

## **EFL Pronunciation Teaching: A Theoretical Review**

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This study aims to represent the developing status of pronunciation teaching and presents the current perspectives on pronunciation learning and teaching, coupled with innovative approaches and techniques/activities. It is argued that pronunciation teaching methodologies have changed over decades since the *Reform Movement*. The exact status of teaching pronunciation appeared first in the Audio Lingual Methods and continued in the Communicative Language Teaching methods; however, the ways of teaching pronunciation have explicitly a long history. In this study, the researcher scrutinizes the most influential factors in pronunciation learning, the knowledge of which can by and large facilitate both the teaching and the acquisition of pronunciation. Next, the focus of the article will be placed mainly on pronunciation intelligibility as a more realistic purpose of pronunciation pedagogy and instruction. Additionally, the article discusses a number of suggestions for teaching pronunciation and indicates that the teaching of pronunciation can be made more effective and facilitative in the EFL classrooms by offering some state-of-the-art teaching approaches to pronunciation convenient to EFL environment, along with a set of diverse techniques/activities. Finally, the study outlines the current innovative approaches and gives new insights into pronunciation instruction.

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## EFL Pronunciation Teaching

English as an international language, also referred to as an international medium of communication, is learnt by multitudes of speakers of different languages throughout the world. There has been a striking growth, an enormous population explosion in the last quarter of the century, in student numbers across the world, and especially in adult and near-adult learner groups (Morley, 1991). And this phenomenon has triggered radical alterations in instructional and pedagogical programs and in perspectives on language learning and teaching in recent decades. In parallel to a gradual move within the field of language acquisition, with putting greater emphasis on learner and learning-centered classroom rather than teacher and teaching-centered one, a drastic shift from specific linguistic competencies to broader communicative competencies has emerged as goals for teachers and students in which four dimensions of communicative competence are identified: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence ( Morley, 1991; Canale & Swain, 1980). As qualified EFL teachers, we are familiar with the linguistic theory of oral communication and its accentuating the communicative competencies, coupled with the prominence of effective interaction between the speaker and the listener regarding scores of interrelated psychological, linguistic, and communicative aspects. As for linguistic elements, it is evident that nonnative speakers can successfully develop native-like proficiency in speaking sub-skills such as in vocabulary, grammar, pragmatics, and the like; pronunciation is one critical field most learners have severe difficulty with regarding the significant impact of learner's mother tongue, age, attitude, motivation, etc (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996). Despite attaining expertise in other communicative components, lacking an intelligible pronunciation leads to an abortive and/or meaningless communication. As Fraser (2000) states

being able to speak English of course includes a number of sub-skills, involving vocabulary, grammar, pragmatics, etc. However, by far, the most important of these skills is

pronunciation; with good pronunciation, a speaker is intelligible despite other errors; with poor pronunciation, a speaker can be very difficult to understand despite accuracy in other areas. Pronunciation is the aspect that most affects how the speaker is judged by others, and how they are formally assessed in other skills. (p.7)

Pronunciation accuracy may also help escalate one's social status since speaking with a foreign accent may be degraded and stigmatized by native speakers and, therefore, ESL/EFL learners may forfeit their true standing and thus, result in social and/or professional discrimination (Derwing, Rossiter, & Munro, 2002). Hence, pronunciation intelligibility is of great importance for successful oral communication to take place since a reasonably intelligible pronunciation is an essential component of communicative competence (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996; Morley, 1991). "Ironically, pronunciation is also the aspect of language that is most difficult to acquire. Although some people with 'an ear for language' can 'pick up' pronunciation very effectively, for most, it requires special tuition" (Fraser, 2000, p. 7).

### A Review of Perspectives on Pronunciation Teaching

Over the decades, the role of pronunciation in language teaching has witnessed drastic changes in both its functional and instructional perspectives. There have been three core periods in which pronunciation teaching saw radical shifts in terms of methodologies.

- Pre Reform Movement Era

In this era, pronunciation had either a reputation as a subject language teachers preferred to avoid (Fraser, 2006; Macdonald, 2002) or it was taught implicitly depending chiefly on the learner's capability of imitating the sounds and rhythms without any explicit instruction alluding to intuitive-imitative approach of teaching pronunciation (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

Having been viewed as totally irrelevant, pronunciation has found no place in Grammar-Translation method and Reading-based approaches in which oral communication in target language

is not a primary instructional objective (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996; Florez, 1998). In the Direct method, originated in late 1800s and early 1900s, pronunciation was considered an important component; albeit, the methodology for teaching pronunciation was not rigorously nurtured and was primitive: The teacher is ideally a native or near-native speaker of the target language presenting pronunciation inductively and correcting through modeling, meanwhile, learners are to listen meticulously and do their utmost to reproduce the sounds through imitation and repetition (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

- **Post Reform Movement Era**

In 1890s, the first systematic contribution to pronunciation teaching in terms of linguistic analysis of sound systems took place as it had become the center of focus of a handful of scholars such as Henry Sweet, Wilhelm Viëtor, and Paul Passy who developed the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) within the field of phonetics. And this analytical contribution strongly influenced a movement which instigated a prominent shift in language acquisition known as Reform Movement. Concurrently, the advent of IPA paved the way for the emergence of another pronunciation teaching approach known as analytic-linguistic approach, an explicit type of instruction in which the emphasis was on phonetic alphabet, articulatory description, and contrastive information as a complement to intuitive-imitative approach (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

