The Significance of Pronunciation in English Language Teaching

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Abstract

Learners with good English pronunciation are likely to be understood even if they make errors in other areas, whereas learners with bad pronunciation will not be understood, even if their grammar is perfect. Such learners may avoid speaking in English, and experience social isolation, employment difficulties and limited opportunities for further study. We judge people by the way they speak, and so learners with poor pronunciation may be judged as incompetent, uneducated or lacking in knowledge. Yet many learners find pronunciation one of the most difficult aspects of English to acquire, and need explicit help from the teacher. Therefore, some sort of pronunciation instruction in class is necessary. The goals of this paper are to define English pronunciation, review the history of English pronunciation instruction, explain the aim of English pronunciation instruction, elaborate pronunciation and communication, review the previous research about the effectiveness of pronunciation instruction on learners' achievement, and discuss the English pronunciation and the target of comfortable intelligibility.

Keywords: Pronunciation, Instruction, History, Aim, Communication, Intelligibility

1. Introduction

Pronunciation instruction is a prominent factor in foreign language teaching. Since sounds play an important role in communication, foreign language teachers must attribute proper importance to teaching pronunciation in their classes. It is evident that communication is a mutual relationship between the speaker and the hearer. This means that one must comprehend what he/she hears in the target language and must produce the sounds of the language he/she is trying to learn accurately. Unless he has sufficient knowledge of the sound patterns of the target language, he can neither encode a message to anybody nor decode the message sent by another person by learning the sounds of the target language within his mother tongue. Therefore, pronunciation instruction is of great importance for successful oral communication to take place since it is an important ingredient of the communicative competence (Hismanoglu, 2006).

This paper emphasizes the prominence of pronunciation as a key to gaining full communicative competence, and takes into account the important issues in pronunciation pedagogy such as the history of English pronunciation instruction, the aim of English pronunciation instruction, pronunciation and communication, the previous research about the effectiveness of pronunciation instruction on learners' achievement, and the English pronunciation and the target of comfortable intelligibility.

2. What Is Pronunciation?

Pronunciation is a set of habits of producing sounds. The habit of producing a sound is acquired by repeating it over and over again and by being corrected when it is pronounced wrongly. Learning to pronounce a second language means building up new pronunciation habits and overcoming the bias of the first language (Cook, 1996). Pronunciation refers to the production of sounds that we use to make meaning. It includes attention to the particular sounds of a language (segments), aspects of speech beyond the level of the individual sound, such as intonation, phrasing, stress, timing, rhythm (suprasegmental aspects), how the voice is projected (voice quality) and, in its broadest definition, attention to gestures and expressions that are closely related to the way we speak a language. A broad definition of pronunciation includes both suprasegmental and segmental features. Although these different aspects of pronunciation are treated in isolation here, it is important to remember that they all work in combination when we speak, and are therefore usually best learned as an integral part of spoken language.

Traditional approaches to pronunciation have often focused on segmental aspects, largely because these relate in some way to letters in writing, and are therefore the easiest to notice and work on. More recent approaches to

pronunciation, however, have suggested that the suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation may have the most effect on intelligibility for some speakers. Harmer (1993) stresses the need for making sure that students can always be understood and say what they want to say. They need to master "good pronunciation", not perfect accents. That is, emphasis should be on suprasegmental features of pronunciation—not segmental aspects—to help learners acquire communicative competence (Seferoglu, 2005). Bott (2005) asserts, "In recent years, increasing attention has been placed on providing pronunciation instruction that meets the communicative needs of non-native speakers (NNSs) of English. Empirical research and pronunciation materials' writers suggest that teaching suprasegmentals before segmentals to intermediate and advanced NNSs could be more beneficial in a shorter period of time" (p. 5).

Anderson-Hsieh, Johnson, and Koehler (1992) compared the relative contributions made to intelligibility by prosody, segmentals, and syllable structure. Within 11 different language groups, they found that the score for prosody was most significantly associated with the overall score for pronunciation. A similar finding was reported by Anderson-Hsieh and Koehler (1988), who concluded that "prosodic deviance may affect comprehension more adversely than does segmental deviance" (p. 562). In a related finding, Derwing, Munro, and Wiebe (1998) studied the effects of both segmental and suprasegmental instruction on learners' comprehensibility ratings and concluded that the latter had a greater effect on performance in communicative contexts. Usually learners benefit from attention to both aspects, and some learners may need help in some areas more than in others. One considerable practical advantage of focusing on suprasegmentals is that learners from mixed L1 backgrounds in the same class will benefit, and will often find that their segmental difficulties improve at the same time (Fraser, 2001).

