



TEACHING PRONUNCIATION IN ESL/EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract: Language teachers recognize the importance of clear pronunciation for effective communication. Pronunciation is a crucial aspect of learning to speak, and students often request additional class time for it. Teachers typically struggle with incorporating pronunciation into their curriculum, despite its importance. Teachers must integrate pronunciation into speaking-oriented classrooms in a way that aligns with the course's oral communication goals (Murphy, 1991).

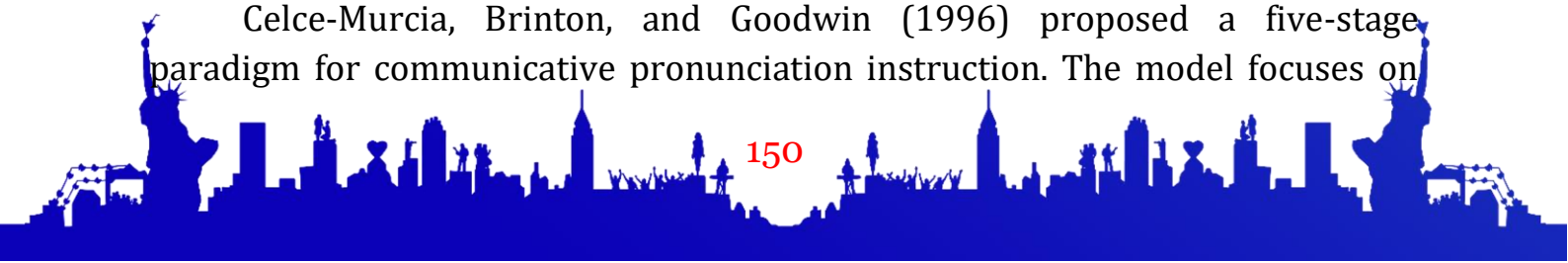
Research suggests that teaching pronunciation in the context of speaking is more successful than focusing just on fluency or articulatory goals (Firth, 1993; Morley, 1991). Murphy (1991) emphasizes the need of integrating pronunciation teaching with other communicative activities to promote meaningful communication between speakers and listeners. We want to integrate without focusing solely on pronunciation in the classroom, but recognize that implementation is still ongoing integration. For over a decade, there has been a push for instructors to include pronunciation into oral communication, but there has been no guidance on how to do so effectively.

Key words: paradigm, suprasegmental, semistructured, manner, communicative pronunciation, listening comprehension, corrections, speaking-based, speech qualities, pronunciation traits, accidental speech, incorporating pronunciation, Slowing speech, chunking words.

Introduction: This article discusses the practical issues of incorporating pronunciation into spoken communication. To begin, we discuss the challenge of incorporating proper pronunciation into the educational setting. We propose general rules for incorporating pronunciation into oral communication training. Finally, we analyze implementation options for four common classroom activities that may be used in various educational situations. The activities primarily focus on suprasegmental elements like emphasis, rhythm, and intonation, rather than segmental. Although consonants and vowels are not crucial for communication, suprasegmentals have a more significant role in spoken English.

Educating Pronunciation and Spoken Communication: Issues.

Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (1996) proposed a five-stage paradigm for communicative pronunciation instruction. The model focuses on





improving awareness of pronunciation, perception, and oral practice. Oral practice for segmental and suprasegmental characteristics evolves from controlled reading to semistructured information gap exercises and conversations, followed by less structured communication. Oral practice shifts from focusing just on phonological form to emphasizing both form and meaning simultaneously.

This framework may be used by teachers in a variety of ways, but it is often applied in two ways based on the primary skill of the course. In pronunciation lessons, teachers often go from organized pronunciation practice to more conversational speaking practice. Teachers typically prioritize controlled or supervised practice over conversational pronunciation, neglecting the latter. Pronunciation is often overlooked during speaking practice.

