Best practices in pronunciation: From classroom space to cyberspace.

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An excited professor on a Halifax pier.

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Learning spaces
My first teaching space...
r/l
My sole pronunciation technique
My sole pronunciation technique
Pronunciation is not like other skills...
Pronunciation is not like other skills...

Age

First Language

Identity

Outcomes

Motor Component
This had led to some odd approaches...
And some drastic ones...

S. Koreans Accent Surgery in Bid for Flawless English

A government movie shows tongue snipping in an effort to halt the practice on children.

January 18, 2004 | Sang-Hun Choe | Associated Press Writer

SEOUL — South Korean mothers know few bounds in trying to give their kids a leg up in speaking English. They play them nursery rhymes in the womb, hire pricey tutors for toddlers, send preschoolers to America to pick up the accent.

But now they're even turning to surgery to sort out misplaced L and R sounds, underscoring the dark side of the crushing social pressures involved in getting a highly competitive society in shape for a globalized world.

The surgery involves snipping the thin tissue under the tongue to make it longer and supposedly nimbler

The government is so dismayed that its National Human Rights Commission has made a movie to scare
And some drastic ones...

Lost in Translation: Student Has Tongue Surgery to Speak Better Korean

By Erin Skarda @ErinLLeighSkarda | Aug. 16, 2011

Talk about a tongue-twister.

British student Rhiannon Brookbank-Jones always dreamed of being fluent in Korean, living in the country and studying the culture while in college. But some aspects of the complex language left her “tongue-tied” — literally. So the 19-year-old did what many of us would never even consider: She underwent a tongue operation that would correct her speech difficulties once and for all.

Pronunciation: The Cinderella skill?

https://www.pinterest.com/Beingniki/cinderella-issues-for-esi/
A booming area of research
But before we go any further...

Some things that matter for all learning spaces...let’s call this the “best practices” part of the talk.
Does it really matter?

- Poor pronunciation can cause significant challenges for students who need to communicate in English.
- Students often want it!
- Pronunciation gets harder to change the longer you speak a second language.

Why didn’t someone tell me these things 10 years ago?
Does pronunciation instruction even work?

Yes!
Does pronunciation instruction even work?

It is very unlikely that your students can lose their accents, but they can make changes that will make their speech easier to understand.
Looking at research


- A meta-analysis of 86 separate studies of pronunciation instruction showed that pronunciation instruction really does make a difference!

However....


- Age-related constraints show that only very exceptional learners can come close to native-like accents...and there aren’t any interventions that can overcome this age-related constraint.
Looking at advertising...
How are the three constructs related?

Accentedness is only partially related to comprehensibility
Choosing Teaching Priorities

The Intelligibility Principle

The Nativist Principle
What is important to intelligibility?

Pronunciation

Segmentals
- p, s, e, l, o

Suprasegmentals
- Stress, intonation, rhythm, etc.
So many comprehensibility studies!


Comprehensibility is complicated

- Speaker’s first Language (Crowther et al., 2014)
- Listener’s first language (Foote, in press)
- Type of speaking task (Crowther et al., 2014)
- Proficiency level of the speaker (Saito et al., 2016)

What matters most?
Suprasegmentals

- A number of studies have shown that suprasegmentals impact comprehensibility

- Suprasegmentals can more daunting to teach
Suprasegmentals

- Intonation
- Word stress
- Sentence level stress
- Thought groups
- Focus words

Suprasegmentals also convey pragmatic meaning
However, context is important

- Some researchers argue that most suprasegmentals are less important if you are planning to teaching English as Lingua Franca - (Jenkins, 2002)

- For pronunciation in contexts where English is used primarily as a lingua franca, the lingua franca core (LFC) was proposed. - (Jenkins, 2000; Walker, 2010)
Segmentals

a or e?
pan or pen?

No this pen is mine
Functional Load

Let’s think about individual sounds:
-/θ/ /ð/: how often will mixing these sounds up lead to a possible misunderstanding?
-What about /i/ and /ɪ/?

