Pronunciation Teaching Approaches: Considering the Options

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Pronunciation is ...

A complex, multi-functional and multi-dimensional aspect of speech involving the ability of a speaker:

- to perceive and produce communicatively relevant cues and contrasts in individual phonemes and larger prosodic patterns of connected speech,
- as these relate to linguistic and broader kinds of social meaning in context, and
- to do so in real time,
- while also balancing a large number of other linguistic and situational factors and constraints.

A speaker’s pronunciation articulates a message not only in the sense of defining how much of it is intelligible, but also in the sense of giving a certain impression of the speaker that contextualizes the message and how it is received by the listener.
This contrastive 5-part scheme incorporates my thinking and practice in pronunciation teaching since the 1970’s up to the present time, including:

- Teaching segmental and suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation in a classroom without technology supplemented by teaching in a language laboratory and soon with Visi-Pitch and then many other kinds of technology (Pennington & Esling, 1996);
- Top-down versus bottom-up pronunciation teaching (Pennington, 1989);
- Teaching of pronunciation from a second-language versus a multilingual/plurilingual perspective (Pennington, 2015a,b).


Other ideas were developed in writing and then later reflecting on sections of this book:


- Offers contemporary perspectives on English pronunciation teaching and research in an environment of increasing multilingualism and English as an international language.
- Reviews theory and practice in pronunciation pedagogy, language learning, language assessment, and technologies.
- Presents an expanded, sociolinguistically informed view of pronunciation in communication, L1 and L2 teaching and learning, and work environments.

See especially Chapter 4, "Pronunciation in the Classroom: Teachers and Teaching Methods" (pp. 187ff).
Teaching Approaches for Pronunciation

1) Micro-focused vs. Macro-focused
   aka Bottom-Up vs. Top-Down
   or Segmentally Oriented vs. Suprasegmentally or Prosodically Oriented

2) Meaning-focused vs. Form-focused

3) Explicit (Metacognitive) vs. Implicit (Cognitive)

4) Without Technology vs. With Technology

5) Second-Language vs. Multilingual/Plurilingual
Micro-focused Teaching of Articulation

- Input from a teacher in the way of verbal instructions and demonstration;
- Static forms of visual input such as cut-away visuals of the vocal tract; or
- Animated forms visual input, such as videos of articulatory motions.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wYwk07QM4rc
Integrated Bottom-Up Approach

1) **Teaching individual sounds and phonemes**, and then leading systematically into

2) **Teaching connected speech** involving coarticulation, articulatory setting, stress, and intonation in syllables, words, phrases, and larger discourse units.

- Such an approach could logically start with phonemes and finish with communicative functions of intonation.
Top-Down Curricular Sequence

TOP LEVEL  Focus on broad functions and features of message pragmatics and communicative framing through discourse structure and global features of prosody.

BOTTOM LEVEL  Focus on details of linguistic form and mechanics at the word and phoneme level.

- This top-down order of focus matches the order in which communication planning and performance proceeds, from the most global or macro discourse level and then proceeding to each more micro in succession, resulting ultimately in the detailed mechanics of sequential articulation (Levelt, 1989, 1999).


Integrated Top-Down Approach

1) TOP LEVEL Discourse intonation \cite{Brazil1980}, voice quality \cite{vanLeeuwen1999}, accents/varieties \cite{Wells1982}, speech styles \cite{Eckert2001, Rampton1999}.

2) MIDDLE LEVEL Connected/running speech phenomena - "phonological fluency" \cite{Pennington1989}, involving coarticulation, articulatory setting, stress, and intonation in clauses, phrases, words, and syllables.

3) BOTTOM LEVEL Details of articulation and linguistic form, allophonic as well as regional and social variants of phonemes with reference to intelligibility as well as communicative impact and effectiveness.

Micro-focused vs. Macro-focused
What Does the Research Say?

- **Hahn (2004):** Instruction on suprasegmentals is more effective.
- **Levis (2005) and Saito (2014):** Segmentals may be easier to teach and learn than suprasegmentals.
- **Derwing & Munro (1997):** Improved comprehensibility is more likely with improved grammatical and prosodic proficiency than with sole focus on correction of phonemic errors.


