

Bringing pronunciation back into the ESL/EFL classroom: Current research trends and recommendations for teachers and teacher trainers

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ABSTRACT

Pronunciation instruction in English as a second/foreign language classes has often been limited or outright ignored in communicative approaches to second language (L2) teaching. In parallel, pronunciation research in the last two decades has witnessed a major paradigm shift driven by the premise that learners' speech needs to be intelligible and not necessarily native-like. L2 pedagogy, however, has not taken full advantage of the substantial body of research produced under this approach. The goals of this paper, therefore, are to bridge the gap between scholars and practitioners and to make recommendations for teachers and teacher trainers. The paper reviews the effectiveness of pronunciation instruction, synthesizes research on what aspects of English pronunciation should be taught and how, and examines English teachers' cognitions, beliefs, and training in pronunciation instruction. The last section discusses learners' goals and identities regarding English pronunciation within the English as a Lingua Franca framework.

Keywords: EFL, ESL, intelligibility, pronunciation instruction, teacher training

RESUMEN

La enseñanza de la pronunciación del inglés como lengua segunda o extranjera ha sido a menudo restringida o directamente ignorada en enfoques comunicativos de la enseñanza de una segunda lengua (L2). Al mismo tiempo, en las últimas dos décadas la investigación en el campo de la pronunciación ha atravesado un gran cambio paradigmático impulsado por la premisa de que el habla de una L2 debe ser inteligible y no necesariamente sonar nativa. Sin embargo, las pedagogías de la enseñanza de una L2 no se han hecho eco de los resultados de la investigación producida dentro de este enfoque. Por ende, el objetivo del presente trabajo es contribuir a cerrar la brecha entre investigadores y profesionales de la enseñanza de lenguas, así como presentar recomendaciones para profesores y formadores de profesores. El artículo analiza la efectividad de la enseñanza de la pronunciación, sintetiza estudios previos sobre qué aspectos de la pronunciación se deben enseñar, recomienda cómo deben enseñarse y explora las creencias, el sistema de cogniciones y la formación de profesores en lo relacionado con la enseñanza de la pronunciación. Por último, el trabajo analiza las metas e identidades que poseen los estudiantes en cuanto a la pronunciación en un marco que entiende al inglés como una lengua franca.

Palabras claves: enseñanza de la pronunciación, formación de profesores, inglés como segunda lengua, inglés como lengua extranjera, inteligibilidad

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Introduction

Most teachers will agree that speaking, one of the four skills traditionally addressed in the second language (L2) classroom, is the hardest to master as it involves using linguistic knowledge (often limited in the case of L2 learners) to produce language in real time. Most teachers also believe that L2 learners improve their speaking abilities as their grammar and vocabulary expand, which gives learners further confidence and a broader linguistic repertoire from which to draw. Seldom, however, is pronunciation seen as a building block of speaking competence or addressed pedagogically. The scant attention to pronunciation in current L2 teaching approaches arguably resulted from a counterreaction to previous methods of language teaching, in particular audiolingualism and contrastive analysis, where pronunciation became associated with decontextualized drills, repetition activities, and the avoidance of pronunciation ‘errors’ that resulted from the first language (L1). In the more meaning-oriented instruction of communicative language teaching (CLT), pronunciation has been left aside, considered an element of learning that would be “picked up” as a byproduct of communicative language use.

Although most L2 pronunciation scholarship had focused on *naturalistic* settings, that is, how pronunciation develops simply as a result of being immersed in the L2 community (e.g., Flege et al., 1997), the last two decades have seen an increased interest in how learners acquire pronunciation in a classroom, virtual environment, or any other context where someone manipulates or intervenes in the learning process. This type of research thus falls within *instructed* Second Language Acquisition (ISLA), whose goals include understanding L2 learning conditions and processes in instructed settings and how these conditions and processes facilitate the development of an additional language (Loewen, 2020). Findings from ISLA studies on pronunciation, however, have barely reached teachers nor have they impacted pronunciation instruction (PI) in the classroom. The goal of this paper, therefore, is to bridge the gap between scholars and practitioners by summarizing main trends in L2 pronunciation research and making recommendations for teachers and teacher trainers.

