Innovations in Pronunciation Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Pronunciation has emerged from its past history of rote drill and repetition. Influenced by works on contemporary pedagogical practices and recent research into factors that directly impact learner intelligibility, the field of pronunciation teaching today embraces numerous innovations in classroom practice, both for dedicated pronunciation courses and for multi-skills courses where pronunciation practice is integrated. This presentation by Donna Brinton highlights the juncture of research and emerging innovative practices in pronunciation pedagogy. These practices include but are not limited to means of increasing learner motivation and autonomy, multi-modal approaches to pronunciation teaching, the increasing role of technology in today's pronunciation practice, pronunciation priorities for lingua franca communication, and insights into the impact of rhythm, stress, intonation, and thought groups on learners' overall intelligibility.

OVERVIEW

Emerging research findings and innovative practices in pronunciation pedagogy, including

- means of increasing learner motivation and autonomy
- multi-modal approaches to pronunciation teaching
- the increasing role of technology in today's pronunciation practice
- pronunciation priorities for English as a lingua franca (ELF) communication
- the impact of rhythm, stress, intonation, and thought groups on learners' overall intelligibility
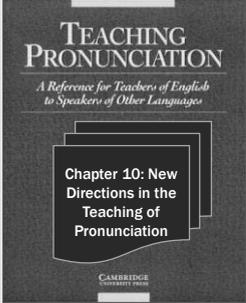- enhancements to previous pedagogical practices

BACKGROUND

I am writing on behalf of [editors] to invite you to compose a book chapter for [name of volume] slated to be published in 2017…. The topic of the chapter we are inviting you to compose is "New Ways of Teaching Pronunciation"….
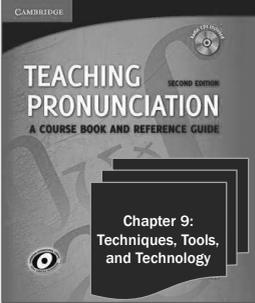What we would like you to include is an overview survey discussion of contemporary and emerging directions in pronunciation teaching…. We are asking you to describe current and emerging themes, to provide illustrations and examples, and to offer future directions and recommendations…

MY QUANDARY

TEACHING PRONUNCIATION
A Reference for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

Chapter 10: New Directions in the Teaching of Pronunciation

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

1996

CAMBRIDGE
TEACHING PRONUNCIATION
SECOND EDITION
A COURSE BOOK AND REFERENCE GUIDE

Chapter 9: Techniques, Tools, and Technology

2010

TOPICS COVERED IN THE 1ST EDITION

| Fluency-building activities	Visual reinforcement	Auditory reinforcement	Tactile reinforcement	Kinesthetic reinforcement
effective listening exercise	wall charts	kazoos	rubber bands	Use of fingers to indicate stress
fluency workshop	flash cards	clapping or tapping out stress patterns	drinking straws	use of hands to demonstrate articulatory settings, emphasize vowel length, etc.
board games	diagrams of the articulatory system	jazz chants	Q-tips	use of body to trace intonation contours
introduction collage	strips of paper, matches, feathers	memory pegs	popsicle sticks	

1ST EDITION, CONTINUED

Authentic materials	Techniques from psychology	Drama techniques	Instructional technology
anecdotes and jokes	guided imagery	voice modulation techniques	audio journals
limericks and children's rhymes	visualization	mirroring	video feedback
advertisements	neuro-linguistic programming	shadowing	computer-assisted language learning
comic strips		tracking	speech spectrographic devices
literature excerpts			

MY CONUNDRUM

Aside from advances in instructional technology, what true innovations exist in the field of teaching pronunciation?

RESOLVING THE CONUNDRUM

Step 1   Step 2   Step 3
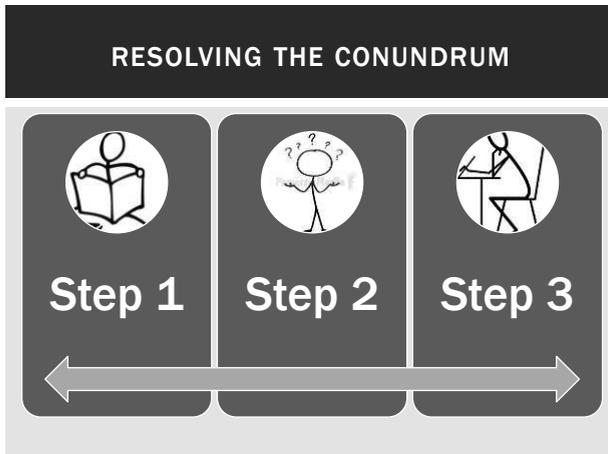
Increasing learner motivation and autonomy

Innovation #1

TAKEAWAY

There is a significant correlation between learners' beliefs and attitudes toward L2 pronunciation and their ultimate attainment.

beliefs

attitudes

attainment

RESEARCH SUPPORT

Learners are aware of the role that motivation plays in their acquisition of L2 pronunciation.