3. The History of English Pronunciation Instruction

The amount of prominence that has been attributed to L2 pronunciation teaching has altered remarkably as have the views on the extent to which non-native pronunciation mistakes should be corrected. In the 50's and 60's, when the audio-lingual approach was very popular, the goal of L2 pronunciation instruction was the achievement of a native-like accent, as modelled by the language teacher. In this period, pronunciation instruction was based on the discrimination and production of sounds as a way of developing the recognition and articulation of L2 specific sounds (Lambacher, 1996).

From the late 1960's to 1980's, many commenced to question the prominence of an instructional focus on pronunciation in the L2 classroom. Some speculated that native-like pronunciation was an unattainable goal in a second language (Preston, 1981). Many language programs reduced their pronunciation instruction or eliminated it altogether. In the late 1980's, there was a reconcentration on pronunciation (Morley, 1991). Instead of mimicry, people commenced to concentrate on supra-segmentals (i.e. stress, intonation, pitch, juncture), sound co-articulation and voice quality of learning a new language (Esling & Wong, 1983). The goal became attaining communicative competence, an L2 learner's ability to not only apply and utilize grammatical rules, but to generate pragmatically appropriate utterances and employ them suitably in a given context. Although this new shift in pronunciation teaching maximized meaningful interaction, it included less emphasis on correct articulation of L2 specific sounds (vowels and consonants) (Pennington & Richards, 1986; Morley, 1991).

After 1980's, L2 pronunciation, gained new meaning due to its fruitfulness to a broad group of international people in both ESL and EFL settings (Anderson-Hsieh, 1989; Brown, 1991; Shimamune & Smith, 1995; Derwing & Munro, 2005; Gatbonton, 2005). Immigrant residents, refugees, students, academic professionals, and other professionals all over the world needed to develop their pronunciation because they left their native countries to accommodate in or visit English speaking countries to embrace cultural, economic, and financial opportunities (Wong, 1986; Celce-Murcia, 1991; Chaudhary, 2009; Derwing & Munro, 2009). In reality, many of these L2 learners, especially immigrants and international students in the U.S. and Canada, encountered problems in finding jobs due to having a foreign accent (Ferrier et al., 1999) and this gave rise to a greater demand for L2 pronunciation learning. Because researchers, linguists, and teachers found ways to meet L2 learners' pronunciation needs in view of globalization and the need for international communication, new perspectives on pronunciation teaching and learning emerged (Haslam, 2010).

In the 90's, pronunciation was viewed as an important part of communication. The focus of pronunciation teaching was on suprasegmentals and how they were utilized to communicate meaning, meaningful practice, and the uniqueness of each individual ESL learner. Learner-centred speech awareness and self monitoring were also prominent in pronunciation learning in those years (Morley, 1991). The focus of pronunciation learning shifted from the teacher playing the key role in the learning process to the student performing that role (Pica, 1994; Hoven, 1999; Brown, 2003; Oxford, 2003).

Most foreign language teachers attempt to integrate the necessary grammar, vocabulary, culture, and four skills practice into their classes without considering integrating pronunciation instruction as well. While many language

teachers presume that students will master the pronunciation on their own via exposure to more input in the second language (L2), or will internalize it at some future point, other language teachers interrogate whether it is even worth the time and energy to teach the segmental and supra-segmental features of the phonology of a foreign language. Yet, the phonological system of a language is generally the most prominent characteristic in the speech of a foreigner. In our times, the increasing demand for global competence and international communication and collaboration makes attaining proficiency in a second or foreign language more prominent and this proficiency should cover not merely vocabulary and grammar, but good pronunciation as well (Lord, 2008).

4. The Aim of Teaching Pronunciation

Being able to speak English in a global society is helpful. What constitutes 'acceptable' English pronunciation? Acceptable pronunciation can best be understood if we divide the problem into three parts. A learner's pronunciation has three basic levels (James, 2010).