This paper will review studies conducted in classrooms as well as in more controlled, laboratory-based settings, which can also be considered ISLA research as they fit the definition by Loewen (2020) and others (e.g., Long, 2017) requiring a manipulation that potentially impacts learning. In some cases, however, noteworthy results from naturalistic research are also reviewed since they apply to the instructed setting. References consist of articles published in international, peer-reviewed journals and books by leading figures in the field. I privilege scholarship published within the last five years to reflect the state of the

art in the discipline. Finally, I include research from both English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL). Unless noted, findings from one context can usually be applied to the other.

Is pronunciation instruction effective?

Recent meta-analyses and narrative reviews synthesizing PI research have provided evidence that targeting pronunciation makes a positive difference in L2 learners' phonological development. For example, out of the 15 quasi-experimental (with a pretest and posttest design) studies surveyed in Saito (2012), 13 showed improvement resulting from PI. The two studies where improvement was not found probably contained an intervention that was too short or pretest scores that were at ceiling and did not allow for improvement in the posttest. Most studies in Thomson and Derwing (2015) showed significant improvement after learners received PI, although these gains were clearer where instruction targeted narrow constructs—such as the problematic /i/-/I/ vowel contrast in English, while few studies examined how instruction can improve learners' overall comprehensibility in the L2. Building upon the meta-analytic study by Lee, Jang and Plonsky (2015), Saito and Plonsky (2019) synthesized results from 77 studies, comprising 2,573 participants, 1,961 of whom received PI while 612 were control participants. Results from a fine-grained statistical analysis suggested that the effectiveness of PI is clearer for segmental and suprasegmental features (as opposed to global measures) and when speech is elicited in controlled tasks.

Regarding methodology, these syntheses and reviews strive to broaden their scope, hence they are mostly—but not exclusively—about L2 English. They are important not only because they bring together similar questions put forward in previous studies, but also because they signal the field has matured and produced substantial findings that deserve critical examination. In addition, by scrutinizing methodological trends in the field, these reviews recommend new directions in research designs. For instance, Saito and Plonsky (2019) discuss their results around three main dimensions involving research on the effects of PI: (a) what construct is being measured (whether it is specific, such as individual segments, or global, such as degree of foreign accent), (b) how pronunciation samples are collected (through a controlled task, such as reading a list of words, or a spontaneous one, such as narrating a story), and (c) how pronunciation is measured (objectively, such as an acoustic analysis of sounds, or subjectively, such as overall impressions by human raters). Saito and Plonsky found that most studies (57.1%) used controlled tasks to elicit pronunciation, which complements Thomson and Derwing's (2015) review of 75 pronunciation studies, where 56% used controlled tasks exclusively. As a recommendation for the field, these authors urge researchers to incorporate more spontaneous elicitation tasks to increase the ecological validity of their studies.

In conclusion, data from these meta-analytic and narrative reviews provide evidence that instruction leads to greater gains in pronunciation when compared to mere exposure to the language. When no or small effects are found, this is often due to issues in the design and not necessarily because PI is ineffective. Researchers are encouraged to use the lessons learned to extend and replicate the existing body of literature. Also, several studies reviewed in these syntheses were conducted in lab settings; therefore, applications to the classroom are not always apparent. Future research—even if limited to observations at the initial stages—should concentrate on pronunciation learning as it occurs in more ecologically valid contexts, such as the classroom or virtual environments.

What aspects of English pronunciation should we teach?

If asked whether they would like to sound like native English speakers, most L2 learners would say yes. English teachers and ISLA researchers know, however, this is extremely difficult to achieve. The most important question is whether sounding like a native speaker is necessary for successful communication. Though the answer seems obvious, the native speaker paradigm has been pervasive since audiolingualism and it has not only misguided instruction but also caused frustration for learners and teachers alike. The departure from this paradigm began in the 1990s when scholars such as Derwing and Munro introduced three crucial constructs in the field of L2 pronunciation research, namely *intelligibility*, or how much of what speakers say can be understood, *comprehensibility*, or the amount of effort required to understand speakers, and *accentedness*, or the degree to which speech deviates from a native variety or standard (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Munro & Derwing, 1995). In a landmark article, Levis (2005) pushed the paradigm forward by contrasting the dominant *nativeness* principle, which holds that “it is both possible and desirable to achieve nativelike pronunciation in a foreign language” with the *intelligibility* principle, which proposes that “learners simply need to be understandable” (p. 370).

