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PHONODIDACTICS IS NOT SO BLACK AS IT IS PAINTED: TRADITIONS AND TRENDS IN FL PRONUNCIATION TEACHING

Abstract: By a curious paradox, the indispensability of intelligible, comprehensible and minimally accented foreign language (FL) speech in oral communication does not translate into intensive pronunciation practice in instructed settings. Teaching pronunciation usually poses a major challenge to language instructors both at the level of planning and implementation of pronunciation teaching activities, and is therefore frequently frowned upon to the advantage of the remaining language subsystems. However, underdeveloped FL pronunciation skills carry negative consequences every time learners enter into oral conversations. The problem takes on yet greater significance nowadays when the increased mobility of 21st century societies raises the likelihood of students making contacts with native and non-native speakers of the target language (TL). On having, firstly, enumerated some of the culprits responsible for the inferiority of pronunciation component in everyday language classroom routine and, secondly, demonstrated the importance of the subskill in establishing contacts with native and non-native speakers of the TL, we attempt to provide a general overview of the well-established traditions and main trends in the field of phonodidactics. In view of the above, our primary objective is to first and foremost overcome deep-rooted prejudices against including the pronunciation component in language classrooms by developing readers' awareness on the fundamentals of pronunciation teaching.

Key words: phonodidactics, pronunciation, FL instructed settings, oral communication.

Rationale

As evident in such telling terms as “the Cinderella area” (Kelly 1969), “the neglected orphan” (Deng et al. 2009) and “the lost ring of the chain” (Moghaddam et al. 2012), a generally laissez-faire approach towards pronunciation teaching, technically known as phonodidactics, has been adopted in foreign language (FL) instructed settings.

According to Cruttenden (2008: 315), grammar- and vocabulary-based classroom work has enjoyed greater popularity than pronunciation teaching. The major reason behind the former's ubiquity has lain in the ease of the selection of lexical and grammatical items. Their complexity—"as a rule of thumb the simpler the structure, the earlier it is taught"—and learners' individual characteristics—their age and interests—have served as a reference for teachers and syllabus designers.

For the sake of comparison, planning pronunciation instruction is far from straightforward. Language instructors are required specialist expertise in the field of phonodidactics as their decisions concern the following:

1. the choice of an appropriate teaching model, or the variety of English that students aim to approximate (e.g.: Received Pronunciation, General American, English as a Lingua Franca, International English, Native English as a Lingua Franca),
2. the compilation of the list of pronunciation priorities, or a set of sounds and speech production phenomena that carry the highest functional load and, therefore, are particularly significant in ensuring learners' intelligibility. (e.g.: segments, prosody),
3. the implementation of effective pronunciation teaching techniques (e.g.: imitation, phonetic training).

The presentation of the selected aspects underlying *the whats* and *the hows* of pronunciation teaching listed above can be found in Brinton (2018), Burns and Seidlhofer (2002), Collins and Mees (2013), Cruttenden (2008), Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994), Kretzschmar (2008), Seidlhofer (2004, 2008), Szpyra-Kozłowska (2013, 2015, 2018) and Trudgill and Hannah (2013).

What also might cool language teachers' ardour to introduce a pronunciation component into their classes is most often an unsatisfactory outcome of the whole endeavour that is pronunciation teaching. Its effectiveness is frequently limited by the multidimensional character of FL phonology acquisition affected by a plethora of learner-related determinants. For the discussion of selected pronunciation-influencing factors see for example Carroll and Sapon (1967), Flege and Fletcher (1992), Flege, Munro, and McKay (1995), Kruger and Dunning (1999), Munro and Mann (2005), Nerlicki (2011), Nurani and Rosyada (2015), Patkowski (1990, 1994) and Scovel (2000).

Since it has been impossible to propose a set of universal rules for what elements of the target language (TL) sound system to teach and how to do it effectively in all educational contexts, a very pragmatic yet extremely disappointing solution most often worked out by teachers has limited (or even completely excluded!) the pronunciation component from FL classrooms (Brown & Yule 1983).

Paradoxically, however, pronunciation should take precedence over grammar and vocabulary. Lexico-grammatical competence, even though crucial for message formulation, seems less important in the process of articulation. Speakers are

certainly not able to utter the products of conceptualisation and formulation stages without their ability to articulate sounds. This is well illustrated by Levelt (1999) in his model of *Blueprint of the Speaker*.

Seidlhofer (2004) also points to the role that pronunciation plays in the process of constructing and decoding linguistic signals. Since pronunciation is an expressive tool, it, if combined with other linguistic resources, can be used to display different affective states and attitudes. An instance may be illustrated in this regard through the comparison of speakers' high versus low pitch on the perception of their utterance "Thanks a lot" with the former expressing pleasure and the latter suggesting dissatisfaction.

