meinardi, M., Pritchard, C.,
Richardson, B., Wang, Y.**

The Digital Media Centre of the Dublin Institute of Technology undertakes applied, multi-disciplinary research with the help of external funding. The **FLUENT** project outlined below, which is funded by Enterprise Ireland, involves the construction of a Dynamic Speech Corpus (DSC). This is a resource aimed mainly at learners of English, but is sophisticated enough to also address the needs of teachers, authors and researchers.

Speech corpus or spoken corpus?

The DSC is deliberately called a **speech** corpus. This is to distinguish it from existing **spoken** corpora, which study the form of spoken language and study that which has been spoken. The **FLUENT** DSC, on the other hand, aims at making the act of speech production itself available to learners and researchers. It is not the transcript of spoken language which is important, but the actual sound files themselves and those findable, reduced features of spoken language which are the subject of study.

Most current spoken corpora use readily available speakers (e.g. students) in accessible situations (e.g. seminar presentations) and are recorded so as to maintain 'naturalness'. But in many recordings, 'naturalness' equates to a low audio quality, e.g. telephone recordings, ambient noise, or a messy signal. Other recordings have been made with speech synthesis in mind and may therefore be totally unsuitable for learning purposes.

In contrast, the DSC uses industry-standard recording techniques while retaining a high degree of naturalness. The unscripted dialogues it contains are similar to telephone conversations between friends, but with an audio standard that can bear instrumental analysis.

Traditional teaching dialogues

Dialogues written for classroom use are characterised by short, self-contained, focused interchanges which are politely 'choreographed'. Speaker A finishes a turn

completely before Speaker B takes up his/her turn. There is rarely any cross talk or back-channelling. The aim of these 'dialogues' is to increase the learner's vocabulary in a coherent (realistic) context and to demonstrate correct application of linguistic structures. They can be good production models for L2 speakers of the language, but they are inadequate for promoting dialogic fluency. They are like a series of interleaved monologues rather than L1-L1 dialogues and do not represent the way L1 speakers actually interact.

Real dialogues

Genuine dialogues, on the other hand, do not exist in order to demonstrate anything, but rather to realise a communicative goal. We rarely speak for the sake of speaking, but rather to influence our interlocutor, effect a change, achieve a goal, etc. There is a purpose towards which we steer our listener. In fact, for every speaker there are two listeners: the interlocutor and the speaker him/herself. In genuine dialogues speakers monitor and adjust their speech production in light of the development of the dialogue. It is a highly interactive process and fluency in this context consists not in a *legato*, coherent flow of speech characterised by syntactic elegance, but rather a 'confluency' of two speakers.

McCarthy and Tao (2008) have looked at the importance of appropriate turn-taking with regard to fluency. They propose that in order for speakers to be deemed 'fluent', they need to be 'confluent', i.e. they need to be able to interact naturally. In order to do this McCarthy and Tao highlight three important features of natural dialogue: chunks, linking items and 'small words'. When interlocutors do not use these items, the dialogue sounds unnatural.

Ready-made chunks, such as: *you know, I mean, what do you think, and or something like that*, have an interactive function 'connecting, as it were, the speakers together'. Tao (2003) found that items that link to the previous turn are the norm (e.g. *uh-uh, yeah, well, right*), while items which do not are rare. Without such linking, flow between turns is disrupted. The linking items also allow for thinking time or pause-time just after them, so they may be placed immediately the previous speaker finishes, without silence or over-hesitation between turns.

What Hasselgreen (2004) calls small words (*well, actually, cos, just, so, like*) have high frequency in any L1 conversational corpus, but a much lower frequency in written corpora. They have an important interactive function.

Grounding stress in expiratory activity

Piers Messum

This is a report of my presentation at the recent Cardiff IATEFL conference, where I argued that we must understand English stress not only in the form it takes in adult native speakers but also in its form in children. We should then use this developmental model for our teaching. Our learners will have to embody stress in a way that will not have been demanded from them before (in most cases), but will then have a chance of pronouncing English more authentically and easily. Up to now, I don't think we have given them the tools to do this.