Priorities for teaching pronunciation change drastically when we shift the focus from nativeness to intelligibility. Instruction can target pronunciation features that are most important for intelligible and comprehensible speech. Choosing critical aspects also allows instructors to maximize the often-limited contact students have with English in an instructed setting. Recent research under this new paradigm sheds light on what this instruction may look like. A major consideration is the focus on segmental versus suprasegmental features of English pronunciation. For many decades suprasegmental information was believed to carry more importance. Anderson-Hsieh et al. (1992), for example, has frequently been cited to support this claim. In this and similar studies, however, pronunciation was operationalized as degree of nativelikeness, thus crediting the nativeness principle. When comprehensibility and intelligibility are considered, however, the picture is not so clear. Recent studies suggest that comprehensibility is affected not only by pronunciation but also by factors such as lexical richness and grammar (Isaacs & Trofimovich, 2012). Some studies support the notion

that suprasegmental features contribute the most to comprehensible speech in English (e.g., Gordon & Darcy, 2016). However, as the field moves to an intelligibility and comprehensibility paradigm, we need to revise what we know about the segmental and suprasegmental dimensions of English and how it affects pronunciation (for more on this issue, see Zielinski, 2015). That said, in the view of scholars such as Derwing and Munro, “there is little value in attempting to determine a definite answer” in part because “difficulties of each kind [segmental or prosodic] depend to some degree on the learner’s L1” (2015, p. 73).

I agree with Derwing and Munro. Learners’ L1 is crucial in prioritizing what segmental and suprasegmental information to teach. Spanish speakers, for example, are known for having problems with the pronunciation of consonant clusters in both word-initial (e.g., /sk/ in “school”, /sp/ in “spirit”) and word-final (e.g., /tft/ in “watched”) positions. In the last example, mispronouncing the verb ending may cause intelligibility issues ([wɒtft] vs. [wɒtʃ]). In contrast, the widely researched /l/-/ɹ/ contrast which causes problems for Japanese speakers is not an issue in the context of L1 Spanish. At the suprasegmental level, the complexities of English stress—with its long words and secondary stress patterns—seem to pose a challenge for most learners regardless of L1. Combinations of different L1s and even individual learners’ idiosyncrasies result in abundant variability within a classroom; therefore, instructors are advised against a one-size-fits-all approach (Munro et al., 2015). It is beyond the scope of this article to summarize the vast literature on segmental and suprasegmental features of English pronunciation and how to teach them. Readers should refer to Celce-Murcia et al. (2010), which breaks down pronunciation learning within a communicative approach and has rightfully established itself as a favorite among ESL/EFL teachers. Levis (2018) thoroughly reviews many of the traditional segmental and suprasegmental challenges in English pronunciation from the perspective of the intelligibility principle. Finally, as an example of a publication that addresses L1-specific challenges, Gómez González and Sánchez Roura (2016) provide an excellent resource to understand and better teach Spanish speakers learning English.

The concept of functional load provides another useful tool to determine what aspects of English phonology teachers need to prioritize. This concept posits that some sound contrasts carry more weight than others, and thus are more important in determining error gravity and intelligibility. Factors such as word class (part of speech), word frequency, and position of the sound in the words that form a minimal pair work together to determine if the sound contrast has a high or low functional load. For example, the contrast /s/-/z/ in initial position has a low functional load (6% on Catford’s scale, 1987) as it appears in relatively few minimal pairs and for words that are not very frequent in the language (e.g., ‘seal’ vs. ‘zeal’), whereas the functional load rises to 38% when the contrast is considered in word-final position (e.g., ‘piece’ vs. ‘peas’), though in some cases context and word class will disambiguate the pair (e.g., noun ‘rice’ vs. verb ‘rise’). Vowel contrasts such as /æ/-/ʌ/ (as in

“cat” vs. “cut”) have high functional loads, as expected (though see discussion in Sewell, 2017, on dialects with vowel neutralization). Originally applied to L2 pronunciation more than three decades ago (Brown, 1988; Catford, 1987), this concept has recently produced a number of studies that test its principles, especially in relation to what contrasts affect speakers’ intelligibility and comprehensibility the most. Munro and Derwing (2006) found that utterances with low functional load errors (e.g. /f/-/θ/) produced by Cantonese speakers learning English were associated with increased comprehensibility, as compared with utterances with high functional load errors (e.g., /s/-/ʃ/), a result confirmed in a recent study of Japanese learners of English by Suzukida and Saito (2019). In sum, results from L2 English functional load research, in conjunction with L1-specific challenges, may help ESL/EFL teachers set instructional priorities for segmental features of English that will yield the greater outcomes when attempting to increase learners’ comprehensibility.