To teach speaking or oral communication, teachers typically begin with less regimented practice and progress to pronunciation. Teachers often handle pronunciation in an ad hoc manner, using it as a remedial remedy for obvious faults. Students typically do not receive adequate practice opportunities to improve their speaking and pronunciation skills. Teachers often struggle to integrate communicative pronunciation into a listening and speaking course, resulting in ad hoc corrections that hinder the course's communicative goals.

Existing textbooks provide two options for merging pronunciation and speaking education. While pronunciation-based texts include communicative exercises, their focus on phonetic qualities makes them unsuitable for primary use in oral communication courses. However, many speaking-based or integrated-skills texts lack a consistent focus on pronunciation.

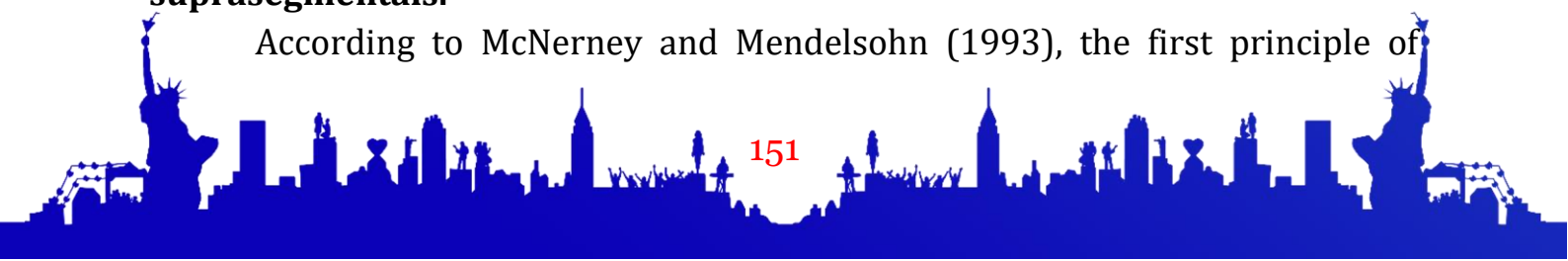
Pronunciation often focuses on improving listening comprehension through controlled oral reading or repetition. Speaking-oriented pronunciation teaching often involves controlled oral reading or repetition. A decade ago, a researcher discovered that speaking and listening are more prevalent in oral communication texts than pronunciation (Murphy, 1991, p. 64).

Guiding Principles

Our approach to pronunciation in speaking sessions is based on both practice and theory. These ideas prioritize connecting speech qualities to their communication tasks, rather than focusing solely on the sound system without context.

Principle 1: Prioritize primary thoughts and avoid focusing solely on suprasegmentals.

According to McNerney and Mendelsohn (1993), the first principle of





teaching is to prioritize suprasegmentals (such as emphasis, rhythm, and intonation) as they are more likely to contribute to intelligibility than segmentals. However, intelligibility is not the sole reason for their significance in the speaking classroom. Suprasegmentals are more significant to speaking abilities due to their link to discourse meaning and related speech compared to segments. Stress, rhythm, and intonation impact entire utterances, making them directly related to spoken language proficiency.

Principle 2: Focus on speaking in class.