Micro-focused vs. Macro-focused
What Does the Research Say? [cont'd]

- **Derwing, Munro, & Wiebe (1998):** Suprasegmental instruction resulted in higher comprehensibility scores than segmentally focused instruction.

- **Lee, Jang, and Plonsky (2015):** Effects of pronunciation instruction are greater if instruction combines segmentals and suprasegmentals.

- **Hardison (2004):** A focus on suprasegmental or prosodic aspects of pronunciation has a payoff also at the segmental level.

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A focus on segmentals would show how the most micro elements of language, phonemes—or phonetic variants—link up with each other and with features of stress and intonation to create what speakers produce and listeners perceive as syllables, words, phrases, clauses, and discourses (i.e., what they perceive as discriminable and meaningful units of language).

A focus on suprasegmentals would show how such features as intonation, rhythm and phrasing, articulatory setting and voice quality realize the pragmatic framing of a message in terms of:

- politeness, seriousness or playfulness, sincerity or irony, condescension or sarcasm;
- broad communicative functions (e.g., asserting versus proposing, suggesting, or questioning);
- discourse structure (e.g., turn opening, continuation, completion);

and also how the macro prosodic features influence the articulation of individual phonemes in context, such as through the effects of stress and coarticulation, or the choice of one or another phoneme variant.
Types of Form-Focused Instruction [FFI]

➢ **Pre-input** background information, preview activities, and preliminary practice to raise awareness, focus attention, and guide performance, e.g., “giving a rule or procedure to follow, modeling, or...opportunities to practice within a limited context” (Pennington & Rogerson-Revell, 2019, p. 196); “input flooding" (Doughty & Williams, 1998); or “high variability perceptual/phonetic training” (HVPT; Logan, Lively, & Pisoni, 1991).

➢ **In-process input**, including form-focused aspects of performing instructional tasks, e.g., corrective feedback during task-based language teaching (TBLT; Long, 2015) and other meaning-focused interaction or exercises bridging between form and meaning (Muller Levis & Levis, 2016).

➢ **Post-input** or output-focused input, e.g., post-task teaching, post-reflection, and delayed corrective feedback (Pennington & Rogerson-Revell, 2019, p. 196).

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Norris & Ortega (2000); Spada & Tomita (2010); Goo, Granena, Yilmaz, & Novella (2015): Meta-analytical studies showing positive effects of focus on form in Long’s sense and for other kinds of explicit instruction with a focus on forms.


Lyster, Saito, & Sato (2013); Saito (2011, 2013); Saito & Lyster (2012): Corrective feedback in combination with other kinds of FFI is an effective approach to teaching segmental aspects of pronunciation, and explicit feedback is more effective than implicit feedback in raising awareness of errors.


Saito and Saito (2016): significantly improved comprehensibility and prosody based on pre-input instructional information and practice, and in-process corrective feedback in meaningful interaction.

Gordon, Darcy, & Ewert (2013): CLT for 3 groups, G1 - explicit instruction on segmental features (pairs of commonly confused vowel phonemes), G2 - explicit instruction on suprasegmental features (stress, rhythm, linking, reductions), G3 - no explicit instruction on these features. Only G2 showed significant improvement in comprehensibility.


HVPT focuses learners’ attention on pronunciation using speech samples from a variety of speakers and phonetic contexts.

- It is highly effective for improving learners’ ability to discriminate different phonemes (Thomson, 2011; Wang & Munro, 2004); and

- It can have lasting effects on learners’ performance (Bradlow et al., 1999; Lambacher et al., 2005).