- **1940s and 1950s**

In the audio-lingual approach, established in the United States, pronunciation, coupled with correct grammar was very prominent and a high-priority goal with great emphasis was put on the traditional notions of pronunciation, minimal pair drills, phonemes, morphemes, and short conversations (Celce Murcia & Goodwin, 1991; Morley, 1991). This approach accentuated the application of phonetics and phonology and brought them into the language curriculum as it was thought that correct articulation of L2 sounds required a basic perception of the mechanisms for L2 and L1 sound production (Lambacher, 1996). Likewise, Situational language teaching, developed in Britain between 1940 and 1960,

also reflected the audio-lingual view of the pronunciation pedagogy (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Morley (1991) states “the pronunciation class in this view was one that gave primary attention to phonemes and their meaningful contrasts, environmental allophonic variations, and combinatory phonotactic rules, along with structurally based attention to stress, rhythm, and intonation” (p.484). However, the shortcomings associated with this method were too much emphasis on production and failure to take into account perception of the aspects of English sounds that are most important in communication, excessive focus on individual sounds rather than intonation (prosody), and less attention on conversations and sentences (Fraser, 2000).

- **1960s through 1970s**

In 1960s, with the development of cognitive approach which strongly endorsed the notion that native-like pronunciation could not be attained and seemed unrealistic in conjunction with its proponents’ avowal that time would be better spent on more learnable sub-skills such as grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation lost its pivotal role in the language curriculum which had once been deemed necessary (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). It was during these years that questions were posed about the role of pronunciation in the ESL/EFL curriculum whether there should be any instructional focus solely on pronunciation or whether it can be taught explicitly at all (Morley, 1991). Pronunciation programs until then were “viewed as meaningless non-communicative drill-and-exercise gambits” (Morley, 1991, p. 486). This newly shaped attitude toward the uselessness of pronunciation teaching and the notion that “little relationship exists between teaching pronunciation in the classroom and attained proficiency in pronunciation; the strongest factors found to affect pronunciation (i.e. native language and motivation) seem to have little to do with classroom activities” (Suter, 1976, p. 241) resulted in the elimination or significant reduction of pronunciation as an instructional component (Purcell & Suter, 1980).

In 1970s, the two predominant methods\_ the Silent Way and Community Language Learning\_ viewed pronunciation as an essential component; however, practiced it quite divergently (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

To Silent Way advocates and trainers, the production of accurate L2 sounds as well as other phonological elements of an utterance such as stress and intonation was deemed crucial and ,accordingly, dealt with from embryonic stages of learning. It can largely be likened to Audiolingualism except for the fact that in Silent Way phonetic alphabet or explicit linguistic instruction has no place in the language program(Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

As for Community Language Learning (CLL), correct pronunciation receives special attention to an extent which would gratify the learners. CLL pronunciation approach as in the Direct Method is intuitive-imitative and the only difference appears in the content and degree of practice which is learning-centered and controlled by the learner (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

According to Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) the Reform Movement practices from the 1890s and the Audiolingual/Oral Approach from 1940s to 1950s are considered as the methods in the forefront of instruction while the Direct Method and naturalistic methods from the late 1800s to the early 1900s are considered to be the methods in the back wings of instruction.

- Modern Era

As can be seen from the preceding discussion, throughout the decades, the role of pronunciation teaching underwent wild ups and downs. However, since the beginning of mid-1980s to the present time, the overall attitude toward the role and instructional prominence of pronunciation as a potent and essential communicative element has been consistent (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). In line with what has just been pointed, it is worth mentioning that the emergence of Communicative Approach currently dominant in language teaching, which emphasizes communication as the central purpose of language instruction, instigates pronunciation teaching to receive a renewed urgency (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

### - **Through 1980s into 1990s**

This period is well-known for the increasing and to some extent insatiable interest in engendering and designing ESL curriculum in which pronunciation component is highly taken into consideration. A considerable part of this attention is placed on pronunciation in specific areas and for specific purposes, that is, academic, professional, etc. (Morley, 1991). Coincidentally, in 1980s, Communicative Approach came into attention. This approach strongly focuses on oral communication as a primary use of language and therefore should be central in language instruction (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). As Beebe (1978) states, in order for ESL learners to have meaningful communication, it is important to consider that pronunciation like other elements of language such as grammar, syntax, and discourse organization, communicates. “The very act of pronouncing, not just the words we transmit, is an essential part of what we communicate about ourselves as people” (Beebe, 1978, p. 3). Particularly, in adult or near-adult ESL programs, it is regarded crucial that language instruction serves a reasonably intelligible pronunciation as an imperative goal since neglecting such a goal is just “an abrogation of professional responsibility” (Morley, 1991, p. 489) to better serve this end as Morley (1991) suggests, students will attain more desired results if pronunciation class becomes an integral part of oral communication rather than dealing with it solely as an isolated pedagogy. Moreover, the purpose of pronunciation teaching is not to help students obtain native-like or perfect pronunciation but more realistically to help them develop functional intelligibility through which the spoken English becomes easy to understand and leaves a positive image of the speaker of a foreign language (Fraser, 2000).