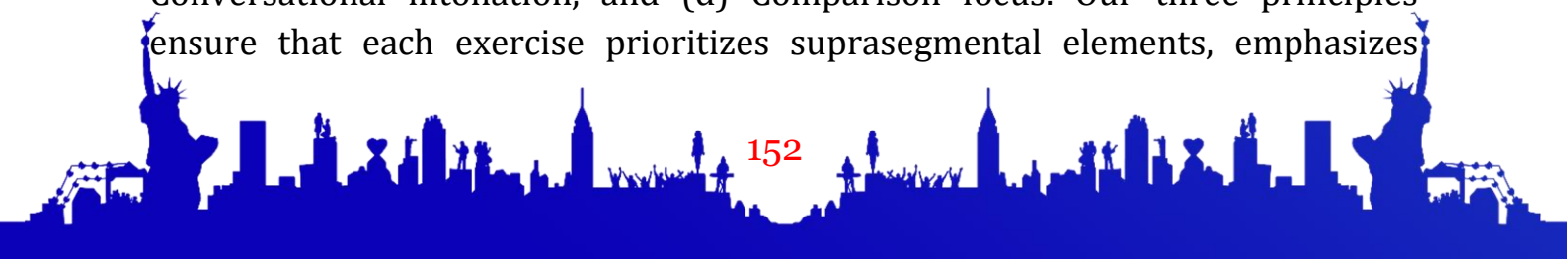
According to Firth (1993, p. 173), the second concept of a pronunciation syllabus is to start with a broad emphasis and progressively progress to particular concerns. According to Murphy (1991), pronunciation is a subset of speaking and listening abilities and should be taught alongside them. According to Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (1996), pupils who focus solely on pronunciation may struggle to apply their newly learned sounds in meaningful communication. Incorporating pronunciation into a speaking curriculum can help overcome this gap. When teaching pronunciation in a spoken setting, it's important to focus on naturally occurring elements. Engage in speaking activities to enhance interaction success. This differs from conventional pronunciation techniques, which merely indirectly link pronunciation traits to speaking effectiveness.

Principle 3: Pronunciation instruction should align with the constraints of the speaking task.

The third principle focuses on the many tasks associated with speaking. Speakers can plan for formal speaking duties like presentations and instructing. Sometimes communication is spontaneous, and the discourse is formed while speaking. Traditional pronunciation education, which emphasizes preparation and planning, is best suited for formal speaking activities. According to Levis (2001), students must be able to employ pronunciation as a tool in informal conversations, and education should address this requirement. Integrating pronunciation in the classroom may improve both planned and accidental speech.

Teaching Pronunciation and Oral Communication: A Solution

To improve students' oral communication abilities, consider including crucial pronunciation aspects into speaking exercises. Here are some examples: (a) Clear wording in public speaking, (b) Storytelling thinking groups, (c) Conversational intonation, and (d) Comparison focus. Our three principles ensure that each exercise prioritizes suprasegmental elements, emphasizes





pronunciation while retaining a broad focus on speaking and communication, and aligns with the speaking task requirements.

Activity 1: Word Integrity in Oral Presentations.

Oral presentations, a typical activity in ESL/EFL programs, can help students improve their pronunciation abilities with minimum guidance. Effective wording, rhythm, and sentence emphasis are crucial in this planned setting. Planning also enhances word clarity.

Word clarity refers to pupils' ability to express themselves in a way that is understandable to others.

This includes consonant and vowel sounds, stressed vowel lengthening, stress patterns in multisyllabic phrases, and pronunciation of lexical units like "on the other hand" or "to sum up".

The passage below, taken from a Thai student's oral presentation, highlights some of these difficulties. The underlined r letters were sounded similarly to /l/, whereas italics ch spellings were pronounced like sh. The second syllable received more emphasis than the fourth.

Names correspond to the characteristics of the children. This example highlights the difficulty in distinguishing between suprasegmentals and segmentals, despite their relevance to speech tasks. Both types of faults can impact overall intelligibility. The word's stress pattern did not meet listeners' expectations, causing intelligibility issues.

Changes in stress can impact vowel pronunciation, which is a key indicator for native speakers (Cutler, Dahan, & van Donselaar, 1997). Research indicates that incorrect pronunciation of consonant sounds, known as a segmental issue, can hinder speech decoding for nonnative speakers (Jenkins, 2000). The possibility of adding pronunciation education into oral presentation tasks is dependent on students' ability to plan. Presentations require precise speaking and pronunciation abilities in a controlled environment.