Level 1: People often do not understand what the speaker is saying. The speaker uses the wrong sounds when making English words or uses the wrong prosodic features when making English sentences. For example, Hinofotis and Bailey (1980, as cited in Celce-Murcia & Goodwin, 1991) suggest that there is a threshold level for pronunciation; that is, if a speaker has a level of pronunciation that falls below this threshold, he/she will be unable to communicate regardless of his/her knowledge of grammar and vocabulary.

Level 2: People understand what the speaker is saying, but the speaker's pronunciation is not pleasant to listen to because he/she has a distracting and/or heavy accent. As Morley (1994) noted, when a speaker's pronunciation performance is heavily accented, it can affect how the speaker is perceived. As Morley (1994) notes, "Speakers are judged to lack credibility and do not inspire confidence in either their knowledge or their persona" (p. 69).

Level 3: People understand the speaker, and the speaker's English is pleasant to listen to. Scovel (1988) refers to this as comfortable intelligibility, and he suggests that this, rather than native-like accuracy, should be the goal of pronunciation.

Thus the answer to the question, "What constitutes 'acceptable' pronunciation?" is the following. A speaker has acceptable pronunciation when other people can understand what he/she says and the speaker's English is pleasant to listen to; in other words, the speaker is 'comfortably intelligible.' Some learners, however, believe that the aim of learning pronunciation is to sound like a native speaker of English. Although this is a worthy individual goal, it should not be the aim of a teacher who wishes to improve their students' pronunciation and to improve their students' confidence. 'Acceptable' pronunciation is not synonymous with having an American or British accents. Thus, one does not have to aim to have their students sounding like the Queen of England or the President of the United States (James, 2010).

However, the learners' accents should be close to a standard variety, because an accent that deviates too far from a recognized standard has the risk of becoming distracting and unpleasant. This is problematic, because, as Morley (1994) noted, a heavy accent can result in negative judgments about the speaker's personality and competence. This, then, raises an interesting question. If one's students need not sound like the Queen of England or the President of the United States, but they still need to have an accent that is close to a recognized standard, then what models of English can one use with one's students?

Useful models of English pronunciation are everywhere. One only has to turn on his/her TV and one can find channels like CNN International, BBC, or Sky News. On these channels one will hear many different people (news anchors, reporters, etc.) from Germany, France, and other non-English-speaking countries. Their pronunciation is easy to understand and pleasant to listen to (James, 2010).

Thus, learners do not need to aim for a particular accent, but they do need to develop their own accent which is close to a standard variety, because if you are close to the standard, you can always communicate, and your English will be pleasant. If you are far from the standard, sometimes you will not communicate successfully, and sometimes even if you communicate successfully, you will be judged negatively (James, 2010).

5. Pronunciation and Communication

The rise in stature of pronunciation in the broader field of applied linguistics has recently been highlighted by the dedication of an entire special issue of *TESOL Quarterly* to pronunciation. The contributions focus on a range of topics, including the *nativeness* and *intelligibility* principles—two contradictory ideologies that underlie much pronunciation research and teaching (Levis, 2005)—the role of accent as a marker of ethnic group affiliation (Gatbonton, Trofimovich, & Magid, 2005), a research-oriented approach to developing instructional priorities (Derwing & Munro, 2005), and the effects of misallocation of lexical stress on intelligibility (Field, 2005).

TESOL Quarterly boasts the widest circulation of all peer-reviewed applied linguistics journals and features a readership of approximately 12,000 academics and practitioners. Thus one might infer from the publication of this special pronunciation issue that the journal editor and presumably a growing number researchers and pedagogues (the readership) acknowledge (a) that pronunciation is often responsible for breakdowns in communication, and (b) that pronunciation should, therefore, assume a central role in communicative instruction, from which one might expect (c) that teacher training and the development of appropriate communicative pronunciation materials have followed suit. However, it seems that the field is still feeling the effects of the neglect of communicative proponents, first, to account adequately for the role of pronunciation in a communicative framework, and second, to propose strategies for teaching pronunciation communicatively (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

In a survey of 67 Canadian ESL programs, Breitkreutz, Derwing, and Rossiter (2001) found that only 30% of teacher respondents had received pedagogical training in pronunciation. Several of the teachers identified the need to integrate pronunciation into the communicative classroom to a larger extent, but most lacked the requisite knowledge and training to do so. Inadequate teacher training may be a lasting effect of the de-emphasis on pronunciation instruction during the communicative era due to the failure of communicative proponents to account adequately for any role for pronunciation in a communicative framework (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). However, this is not the only reason for the existing gap between pronunciation and communicatively oriented instruction.