As argued by Szpyra-Kozłowska (2015), it usually proves more taxing on listeners' energies to evaluate one's grammar and vocabulary. Pronunciation instead creates impressions about speakers within a few words. It is therefore often referred to as "the initial layer of talk" and "a major ingredient in first impressions" which describe speakers' gender, age, origin, education and status (Pennington & Rogerson-Revell 2019: 7). The view that heavily accented speech negatively affects its perception by native speakers who tend to show irritation, aversion and discrimination has received empirical support from a number of studies including, for instance, Brennan and Brennan (1981a), Cunningham-Anderson (1993) and Gynan (1985). It is to be noted here that neither a lexical nor grammatical mistake, but a pronunciation error most frequently leads to communication breakdowns (e.g.: Burns & Claire 2003; Demirezen & Kulaksiz 2015).

In view of the above-mentioned clash between the inferiority of pronunciation in language education and its significance in ensuring the success of oral communication, we would like to present the basic facts pertaining to the field of phonodidactics. We believe that by raising language teachers' (including language teachers'-to-be) awareness on the problem and broadening their knowledge on pronunciation teaching practices, a general reluctance towards phonodidactics can be overcome so that, as tentatively suggested in the title of the present paper, it is not so black as it is painted.

Following scholars from the relevant field (e.g.: Brinton 2018; Celce-Murcia et al. 1996; Cruttenden 2008; Kelly 1969; Nation & Newton 2009; Seidlhofer 2004; Sobkowiak 1996), we would like to provide arguments in favour of three statements:

1. Two pronunciation teaching traditions based on intuitive-imitative and analytic-linguistic approaches have been continued in FL instructed settings.
2. Two mechanisms of speech, perception and production, have laid the foundations for pronunciation instruction.
3. An individual approach to pronunciation teaching has been advocated to match FL learners' different educational needs and learning styles.

Thus, the objectives of the article are threefold: (1) to introduce two major approaches to pronunciation teaching, (2) to underline the importance of speech

perception and production in pronunciation instruction and (3) to suggest recent trends in phonodidactics.

Phonodidactic traditions in language teaching

Two major approaches, intuitive-imitative and analytic-linguistic, have dominated pronunciation-oriented classroom settings (Celce-Murcia et al. 1996; Kelly 1969; Newton 2018).

Mimicry (in other words imitation), the oldest and the easiest pronunciation teaching tool, set the groundwork for the intuitive-imitative approach, the milestone for phonodidactics. It provided the basis for pronunciation instruction in such methods as the Direct and Berlitz Methods. They both, based on language immersion and the imitation of TL sounds, implemented a naturalistic approach to language teaching to bear a close resemblance to the process of first language (L1) acquisition (Celce-Murcia et al. 1996).

Over recent decades, language teaching specialists have experimented with an array of mimicry-based classroom techniques (Brinton 2018; Cruttenden 2008; Derwing & Munro 2015). One of them is shadowing. In contrast to some other imitative techniques, such as oral reading and repetition, shadowing requires the instant production of speech without time provided for understanding its meaning. The technique seems useful during listening comprehension practice. According to Newton (2018), it contributes to more accurate perception of phonemes and an improved ability to identify words.

The analytic-linguistic approach, on the other hand, has been associated with the Audiolingualism (Atli & Bergil 2012). In contrast to the Direct and Berlitz methods, the central aim of the audiolingual methodology was to offer a formal pronunciation instruction *via* rote learning and the mechanical practice of selected segmental and suprasegmental features of the TL (Newton 2018).

One of the ways to develop speakers' accuracy and promote their autonomy in learning the pronunciation of novel words within the analytic-linguistic approach is to introduce International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols and activities based on phonemic transcriptions. Given literate people's preoccupation with print and handwriting, spelling serves an important role in FL pronunciation teaching. The role of IPA is well illustrated by Sobkowiak (1996) on the example of the English language:

In a language such as English, with its crazy spelling, this is a great benefit. One sound is coded with one symbol, and one symbol stands for one sound, unlike in the spelling of *apple* above, where five letters symbolize three sounds, and the final <e> is 'mute', i.e. does not relate to any sound (Sobkowiak 1996: 24).

Learning IPA usually takes place after students have mastered their L1 speaking and writing skills. The idea, as pointedly remarked by the scholar, may be met with a cold reception from learners who have every right to feel unenthusiastic about memorising yet another coding system (Sobkowiak 1996).