Developing on Word Clarity for Presentations

1. Ask students to prepare an oral presentation.
2. Have students pick five crucial words to speak correctly.
3. Have students rehearse and record their speeches on audiotapes.
4. Evaluate students' audiotape recordings for presentation and pronunciation of essential terms.
5. Request students submit tape recordings, written presentations with





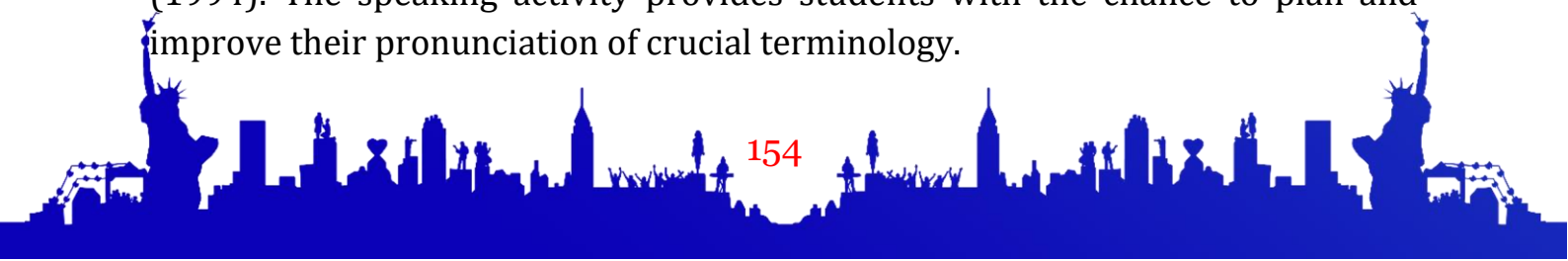
important terms, and self-evaluations.

6. Provide feedback on students' audiotapes, including pronunciation of selected important terms and suggestions for extra practice.
7. Request that students modify and rehearse their presentations after obtaining your feedback.
8. Have students deliver their presentations in class.
9. Evaluate their class presentations and the pronunciation of all essential terms.

To improve word clarity, both students' choices and instructor comments are important factors. Students prepare for oral presentations by identifying five important words to speak well. Students can recognize essential words alone or with instructor guidance, depending on their pronunciation awareness. Students should plan, rehearse, record, and provide a self-evaluation for their presentations.

The teacher can propose up to five extra challenging terms for children to practice understanding. Students review and practice their presentations before delivering them in class. The final evaluation assesses the pronunciation of all essential terms specified by the teacher and pupils. After incorporating pronunciation practice into her busy course load, one instructor shared the following feedback. The children appreciated the personalized attention, which came in the form of a tape they could listen to at home, despite the short time commitment. In addition to providing pupils with practice, the experience made me more aware of opportunities for improvement. Removing facial expressions and body language improved my ability to hear students' voices clearly. (Jessica Mercer, personal communication, March 2002)

Improving on pronunciation in the context of presentations has various benefits. Teachers may assess students' talents and deliver more effective education by focusing on individual strengths and shortcomings. Listening to pupils individually allows teachers to detect common difficulties and address them later in class. Students may design and give presentations without interruptions, allowing them to identify difficult-to-pronounce terms with instructor guidance. Recording practice sessions on audiotapes or digital files allow teachers to listen and offer comments prior to presentations. Free discussion gives limited opportunities. Depending on students' comfort level with presentations, this exercise can range from a controlled oral reading to a task centered on important phrases, as described by Yule and Macdonald (1994). The speaking activity provides students with the chance to plan and improve their pronunciation of crucial terminology.





According to how comfortable learners are with presentations, this exercise can range from guided oral reading to a task based on key words, as described by Yule and Macdonald (1994). The speaking practice allows students to plan and enhance their pronunciation of key words.

Activity 2: Phrasing and Narrative.