Currently existing instructional materials on pronunciation do not fit the bill in terms of providing authentic, context-rich activities that provide focused practice for the specific area of pronunciation to be targeted, nor do they always draw on research evidence. In a review of intonation, Levis (1999) maintained that "present intonational research is almost completely divorced from modern language teaching and is rarely reflected in teaching materials" (p. 37). He elaborated that despite a plethora of research on English intonation since the 1970s, current textbooks tended to rely heavily on archaic and often erroneous conceptions of intonation and would need to revise and update how they depicted intonation in order to get out of that time warp. Like other areas of pronunciation, intonation would benefit from increased collaboration between pronunciation researchers, pedagogues, and designers of materials (Derwing & Munro, 2005).

Levis (1999) also noted that the treatment of intonation in textbooks was often devoid of context and lacked communicative value. He argued that although intonation had been touted as a purveyor of meaning in instructional materials, its full communicative value had not and would not be realized unless instructional activities went beyond their current focus on pattern practice and encouraged the communicative use of language. The challenge of integrating the targeted practice of a given feature of pronunciation with meaning in instructional materials and activities is not particular to intonation, nor indeed to pronunciation. Pennington and Richards (1986) cited as artificial the separation of pronunciation from communication and from other components of language use and called for more integration. Grant (1995), in a pronunciation-based materials developer for the classroom, maintained, "of all skill areas in ESL the gap between communicative principles and classroom practice remains the most apparent in the area of pronunciation" (p. 118).

To facilitate a carryover from targeted practice into spontaneous, real-word (or at least simulated) communication, Grant suggested shifting the communicative load from more to less controlled in an instructional sequence, conveying this progression by plotting activity types on a form-meaning continuum. The movement from guided (rehearsed) practice to more contextualized practice is in line with Morley's (1994) guidelines for the instructional planning of oral pronunciation activities. Irrespective of these instructional strategies, however, it seems from the above that instructors have been less successful in bridging the gap between pronunciation and communication than in other areas of language instruction.

6. Previous Research about the Effectiveness of Pronunciation Instruction on Learners' Achievement

There have been various arguments and support for the effectiveness of pronunciation instruction on learners' achievement in communicative competence. Morley (1998) stated that pronunciation plays an important role in overall communicative competence. Yong (2004) suggested that from the traditional ways of learning English, students neglected the basic knowledge of speaking. This may have been enough to meet the demands of English in the years when we had less communication with foreign countries. However, oral communication began to be more important when they arrived in this century with extended forms of communication with Western countries. Yong (2004) asserted that understanding by reading or writing would no longer be sufficient for the development of the economy and that communicating face to face personally or through the internet needed to be understood.

The central issue of pronunciation teaching is how to maximize the beneficial effects of instruction for students. One aspect of this issue is what should be taught in class. Earlier teaching approaches focused on the segmental features of pronunciation, while more recent approaches have emphasized supra-segmental features such as sentence rhythm

and intonation. However, this debate has never reached a conclusion. The growing trend in today's pronunciation curriculum design is to integrate both the most important segmentals and supra-segmentals appropriately in one course. Another aspect of the issue is how to teach effectively. Along with the development of instruction approaches, traditional teaching methods and techniques have been advocated or challenged during different times while new methods and techniques have been created. A more balanced view today, as represented by Celce-Murcia et al., (1996), is to use traditional pronunciation techniques as a starting point of class and later have students move to more communicative classroom tasks.

