CLEAR

**FEATURED THEME:
PRONUNCIATION**

**MICHIGAN STATE
U N I V E R S I T Y**

Trends in teaching pronunciation

by Debra M. Hardison

What to teach?

In this look at some trends in teaching pronunciation, I start with the issue of *what* to teach, and not *why* teach it. Although the field of second/foreign language (L2) teaching has generally accepted some pronunciation instruction in the communicative classroom, we still grapple with the issue of exactly *what* to teach. Should the focus be segmental (i.e., individual sounds) or suprasegmental (i.e., prosodic features such as stress, rhythm and intonation)? As some studies have demonstrated, a combination of both approaches has merits (e.g., Derwing, Munro, & Wiebe, 1998).

Choosing the focus of instruction is also dependent upon the needs and goals of learners, their ages and proficiency levels, and overall objectives of the curriculum. While studies have shown that a substantial number of learners of English (inside and outside of the US and Canada) want to sound like native speakers (Derwing, 2003; Timmis, 2002), this is not necessarily generalizable to all learners or target languages. Some learners want to maintain aspects of their accent as an overt marker of their identity (Gatbonton, Trofimovich, & Magid, 2005). Overall, learners need to make themselves understood in the L2; however, comprehensibility can coexist with accentedness.

Teachers of pronunciation must also deal with the issue of variability. For example, consider the production of the English sentence *eat your vegetables* in conversational speech. Two phenomena typically occur that depart from the form typically given in a dictionary, also called the citation form. The consonant 't' in *eat* and the sound that begins *your* assimilate and speakers often produce a 'ch' sound (as in *chip*). The second modification is the reduction in quality and duration of the vowel in *your*, which occurs with a more casual style of speech. These types of variability are not unique to English, and pose challenges to teachers in terms of how much variability to address in the classroom and when to introduce it. Using the guidelines of a pedagogical norm (e.g., Gass, Bardovi-Harlig, Magnan, & Walz, 2002), beginning learners can be presented with the forms of the language that correspond to citation forms as the initial targets of learning with greater variability being added over time. In my teaching, I have presented variable forms of pronunciation to lower level learners for recognition (vs. production) purposes using their frequency of occurrence as a guideline so learners can understand what they are hearing and respond appropriately.

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Dear Readers,

Greetings from CLEAR, where we are celebrating the beginning of a new grant cycle and our fifteenth year of service to the language education community. CLEAR and Michigan State University have been awarded another four-year Title VI Language Resource Center grant from the US Department of Education, and we're so pleased that we'll be able to continue our work to bring you tools and opportunities to help you in your language classrooms. You can read more about our upcoming projects on pp. 6-7 of this issue, and of course updates on new products will be posted on our website as well.
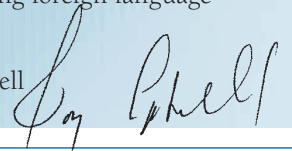
We hope your summer was refreshing and productive, and enjoyed meeting many of you at our professional development workshops, where we had our highest number of participants in several years. We strive to bring you high-quality and low-cost opportunities for training and development, and were happy to see so many teachers this summer especially in light of the ongoing financial difficulties faced by nearly all institutions and districts. Our 2011 summer workshops are already scheduled, and include new topics as well as some popular encore offerings for the same low prices as in the past.

In this issue of *CLEAR News*, Dr. Debra Hardison gives an overview of some of the current trends in teaching pronunciation in the language classroom, a topic which is sometimes overlooked in favor of the traditional "four skills." She offers an extensive list of references and resources so you have plenty of places to turn for even more details on best practices in teaching this tricky topic.

We continue to visit regional and national conferences to give sessions and run exhibits about CLEAR's free and low-cost products for world language teachers. We hope to meet some of you at ACTFL in Boston this November. Come visit us at Booth #2240 in the LRC Pavilion to say hello and learn more about CLEAR and our products in person. You can also always visit our website for the latest information about CLEAR and our projects: http://clear.msu.edu.

On behalf of CLEAR and its staff, I wish you all a fruitful and productive school year, and look forward to meeting you at conferences, workshops, and online as we work toward the common goal of improving foreign language teaching in the US.

Joy Campbell

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SUGGESTIONS WANTED!