Except mimicry and formal teaching, there were some other criteria taken into account to categorise pronunciation-based classroom work. For example, Murphy (1991) distinguishes between phonetic accuracy- and fluency-oriented tasks, involving repetition, reading out-loud and role-plays. Seidlhofer (2004) classifies examples of pronunciation activities under five main headings, including global holistic activities, cognitive analysis, sounds for meaning contrasts, ear training and mechanical exercises. Derwing and Munro (2015) make a division of tasks according to, for instance, their focus (sounds versus prosody) and the number of participants (pair-work versus group-work), to mention just a few.

Table 1 lists selected types of teaching techniques and activities that can potentially be implemented during instructed pronunciation practice.

Table 1. Overview of pronunciation teaching classroom techniques, procedures and activities (self-prepared)

| <i>Author</i> | Types of pronunciation teaching techniques and procedures | Selected activities |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> |
| <i>Kelly (1969)</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> intuitive procedures targeting perception and mimicry analytical procedures based on teaching discrimination and reproduction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> dictation minimal pair drills oral reading poetry and music pattern practice directed and free conversations drama games and projects |
| <i>Murphy (1991)</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> phonetic accuracy fluency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> repeating self-initiating the production practising stress pattern reading aloud with aural input reading out loud from written texts rehearsing one's speech patterns in front of a mirror rehearsing dialogues from plays |

| 1 | 2 | 3 |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Burns & Seidlhofer (2002)</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> elicited mechanical production ear training for sound contrasts sounds for meaning contrasts cognitive analysis whole brain and communication activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> manipulating stress phonetic training teaching phonemic script comparing L1 and TL sounds awareness-raising questionnaires recording of learners' production |
| <i>Seidlhofer (2004)</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> global holistic activities cognitive analysis (particularly for older learners) sounds for meaning contrasts ear training mechanical exercises | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> game-like activities whole-brain activities involving poetry and relaxation techniques phonetic training teaching phonemic script minimal pairs sound discrimination exercises listen and repeat tongue twisters |
| <i>Cruttenden (2008)</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> emphasis on consonants emphasis on vowels emphasis on accentuation multi-sensory reinforcement techniques drama techniques imitation techniques the use of different tools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> discrimination exercises direct articulatory instruction modifying lip shapes and jaw positions identifying weak forms in connected speech visual reinforcement (vowel charts, mouth diagrams) auditory reinforcement tactile reinforcement (learners experience a physical act of phonation) kinaesthetic reinforcement (hand gestures, body movement) role-plays simulations silent vowels mirroring songs, chants, jokes, cartoons, etc. |
| <i>Derwing & Munro (2015)</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> focus on sounds and prosody pair- and group-work use of technology perception and production of sounds | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> mirroring with focus on prosody, body language and speech habits dictation cloze dialogues |

| 1 | 2 | 3 |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Brinton (2018)</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing learners' motivation and autonomy • adopting multimodal approach to pronunciation • using technology | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishing “out-of-class learning opportunities”: collecting audio and video materials (Brinton 2018: 451) • developing pronunciation strategies • using visuals, gestures, sound and movement • introducing haptic pronunciation technique as advocated by Acton (2012) which requires “the coordinated use of movement, touch and gesture” (Brinton 2018: 453) • digital recording • automatic speech recognition • synchronous voice chat apps |

Introduction of any pronunciation activity—be that phonetic training, mirroring, tongue twisters or repetition—is fully justified once it is in line with a given educational context. Therefore, preferably, a number of considerations pertaining to, for example, FL learners’ age and level of proficiency should precede the choice of a pronunciation teaching technique. Children, who can uninhibitedly imitate TL sounds, may benefit from the intuitive-imitative approach to pronunciation. Adolescents and adults, on the other hand, are highly unlikely to remain unconstrained by their L1 sound systems and, thus, they are in greater need of formal instruction (Cruttenden 2008).

Once we have looked more carefully into the examples of pronunciation activities listed in the table above, it becomes evident that they employ at least one of two language modes, speech perception and speech production. Three combinations can be involved:

1. focus on the perception of TL sounds as in dictation, sound discrimination and sound identification,
2. focus on the production of TL sounds as during read-aloud tasks,
3. the combination of speech perception and production as during imitation, shadowing and role-plays.

The effectiveness of speech perception and production has been extensively investigated to assess the influence of the two on learners’ phonetic attainment. The proposals on how to improve pronunciation instruction have, as suggested below, favoured each of the language modes to varying degrees.