Empirical evidence on the effect of classroom pronunciation teaching practice has been provided by a number of studies (Suter, 1976; Jamieson & Morosan, 1986; Yule, Hoffman & Damico, 1987; Macdonald, Yule & Power, 1994; Elliot, 1995; Derwing, Munro & Wiebe, 1997, 1998; Derwing & Rossiter, 2003). Positive effects have been documented for various teaching methods and techniques on various pronunciation features. For example, Jamieson and Morosan (1986) proposed a framework for successful pronunciation instruction and showed its effectiveness for the acquisition of a pair of contrastive English sounds by French learners. Elliot (1995) found that a multimodal teaching methodology effective in improving certain Spanish sounds in American SSL learners. Derwing, Munro, and Wiebe (1997) showed that long-term ESL individuals' pronunciation improved significantly in terms of intelligibility, accentedness and comprehensibility in a program emphasizing global production skills.

However, some research has found few positive effects, or even a negative effect of pronunciation instruction under certain circumstances. Suter (1976) measured 61 non-native speakers of English on 20 variables suspected of displaying significant relationships to pronunciation accuracy using small interviews, questionnaires and psychological tests. The subjects' oral performance was rated by 14 English native speakers for overall pronunciation quality. Surprisingly, Suter found the variable of total amount of formal classroom training in English had a negative correlation with the pronunciation scores. It appeared that the more total formal training on pronunciation a speaker had had, the less accurate the pronunciation tended to be.

However, Suter (1976) argued that since all subjects had had some training before the investigation, the variable actually measured the relationship of much versus little training instead of some versus none. Therefore he suggested that formal training under certain limits is essential, but beyond the limit is simply unproductive. Also, the study measured only the amount of training. The quality of training received was not considered and could have had a different correlation with pronunciation accuracy.

Yule, Hoffman and Damico (1987) studied some ESL students' performance in a phoneme discrimination task before and after 8 weeks and 15 weeks of pronunciation training. They found that more than half of the subjects had actually decreased scores after 8 weeks of training, while their self-monitoring ability improved noticeably. The same subjects improved their performance after 15 weeks of pronunciation training. Therefore they argued that "there is a complex interaction over time between simply identifying a sound contrast and being confident that the identification is accurate" (p. 768). Macdonald, Yule and Powers (1994) compared learning outcomes under four instructional conditions- no instruction, teacher correction, self-study and interactive modification. The three groups of students' oral productions were assessed before and after a single experimental treatment for the quality of some target words and phrases in the field of metrical systems. All four conditions yielded similar results. Therefore little positive effect was found to favour any type of instruction.

Derwing, Munro and Wiebe (1998) and its continued research by Derwing and Rossiter (2003) compared learning outcome of 48 ESL learners under different types of pronunciation instruction. Their focus was what to teach instead of how to teach. The three groups of subjects received segmental instruction, global (general speaking habits and prosodic factors) instruction and no specific pronunciation instruction, respectively. The students' oral production was rated by 48 native speakers of English on a 9-point scale for comprehensibility, accentedness and fluency. The results showed that, for a sentence reading task, both the segmental and global groups improved in terms of comprehensibility and accentedness. However, for a narrative task, only the global group improved in terms of comprehensibility and fluency.

Although the segmental group made significantly fewer phonological errors than the global group at Time 2, it did not seem to have contributed to the raters' judgment of comprehensibility of their pronunciation. In addition, the raters' overall impressions for the speech samples showed that their attention was mostly drawn to prosodic problems instead of phonological errors, indicating the essential role of supra-segmentals in judgments of comprehensibility. Therefore they argued that prosody instruction should be more emphasized than segmental instruction. In sum, the past literature has documented the likely effects of teacher-led classroom instruction on various aspects of pronunciation using various approaches.

The focus of the pronunciation instruction on consciousness and awareness raising in second language acquisition

though Krashen's (1985) position was that pronunciation is acquired naturally. Furthermore clear instruction was important to the effectiveness of pronunciation teaching (Pennington, 1998) but this was contested by Suter (1976) who was not able to find a positive effect from instruction.

Derwing, Munro and Wiebe (1997) found a positive outcome of instruction which focused on general speaking habits as opposed to a concentration on individual segments. Derwing, Munro and Wiebe (1998) also found that both instruction in segmental accuracy and instruction in general speaking habits and prosodic features, led to improved pronunciation. Morley (1994) suggested that the focus on pronunciation teaching nowadays should be on designing new-wave instructional programs. Moreover, she stresses that these new instructional designs should take into account not only language forms and functions, but also issues of learner self-involvement and learner strategy training. Students who have become active partners in their own learning have developed the skills to monitor and modify their speech patterns. Teachers' awareness of learning opportunities might create potential for a deeper understanding of language learning and language classroom interaction. Alwright (2005) defines the learning opportunity as a more developmental unit of analysis and assesses for well planning in language learning.