### - **Current Perspectives**

In line with the mentioned shift in language acquisition, in which learning has received more attention and emphasis rather than teaching, due to the popularity of English learning throughout the world, communicative competencies as a broader scope have been largely stressed than more specific linguistic competencies (Morley, 1991). According to Morley (1991), “intelligible

pronunciation is an essential component of communication competence” (p.513). In the knowledge of such a move in language instruction and with the realization of pronunciation as an influential communicative element, pronunciation teaching appeared to be treated multidimensionally (Morley, 1987).

The following are the mainstream principles and directions about pronunciation teaching in modern-day instructional curriculum:

1. The integration of pronunciation with oral communication is required, that is to say, communicative approaches to pronunciation teaching (Morley, 1987; Otlowski, 1998) in order for nonnative speakers to communicate both effectively and understandably with native speakers, it is imperative to teach them pronunciation in parallel to communicative practices (Otlowski, 1998).

2. There should be a shift in priorities from segmentals to suprasegmentals and an appropriate integration of the both, and ideally given the pronunciation constitutional features such as voice quality, facial expressions, etc. (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996; Morley, 1987). According to Cohen (1977), failure in maintaining a perceptible communication attests to the inadequacy of the teaching of segmental phonemes.

3. There should be more emphasis on self-correcting and self-monitoring by increasing the speech awareness and autonomy of the participants and by the help of teachers chiefly as supporters (Kenworthy, 1987; Morley, 1991),

4. More focus should be placed on meaningful task-based practices within communication mode and real-life situations known as contextualization (Bowen, 1972; Celce-Murcia & Goodwin, 1991). According to Bowen (1972), "one way to affect an improvement would be to find means of better integrating pronunciation instruction with other elements of instruction" (p.89).

5. Attention should be paid to “pronunciation-oriented listening instruction” (Morley, 1991, p. 494). Gilbert (1984) observes the interdependency of listening comprehension and pronunciation and therefore states “if they cannot hear English

well, they are cut off from the language. If they cannot be understood easily, they are cut off from conversation with native speakers” (p. 57).

6. The impact of the discipline of psychology due to the undeniable influence of emotional factors on pronunciation learning and psychologically related factors such as students' ego and level of self-confidence, establishing a stress-free ambiance related to pronunciation practice and the use of drama techniques to better deal with students' emotions (Wrembel, 2001).

7. The role of Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP), a set of techniques and strategies about the function of mind and the act and react of people, used to induce a desired state of mind in which learning occurs naturally and most efficiently through positive messages and suggestions of success sent by the teacher which lead students to facilitative states (Wrembel, 2001).

8. Sound presentation within a multi-modal method; that is, a combination of auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and tactile. This way, learners can hear a sound, visually see the movement of lips and tongue, feel the distinction and try to reproduce it (Acton, 1997).

9. “A focus on the uniqueness of each ESL learner” (Morley, 1991, p. 495), some researchers have offered various pronunciation teaching techniques and activities related to each intelligence type included within the theory of Multiple Intelligences by Howard Gardner's (1983) (Hismanoglu, 2006). Take for example, students with visual/spatial intelligence, they can make best use of techniques such as using a mirror, wall charts, card games, etc., while techniques like tossing a ball, using a rubber band, knee bending / body language, balloon squealing, etc. can be best for those with bodily / kinesthetic intelligence (Thompson, Taylor, & Gray, 2001).

10. The use of technology for the teaching of pronunciation\_ Computer Assisted Pronunciation Teaching (CAPT). Many teachers have admitted the benefits taken from CAPT pedagogy (Chun, 1989; Molholt et al., 1988; Pennington, 1988; Perdreau & Hessney, 1990) since it provides learners with a stress-free privacy within which they can access almost unlimited input, practice at

their own pace and receive instantaneous feedback through the integration of Automatic Speech Recognition (Hismanoglu, 2006).

The Table below summarizes the several pronunciation-teaching approaches since the teaching of language started (Taken from Su Tseng Lee, 2008).

Table 1

*Pronunciation-Teaching Approaches*

<b>Years</b>	<b>Approach</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
The late 1800s and early 1900s	Direct Method	Teachers provide students with models for native-like speech. By listening and then imitating the model; students improve their pronunciation.
(1940s – 1950s)	Audio lingual method in USA, Oral approach in Britain	Pronunciation was taught explicitly from the start. Learners imitated or repeated after the teacher or a recording model. Teachers used a visual transcription system or articulation chart. Technique: minimal pair drill
(1960s)	Cognitive approach	This de-emphasized pronunciation in favor of grammar and vocabulary because (a) it was assumed that native-like pronunciation was an unrealistic objective and it could not be achieved and (b) time would be better spent on teaching more learnable items, such as grammatical structures and words.
(1970s)	Silent way	The learners focused on sound system without having to learn a phonetic alphabet or explicit linguistic information. Attention was on the accuracy of sounds and structure of target language from the very beginning. Tools: sound-color charts, the Fidel charts, word charts, and color rods.
	Community language learning	The pronunciation syllabus was primarily student initiated and designed. Students decided what they wanted to practice and used the teacher as a resource. The approach was intuitive and imitative.