Traditionally, language production guided pronunciation instruction. The development of the articulatory abilities—most closely associated with the

improve participants' pronunciation attainment. intuitive-imitative approaches to pronunciation teaching—was believed to

The evidence supporting the above-mentioned claim can be found in Catford and Pisoni's (1970) study. The researchers conducted their research with two groups of English speakers who were expected to learn a set of exotic sounds having been involved in two kinds of instructions, auditory and articulatory training. The results demonstrated the advantage of speech production over speech perception in pronunciation instruction as the subjects "performed more than twice as well, in the production test, as Group B, with only auditory training" (Catford & Pisoni 1970: 6).

Nevertheless, in view of the fact that "correct articulation was impossible without some control by the ear" (Kelly 1969: 61), speech perception superseded speech production in FL instruction.

One of the controversial proposals relating to the superiority of speech perception over production in pronunciation instruction concerned the Tan-Gau method. Its founders, Tan Gwan Leong, Burmese Director of Education, and Robert Gauthier, assumed that an initial emphasis on the skill of listening creates conditions similar to L1 acquisition. Therefore, they recommended exposing learners to spoken input and allowing them to respond in their mother tongue.

Perceptual training has been considered effective in enhancing students' ability to discriminate between sounds. Gilbert (2008) underlined the significance of developing learners' language perception for the sake of successful listening comprehension. The scholar speculated about the negative consequences of students' inability to identify words:

So if students depend on the "dictionary pronunciation" of words, they will likely fail to recognize a spoken vocabulary item when they hear it, even though they "know" the item in print. In fact, they do not really know the word until they can identify it in actual speech (Gilbert 2008: 7).

Since the flow of natural speech is affected by a variety of context-dependent modifications, including changing patterns of intonation, rhythm and stress, FL students' reliance on dictionary-like (and, therefore, artificial!) pronunciation may prove catastrophic during communication.

Phonodidactic trends in language teaching

Scholars have generally remained divided over what guarantees the most viable solution in the area of pronunciation teaching. Some of them claimed that language production ensures pronunciation teaching and learning (e.g.: Catford & Pisoni 1970) while others found language perception more effective (e.g.: Baker & Trofimovich 2006).

Nevertheless, following Murphy (1991), Jenkins (2004), Seidlhofer (2004) and Cruttenden (2008), we would like to suggest that both language perception and production are vital to the field of phonodidactics. The order in which pronunciation activities are introduced to language classes is also an issue. It has been agreed that perceptual training combined with awareness-raising activities both at the level of segmental and suprasegmental features ought to precede production-oriented pronunciation practice (Vandergrift & Goh 2012 as cited by Newton 2018).

One of the proposals which fully implements the assumption is the framework for pronunciation teaching established by Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (1996). The scholars identify two stages, each of which requires teachers to take appropriate steps before and during instructed pronunciation practice. The planning stage involves some preparation on the part of language instructors: they analyse the TL with regard to its sound system to identify pronunciation difficulties and priorities. The teaching stage consists of five components which account for a chronologically ordered pronunciation instruction: from presentation through sound discrimination to sound production. Points III, IV and V of the teaching stage are structured in such a way so that to increase learners' autonomy *via*, firstly, controlled, then, guided and, finally, communicative language practice.

The underlying features of the two-stage framework are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin's (1996) framework for teaching pronunciation

| (1) Planning stage | (2) Teaching stage |
|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I. collection of data relating to the features of the TL | I. presentation of the TL sounds involving their description and analysis |
| II. making predictions about pronunciation difficulties | II. listening discrimination requiring focused listening practice |
| III. establishing pronunciation priorities | III. controlled practice including read aloud-based tasks of minimal pairs IV. guided practice focusing on structured activities such as information gap activities V. communicative practice introducing less structured activities |

A similar approach to pronunciation teaching has been taken by Nation and Newton (2009). The scholars divide the process of pronunciation teaching into four steps. The first one, the so-called “survey”, bears close resemblance to Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin’s (1996) planning stage. The remaining three roughly correspond to the teaching stage as they provide a transition from language perception towards language production (cf. Table 2 and Table 3). An

extra component which precedes theoretical phonetic training is that of the “analyse” step. The aim of awareness raising activities is to make learners cognizant of the difference between their L1 and the TL.