Pronunciation practice is also important for the students who plan to study abroad or are currently living abroad. Increasing their pronunciation skills beforehand can build confidence and make them feel less reluctant to venture out to speak English. Students' personal attitude and self-esteem are major factors in improving English pronunciation. It is not merely exposure that matters, but how the students respond to the opportunities of listening to English spoken by a native speaker or of speaking themselves (Kenworthy, 1987).

Through the years, researchers interested in pronunciation learning have examined many variables in attempting to explain successful second language pronunciation ability. Studies have not been numerous, but have been productive. Research has shown (Vitanova & Miller, 2002) that learners can see improvement in both segmental and supra-segmental areas of pronunciation. However, once learners have mastered the basic sounds of English and identified some of the supra-segmental differences between their L1 and English, it is time to help them learn some strategies so that they can study more effectively on their own.

Oxford (1986b) explains that learning strategies are of great importance because they improve language performance, encourage learner autonomy, are teachable, and expand the role of the teacher in significant ways. Given the pronunciation instruction that promotes learner strategy awareness more basic knowledge about the relationship between learning strategies and pronunciation is needed (Morley, 1998). Research into potentially important variables affecting pronunciation has been surprisingly absent from the literature (Peterson, 2000).

In recent years, there has been a greater emphasis on teaching competent pronunciation, especially in ESL/EFL classrooms. This is due to the increasing realisation that poor pronunciation can cause serious problems for learners, such as communication breakdowns, anxiety, and discrimination (Morley, 1998). Yet English pronunciation is neglected in classrooms throughout the world today, including Asia. One of the reasons that it is neglected or ignored is because not many English pronunciation teaching strategies or techniques are available to teachers in the classroom (Wei, 2006).

Lu (2002) concluded that learners of ESL in Hong Kong have poor English pronunciation because they seem to lack of knowledge of English sounds. There is no practice in using phonetic symbols required in the curriculum. Moreover teachers of English pronunciation do not receive relevant professional training in the use of phonetic symbols. The reason is not unwillingness to teach pronunciation, but uncertainty as to how best to help learners' pronunciation is one of the most difficult areas for learners as well as teachers.

There are two opposing views on the teaching of pronunciation in the ESL classroom (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992). One view holds that the purpose of teaching pronunciation is to eradicate all traces of a foreign accent through pronunciation drills. The other view holds that the teaching of pronunciation is futile after a certain age due to a decreasing ability among learners to develop native-like pronunciation in a second language. Avery and Ehrlich (1992) assert that neither of those views is completely accurate. Factors that should be considered as having an effect on the acquisition of the sound system of a second language are biology, socio-culture, personality, and linguistics. These factors may prevent learners from attaining native-like pronunciation in a second language, so it is important that teachers set realistic goals. Kachru (1990, 1992) and Kachru and Nelson (1996) urge English language teaching practitioners to consider contextual realities before adopting pedagogic models of global English; language education should reflect how the language is used in that specific society.

Gillette (1994), Graham (1994), Pennington (1994), Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (1996) agree that the learner's first language influences the pronunciation of the target language and is a significant factor in accounting for foreign accents. So-called interference or negative transfer from the first language is likely to cause errors in aspiration, intonation, and rhythm in the target language and pronunciation of the basic formation of the vowel or

consonant. Fraser (1999) added that in the quest for effective teaching, it is worth diagnosing carefully the nature of the difficulties that may be encountered. There is a significant skill component for learners. Pronunciation is not just a cognitive 'knowing-that', it is also a physical 'knowing-how', similar to playing a sport or musical instrument. Learners need motivation and time to really practise pronunciation. It is worth spending class time discussing with learners their own ideas about what is involved in learning pronunciation.

Lu (2002) claims that learners suggest they should practise speaking. Learners need help in overcoming both their expectation that pronunciation is a subject which can be learned by listening to a teacher, and the psychological and social barriers that make it difficult for them to practise effectively. In addition, there is also a significant cognitive component in pronunciation learning, which is much less often acknowledged. It is useful to think of learning to pronounce a new language as involving a kind of concept formation rather than as a purely physical skill. The teachers must focus on two areas in teaching pronunciation. Firstly, learners must be made aware of aspects of their pronunciation that result in other people being unable to understand them. Secondly, learners must be given the opportunity to practise aspects of the English sound system which are crucial for their own improvement.