Anxiety and low self confidence negatively effect learners' willingness to communicate.

Identifying strongly with the L2, wanting to sound like an NES, having a socially outgoing orientation, and using the language in a variety of domains figures strongly in success.

However, despite the overriding importance of social factors in L2 pronunciation acquisition, many learners remain unaware of the relation between identity and accent.

Cenoz & Lecumberri (1999); Baran-Lucarz (2014); Moyer (2014); McCrocklin & Link (2014); Levis (2015)

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM

Motivation
- Adopt Dörnyei's (2014) notion of the possible self
- Provide safe environments in the classroom for learners to practice as this can help them build confidence and be more willing to speak in the L2 Zielinski (2012)

Learner autonomy
- Create archives of out-of-class learning opportunities housed on CMS (e.g., TED talks, elevator pitches, and Three-Minute Theses)
- Combine student self-regulated practice with scaffolded in-class instruction (Sardegna & McGregor, 2013)
- Implement strategy instruction (Rokoszewska, 2012; Sardegna, 2012; Smemoe & Haslam, 2013)

Multi-model approaches to pronunciation teaching

Innovation #2

TAKEAWAY

Since pronunciation teaching involves auditory, visual, and kinesthetic modalities, best practice mandates that it be taught through a multi-modal approach.

Brinton (2014)

RESEARCH SUPPORT

Multi-modal approaches can help to break down ego boundaries, thereby increasing learners' receptivity toward acquiring L2 sound features.

The inclusion of body movement is critical to successful pronunciation teaching; such physical engagement provides a viable pathway to more accurate L2 fluency

Multi-modal approaches enhance students' ability to anchor sounds, words, and phrases to movement and/or visuals (e.g., a phonemic vowel chart) and facilitate students' recall and integration of target L2 features in their spontaneous speech .

Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin (2010); Acton (2012); Acton, Baker, Burri, & Teaman (2013)

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM

- Chan's (n.d.) "Pronunciation Doctor" pronunciation workouts - exercises to heighten learners' awareness of their vocal apparatus, increase the strength and flexibility of their articulatory muscles, and enhance the automaticity of L2 sound production
- Acton et al's (2013) haptic pronunciation - a teaching system grounded in the coordinated use of movement, touch, and gesture to anchor new sound features
  - punching in time to primary stressed syllables of multi-syllabic words ("fight club")
  - stepping or dancing in time to key words in a stretch of discourse
  - holding an object and shaking it to the rhythm of a poem

The increasing role of technology

Innovation #3

TAKEAWAY

Technology's influence on pronunciation teaching includes the entire spectrum—from the simplest audio solutions such as digital recording software to threaded voice boards to more advanced technologies such as web-based applications and automatic speech recognition.

RESEARCH SUPPORT

Learners exposed to digital sound files improved not only their perception of unfamiliar English vowels but also, to a limited degree, the intelligibility of their production.

There are currently 6.8 billion mobile phone subscribers worldwide (rapidly approaching the world's population of 7.1 billion.) As a result, mobile technologies hold great promise for empowering literally billions of learners in their acquisition of English pronunciation skills.

Mobile technologies not only empower learners and encourage learner autonomy but also enable learning to extend beyond the classroom.

Thomson (2011; 2012); Jarvis (2015); Huffman (2011)

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM

- Links to digital resources on the course website
- Audio file attachments for teacher and peer feedback
- Streaming video samples of authentic native speaker discourse
- Synchronous video conversations where tutors can view images of the learners' faces in real time, providing them with simultaneous visual and audio feedback
- Mobile technologies including synchronous voice chat apps (e.g., Skype), interactive feedback apps (e.g., MobiLearn), videoconferencing software (e.g., NetMeeting) that allows both parties to hear and speak to one another while attending real-time virtual classrooms

Pronunciation priorities for lingua franca communication

Innovation #4

TAKEAWAY

The NES is no longer the sole target interlocutor. Our job as pronunciation teachers is to prepare English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) users of English to communicate their ideas and needs intelligibly to other ELF speakers, prioritizing those pronunciation features that will best prepare them for this goal.

RESEARCH SUPPORT

A "common core" pronunciation curriculum would consist of the minimal inventory of pronunciation features needed for successful interaction among ELF speakers.