We strive to publish *CLEAR News* articles that represent current topics in foreign language teaching, and we want to hear from you! If you have an idea for an article or would like to see a particular subject addressed, please let us know at clear@msu.edu. We will consider your idea for future issues of the newsletter.

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A role for technology in teaching pronunciation

Technological advances have provided a range of tools to assist teachers and learners in the development of pronunciation skills in a variety of target languages. Visual displays on a computer screen of some features of speech production such as pitch are user-friendly and valuable sources of input for learners (see Fig. 1 for an example). In a study using visual pitch displays for feedback during training, native English-speaking learners of French showed significant improvement in both L2 prosody and segmental accuracy (e.g., Hardison, 2004). Post-study questionnaire responses indicated learners had developed greater awareness of various aspects of their L2 speech and increased confidence. In addition, waveform displays can visually represent the duration of segments, which is a contrastive feature (i.e., creates a difference in meaning) in some languages such as Japanese. In a study involving American learners of Japanese, training using these displays was more beneficial for learners than training with only auditory input (Motohashi-Saigo & Hardison, 2009).

Learners can also take advantage of some web-based tools to practice the sounds of a new language as a complement to classroom instruction. A popular website developed by the University of Iowa (http://www.uiowa.edu/~acadtech/phonetics) offers users the opportunity to see and hear a speaker producing sounds in English, German, and Spanish. Research has shown that visual input can contribute to the improvement of L2 speech perception, which can transfer to improvement in production (Hardison, 2003). However, the site is limited in the amount of input and variability (e.g., contextual, talker, stylistic) that it can provide, and there is no feedback on learners' pronunciation practice.

What accounts for variable success in L2 pronunciation?

Over the years, research on L2 pronunciation has provided some interesting findings on the factors that contribute to the development of some aspects of L2 speech. Relationships have been found between a) learners' L2 fluency and the amount of contact they have with L2 speakers (Derwing, Thomson, & Munro, 2006), b) the fluidity of their L2 speech and their L2 writing activities outside the classroom (Freed, Segalowitz, & Dewey, 2004), and c) the degree of accentedness and the amount of L2 use (e.g., Piske, MacKay, & Flege, 2001). Ratings of accentedness are also frequently associated with the age at which L2 learning begins (see Piske et al., 2001 for a review). Recent work also suggests that learners' perceived

competence, amount of L2 speaking, and communication anxiety contribute to proficiency in various features of oral interaction ability including pronunciation (Hardison, 2009).
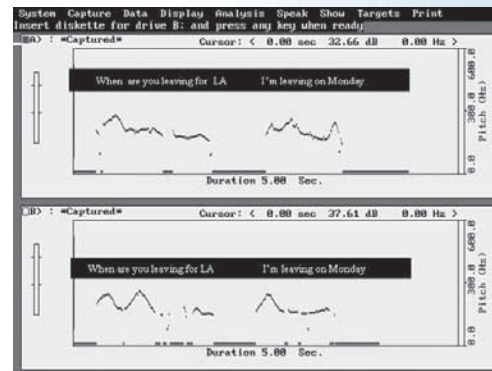

Fig. 1

Pronunciation instruction by itself or integrated into the curriculum

Opinions and curricula vary on whether pronunciation is treated as a stand-alone class or is incorporated into another course. When I think of teaching pronunciation in an integrated skills class, I am reminded of my early training as a college-level foreign language teacher when our lesson plans were organized around modules (e.g., presentation of vocabulary, grammar issue, etc.) and rigidly timed. Pronunciation was relegated to the "if-we-have-time" status, and at most, it got three minutes for presentation and practice of a sound. As one might imagine, there was very little pronunciation instruction.

Today, pronunciation issues can be dealt with as they arise following an incidental focus-on-form approach in the communicative classroom. Teachers can also choose vocabulary and pedagogic tasks that would seed the content of a lesson with a particular segmental or suprasegmental issue (e.g., intonation in questions); in doing so, it would be presented and practiced in contextualized meaningful communication.

In addition, theatre voice-training techniques can be incorporated into a lesson, and include raising learners' awareness of how speech is produced, emphasizing clear articulation and language-appropriate pausing, and improving fluency through shadowing and mirroring (see Hardison & Sonchaeng, 2005 for details).

What does pronunciation instruction require of the teacher?