Firth (1992) stated that learners' achievement of a near perfect standard may individually vary to the degree in motivation, sensitivity to accuracy, age and education factors which are beyond a teacher's control. However, teachers should pay attention to the development of self-correction techniques and self-monitoring strategies. Self-correction is the ability to correct oneself when a pronunciation error has been pointed out by teachers or peers. It is critical that the teacher help to develop strategies which will allow the learner to self-correct and self-monitor by focusing on motivation (learners should understand why accuracy of oral production is important), explanations (description and demonstration appropriate to proficiency levels), practice (adequate opportunities to practise) and feedback (receive supportive and accurate feedback from teachers and learners in class).

The role of pronunciation in schools of language teaching has varied widely from having virtually no role in the grammar-translation method to being the main focus in the audio-lingual method where emphasis is on the traditional notions of pronunciation, minimal pairs, drills and short conversations (Castillo, 1990). Situational language teaching, developed in Britain, also mirrored the audio-lingual view of the pronunciation class (Richard & Rodgers, 1986). Morley (1991) states that the pronunciation class was one that gave primary attention to phonemes and their meaningful contrasts, combinatory phonotactic rules, and pronunciation of the basic formation of vowel or consonant etc., along with attention to stress, rhythm, and intonation.

During the late 1960s and the 1970s, questions were asked about the role of pronunciation in the ESL/EFL curriculum, whether the focus of the programs and the instructional methods were effective or not. Pronunciation programs were viewed as meaningless non communicative drill-and exercise gambits (Morley, 1991). In many language programs, the teaching of pronunciation was pushed aside, as many studies concluded 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, seemed to have little to do with classroom activities (Suter, 1976; Suter & Purcell, 1980).

Suter (1976) and Suter and Purcell (1980) concluded that pronunciation practice in class had little effect on the learner's pronunciation skills. The attainment of accurate pronunciation in a second language is a matter substantially beyond the control of educators. They qualified their findings by stating that variables of formal training and the quality of the training in pronunciation could affect the results, as would the area of pronunciation that had been emphasised, that is 'segmentals' (individual sounds of language) or 'supra-segmentals' (the 'musical patterns' of English, melody, pitch patterns, rhythm, and timing patterns). Pennington stated that there was "no firm basis for asserting that pronunciation is not teachable or that it is not worth spending time on" (1980, p. 20). Pennington (1994) questioned the validity of Suter and Purcell's findings as the factors of formal pronunciation training and the quality of the teaching could affect any research results. Also, Stern (1992, p. 112) stated that "There is no convincing empirical evidence which could help us sort out the various positions on the merits of pronunciation trainings."

If the above views represent a split in the teaching of pronunciation, what can the teacher do to improve their students' pronunciation if improvement can be obtained? Jones, Rusman, and Evans (1994) found that students with prior exposure to phonological rules and principles, although they do not always produce more accurate pronunciation, seem to be better equipped to assess their own speech and to be more aware of their particular problems. Concurrently, there was a shift from specific linguistic competencies to broader communicative competencies as goals for teachers and students (Morley, 1991). Morley states the need for the integration of pronunciation with oral communication, with more emphasis from segmentals to suprasegmentals, more emphasis on individual learner needs, and meaningful task-based practice and introducing peer correction and group

interaction (Castillo, 1990). Research has shown that teaching phonemes is not enough for intelligibility in communication. With the emphasis on meaningful communication and Morley's (1991, p. 488) premise, that "intelligible pronunciation is an essential component of communication competence", teachers should include pronunciation in their courses and expect students to do well in them. Without adequate pronunciation skills, the learners' ability to communicate is severely limited. Morley believes that not attending to a student's need is an abrogation of professional responsibility.