How should we teach pronunciation?

The recent surge in L2 pronunciation research has also pointed out best practices for PI in the classroom. As noted by Saito (2012), pronunciation instruction “has been notorious for its overdependence on decontextualized practice such as mechanical drills and repetition, reminiscent of the audiolingual teaching methods of several decades ago” (p. 842). Baker (2014), one of the few studies that relied on actual classroom observations, noticed that the preferred type of pronunciation activities among five experienced ESL teachers was indeed controlled in nature, such as repetition drills, discrimination and recognition of sounds, and reading words or sentences out loud focusing on specific pronunciation features. This kind of instruction potentially enhances pronunciation in controlled speech production but might be less useful for the development of spontaneous speech. In addition to being limited in scope, PI tends to be *reactive*, that is, in response to learners’ errors (Couper, 2017; Foote et al., 2016). For example, in 40 hours of videotaped lessons taught by three experienced ESL instructors in Canada, Foote et al. (2016) found that 78 (or 86%) out of 91 pronunciation-related episodes were teachers’ reactions to learners’ errors, while only the remaining 14% consisted of preplanned activities that targeted pronunciation. In this context, mainstream pronunciation pedagogy desperately needs *proactive* interventions where pronunciation is purposefully included in lesson plans. A few ideas and examples follow on how to accomplish this, along with research that supports them.

Some strategies and methods for PI fit within well-known approaches to general L2 instruction (see Couper, 2015, for an extensive review). Principles of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), for example, have been empirically tested in the realm of pronunciation and initial evidence suggests that TBLT can indeed be extended beyond grammar and lexis, as recently covered in a special issue of *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* (Gurzynski-Weiss et al., 2017). TBLT literature posits that the benefits of tasks lie in their ability to draw learners’ attention to form while they collaborate with an interlocutor towards a

communicative goal. In pronunciation learning, where accurate perception of L2 sound contrasts is crucial, tasks may direct learners' attention to key phonetic forms and hence aid in the development of speech perception and production (Mora & Levkina, 2017). The common debate in ISLA on implicit versus explicit learning and instruction has also trickled down to pronunciation teaching. Though dismissed during initial communicative approaches, explicit instruction is now believed to have an important role in pronunciation development. As Darcy (2018) proposes, explicit instruction can raise awareness of specific phonetic features and, with time and practice focused on meaning, learners can develop automaticity of features initially learned explicitly. Readers are advised to consult Darcy (2018) and Darcy et al. (2012), two open-source publications packed with research-grounded, practical suggestions on how to bring English PI into the classroom.

When teachers need to respond to learners' pronunciation issues, research suggests that there are better options than the commonly used overt corrections or direct requests to repeat a word. For instance, quasi-experimental studies have highlighted the effectiveness of reactive corrections (i.e., feedback) coupled with form-focused instruction (Saito & Lyster, 2012a, 2012b). Saito (2015) found that Japanese students who received four hours of form-focused activities along with recasts (i.e., reformulations of learners' production in a target-like manner) on their production of English /ɪ/ improved their production of this sound significantly more than control group participants who only received form-focused instruction. Recasts on learners' production in Parlak and Ziegler (2017), however, did not lead to benefits in the development of lexical stress in English in either face-to-face or computer-mediated instructional settings. Although recasts are the most common type of corrective feedback in L2 instruction and their benefits have been widely documented in general L2 research, their nonintrusive nature also means recasts may go unnoticed by learners. Indeed, teachers interviewed in Baker and Burri (2016) declared that they sometimes needed a more direct approach to providing pronunciation feedback, as recasts did not always work, which authors also corroborated while observing classes taught by these instructors. These findings call for further investigation into the role of recasts in L2 phonology, particularly in classroom settings, where these techniques can be challenging to implement.