In this article I will use 'stress' to refer to (actual) sentence stress, rather than (potential) lexical stress, and to refer specifically to 'stress accent' (Beckman 1986:1): the form of stress found in West Germanic languages, including English, where the correlates of stress include extra loudness, and not just pitch movement and increased length (these last two being the principal correlates found in the routine stress/prominence mechanisms of, for example, French and Japanese.)

Sentence stress in English

What is stress? Linguistically, it is a way of modulating attention at the level of the syllable (De Jong 2000). Phonetically, stress can be looked at from the different points of view of production and perception (yielding its correlates and its cues). Its developmental aspect has had less attention paid to it, but I will consider this later.

Within phonetics there has been a historical change of emphasis regarding stress, from production to perception. (Jensen (2004) has a good recent summary of this movement.) There has also been continuing uncertainty about the phenomenon.

Before 1950, phoneticians might have generally agreed with Jones (1918: 245): 'Stress may be described as the degree of force with which a sound or syllable is uttered. It is essentially a subjective action.'

After 1950, however, various experimental studies seemed to undermine this. Fry's work on the perception of pairs of words like *'import* and *im'port* relegated loudness to a supporting role among the cues to stress, where it had previously been seen as the most important result of the greater effort postulated. Adams and Munro (e.g. Adams 1979) could not find the expiratory muscle activity that was an expected correlate of stress. And Ohala (e.g. Ohala 1990) explained slight increases in subglottal pressure that accompany the production of routine sentence stress as being the result of back pressures rather than greater expiratory drive (the expiratory activity of the muscles of the respiratory system).

All of these conclusions have, in fact, been challenged by more recent theoretical and experimental work (see Messum 2007 for details), but their legacy has been the uncertainty I mentioned in the field. Notice, for example, the qualification that Roach (2002) signals with the word 'likely' in the following description:

It seems likely that stressed syllables are produced with greater effort than unstressed, and that this effort is manifested in the air pressure generated in the lungs for producing the syllable and also in the articulatory movements in the vocal tract. These effects of stress produce in turn various audible results: ... [pitch ... length ... loudness].

How stress is learnt

Let us for now put the question of what stress is to one side, and ask about how it is replicated. Generally, there are at least three ways that a learner can pick up an aspect of pronunciation from a model: by what I will call acoustic matching, acoustic pattern matching and action matching.

By 'acoustic matching' I mean something like mimicry, although the accuracy of this will always be limited by anatomical differences between people – for example in vocal tract sizes – that make exact acoustic matching impossible.

By 'acoustic pattern matching' I mean that the listener first identifies a pattern within the model's utterance, and then tries to reproduce this pattern with his or her own voice. So, for example, rather than matching the exact trajectory through which an intonation contour has moved, the listener abstracts the fact that the model speaker has moved from low to high and does the same.

Interference resulting from the learning of written before spoken English

Meredith Stephens

Teachers of English strive to satisfy the competing demands of not imposing 'native speaker' standards on learners of English as an International language (EIL), and providing tools so that students can attain maximum intelligibility. Erring on the side of the former objective may lead to a pronunciation which is best understood by a bilingual teacher; erring on the latter side suggests the teacher is imposing Inner Circle norms on learners for whom this may be irrelevant.

The following discussion concerns the case of Japanese learners of English. Japanese and English are linguistically distant from each other and thus it is extremely challenging for both Japanese speakers of English and native English speakers of Japanese to achieve both fluency and accuracy.

The artificial distinction between 'English' and 'English Conversation'

Gilbert advises that the teaching of English rhythm and phonemic awareness should be 'a necessary pre-condition to literacy' (2009: 8). Similarly Kjellin argues 'the prosody-first approach may be the most effective one in second-language pedagogy' (1999: 13). Wales asserts one must set up 'the necessary conditions for acquisition of fluent English, first spoken, and then written' (1989: 20). This happens also to be the case in first language acquisition, and could be extended to EFL: 'Oral language is of primary importance and (the point may seem obvious, but it cannot be overestimated) no child could learn to read or write without a very well-established oral language (Christie, 1984: 65). Hopefully this will be the approach adopted in 2011 in Japan when English is introduced into the upper primary school.