Mid-late 1970s- 1980s	Communicative approach		The ultimate goal was communication. Teaching pronunciation was urgent and intelligible pronunciation was seen as necessary in oral communication. The techniques used to teach pronunciation were: listening and imitating, phonetic training, minimal pair drills, contextualized minimal pairs, visual aids, tongue twister, developmental approximation drills, practice of vowel shifts and stress shifts related by affixation, reading aloud/recitation, recordings of learners' production.
Twentieth century	Grammar translation and reading-based approaches		Oral communication was not the primarily goal of language instruction. Therefore, little attention was given to speaking, and almost non to pronunciation.
	Naturalistic methods	Total physical response	Students would begin to speak when they were ready. They were expected to make errors in the initial stage and teachers were tolerant of them.
Natural approach		The initial focus on listening without pressure to speak gave the learners the opportunity to internalize the target sound system.	
Today	New directions		New thoughts from other fields, such as drama, psychology, and speech pathology. Techniques: the use of fluency-building activities, accuracy-oriented exercises, appeals to multisensory modes of learning, adaptation of authentic materials, and use of instructional technology in the teaching of pronunciation.

### Influential Factors in the Learning of Pronunciation

The fact is that when we learn a second/foreign language in early childhood, there is a great likelihood that we learn to speak it fluently and often without any conspicuous foreign accent (Fraser, 2000). As we grow older, the chance becomes so slim and to large

extent impossible to acquire native-like accent (Fraser, 2000; Scovel, 1988). "At first glance, it looks as though learning second language pronunciation should be easy: a simple matter of imitating the pronunciation of native speakers. In practice, of course, the reality is quite different" (Fraser, 2006, p. 82). There are several linguistic and notably psychological factors that affect a non-native English speaker's pronunciation in ways that are not so true about grammar or vocabulary, most of which are learner-based factors which inhibit or slow the process of pronunciation acquisition. Recognizing these factors can help teachers integrate effective pronunciation practice into the curriculum (Kat Bradley-Bennett, 2007). However, it is worth mentioning that too much emphasis on pronunciation and incessant focus on it distracts the learners from the meaning of the content (Parrish; cited in Kat Bradley-Bennett, 2007).

- Learners' Native Language

Leather and James (1991) claim that since adults have already consciously formed and developed their L1 sound system, they tend to use the established sound patterns and categories of their L1 which makes it difficult for them to perceive and reproduce the different sounds in L1 and L2 (Cited in AMEP Fact sheet). "Characteristics of a first language largely determine speech production in a second, non-native language," (Weil, 2001, p. 64) known as *Foreign Accented Speech* which can span from a barely perceptible accent to strongly accented, unintelligible speech. To corroborate what has just been pointed, according to contrastive analysis theory, L1 acts like a filter in SLA meaning that where the two languages share the same structures, the learners' mother tongue assists the acquisition process and where structures are either totally different or nonexistent in L1, the native language interferes (commonly referred to as negative transfer from L1) (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

A learner's native language can interfere in L2 pronunciation learning in three ways identified by Avery and Ehrlich (1992). First, when the sound system of L1 is different from the sound system of the target language. As Ur (1996) states, a learner's pronunciation errors may have roots in: 1). if a particular sound

does not exist in native language. Thus, the learners can't form it, so they try to substitute the nearest equivalence they know. As a typical example, we can refer to /d/ or /z/ for the English /ð/, 2). If a sound exists in native language but not as separate phoneme and learners do not perceive it as a distinct sound, as a result, they fail to pronounce it correctly. As an example, in Hebrew both /I/ and /i:/ (ship/sheep) sounds occur, but which is used depends only on whether the sound comes in the word or phrase, not what the word means. So the Hebrew learners cannot even hear these differences in English. These are called "allophonic variation" of a phoneme or "allophones."

Second, when the rules of combining sounds into words (phonological rules such as phonotactic constraints/rules) are different in L1 and L2, learners face trouble to pronounce the words accurately (Windfuhr, 1979). To further illustrate this point take for example, Farsi syllables cannot be initiated with vowels; on the other hand, vowels can initiate syllables in English. Another difference is that syllable-initial consonant clusters are impossible in Farsi; however, some consonant clusters can occur in both syllable-initial (onset) and syllable-final (codas) positions in English (Windfuhr, 1979). In addition, syllable-final consonant clusters in Farsi normally take no more than two consonants in their structure, but in English, consonant clusters are not limited to two consonants (Hall, 2007). In this regard, a Farsi speaker might mistakenly pronounce *estudent* instead of *student*, and etc. Thirdly, when the patterns of stress and intonation are different, learners automatically transfer the L1 patterns into the L2. To more indicate the prominence of prosodic features, suffice it to say as Munro and Derwing (1999) observed, sometimes prosodic errors (errors in stress, intonation, and rhythm) can decrease pronunciation intelligibility more than those of phonemes (errors in single sounds).