Recent years have seen a surge in innovative techniques and tools to teach English pronunciation. Gestures, for example, are often used in the teaching of suprasegmental features. In an attempt to study the range and usefulness of gestures, Smotrova (2017) observed a beginner-level class taught by an experienced ESL teacher and found that a variety of gestural tools such as clapping and head tilts, used by both teacher and students, facilitated understanding and production of English words stress, syllables, and rhythmic patterns. Shadow reading (or *shadowing*), an activity that requires learners to listen to speech while trying to imitate it as closely as possible, has been sporadically used in pronunciation

teaching, but recent research has supported its benefits for pronunciation development (Foote & McDonough, 2017).

Technology has also emerged as an ally for both teachers and learners, as more and more people worldwide use apps, software, and websites to learn and teach English (see Fouz-González, 2015, for a review on technology and pronunciation). Technology-supported learning seems particularly relevant as I write this article during a world pandemic (COVID-19) which has seriously limited traditional, classroom-based instruction. Even though many sites claim to help learners improve their pronunciation, only a few are created with findings from pronunciation research in mind. For example, *English Accent Coach* (Thomson, 2017) offers a free, interactive platform designed to help learners recognize English sounds. Thompson (2012) used this technology to train Mandarin speakers to perceive English vowels. YouGlish is a powerful and fun tool that allows users to search for specific words, hear them used in different contexts (sometimes hundreds or thousands, depending on word frequency), and see a transcription of the audio. Users can not only listen to idiosyncratic uses of the word but also observe dialectal variations (now American, British, and Australian English are available). Twitter has been successfully used to deliver short lessons on commonly mispronounced English words (Kartal & Korucu-Kis, 2020; Mompean & Fouz-González, 2016). These studies show that new technologies and social media can draw learners' attention to specific aspects of English pronunciation through the use of popular and readily available audiovisual materials, which increases learner engagement and motivation (for example, consult Mompean & Fouz-González, 2016, who provide an appendix with a list of tweets used in the study). Technology can also be used to deliver instruction synchronously, as an alternative to classroom instruction. Research in this area suggests that computer-mediated communication (CMC), while not superior, is at least as effective as face-to-face (FTF) communication for pronunciation learning (Loewen & Isbell, 2017; Parlak & Ziegler, 2017), which mirrors findings on the effectiveness of CMC and FTF instruction beyond pronunciation (Ziegler, 2016). These findings bode well for ESL/EFL instruction conducted partially or fully in a virtual learning environment.

How are we preparing instructors to teach pronunciation?

Despite the mounting body of work that suggests PI makes a difference, survey-based research has shown ESL/EFL teachers believe PI is important but feel unprepared to implement it. As Darcy highlights, the “consistent uncertainty voiced by teachers about teaching pronunciation and the overall low satisfaction they feel about how they teach it stands in contrast to their clear perception of its importance” (2018, p. 18). In the context of ESL teachers in Canada, Foote et al. (2011), extending a study by Breitkreutz et al. (2001), found that only 23% out of 201 participants considered PI not worth undertaking. At the same time, however, only half felt completely comfortable teaching segmental (58%) and suprasegmental (56%) aspects of English pronunciation, while 75% desired more training in

pronunciation. Similarly, Uruguayan EFL teachers interviewed in Couper (2016) viewed PI as an important component in the classroom but were uncertain how to incorporate it into their lesson plans. Brazilian EFL teachers in Buss (2016), in contrast, felt mostly comfortable teaching pronunciation but—in line with previous studies—expressed a desire to have more pronunciation training. A small sample of ESL teachers from New Zealand interviewed in Couper (2017) acknowledged the importance of both segmental and suprasegmental features but their answers in other parts of the survey also showed that in the classroom they focused on segmental accuracy. These trends in EFL/ESL teaching are mimicked by L2 teachers of other languages such as Spanish (Nagle et al., 2018), and French and German (Huensch, 2019), which further suggests the field of ISLA as a whole should critically review how and if teachers are being trained to impart effective PI.