Traditionally, however, in Japan the teaching of reading has preceded the teaching of pronunciation.

The traditional EFL classroom in Japan represents the antithesis of the 'oral language first' approach described above. Takeda (2001) explains the traditionally prevalent teaching methodology in Japan called *yakudoku*, or 'teaching by translation'. The goal is to provide an accurate Japanese translation of an English text, and pronunciation is neglected. Matsuura et al argue that university students tend to regard translation to be a necessary tool in reading comprehension: 'English reading comprehension is almost equivalent to translation into Japanese (2001: 85).

This approach imposes an enormous burden on the memory because long lists of vocabulary must be memorised. Sadly, the result of the *yakudoku* method is a student backlash against the study of English: 'English is often described as a subject which saps students' energies and motivation in Japan' (Takeda, 2001: 99). Pronunciation is not particularly emphasized in university English classes because of the focus on integrated skills rather than isolated skills (Matsuura et al, 2001: 83). However, recent studies (e.g. Gilbert, 2009; Tiziani, 2009) indicating the essential role pronunciation plays in communication suggest that it is essentially the kind of isolated skill which merits attention. In Matsuura et al's (2001) study it was the students rather than the teachers who were concerned with improving their pronunciation. Teachers trained in teaching communicatively may value conveying a message over the accuracy of isolated skills. However the students' preference for 'correct' pronunciation may be because they intuitively realise its importance when conveying a message. Herein lies the contradiction between the apparently conflicting demands of effective communication, an integrated skill, and pronunciation, an isolated skill. Teachers may suggest that students not distract themselves too much with a focus on pronunciation, but ironically this is one of the essential skills that will help them achieve that end.

Incredibly, in Japanese there is a distinction between 'English', known as *eigo*, and 'English conversation', known as *eikaiwa*. *Eigo* is the unmarked term, and is the general term used to refer to the English language. Interestingly, *eikaiwa* is a separate term used to refer to conversing in English. *Eigo* is (usually) a compulsory exam subject, whereas *eikaiwa* is an expensive extra, for the enthusiasts, available at private language schools. *Eigo* is taught by tenured Japanese professionals; *eikaiwa* tends to be taught by recently graduated foreigners, often in their gap year between university and a serious job, on short term contracts. *Eigo* is the base subject to be learnt by all; *eikaiwa* is a commodity, only available to those who can pay for it.

Questioning target codes in pronunciation teaching: implications for practice from the sociolinguistics of international English(es)

Allan James

Target codes in pronunciation teaching represent the sound structure of a language or language variety associated with a particular real or imagined speech community. However, these speech communities are still conceived of very traditionally, while the sociolinguistic realities of English worldwide now require a more differentiated view of anglophone 'communities'. This has consequences for our specification of codes and our pronunciation practice.

There has been much controversy in recent years over the appropriate target code for English pronunciation teaching internationally, and proposals range from code choices on the basis of the *Lingua Franca Core (LFC)* (Jenkins 2000) via Cruttenden's *Amalgam English* – itself a new version of Gimson's original *Minimum General Intelligibility* model – or *International English* (Cruttenden 2008) to the status quo RP or GA. However, while all these targets, whether more 'imagined' or 'real', can be criticised for degrees of – inevitably pedagogical? – artificiality with respect to the phonetic realities of English accent use worldwide, they nonetheless represent, albeit sanitised, versions of the sound systems of 'speech communities', whether these are totally imagined or not. Indeed, these target codes are based fundamentally on the traditional notion of speech communities (of native speakers) of structuralist linguistics, familiar from Chomsky's well-known radical formulation. At

the same time, recent sociolinguistic research has shown that the traditional notion of 'speech community' is in dire need of revision and extension in the light of the shifting loyalties of 'late modern' or postmodern language use (e.g. Rampton 2009). Indeed, in discussions of English in lingua franca use, the sociolinguistic concept of 'community of practice' (Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999) is occasionally adopted to characterise the membership of this language-using group.