The amount of work a sound does to distinguish meaning is called its functional load (Catford, 1987)
'Th' sound to vanish from English language by 2066 because of multiculturalism, say linguists
So in sum...

- Suprasegmentals are really important for comprehensibility (though possibly less in lingua franca contexts) and also for conveying pragmatic information

- Some segmental pairs (especially vowels) do a lot more work than others for carrying meaning. Focus on those sounds.
Learning spaces
Learning spaces
What do we need to do for successful pronunciation training?

- We need to focus on the things that matter to intelligibility/comprehensibility
- Noticing the gap (Schmidt, 2001)
- Feedback
- Reasonable expectations
- Accurate information
- A focus on perception and production
Learning Spaces
How can I help learners outside of class?
Segmentals

Perception Precedes Production
How you do improve perception?

Traditionally: minimal pairs

VS.
However...

- Research has found that there is a much more effective way to improve your perception of sounds.
  - High Variability Phonetic Training (HVPT)

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Two main principles:

1) It is better to hear many voices instead of just one.

2) It is better to contrast more than two sounds when you practice.
How can I find HVPT for free?

- **English Accent Coach**
High Variability Phonetic Training
High Variability Phonetic training
What about Suprasegmentals?
Shadowing

• **Shadowing** is a good activity for practicing many different aspects of pronunciation
  • It is especially good because it doesn’t require you to remember a lot rules

  ◦ All you need is your smart phone and something to listen to
Do learners find it boring?

“just vocalized repetitions and only results in meaningless parrot-like practice”
- (Bovee & Stewart, 2009, p. 20)
Do learners find it boring?

“just vocalized repetitions and only results in meaningless parrot-like practice”
- (Bovee & Stewart, 2009, p. 20)

- Students rated it higher at the end of 8 weeks than at the beginning
- Most really liked it and recommended it to friends
- Using a recorder was really helpful for drawing their attention to errors
Leonard: Listen, I have to kinda sneak out for a while.
Sheldon: All right, goodbye.
Leonard: No, wait! If anyone asks you where I went, you don’t know.
Sheldon: Where are you going?
Leonard: I can’t tell you that.
Sheldon: Who would ask me?
Leonard: I can’t tell you that, either.
Sheldon: So you brought me in here to inform me that you can’t tell me where you’re going and you can’t tell me who might ask?
Leonard: Yeah, I really didn’t think this through.
Dubbing a TED Talk
Working collaboratively outside of class
Collaborating on pronunciation online
Collaborating on pronunciation online
Using shared folders works as well
Learning about pronunciation
Learning about pronunciation

Halifax

biographical name | Hal-i-fax | \'ha-la-faks\'

Definition of HALIFAX

Earl of 1881-1959 Edward Frederick Lindley Wood English statesman and diplomat
Learning about pronunciation

Use YouTube to improve your English pronunciation. With more than 20M tracks, YouGlish gives you fast, unbiased answers about how English is spoken by real people and in context.

Examples:

power, courage, coup de grâce, how’s it going, goals #barackobama
How to pronounce 'Halifax' in American English (2 out of 83):

He ran immediately to Halifax.
Learning about pronunciation
Sounds of Speech: Iowa Speech Lab
It is easy to find inaccurate information...
In Class
What do we need to do for successful pronunciation training?

- We need to focus on the things that matter to intelligibility/comprehensibility
- Noticing the gap (Schmidt, 2001)
- Feedback
- Reasonable expectations
- Accurate information
- A focus on perception and production
What types of feedback is a computer poor at giving?
In class

- Teachers can give much better feedback on production.
In Class

- Teachers can help learners manage their expectations and stay motivated even when they are struggling.
Good activities for in class

- Peer feedback groups and assignments with performance aspects.

- You can have students bring recording made outside of class and analyze them in groups.

- Suprasegmentals are often a better focus for in class activities because they are more likely to help a larger number of learners.
Or...if you are short on time
Or...if you are short on time
Thank you

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