Explicit (Metacognitive) vs. Implicit (Cognitive)

Critical Listening (Couper, 2011; Fraser, 2009)  
- Explicit learning through narrow form-focused "micro-listening"

Extensive Listening (Pennington & Körmücü, 2018)  
- Implicit learning through broad unfocused "macro-listening"

Shadowing (Kusumoto, 2015; Foote & McDonough, 2017)  
- Explicit-implicit learning through broad form-focused "macro-micro listening"

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Pennington, M. C, & Körmücü, S., (2018). Trialing a pedagogy designed to minimize L1 phonological transfer Student and teacher responses to a curriculum for teaching Turkish first by ear and then by eye.

Input via Pronunciation Technologies

- quick and repeatable
- precise, reliable, and authoritative
- highly salient
- multi-modal
- individual
- extensive and variable

AND THEREFORE

- Motivates and stimulates
- Raises awareness and increases understanding
- Enhances learning and develops skills
- Increases precision and automaticity of performance
- Builds interest and confidence

Examples of Technological Resources for Pronunciation

- Protea Textware Connected Speech
- Richard Caudwell's Cool Speech app
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uUcWrEoq-bU
- English Learning *Pronunciation Power*
- Rosetta Stone *Tell Me More*
- Cambridge University *Clear Speech* app.
- ELSA Corp. *ELSA Speak* app.
- Oxford English File Pronunciation
- Ron Thomson’s (2012) *English Accent Coach*
  https://www.englishaccentcoach.com/vowels.aspx
- University of Iowa *Sounds of Speech*
  https://soundsofspeech.uiowa.edu
- George Mason University *Speech Accent Archive*
  http://accent.gmu.edu/browse_language.php
Pronunciation Technologies: What Does the Research Say?

- Effectiveness has been shown for both commercial software designed specifically to work on pronunciation and for applications of other online tools adapted to work on pronunciation (e.g., Fouz-González, 2015, 2017).

- Meta-analysis of pronunciation effectiveness studies shows greater effects for human than computer-based pronunciation instruction (Lee, Jang, & Plonsky, 2015).

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Second-language approaches to pronunciation focus on accuracy or intelligibility.

Multilingual / plurilingual approaches to pronunciation might focus on aspects of identity tied to pronunciation, aiming to develop a broad repertoire of pronunciation features and competences usable in contexts of multilingualism, plurilingualism, and translanguaging.

Multilingual / plurilingual approaches to pronunciation are translingual in that they reference leaners' knowledge of more than one language.
Activities using Learners' Multilingual/Plurilingual Competence

- Comparing and contrasting the pronunciation of L1 loanwords and their English equivalents;
- Listening to, imitating, and discussing impressions of accents;
- Imitating a high-profile speaker from a recording or video and adjusting performance until listeners (e.g., classmates) rate the match as good;
- Imitating different English accents;
- Imitating careful, form-focused vs. casual pronunciation;
- Altering prosody in tasks in which a speaker is to diverge or converge with other speakers in a group (e.g., angry vs. conciliatory, excited vs. calm, accepting vs. questioning, highly engaged vs. disengaged);
- Roleplaying to practice style-shifting and projecting different identities associated with different features of pronunciation and accent.

(Adapted from Pennington & Rogerson-Revell, 2019, pp. 2-13-214)

General Advice for Teaching Pronunciation

1. Connect the Binaries, in These Orders

- Top to Bottom
  [macro before micro features of language]

- Meaning-focused to Form-Focused
  [communicative function before form]

- Implicit to Explicit
  [extensive listening before teacher instruction]

- With Technology to Without Technology
  [media input before human input]

- Multilingual / Plurilingual to Second Language
  [translanguaging focus before second language focus]
General Advice for Teaching Pronunciation [cont'd]

2. Teach Pronunciation in Context
   - Meaningful communication
   - Natural speech samples
   - Diverse speech samples [multiple speakers, accents, contexts]
   - Running speech

3. Use Implicit Teaching (e.g., extensive listening) as Background / Reinforcement for Explicit Teaching

4. Use Technology (e.g., for student use outside class) as Background / Reinforcement for Human Teaching

5. Use Translanguaging for Gaining Student Interest and Investment in L2 Pronunciation (e.g., by comparing L1 and L2, considering issues of pronunciation related to identity, speaking style, and impression on listeners)