- Age

It is widely believed that adults are very unlikely to attain a native-like accent, while both empirical and anecdotal findings attest to the fact that children can generally acquire a target-like proficiency in pronunciation (Lenneberg, 1967). The

mentioned claim may be well backed up by a theory proposed by Lenneberg (1967) known as “Critical Period Hypothesis”. According to this theory, there is a biological or neurological period during which the maximal conditions to learn a language exist and as learners pass this period their ability to acquire a second language drastically diminishes, noticeably in pronunciation this competence reduction is highly conspicuous (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). The cut off age ending this period in case of pronunciation acquisition was formerly believed to be around 13, but recent researches substantiate that even after the age of 6, the learners' accent is discernible to be non-native albeit with slight discrepancy (Fraser, 2000). It is, however, worthy of mentioning here that the effects of age on pronunciation learning have suggested that there is a progressive decline rather than a strong drop-off after puberty in the ability to learn the sounds of a new language (Yates, 2002). “The good news is that these neurological differences between adults and children seem to result from a change, rather than a deterioration, in the way the sounds in a new language are processed, and so training **can** help adults improve in their ability to discriminate new sounds and establish new phonetic boundaries” (Yates, 2002, p. 14).

- Motivation

The learners' motivation and the desire to be integrated in the target language and be an indistinguishable member of the target society (known as integrative motivation) serves as a very strong factor to help learners acquire native-like or near-native pronunciation (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). According to research findings, having a personal or professional goal for learning English can influence the need and desire for native-like pronunciation (Bernaus, Masgoret, Gardner, & Reyes, 2004; Gatbonton, Trofimovich, & Magid, 2005; Marinova-Todd, Marshall, & Snow, 2000; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). The review by Marinova-Todd et al. (2000) of research on adult acquisition of English concluded that adults can become highly proficient even native-like speakers of second languages, especially if motivated to do so. Hence, in case there appears neither strong motivation nor

need to attain, say decent pronunciation, no wonder the instruction fails to come to fruition.

- Aptitude (phonetic ability)

It is generally believed that some learners are relatively weak in phonemic coding ability: the capacity to discriminate and code foreign sounds. (Amongst one of the four traits constituting language aptitude identified by Carroll (1965, 1981)) Thus, teachers as well as pronunciation curriculum should be sensitive and compatible to such aptitude differences (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

- Attitude and Cultural/Ethnic Identity

As measured by Pronunciation Attitude Inventory (PAI), attitude toward acquiring native-like pronunciation plays a crucial role in easing the process of pronunciation learning. That is, if the students are more concerned about their pronunciation of the target language, they tend to have better pronunciation of the target language (Elliot, 1995). Aside from attitude, Strong feelings of ethnic identity may consciously or unconsciously inhibit a learner from any serious attempt to make any distinguishable change to their accent which signifies their social identity and ethnicity (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2006). According to Diaz-Rico and Weed (2006), the students' accent is part of who they are culturally and ethnically. Building sensitivity to the fact that we all speak in different ways to different interlocutors, may help learners become more comfortable with the idea that they can change their accent in different situations (Yates, 2002).

- Exposure to Target Language

Greater exposure to the target language makes it easier to acquire good pronunciation (Krashen, 1982). Given Krashen's language learning theory (1982), prior to any language acquisition, the input learners receive primarily determines how much they acquire language. Thus, before being required to speak, students need to receive large amounts of perceptible input (Krashen, 1982). No wonder why EFL learners are frequently confronted with drastic problems in face of learning pronunciation due to general lack of authentic oral discourse with native speakers (Fraser, 2000). Even in ESL setting, many speakers are likely to

live and work in what is known as linguistic ghettos where they again have little meaningful exposure to the target language thus inhibiting their acquisition (Morley, 1991). The burden is on teachers to counterbalance such a barrier to pronunciation learning by providing students with as much exposure as possible inside and outside the class walls (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). By providing adequate model of the target language inside the classroom, teachers can also encourage learners to listen to a context that is both comprehensible to the students and relevant to their lives beyond the classroom walls. Students should be exposed to different voices and through different modes of delivery (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2006).

- Instruction

Was there any formal English instruction? If so, did it involve drilling isolated vocabulary or sounds out of context? Was the students' prior instruction taught by instructors whose own pronunciation deviated from the norm? The answers given to these questions can help teachers take into account and deal with any possible fixed or systematic pronunciation errors (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). "If learners have had good pronunciation training before, this will help them. If they've had ineffective training or no training, they're at a disadvantage" (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996, p. 16).

### Focus on Intelligibility as a More Realistic Goal

The pronunciation goals and needs of adult English language learners are diverse depending on a variety of factors including: the use of language, the learners' purpose and setting, their motivation to sound native-like, the frequency with which they speak English (Flege, Frieda, & Nozawa, 1997; Gatbonton, Trofimovich, & Magid, 2005; Moyer, 2008). Most people, however, agree that the most appropriate goal for learners is intelligibility not perfection. There is a wide consensus that only a few people can acquire native-like accent especially after the age of puberty (Lenneberg, 1967). Thus, wishing students to learn perfection is only holding an unrealistic goal which might discourage learners who have failed to achieve so. Besides, it

gradually instills failure into teachers who have repeatedly been defeated to reach their goal (Morley, 1991).

- What Is Intelligibility?