The implications for pronunciation teaching are that we must now seriously consider the possibility of complementary, not competing, target codes of English sound structure, which are not different according to measures of intelligibility or acceptability or sociopolitical desirability or even putative learnability/teachability, but which co-exist as codes representing different types of English language-using 'communities' in a non-traditional sense, i.e. which do not correspond to the conventional linguocultural or geopolitical groupings of speakers we are used to.

Language varieties and communities

As long ago as 1978 the linguist Michael Halliday argued for a distinction between two major varieties in language according to macro-function: dialect as variety according to the language user, and register as variety according to the language use. The former is 'what you speak (habitually)', constitutes 'differing ways of saying the same thing' and is realised particularly via lexicophonological characteristics; the latter is 'what you are speaking (at the time)', constitutes 'ways of saying different things' and is realised particularly via lexicosemantic characteristics (Halliday 1978: 35). To these may be added a third variety, genre, a variety according to language using, i.e. 'what actional mode you are speaking in', constituting 'ways of saying things differently', which is realised via particularly lexicogrammatical characteristics (as argued in James 2008). With regard to the communities that the different varieties serve one might conclude that dialects serve speech communities (as conventionally understood); registers serve discourse communities; whereas genres serve actional communities (for further development of these categories and empirical data analysis, see James 2006, 2008).

Related to the employment of English in the world, we can note that dialects in this sense are associated primarily with the traditionally described speech communities of the anglophone countries (where English has the role of 'first' or 'second'/'official'/'recognised'/'national' language). Registers, however, are associated with the international communities of the 'specific purpose' use of English, whether this be in

The implications of the LFC for the Arab context

Wafa Zoghor

The purpose of this paper is to report on the fieldwork of a current doctoral thesis to investigate the influence of a pronunciation syllabus based on the Lingua Franca Core (LFC) in improving the intelligibility and comprehensibility of Arab learners. The paper will introduce a sample of how this syllabus has been designed based on a Contrastive Analysis (CA) between the LFC and the phonology of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). It will then present a workable example of how the pronunciation elements of the LFC syllabus can be integrated in adopted textbooks and discuss the classroom practice which the LFC necessitates.

Contrastive Analysis between Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and the LFC

According to James (1980), CA describes the systems of the phonology of L1 and L2 on the assumption that significant differences between them will constitute major problems for the language learner, and that these should therefore be a major focus of attention for pronunciation teaching. In discussing the value of CA in language teaching, Fries (1945) asserted that the most efficient material is that which is based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the learners' L1.

One of the issues encountered in implementing CA when teaching Arab learners is that there are two main varieties of Arabic in each Arab country: Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Non-Standard Arabic (NSA) (Mahmoud, 2000). While there is considerable uncertainty about the source of L1 transfer, Arab teachers tend to use MSA when comparison with English is needed. It is logical that they should do this for two closely-related reasons:

MSA (a simplified version of Classical Standard Arabic) is the language of the Koran – the holy book of Islam – and is

taught in schools throughout general education in the Arab-speaking world.

MSA is the only official written variety and is also used in mass media in all Arab countries and for all communications of any official nature (Mahmoud, 2000; Swan & Smith 2001).

For these reasons Arab learners are expected to master, or to some extent to recognize, the phonology of MSA, since they have received instructions on MSA throughout their education. This latter idea is particularly influential in formulating the tendency to transfer from MSA rather than NSA. NSA is acquired naturally and informally with no conscious knowledge of its structure and how it works. MSA, in contrast, is similar to English in that both are learned explicitly in a formal classroom situation (Mahmoud, 2000). Accordingly, it is possible that Arab learners transfer from MSA in an attempt to use their explicit knowledge in Arabic with learning English.