From observations of various language classes over the years, I have noticed that some teachers, including native speakers of the target language, lack confidence and are sometimes deficient in correct information when they address pronunciation issues. Inaccuracies may occur in their descriptions of such features as the production of individual sounds, the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a word, and the implications for comprehension of shifting stress to different words in a sentence (where permissible by the language). For many, it is the result of a lack of training on these issues. For example, Breitkreutz, Derwing, & Rossiter (2001) reported that only 30% of teachers in 67 ESL programs across Canada had received any formal pronunciation teacher training. Derwing (2008) recommended that teacher education programs include a course on pronunciation teaching, incorporating relevant research findings, curriculum development, and an opportunity for teaching practice. Preservice teachers may benefit from coursework that involves experience in analyzing L2 speech samples. This could include a discussion of the severity of the learners' individual problems in terms of comprehensibility by native and nonnative listeners of the target language, and possible options for improvement. For English, there is a website called the *Speech Accent Archive* developed by George Mason University under the guidance of Steven Weinberger (http://accent.gmu.edu). This is an archive of speech samples produced by numerous native and nonnative English speakers representing a wide variety of backgrounds, and I have found it useful for preservice teachers.

Assessment

The focus of pronunciation instruction has implications for the assessment of improvement. In the now-classic study by Derwing et al. (1998), the group of ESL learners that received "global" instruction (i.e., focused on general speaking and prosodic factors) showed significant improvement in comprehensibility and fluency when native-speaking raters listened to parts of their recorded narratives. Another group that had received segmental-level instruction did not show such improvement in their narratives; however, they did show improvement in the accentedness of their speech when they produced individual sentences.

For pronunciation assessment, research studies often use recordings of individual words, sentences, oral narratives (e.g., using a picture-story prompt), and oral proficiency interviews. Raters may be asked to evaluate specific features or provide more global ratings of comprehensibility and accentedness. For pedagogical settings, Riggenbach (1998) proposed the use of oral language portfolios for assessment purposes. These could include a variety of recorded exchanges, speech acts, etc. in an audio or audiovisual format. A useful rubric for classroom assessment of a range of proficiency levels is the Student Oral Language Observation Matrix (SOLOM) from the California State Department of Education (http://www.cal.org/twi/evaltoolkit/appendix/solom.pdf) or the Minnesota Modified SOLOM (http://education.state. mn.us/mdeprod/groups/Assessment/documents/ Manual/000424.pdf), adaptable to all languages. Reflective pronunciation journals (e.g., Miccoli, 2003) direct learner attention to the progress they have made over time. This may serve a particularly important role for learners in terms of dealing with a language skill that often requires patience and a longitudinal view.

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Other Suggested Readings

Chun, D. M., Hardison, D. M., & Pennington, M. C. (2008). Technologies for prosody in context: Past and future of L2 research and practice. In J. G. Hansen Edwards & M. Zampini (Eds.), *Phonology and second language acquisition* (pp. 323-346). Amsterdam: Benjamins.

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Participants from two of CLEAR's professional development workshops take a break to enjoy the Michigan summer.

CLEAR enters 15th year of service to language education

CLEAR's directors and staff are pleased to announce that CLEAR has been granted Title VI Language Resource Center funding for a fifth funding cycle, which will run through August 2014. We look forward to four more productive years reaching out to the language education community through beginning new projects and building upon some of our most successful past endeavors. Following are previews of a just a few of our upcoming projects.

Web-based materials development projects

Building on CLEAR's long tradition of creating online tools for language instruction, we will be bringing you even more ways to use technology in – and out of – your classroom. One project in this category will expand on our widely used Rich Internet Applications, not only creating new applications, but also constructing a course management environment that fully integrates the RIAs and other language teaching tools to enable teachers to manage activities and assignments from start to finish. Another planned project will bring language teaching and learning to the palm of your hand, with smart phone applications.

Professional development projects

In addition to continuing our popular summer workshops, we are excited to begin working on two new professional development offerings. The first will bring the expertise of CLEAR and its affiliated faculty right to your computer through a series of webinars. Our onsite workshop program, in which faculty members travel to institutions across the US to give workshops, has grown tremendously in recent years. In order to reach even more language teachers, we will be offering some of these workshops as online webinars, and hope to present them in centralized conference workshops as well. We will work with the Michigan Department of Education to offer State Board Continuing Education Units for these webinars, which will allow K-12 teachers to use them toward their continuing certification. Another new project is entitled *Video Assistance for Understanding Language Teaching Techniques* (VAULTT), and will be especially useful to teachers of less commonly taught languages. The VAULTT project will consist of short video clips and accompanying pedagogical materials that illustrate best practices in language teaching techniques.