This curriculum would omit those features that are deemed peripheral to intelligible NNES-NNES communication.

The end goal of a common core approach to pronunciation syllabus design is a significantly reduced (and thus a more attainable) set of ELF pronunciation goals.

Jenkins (2006); Walker (2010)

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM

▪ Identify those features that are deemed essential to intelligible NNES-NNES communication from the pronunciation syllabus, with the end goal of a significantly reduced (and thus more attainable) set of ELF pronunciation goals.

  — Include: aspiration following /p, t, k/, word initial and word medial consonant clusters, long/short vowel contrasts, and nuclear or tonic stress

  — Omit: vowel reduction, schwa, and weak or reduced forms (such as /kən/ for *can*); features of connected speech such as linking and palatalization; stress timing; pitch movement; and certain consonant phonemes such as /θ/, /ð/, and dark /l/ along with the General American flap /ɾ/

Impact of suprasegmentals on learners' overall intelligibility

Innovation #5

TAKEAWAY

Notwithstanding disagreements between pronunciation experts, most agree that the impact of the message, and to a great degree its meaning, reside in its suprasegmental features.
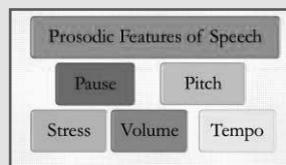
RESEARCH SUPPORT

Within a thought group, the placement of prominence on the focus word contributes to the overall intelligibility of the utterance.

On the word level, correctly placed lexical stress also contributes to intelligibility.

Saito (2014)

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM

- Intelligibility and comprehensibility are of critical importance; therefore teachers should focus classroom time on issues of stress at both the word and phrase level (Derwing & Munro, 2014)
- According to Murphy (2013), thought grouping...
  - is essential to most other aspects of English pronunciation (e.g., prominence, intonation, linking, assimilation, and deletion)
  - consequently, it should be prioritized over other aspects of pronunciation teaching
  - This is especially true when classroom time devoted to pronunciation is limited

Enhancements to previous pedagogical practices
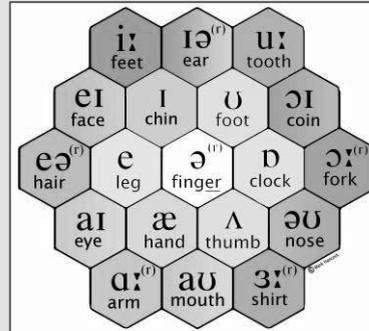
Innovation #6

CAVEAT

One of the more curious phenomena in teaching is the extent to which previously popular and well-received classroom practices or methods resurface in a later time period and are pedagogically re-envisioned (or in some cases simply "repackaged") under new labels or with new enhancements to better appeal to contemporary learners and teachers.... A number of popular approaches to pronunciation teaching appear to fit under this category.... Strictly speaking, none of these practices can be considered novel or innovative since they have been widely discussed in the literature and are by no means new practices in the field.

Brinton (in press)

EXAMPLES

The Silent Way
- Young and Messum's (2013) use of SW sound/color chart, fidels, and Cuisenaire rods which the authors have substantially revised to better reflect the sound system of English

The Color Vowel Chart
- Taylor and Thompson's (2012) CVC which builds on Finger's (1989) "vowel colour chart" and which builds on Gattegno's original sound/color chart
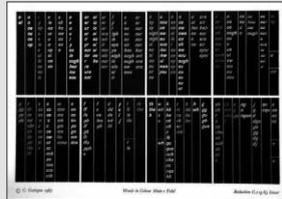
REINVISIONED OR REPACKAGED?

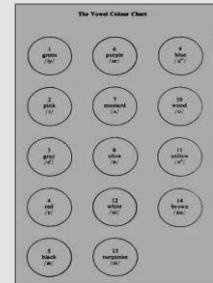Young and Messum (2013)   Gattegno (1972)

YOU BE THE JUDGE...

Taylor and Thompson (2012)   Finger (1989)

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I have come to believe that true innovation connects directly to research findings. As Murphy and Baker (2015) observe, the fourth wave of pronunciation teaching is still in progress. This wave is dedicated to emerging ways of teaching pronunciation as informed by contemporary empirical research; it is defined by researchers in the field who have posed foundational questions that bear a direct relation to classroom pronunciation teaching. In the fourth wave, empirical research is beginning to have more of an impact on the teaching of pronunciation while methodological 'bandwagons' of past decades are receiving diminished attention from teachers, materials developers, and curriculum designers.

Brinton (in press)

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THANK YOU!

A written version of this talk appears in O. Kang, R. Thomson, & J. M. Murphy (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of English pronunciation* (2018)

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