Pronunciation syllabus based on the LFC for Arab learners

The result of CA has traditionally been referred to as the list of L2 features which are more likely to cause difficulties for learners of a specific L1 and, accordingly, requires a great deal of concentration in classroom teaching (Walker, 2001a). To work out the contents of this list for Arab learners the suggestions of Brown (1992) in implementing CA have been used. The phonology of MSA was broadly filtered against the inventory of the LFC. The features that should be included are those phonemes which exist in the LFC but not in MSA, in addition to those which are shared in both Arabic and the LFC.

In Table 1, the left-hand column represents the inventory of the core sounds of the LFC (Jenkins, 2000). This excludes non-core features, for example, 'word stress', 'stress-time rhythm' and 'weak forms'. The column in the middle lists the phonemes of the MSA based on Swan and Smith (2001), Watson (2002), Avery and Ehrlich (1992) and Kenworthy (1987). The column on the right is the result of the CA between the first two columns, and supposedly includes the contents of the pronunciation syllabus for Arab learners.

To enhance the practicality of the above syllabus, it is important that the teacher recognizes that what matters is not strictly whether Arab learners transfer from MSA or NSA, but how to take advantage of learners' phonological background in the first place in learning the inventory we are aiming at. A teacher should not disregard the influence of the learners' NSA variety (and the other varieties which the learner might recognize), as learners' knowledge beyond

Priorities in pronunciation teaching

Ricardo Sili da Silva

Some areas of pronunciation may be much more important than others in the classroom if one considers errors that directly affect learners' intelligibility. In this article I use data gathered about errors affecting Brazilian learners' intelligibility to help determine priority areas for pronunciation teaching in Brazil. I also suggest practical ways to deal with these areas in the classroom.

Introduction

The teaching of English pronunciation is often a challenge for teachers. This may be due to the fact that there is so much to accomplish that we often feel overwhelmed, and perhaps even insecure of our own abilities to give learners what they need. Most of us will have the aid of course books, which highlight certain phonemes and other segmental and suprasegmental features, and provide practice exercises and phonemic charts. Many of us will use these when they come up, as suggested in the books. There are also a number of interesting and useful pronunciation handbooks.

Whenever we teach new language items, we try and make sure students are exposed to and get enough practice of the correct pronunciation of words and phrases. Also, in our everyday classroom practice, we know that correcting students' mistakes is very important to help them achieve acceptable pronunciation. This is what many of us do at any sign of error. However, we can become so used to hearing recurrent errors that we do not notice them any more, especially if we teach monolingual groups.

But the most important aspect of pronunciation teaching may not be how we teach it, how much we teach it, or even what we teach. Perhaps the crucial question to consider is *why* we teach pronunciation. Only by asking ourselves this question, and finding a satisfactory answer to it, can we really have a clear picture of the importance of pronunciation in our students' lives, and begin to think of answers to *how*, *how much* and *what*.

Reflecting on learners' production

In order to focus on the question of why it is important to teach pronunciation, I will use examples drawn from my experience teaching Brazilian learners in Rio de Janeiro, but I believe it will not be difficult for teachers elsewhere to find relevant parallels in their own teaching.

Let us then begin by looking at the following example sentences, uttered by learners of English of different levels in a variety of classrooms:

- *Do you wanty sung coff? Wivvy or widoutchy mewk?
- *Dat sing yooman works in an offs. I don't sink she's he-tir-ed.
- *Dis is my car. I likey ITCHY a lotchy.
- *My sung watch-ed Hobbin Hood yesterday. He was heally happ!
- *Bew is at the cown-trie cloob.

You will probably find these written sentences hard to understand at first glance. But if you are Brazilian, or have lived in Brazil long enough, I am sure that as soon as you read them aloud, you will recognize them immediately! (If not, look at the footnote for their standard English versions²).