The debate over whether native or nonnative English speakers are more effective teachers of the language seems particularly relevant in the teaching of pronunciation. Anecdotally, we have all heard several students (and a few teachers) say that native speakers naturally have ‘better’ pronunciation and serve as better models for learners. An increasing number of scholars, however, are investigating this issue and proposing we categorically reject the notion of native speakers as the ideal teacher, not only for pronunciation (e.g., Murphy, 2014) but in general ESL/EFL teaching (Selvi, 2014). All other factors being equal, nonnative teachers can be as effective as native speakers. In a study designed to compare students’ accentedness and comprehensibility in English as a factor of having a native or nonnative teacher, findings from Levis et al. (2016) revealed that learners’ improvement between pretest and posttest was not related to the instructor but, perhaps unsurprisingly, to students’ motivation to learn English as well as their use of—and exposure to—English outside the classroom. Furthermore, Murphy (2014) discusses that nonnative speaker teachers may possess unique assets such as an increased sensitivity to the challenges they experienced themselves as students (e.g., case study by Gordon, 2019) and the positive role model of someone who achieved very high proficiency in the L2 ‘despite’ not being a native speaker.

Training is critical in helping teachers develop knowledge of and best practices in PI (Murphy, 2014). While previous research has suggested that the practices of more experienced teachers are difficult to change through training (Darcy, 2018), novice instructors and student teachers appear to be more malleable and receptive to education in PI. For example, Burri, Baker, and Chen (2017) concluded that novice (pre-service) teachers are more likely to adopt new and innovative teaching techniques for PI than in-service teachers are. Framed within a language teachers’ cognition approach (Borg, 2006, 2011), studies that assessed the impact of training have also seen changes in teachers’ beliefs about and attitudes towards PI. Burri, Chen, and Baker (2017) followed the development of both identity and teacher cognition among 15 student teachers enrolled in a postgraduate course on English pronunciation at an Australian university. Findings from a qualitative analysis

revealed that participants changed deeply during the 13-week course, in crucial areas such as their identities as native or nonnative teachers or the importance they attributed to PI. In a pre- and posttest design, Buss (2017) also found that a course in English phonology and pronunciation positively changed the awareness of PI among 18 undergraduate TESL students at a Canadian university.

In terms of how to best train English instructors in pronunciation, I echo the sentiments of several scholars who remind us that training in English phonetics and phonology is not the same as training in pronunciation pedagogy (Burgess & Spencer, 2000; Henderson et al., 2015; Murphy, 1997, 2014). Courses in English phonetics and phonology are common throughout the world as part of the preparation of ESL/EFL teachers. These courses raise teachers' awareness of formal aspects of English and, in the case of nonnative speakers, they may also help teachers improve their own pronunciation. Therefore, these courses are intended to help teachers, but they do not necessarily or directly help the learners with whom those teachers work. A course or module in the pedagogy of pronunciation should train teachers to handle English pronunciation in a manner that best meets learners' needs. The next and final section focuses on learners' needs and goals regarding PI in today's world.

English pronunciation for a globalized world

Teachers might ask what variety of English they need to teach. This question is particularly relevant in terms of pronunciation, where dialectal differences become apparent sooner than they do for grammar or vocabulary. Teachers should adopt the variety of English they feel most comfortable with if English is not their first language. Irrespective of what variety of English (native or chosen) they prefer, teachers should be wary of ideas associated with *standard* or *proper* pronunciation, historically associated with British Received Pronunciation (RP) and more recently with General American (GA) English. In a globalized world, English is increasingly an international language, shaped and owned by its users, as the English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and World Englishes paradigms have taught us (Bhatt, 2001; Jenkins, 2007). The community of English users is composed of speakers who learned English as their first language *and* those who have learned it as an additional language.

Jenkins's (2000) Lingua Franca Core (LFC) compiled a set of segmental and suprasegmental features believed crucial for intelligible speech, regardless of speakers' L1 or accent. For example, aspirated fortis plosive consonants /p/, /t/, /k/ in stressed syllable-initial position are part of the LFC, while dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ are not. For vowels, contrasts between long and short vowels are part of the LFC as well. Zoghbor's (2018a) recent examination of the LFC, for example, found support for most of the LFC features for Arabic-speaking learners of English. Principles established in World Englishes and ELF approaches, however, are not without their critics. Tsang (2019), for instance, argues that these principles are not always realistic or easy to implement (e.g., how are instructors