Yates (2002) identified three main elements constituting intelligibility:

- *accentedness*, or the strength of accent;
- the degree to which the listener can understand what is being said; and
- *interlocutor load*, or the difficulty the listener has in understanding what is said.

A strong accented speech may be totally unintelligible, or it otherwise requires a great deal of effort to perceive that is, the interlocutor load is high (Yates, 2002). Sometimes in case the accent is familiar to the listener, even a strong accent can be simply understood. In this sense, we came to realize that intelligibility is a ‘two-way process’ between the speaker and the listener. A speaker may therefore be unintelligible due to their accentedness or because of something about the listener that impedes the intelligibility (Yates, 2002).

To put it succinctly, pronunciation intelligibility is to achieve a level of pronunciation which does not hinder the learners' ability to communicate (Morley, 1991).

Overall prosody (including stress, rhythm and intonation), phrasing and sense groups, intonation, word stress, rhythm (use of stressed and unstressed syllables), syllable structure, segments (sounds), and voice quality are prominent elements, listed by Yates (2002), which make a speaker intelligible in the target language. Thus, in order for teachers to achieve intelligibility as number-one goal of the pronunciation instruction, the above-mentioned elements should be included and taken care of in the pronunciation syllabus.

- How to Achieve Intelligibility?

There is no single strategy that can exclusively lead to achievement in pronunciation intelligibility. On the contrary, there need to be a couple of strategies and elements being prepared and well-integrated which are fully coordinated according to the

ability, age, motivation, mother tongue and goal of the instruction and learners (Morley, 1991).

On the whole, a successful instruction must take the following suggestions into account and deal with them prior to any attempt to begin pronunciation teaching. It also needs to be stated that the following recommendations are made within the context of the communicative method of teaching that is almost the most employed method in ESL/EFL classrooms.

- **Teaching Approaches**

To provide a concise explanation of approaches to pronunciation teaching, the 'bottom-up approach' begins with the articulation of individual sounds or phonemes and works up towards stress, rhythm, tone and intonation. On the other hand, the 'top-down approach' starts with patterns of intonation and brings separate sounds or phonemes into sharper focus as and when required (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994). According to Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994), the former is based on the idea that if the segmentals are taught first, the suprasegmentals will subsequently be acquired without the need to formal instruction whereas the latter rests on the assumption that once the suprasegmental features are in place, the necessary segmental discriminations will follow accordingly. The core concern of 'bottom-up approach', traditional approach, is with isolated sounds and native like pronunciation is emphasized, however, given current studies, the 'top-down approach' appears to be more effective in teaching of L2 pronunciation (Gilbert, 1984).

A true top-down approach to pronunciation should begin at the broadest level of phonology, that of voice quality (Evans & Jones, 1994). Pennington (1996) defines voice quality as the 'overall pattern' of suprasegmental features that 'results in the general auditory impression of the speaker's voice'. This interaction of features rather than the separate features in isolation is what really gives pronunciation its communicative force.

Pitch, rhythm, stress, Speed, loudness, vocal setting, and the realization of particular phonemes, work together to create a constellation of phonological characteristics that although complex, is immediately recognizable to native speakers as

signaling a specific meaning, mood, or attitude towards the listener or topic (Evans & Jones, 1994).

### Classroom Techniques/Activities

Before presenting any activities, it is worth mentioning that some certain aspects of the English pronunciation appear to be easily taught; namely, phonemes, stress while others, such as intonation are extremely dependent on individual circumstances and therefore, practically impossible to separate out for direct teaching (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994). Thus, Due to pedagogical reasons, it might be helpful to think about the teachability-learnability of pronunciation aspects, those which are more teachable and learnable and also essential in terms of intelligible pronunciation should receive higher attention and be set as the prior goal of pronunciation instruction.

Based on the exploration and critical analysis of the different approaches to teaching pronunciation and what seems to be teachable and learnable for EFL classroom settings, the following techniques and activities that according to influential pronunciation researchers (e.g. Morley, 1991; Scarcella & Oxford, 1994; Fraser, 1999; Thompson, Taylor & Gray, 2001) appear to be useful for learners and teachers alike are proposed (Maniruzzaman, 2007).

- Utilization of known sounds: In the early stage of learning, the learner, especially the young one can be helped to compare the sounds of the target language with those of his/her mother tongue. This eventually helps the learner produce the EFL sound pattern to a considerable extent (Maniruzzaman, 2007).
- Explanation: Explanation of how to produce sounds or use pronunciation patterns appropriately should be kept to a minimum through directions about what to do with the vocal organs can help some young and adult EFL learners in some circumstances (Maniruzzaman, 2007).
- Communication activities: The teacher can design communicative tasks, such as dialogues or mini-

conversations for both young and adult EFL learners according to their linguistic level to practice particular sounds, especially those which are not available in their mother tongue, for example, /ɾ, ə, ɪ, ʊ, and ð/in case of Farsi speaking learners (Samareh, 2000). Besides, the learner can be taught some useful communication strategies, such as retrieval strategies, rehearsal strategies, cover strategies which will help him/her give the impression that his/her pronunciation is better than it really is (Oxford, 2000).