If you are teaching in Brazil you will have heard utterances sounding like these in your classrooms. But wherever you are and whatever nationalities you teach, it probably bothers you to hear your students speaking like that. What can we do when we hear such utterances? Can we just ignore these errors because this is the way speakers of this or that language pronounce English? Should we try to correct all possible errors, and make the student repeat the correct pronunciation until we are satisfied (or we give up!)? Perhaps the best course of action is to use these utterances as an opportunity to analyse our learners' errors, and to interpret our own reactions to them. Why do these utterances bother us? Is it because they 'sound bad' and 'hurt our ears'? Is it because they are incorrect? Probably the real reason why we feel students should not speak like that is the fact that we know – even if only on a subconscious level – that this sort of pronunciation is likely to affect the speaker's intelligibility and respectability when communicating in English.

2

Do you want some coffee? With or without milk?
That thin woman works in an office. I don't think she's retired.
This is my car. I like it a lot.
My son watched Robin Hood yesterday. He was really happy!
Bill is at the country club.

At the talk face 2

Mark Hancock

Activities for working on final -s

Final -s is common in English because it occurs in plurals, possessives and 3rd person singular of the present simple, as well as in the contraction of *is* and *has*. Perhaps the main pronunciation issue involved is whether or not to add a syllable. A final -s inflection is pronounced as a syllable (vowel and consonant) the root word ends with a sibilant consonant - /s/, /z/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, /ʒ/ or /dʒ/. Otherwise, the -s inflection is just a consonant, not a syllable. Here are some activities to focus on this feature of pronunciation.

1 Possessive 's maze

Give out the photocopiable maze. Students must find a path from Alice's to Ross's. They may pass through a hexagon only if the 's on the name in it is pronounced as an extra syllable. Explain it like this: *Alice* is 1 syllable. *Alice's* is 2 syllables. So the 's is an extra syllable. You can pass. *Juan* is 1 syllable. *Juan's* is also 1 syllable. So 's isn't an extra syllable. You can't pass.

key: Alice's - Alex's - Thomas's - James's - Charles's - Liz's - Chris's - George's - Ms Fox's - Trish's - Marge's - Ross's

2 Rhyme matching

In plurals and 3rd person verb forms, we can often see from the spelling if the final -s inflexion is an extra syllable because a letter E is added. For example, *box* has one syllable, but *boxes* has 2 syllables – and notice that we added an E as well as an S. But we don't add an E for possessives. So *Ms Fox's* rhymes with *boxes* even though *boxes* has an E while *Fox's* doesn't. Ask your students to match the rhyming pairs opposite.

key: 1-b, 2-c; 3-h; 4-a; 5-e; 6-f; 7-g

3 Rhythm drill

One of the most important aspects of pronouncing final -s suffixes is whether or not the suffix is pronounced as an extra unstressed syllable. Consequently, the final -s has implications for the rhythm of sentences. In the first row in the table below, the -s endings are not extra unstressed syllables, so the two sentences have a rhythm of 4 stressed

syllables. The sentences in the 2nd and 3rd rows have unstressed syllables squeezed between the four stressed syllables as a result of the final -s endings. Get students to chant the sentences in the table from top to bottom.

4 Pronouncing contractions

Which one of these two sentences is more difficult to pronounce?

Tennis's great!

Football's great!

I think you'll agree that the first one is more difficult. Those two letter Ss get mixed up together. For this reason, we tend not to use the contraction in this case – we say instead: *Tennis is great*.

Ask your students to make sentences from the other boxes on page 35, deciding when to use the contraction and when not to according to how easy or difficult it is to pronounce.

5 Sentence pairs

Of course, the important thing about these -s endings is that they make a difference to meaning. For example, Sentences A on page 35 have a different meaning from sentences B, and students should make sure they can hear and pronounce that difference. Read out one of the sentences and ask students to shout out A or B. Then get them to say sentences for each other to decide if they're A or B. It's easy to adapt this activity and devise similar sentence pairs to fit with the vocabulary and topics that you're covering in class.

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