Other research gives support to Morley's belief of the need for professional responsibility when a given non-native speaker's pronunciation falls below the level at which he or she will be able to communicate orally no matter how good his or her control of English grammar and vocabulary might be (Celce-Murcia, 1987). Gilbert (1984a) believes the skills of listening comprehension and pronunciation are interdependent so that if speakers cannot hear English well and cannot be understood easily, they are cut off from conversation with native speakers. Noteboom (1983) also has suggested that speech production is affected by speech perception; the hearer has become an important factor in communication discourse. This illustrates the need to integrate pronunciation with communicative activities to give the students situations to develop their pronunciation by listening and speaking. The current research and the current trend reversal in the thinking of pronunciation shows there is a consensus that a learner's pronunciation in a foreign language needs to be taught in conjunction with communicative practices for the learner to be able to communicate effectively with native speakers.

7. English Pronunciation and the Target of Comfortable Intelligibility

Morley (1991) states that the goal of pronunciation should be changed from the attainment of perfect pronunciation to the more realistic goals of developing functional intelligibility, communicability, increased self-confidence, the development of speech monitoring abilities and speech modification strategies for use beyond the classroom. Abercrombie (1991) defines comfortable intelligibility as pronunciation which can be understood with little or no conscious effort on the part of listener. Morley (1991) also states that the overall aim is for the learner to develop spoken English that is easy to understand, serves the learner's individual needs, and allows a positive image as a speaker of a foreign language. In addition, the learner needs to develop awareness and monitoring skills that will allow learning opportunities outside the classroom environment. It is obvious that creating a stronger link between pronunciation and communication can help increase learners' motivation by bringing pronunciation to a level of intelligibility and encouraging learners' awareness of its potential as a tool for making their language not only easier to understand but more effective (Jones, 2002).

Pronunciation is clearly a central factor in learners' success in making themselves understood (Elson, 1992). Morley (1991) also states that intelligible pronunciation is an essential component of communication competence that teachers should include in courses and expect learners to do well. The ability to employ stress, intonation, and articulation in ways that support comprehension is a skill that for learners from many language backgrounds will only come slowly. Elson (1992) urges that learners need to be encouraged to immerse themselves in the target language and to persist in spite of the difficulties that are part of the language-learning process. The experience of unintelligibility or incomprehension grows larger because of sensitivity to 'correctness' or the need to communicate successfully in the target language. The speaker's self image and sense of accomplishment is closely bound to understanding and being understood. The result can be a high degree of frustration for the speaker or listener who might see each moment of incomprehension as a personal fault and responsibility. Klyhn (1986) observes that learners should be made aware that every message they utter needs to be understood.

8. Conclusion

Pronunciation must be viewed as more than correct production of individual sounds or isolated words. Instead, it must be viewed as a crucial part of communication that should be incorporated into classroom activities. English pronunciation instruction should be viewed in the same light as the other aspects and skills of the English language, such as vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing since it is an important part of communication, particularly through listening and speaking. Therefore, pronunciation components have to be incorporated in the materials, classroom activities and testing tools; and the teachers have to be trained in English pronunciation instruction. The teaching of English pronunciation has to aim at intelligible pronunciation considered as an essential component of communicative competence. Teachers can help students by highlighting elements such as sounds, syllables, stress and intonation. Teachers can actively encourage the students' actual production, build pronunciation awareness and practice through classes. They can encourage them repeatedly to monitor their own pronunciation and practice their speaking skills as much as possible in and outside the classroom. Pronunciation instruction is very important because of the following reasons:

1. Teaching pronunciation should be a priority because language is primarily a means of communication and this

communication should be understood by all. If one doesn't strive for a common pronunciation one runs the risk of not being understood by the target audience.

2. Teaching pronunciation is crucial since this is the main source of understanding. If people cannot utter the correct version of a word/expression then they are not able to communicate properly. It would lead to difficulties.

3. Teaching pronunciation is a priority in learning English. A good pronunciation brings you closer to the native accent of English. A good pronunciation provides a speaker with confidence to communicate.

4. Awareness on pronunciation not only does bring about a comprehensible output but also leads to better listening comprehension.

5. Teaching pronunciation is essential for our students. It leads them to a better understanding of native speakers and improves their ability to communicate. Pronunciation work gives the students more knowledge of how the language works because after all if the students know the language but can't communicate with it then it is a great pity.

6. Being able to speak English with proper pronunciation not only makes our speech intelligible, but also builds up proper rapport with the listeners.

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