Collaborative projects

One of the priorities in this funding competition is to collaborate with other Title VI entities to draw on the diverse strengths of this community in order to develop the best possible materials and professional development opportunities. In this way, CLEAR acts as a conduit to bring you the best the field has to offer. We are partnering with a number of centers, at Michigan State University (MSU) and elsewhere, to bring you cutting-edge products and teacher development options. For example, we will continue to co-sponsor the respected online journal *Language Learning & Technology*, produced in partnership with the National Foreign Language Resource Center at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. We will also be collaborating with MSU's Center for International Business Education and Research to create professional development opportunities for business language educators. This partnership will reach out specifically to teachers of Asian languages with the *Business Asian Language Institute* and to community college faculty with *Business Language/Culture Institutes for Community Colleges*. Michigan teachers will be pleased to learn that the popular World Languages Day event will continue, with CLEAR spearheading the effort and working with several MSU Title VI centers, as well as all the language departments and other campus entities.

Assessment and research projects

Finally, CLEAR will continue its work in assessment and research by sponsoring several projects in these areas. An online collection of listening and speaking tests for less commonly taught languages will be created and made freely available to LCTL instructors across the country. In addition, several research projects will be conducted on topics as diverse as interaction and corrective feedback, online audio portfolios, and oral interaction ability as developed during study abroad.

All this and more

Of course, the array of materials and tools created by CLEAR over the last fourteen years remains available via our website. Without a large advertising budget, we rely on you to help spread the word about CLEAR, and we draw on your feedback, creativity, and enthusiasm to bring you materials best suited to your needs. We know that the needs of language educators and students in the US are great and it is in your excited receptivity to new ideas and materials that CLEAR finds its strongest motivation to provide the highest quality products. Thank you for your support over the last fourteen years, and we look forward to continuing this relationship into our fifteenth year and beyond.

Did you know…

- **That over 24,000 language teachers subscribe to *CLEAR News*?**

- **That CLEAR personnel have given over 250 professional development workshops in fourteen years?**

- **That over 19,900 foreign language professionals are using CLEAR's Rich Internet Applications? This collection of nine free RIAs includes:**
  - **A podcasting tool**
  - **A character formation tool**
  - **A game-creation tool**
  - **A process writing application**
  - **A video repository**

- **That CLEAR co-sponsors the respected peer-reviewed online journal *Language Learning & Technology (LLT)*, which has nearly 18,000 subscribers?**

- **That the above-mentioned LLT "stands out as our field's top journal" according to a December 2009 article in the *Modern Language Journal*?**

- **That CLEAR-funded research has resulted in over 500 journal articles, presentations, and books by our affiliated faculty?**

- **That CLEAR has developed over three dozen "tangible" products, distributing tens of thousands of copies nationally?**

- **That almost all of our teaching materials and products are free?**

UPCOMING CONFERENCES

CLEAR will be represented at exhibit booths and/or presenting sessions at the following conferences this academic year. Stop by to introduce yourself and let us show you what we can offer for your language classroom.

- Michigan World Language Association (MIWLA), October 21-22, 2010, Lansing, MI
- American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), November 19-21, 2010, Boston, MA
- Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (CSCTFL), March 3-5, 2011, Indianapolis, IN
- World Languages Day, April 16, 2011, East Lansing, MI
- Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium (CALICO), May 17-21, 2011, Victoria, Canada

CALENDAR FEATURE ON LRC WEBSITE

The Language Resource Center website offers a central location to learn about products and professional development offered by CLEAR and the fourteen other LRCs nationwide. The calendar feature includes local, regional, and national events of interest to foreign language educators, and allows users to browse by topic, location, date, and sponsoring LRC. Visit http://nflrc.msu.edu/ and click on the calendar icon to learn what's going on in your area.

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CLEAR News is a publication of the Center for Language Education and Research and is intended to inform foreign language educators of the Center's ongoing research projects and professional development workshops, to report on current foreign language research and publications and their applicability to the classroom, and to provide a forum for educators to discuss foreign language teaching and learning topics.