around the world, many of whom are still working in contexts with beliefs and teaching materials that favor ‘standard’ varieties of English, expected to present learners with a wide range of nonstandard varieties and convince them of their usefulness?) or overlook the fact that intelligibility is often subjective, dependent on factors such as interlocutors’ proficiency level and, more importantly, familiarity with and attitudes toward the speaker’s variety or accent. Tsang proposes, therefore, ‘glocalizing’ (adapting to a globalized world while also attending to specific local needs) the ESL/EFL curriculum. Tsang’s proposal contemplates the possibility that teachers and administrators in certain contexts choose to teach and assess pronunciation based on their specific needs and learners’ goals, even if the result is choosing a ‘standard’ variety such as RP or GA English.

Much of the discussion so far implicitly argues that learner’ priorities should dictate how we approach PI. This might seem self-evident, but teachers and curriculum developers, acting in good faith, often impose what they think is best for learners. In reality, however, students’ goals for learning English vary dramatically even inside the same classroom. Recommendations to uphold intelligibility over nativeness, for example, are based on what scholars and teachers consider most practical and achievable. Yet, there could be learners who truly desire to eliminate their accents. These students also deserve to receive sound pedagogy and advice from their instructors. Learners might also aspire to acquire the pronunciation of a certain English variety due to past experiences with English and the communities where it is spoken (e.g., travel abroad or interests in English-speaking pop culture) or with whom they hope to interact in the future. In a study of English learners’ linguistic identities in South Korea, for example, Park (2020) reported that participants wished to sound like an English native speaker of the United States, probably due to the multilingual nature of Seoul and the high value attributed to American English. In contrast, Francophone and Chinese learners of English in Quebec, Canada, were judged as less loyal by peers in their own communities if their English sounded too nativelike, thus highlighting complex issues of identity and affiliation with the L1 and L2 communities (Gatbonton et al., 2005).

Some scholars suggest that the first step in helping learners shape their identities as speakers of English in a global community is to expose them to many varieties of English (Jenkins, 2012; Pennington, 2015). Easy access to digital audios from around the world and tools such as YouGlish provide teachers with unprecedented opportunities to bring multiple varieties of English into the classroom. Still, the notion that learners can make these choices on their own might be too idealistic. Zohgbor (2018b), following authors such as Tsang who advocate for a more context-sensitive approach to PI, reminds instructors it is often difficult to predict what kind of English learners will need, especially in EFL contexts. I would add that many learners might see English just as another course or subject they need to pass and they may not anticipate using it beyond the EFL classroom. Teachers must be cognizant of these realities when setting priorities for pronunciation instruction.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to demonstrate that pronunciation can and must be addressed in ESL/EFL teaching and learning. An impressive amount of research on L2 pronunciation in the last two decades has paved the way to accomplish this goal. We now possess a better understanding of how teachers can implement effective pronunciation instruction and how learners' phonological competence develops in an instructed setting. Language teachers have the unique opportunity—and responsibility—to aid learners improve their pronunciation when their learning ceases or slows down, their L1 gets in the way, and mere exposure to the L2 appears not to be enough.

This paper covered a wide variety of topics in L2 pronunciation instruction. I hope I have whetted readers' curiosity to consult the references in this paper, especially those broad in scope and with practical application (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Grant, 2014; Levis, 2018). Instructors inclined to undertake their own investigations are encouraged to design classroom-based studies, perhaps with their own students. Themes in this paper can serve as a springboard for these teachers/researchers to generate ideas and design their studies. Crucially, we need to further test the effectiveness of new technologies and methodologies in pronunciation teaching and learning. Replication is also critical to advancing sound pedagogies; what works for learners in one context might not work well or at all in another. Longitudinal studies that follow learners over an extended period of time (e.g., several years) will also shed light on what aspects of pronunciation develop naturally and which ones require targeted instruction. Teacher trainers and personnel in administrative positions are strongly encouraged to evaluate and modify, if necessary, how pre- and in-service instructors are trained to teach L2 pronunciation. Even a short module on L2 pronunciation instruction within a course of studies or in professional development endeavors can motivate teachers to implement some of the techniques and methodologies discussed above. This is an exciting time to be a second language pronunciation researcher. This paper has shown this is also an exciting time to expand pronunciation instruction in ways that better help learners develop their communicative competence in a second language.

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