Students in various ESL programs exchange their own stories through speech and writing. Personal stories are among a variety of narratives, including fables, folk tales, and articles from newspapers. Storytellers can help students improve their language abilities, particularly at intermediate levels where they are more confident addressing personal and current themes (Breiner-Sanders, Lowe, Miles & Swender, 2000). The narratives are ideal for developing thought grouping, also known as chunking or phrasing, due to their usage of phrases or paragraphs. English speakers break down big sentences into coherent thinking clusters. Listeners struggle to understand speech that is not divided into meaningful phrases, even if each word is clearly articulated. Gilbert (1994) provides an example of a long sentence broken into small groupings (slash marks indicate pauses): "The sign says construction will be finished by April, but that was obviously optimistic" (p. 46). Slowing speech and chunking words can increase fluency and intelligibility, according to several practitioners (Gilbert, 1994; Morley, 1994). This practice integrates idea groups into oral storytelling.

Better Storytelling with Attention to Phrasing

1. Prepare a paragraph-length tale to read aloud to the class.
2. Rewrite or type the story into thinking groups.
3. Visualize idea groupings by arranging the material into short lines like a poetry.
4. Read in pieces, pausing at the end of each sentence.

This exercise may be used to prepare and practice oral presentations such as stories, reports, and diary entries. Students can use one or more paragraph-length reports, myths, fables, stories, or personal anecdotes as examples. The instructor can introduce chunking by asking pupils to segment the story. Figure 3 illustrates how a model story might be chunked for improved wording. With practice, most students may gain the skill to phrase appropriately throughout speaking. According to Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (1996), teachers can remind students to consider when a speaker might legitimately halt in a stream of speech, allowing them to divide thought groups. As students develop their speaking skills, they understand that chunking material helps both listeners and presenters organize their ideas.





Conclusion

The strategy mentioned above aims to teach students about academic spoken language using a text-based methodology. To understand genuine spoken speech, students should watch and reflect on language use. Transcripts of spoken interactions offer an opportunity for observation and reflection. Listening alone may not capture nuanced linguistic aspects such as indirect pragmatic acts, hedging, complicated exchange patterns, and delayed turn sequencing.

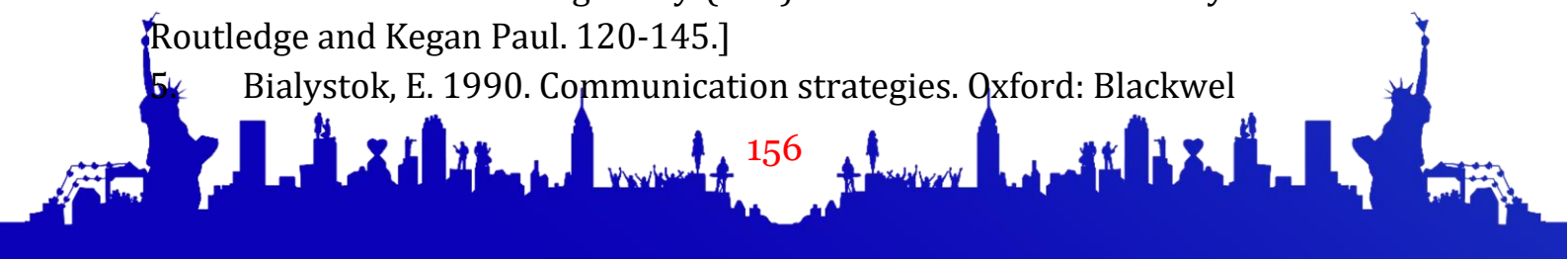
To help students understand language and interaction, teachers should encourage them to record and examine their own and others' spoken conversation. Discourse analysts learn about conversation via observation. Students can learn language in comparable ways. Advanced learners should focus on developing complex language skills and engaging tactics.

Helping learners become discourse analysts in ESOL lessons can transfer to independent language learning. These skills can be applied outside the classroom for future language learning.

This article outlines how instructors might organize materials and activities based on recordings of natural speaking. Alternatively, the method may be used using published texts, such as spoken English corpora. The Wellington Corpus of New Zealand Spoken English (Holmes, Vine, & Johnson, 1998) includes both monologic and interactive texts. The texts are accessible on CDROM, allowing teachers and students to read them on a computer display. The texts can be printed for classroom study on certain language aspects.

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