- Written versions of oral presentations: At the more advanced levels, learners can be given strategies for analyzing the written versions of their oral presentations. This helps them detect, identify and correct errors or mistakes committed in their oral presentations (Maniruzzaman, 2007).
- Modeling and individual correction: In this technique, the teacher reports the results of analyses of learner speech samples individually. The young or adult learner gets feedback from the analyses and stops repeating previous errors or mistakes (Maniruzzaman, 2007).
- Incorporation of novel elements: The instructor can add novel pronunciation elements, such as sounds, stress placement, tones to the old ones with the use of directions. This helps both the young and the adult learners get their EFL pronunciation further improved (Maniruzzaman, 2007).
- Tutorial sessions and self-study: Tutorial sessions commence with a diagnostic analysis of each learner's spoken English, and an individualized program is designed for each learner. This technique can be used for both young and adult learners (Maniruzzaman, 2007).
- Self-monitoring and self-correction: Self-monitoring is the conscious action of listening to one's own speech in order to find out errors and mistakes. This action is followed by self-correction standing for the process of fixing one's errors and mistakes after they have occurred by repeating the word or phrase correctly. By teaching our adult learners to self-monitor and self-correct, we enable them to make their

learning of EFL pronunciation more personal, more meaningful and more effective (Maniruzzaman, 2007).

- Reading aloud: The learner can be given a piece of spoken text to read out loudly. Here the teacher's job is to identify pronunciation errors and mistakes made by the learner, and then give feedback that will help the learner improve his/her EFL pronunciation (Maniruzzaman, 2007).
- Computer-assisted language learning: Computer-assisted language learning or CALL can be an important tool when attempting to help the learners become more autonomous by allowing them to hear their own errors and mistakes and see both segmental and suprasegmental graphic representations (Neri et al., 2002). CALL benefits the learners by letting them study at their own pace in a semi-private environment as well as allowing them to build profiles that enable the teacher to monitor the learners' improvement in EFL pronunciation. In addition, the teacher can exploit visual displays of speech patterns to teach intonation, stress and phonemes to individuals and small groups of learners. This tool can be used for both young and adult learners, but in an adjusted manner (Neri et al., 2002).
- Innovative Approaches to the Teaching of Pronunciation

To embrace communicative and holistic approaches in foreign language teaching which are the principal approaches in ESL/EFL classrooms, new developments have sprung into pronunciation curriculum which are mostly affected by other disciplines such as psychology, neuro-linguistics, drama and technology. In the following, some innovative perspectives that can make the acquisition process more facilitative will be presented (Wrembel, 2001).

- **Communicative Perspective**

Unlike the previous approaches focusing merely on accurate production of sounds and intonation patterns without considering the prominence of the interaction of the sound with function and meaning, now the scope of pronunciation instruction came to realize the interrelation of accuracy and fluency. Consequently,

fluency-based communicative activities are more and more often incorporated into pronunciation instruction, particularly into initial stages of a lesson in the form of warm-ups (Fraser, 2000).

- Voice quality/Setting

Voice quality refers to characteristic features of a given language such as pitch level, vowel space, neutral tongue position and the degree of muscular activity resulting from using organs of articulation in a particular way (Jenner, 1997). It is highly believed that some practical phonetics can be best learned through a more native-like voice 'quality' or 'setting', and mastering sound segments alone cannot lead to achievement in learning (Esling & Wong, 1983). Jenner (1997) identified some general features of the English voice such as the position of larynx which is neutral or slightly lowered and is used with low energy and low tension, the effect of which makes the English sounds rather relaxed and 'breathy' or the use of tongue tip being extremely active and frequently moving toward the alveolar ridge (Wrembel, 2001). Wrembel (2001) suggested the following techniques that can help learners develop general features of the English voice:

- speaking with a light object placed between the lips (e.g., a pen, a cap) which indicates a small degree of opening in English,
- using a 'yawning' voice when counting in English to lower the position of the larynx, - applying breathing exercises to achieve an almost total laxity of the English voice,
- exaggerating the length of long open vowels and diphthongs produced in context, e.g., *I'll see to the tea, How now, brown cow?* (Wrembel, 2001), as long vowels in English are closely connected with muscular laxity,
- practicing rhythmic sentences with frequent /t/, /d/ or /n/ sounds to activate the tip of the tongue to make contact with the alveolar ridge, e.g., *Tip this tin into the bin.*

- Drama Techniques

Drama techniques focus mainly on warming up the organs of speech through tongue exercises and increasing pitch range through intonation exercises. They also deal with the mechanics of speech, the breathing process and visualize the shape of mouth, posture and body language (Wrembel, 2001).

These techniques are particularly efficient to help students attain more control over their articulation and eradicate those fossilized pronunciation (Wessels & Lawrence, 1995). The techniques offered below are among most applicable drama techniques presented by Wrembel (2001).

- Relaxation and posture: these exercises are designed to release tension as stiff bodies impair our breathing and, consequently, decreasing voice control (Wrembel, 2001). They include assuming a correct posture, basic stretching exercises and relaxation of face muscles by ,e.g., smiling broadly or tensing and relaxing facial muscles by making the face as big and then as small as possible. The main aim is to relax and warm up the organs of articulation for further training.