Table 3. Nation & Newton’s (2009) four-step approach to pronunciation teaching

| (1) "Survey" step | (2) "Analyse" step | (3) "Hear" step | (4) "Produce" step |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I. establishing pronunciation priorities for a particular group of learners | I. implementing awareness-raising activities which enable learners to notice differences between their L1 and TL articulatory settings | I. focusing on listening practice which encompass the segmental and suprasegmental features of the TL sound system | I. producing TL sounds |
| II. deciding which features of FL speech are particularly important and ought to take precedence in the classroom | II. introducing information on the sound system of the English language | II. exposing students to spoken language in both focused and global manner | II. engaging in imitative, then guided and, finally, independent practice |

What also deserves a particular attention in the current discussion is Szpyra-Kozłowska’s (2015) holistic multimodal approach to phonetic training. In contrast to Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin’s (1996) and Nation and Newton’s (2009) frameworks, it accounts for the teaching stage of pronunciation instruction only. On the one side, it draws from the traditional approaches to pronunciation, yet, on the other, it introduces a novel, that is multisensory, component to pronunciation teaching.

- Szpyra-Kozłowska (2015) isolates four types of training within her approach:
1. articulatory training which involves the development of learners’ automaticity *via* drills, minimal pairs and tongue twisters; and fluency through communicative pronunciation activities,
 2. auditory training which emphasises the development of learners’ comprehension *via* sound discrimination tasks, and their sensitivity towards different accents of English,
 3. cognitive phonetic and phonological training which aims to increase learners’ phonetic meta-competence and phonological awareness by providing them with theoretical information of L1 and FL sound production, sound contrast and L1 interference,

4. multisensory training which combines different sensory modalities to meet learners' learning styles, support other types of instruction and provide learners with deeper comprehension.

Szpyra-Kozłowska's (2015) proposal, even though initially based on the anecdotal evidence only, was empirically tested. The results of the experiment conducted with the intermediate Polish EFL learners (n=28) presented in Szpyra-Kozłowska and Stasiak (2016) reveal the effectiveness of the holistic multimodal approach. Two groups of secondary school learners participated in a three-month study, each of which was involved in a different kind of instruction, including the intuitive-imitative and holistic multimodal approaches. Szpyra-Kozłowska's (2015) approach to pronunciation teaching was not only more effective, but it was also positively evaluated by the subjects from the experimental group.

Concluding remarks

Even though the current discussion is far from exhaustive, we hope to have achieved our goal of contributing to a world-wide discussion whose goal is to put phonodidactics in the centre of teachers' and learners' interests.

At the beginning of the current discussion, we demonstrated that speakers' phonemic attainment is a guarantee for successful oral discourse. Mastery of segmental and suprasegmental aspects of TL pronunciation, firstly, prevents them from experiencing communication breakdowns and, secondly, allows them to clearly articulate messages, the products of the conceptualisation and formulation stages of speech production. Even though it is possible for an accented speech to be understood by interlocutors, there is every likelihood that speakers' poor pronunciation creates negative impressions about their social status, education and personality.

The influential position of pronunciation in spoken communication has, however, starkly contrasted with the FL classroom reality, in which grammar and vocabulary practice has been extensively promoted to the severe disadvantage of phonodidactics. One of the underlying causes may lie in the problematic nature of pronunciation instruction. It requires the choice of a teaching model and a set of pronunciation priorities. Apart from what to teach, decisions also need to be made with regard to how to teach.

In light of the glaring discrepancy between the negligence of inculcating correct pronunciation habits in speakers and the significance of good pronunciation in communication, our main goal was to reduce the bias towards phonodidactics by presenting readers with the fundamentals of this field of language education.

Given the immensity of the problem in question, we could offer insights only into the selected claims relating to the well-established traditions and recent

trends in pronunciation teaching. First of all, we made a traditional distinction into two most popular approaches towards pronunciation teaching. Readers' attention was drawn to such practices as the imitation of TL sounds (associated with intuitive-imitative approaches) and the direct instruction based, for example, on the presentation of L1 and TL articulatory settings (connected with analytic-linguistic approaches). Second of all, we attempted to reveal the usefulness of speech perception and speech production in pronunciation-oriented classroom activities. Third of all, we presented three approaches towards pronunciation teaching. To sum up, they require TL instructors to:

1. analyse their instructed settings (e.g.: learners' L1 and the TL; their age, language of proficiency, cognitive abilities) to identify pronunciation difficulties and priorities,
2. introduce a sequence of awareness raising, speech perception- and production-based pronunciation activities,
3. cater for different learning styles of students by conducting multisensory training.

It is difficult not to agree that teaching pronunciation may pose a major challenge to language instructors both at the level of planning and implementation of pronunciation teaching activities.

Nonetheless, it must be clarified that underdeveloped FL pronunciation skills will carry negative consequences every time learners get into short or long, face-to-face or telephone, casual or formal conversations. Is the game worth the candle then? We believe it is particularly today when the increased mobility of 21st century societies raise the likelihood of students making contacts with native and non-native speakers of the TL.

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