- Breathing and resonance exercises: a basic breathing exercise consists in breathing in for a count of three, holding the air inside for three, and releasing the air for three. Resonance exercises involve inhaling the air and letting it out on a long vowel or a consonant-vowel sequence (e.g., *aaah*, *oooh*, *eeee*, *mmaaaaa*, *mmmoooo*, *mmuuu*) (Wrembel, 2001).

- Phoneme sequences: practicing phoneme sequences can be compared to playing scales on the piano, so that the production becomes semiautomatised, e.g., *lee lay la low lu*, *pin nip pin nip*, *thick tin thick tin* (Wrembel, 2001).

- Pitch, volume and rate control: producing sound sequences or whole passages progressively louder or softer and at different rates of delivery; practicing (i.e., singing, humming, chanting) sentences like '*I can make my voice go really high / fall really low*' with a gradually falling or rising intonation (Wrembel, 2001).

- Tone awareness exercises: learning to use resonators to create particular tones (e.g., soft or harsh, bright or dull, etc). This can be accomplished through practicing mini-dialogues expressing each time different emotions such as surprise, anger, great pleasure or politeness, e.g.,

*'Let's go for a walk.'* '*OK.*' (Wrembel, 2001).

- Articulation exercises: called 'vocal warm-ups' since they help to exercise the muscles of the mouth and the tongue, contributing to a greater articulatory agility and clearer speech. They include

popular tongue-twisters (e.g., *She sells sea shells on the sea shore*), chants and raps (Wrembel, 2001).

- Imitations of a native-speaker model:
  - mouthing - miming a dialogue without words
  - mirroring – repeating simultaneously with the speaker and imitating his/her gestures and facial expressions
  - tracing – repeating simultaneously without mirroring the speaker's gestures
  - echoing – repeating slightly after the speaker (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

### Conclusion

Although there is recently a wide consensus on the significant role of pronunciation as an integral part of communication, the teaching of ESL/EFL pronunciation is currently less than optimally effective; An important reason would be the lack of suitable instruction in which students' needs, level, and ability are taken care of and/or it lacks any methodical tuition. Pronunciation must be viewed as more than correct production of individual sounds or isolated words. Instead, teachers should incorporate pronunciation into their oral skills and focus on both segmental and supra-segmental features. Thanks to recent researches and technological advances in the field of linguistics, there are now several methods for the teaching of pronunciation regarding all influential factors, coupled with the application of current perspectives on pronunciation acquisition such as the impact of the discipline of psychology, the role of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), Multisensory modes, etc. An interdisciplinary approach to the teaching of pronunciation is what prevails nowadays. The one that applies findings of the science of the brain, appeals to different senses, takes advantage of drama and voice production techniques and allows for affective factors as well as sociopsychological issues such as identity, ego boundary or interpersonal relationships (Wrembel, 2001). It is hoped that this paper will provide teachers of foreign language pronunciation with theoretical and practical insights into a variety of pronunciation

perspectives, techniques and resources, make best use of innovative approaches, apply potent and integrated classroom activities and, consequently, enhance pronunciation instruction.

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## آموزش تلفظ در زبان انگلیسی به عنوان زبان خارجی: بررسی نظری

حمید نیکبخت

دانشگاه فردوسی مشهد

در این مقاله به بررسی وضعیت رو به بهبود آموزش تلفظ و دیدگاه‌های کنونی بر آن و همچنین شیوه‌های نوآورانه به همراه تکنیکها و روش‌های یادگیری و آموزش تلفظ پرداخته شده است. شیوه‌های آموزش تلفظ طی دهه‌های اخیر به خصوص پس از جنبش اصلاحات دستخوش تغییرات زیادی شده است. آموزش تلفظ به صورت خاص برای اولین بار در متد صوتی-زبانی پدیدار گردید و در تدریس زبان به شیوه گویایی ادامه یافت؛ هر چند که روش‌های آموزش تلفظ تاریخچه‌ای بس طولانی دارد. در این مقاله، محقق به مطالعه دقیق عامل‌های موثر بر یادگیری تلفظ پرداخته است. مطالعه‌ای که در تسهیل کردن آموزش و فراگیری تلفظ به صورت گسترده‌ای کمک خواهد کرد. سپس، در ادامه مقاله تمرکز عمدتاً بر قابل فهم بودن تلفظ به عنوان هدفی واقع بینانه تر در آموزش و تعلیم تلفظ خواهد بود. و همچنین، پیشنهاداتی برای آموزش تلفظ ارائه و نشان داده شده است که آموزش تلفظ در کلاس‌های یادگیری زبان به عنوان زبان خارجه با ارائه به روزترین و موثرترین شیوه‌های تدریس تلفظ بسیار آسان و ثمربخش خواهد بود که در این مقاله مجموعه‌ای متنوعه از این شیوه‌ها و تکنیکها معرفی می‌گردد. نهایتاً، محقق روش‌های کنونی و نوین آموزش تلفظ را به اختصار ذکر کرده و بینش‌های جدیدی در تعلیم تلفظ ارائه می‌دهد.

کلید واژه‌ها: آموزش تلفظ، شیوه‌های نوآورانه، قابلیت فهم، تکنیکها/روش‌ها