

Pronunciation in ESL/EFL Teaching Methodologies¹

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Pronunciation has played different roles in ESL/EFL teaching methodologies. It has been more or less important in some of them and has been neglected in others. In the nineteenth century, it was largely ignored, but in the twentieth century, it became central. It was focal until the 1950's, since then, it has again lost importance (Moy, 1986).

The aim of this article is to provide a historical perspective on pronunciation teaching. This perspective considers the main ESL/EFL methodologies that emerged from the 1840's (when English began to be taught as a foreign language in schools) to the year 2001. Such a perspective reveals the different relative importance attached to pronunciation, native-like accent, correction of pronunciation, and accent reduction by each methodology.

In the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) that "dominated European and foreign language teaching from the 1840's to the 1940's" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986 p. 4), pronunciation was all but ignored. This method with certain modifications is still used in some places of the world nowadays (Richards and Rodgers, 1986). Some oral reading is done but there is no insistence on accurate pronunciation. Accuracy in grammar, translation, and writing is emphasized. Oral communication is not a priority for this method (Stern, 1983). The goal is to learn language in order to read the literature not to speak. So, there is no need to focus on pronunciation (Moy, 1986). In fact, it has minimal importance and correction of pronunciation is unnecessary. In short, according to Larsen -Freeman (1986) pronunciation receives little, if any, attention in this method.

In the period of time from 1880 to 1960, there were movements, as well as methods and approaches, in which pronunciation had a central role and a native-like pronunciation was the goal. The Reform Movement (RM) began in the 1880's with the participation of linguists such as Sweet, Viëtor, and Passy, who provided the theoretical elements to renew the teaching of second languages. With their influence, phonetics and the phonetic alphabet started to be employed in the teaching of pronunciation and in teacher training. For the proponents of this movement the spoken language was crucial. Learners had to hear the language first before they saw the written version (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

¹This is a refereed article

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These ideas were adopted by methods that emerged later (e.g. the Direct Method).

The Direct Method (DM) that was popular from around the turn of the century paid especial attention to speaking and pronunciation (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). In this case, learning a language was to communicate. During this period of time, teachers and students believed in the necessity of extensive training in pronunciation. The sound system of the language learned was taught from the very beginning using the International Phonetic Alphabet (Moy, 1986) and it was usual that students took dictation using the phonetic symbols. The teacher never imitated pronunciation errors: self-correction was the norm (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). In this method, pronunciation played one of the major roles in the history of second language teaching (Moy, 1986) and logically native-like pronunciation was sought. A renewed version of this method was introduced in the 1970's (Stern, 1983).

The Oral Approach (OA) and Situational Language Teaching also valued pronunciation. This was a method designed by British applied linguists. It enjoyed popularity from the 1930's to the 1960's and continued to be used in the 1980's (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). The goal of this method was to teach practical command of the four main skills. It aimed at "accuracy in both pronunciation and grammar" (Richards & Rodgers, p.36), native-like pronunciation was pursued. Choral imitation, individual imitation, and isolation of phrases, words, and sounds were different techniques used. In this method, errors were avoided at all costs. Self-correction and peer correction was very important (Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Richards & Rodgers).

The Audiolingual Method (AM) emerged in the United States toward the end of the 1950's and prevailed until the late 1960's. The objective of the Audiolingualism was oral proficiency. And pronunciation had a central role as in the Direct Method and the Oral Approach. Native-like pronunciation was also sought. Learners were introduced into the sound system very early. Segments (vowels and consonants) and suprasegmentals (stress, intonation, rhythm etc) were taught. Dialogs, drills, and minimal pairs were used to develop native-like accent. Language laboratories were helpful to train learners in pronunciation (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Errors were considered to lead to the formation of undesirable habits. So, the teacher had to correct them immediately (Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

The methods and approaches that have emerged since 1960 have placed less emphasis to pronunciation. They do not seek native-like pronunciation. However, there are some of them that pay less attention to pronunciation than others. One of them is the Cognitive Code Learning (CCL) approach. It began to be influential in the second language teaching of the 1960's, after the criticism of the structuralist approach and behaviorist theory by Chomsky. The Cognitive Code Learning holds that it is fruitless for most learners to try to speak with a native-like accent. Pronunciation receives limited attention but it is highly recommended not to overemphasize the teaching of this skill since native-like accent is neither possible nor necessary. The idea is to develop language skills native-speakers have but native-like accent. Pronunciation errors are tolerated. With this ap-

proach pronunciation became less important (Moy, 1986).

Gattegno introduced the Silent Way (SW) in the 1960's, but it became popular in the 1970's. This is a method that pays special attention to pronunciation. The objectives of the method are near-native fluency, correct pronunciation and mastery of the prosodic features of the target language. Hence, the role of pronunciation is important, Moy (1986) mentions that the sound system is introduced before meaningful expressions are taught. He also reports that special materials (rods, colors and charts) are used. Native-like pronunciation is not a goal, affirms Moy. But one may think that near native pronunciation is sought having analyzed Ommagio's (1986), Moy's (1986) Richards & Rodgers' (1986)

And Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin's (1996) discussion of the method. Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (1996 p. 6) mention the existence of accent reduction exercises in the Silent Way. In its context, learners correct pronunciation errors. Learner-learner correction and self-correction are the norms (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

Total Physical Response (TPR) is a method generated by Asher in the mid 1960's that pays little attention to pronunciation. Its goal is oral proficiency at the beginning level. Listening and responding to commands with actions is taught first. Conversational dialogs,

are introduced later, when learners have completed 120 hours of instruction. Before speaking becomes an aim, many errors in pronunciation and grammar occur, and are fully tolerated (Richards & Rodgers, 1986) As Ommagio (1986) points out, the lack of accuracy and absence of feedback are not congruent with the proficiency goals of the method. This wide tolerance of errors may hinder the learner's progress in speaking in the long run.

Community Language Learning (CLL) was introduced by Curran in the early 1970's. The objective of the method is communicative competence accomplishing near-native like command of the target language. The pronunciation work, like all other exercises in this methodology is learner-generated and controlled (Moy, 1986 p.79). Playing the role of a "human computer", the counselor or knower ("teacher") repeats the utterances fed by the clients ("learners"). The clients imitate the computer. The computer may resay an utterance as often as the clients want (Moy). According to this methodology, errors are not corrected at the beginning. It takes time for clients to accept criticism. Only when they are ready the knower begins correcting them (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach that began in the mid 1970's. In this approach, pronunciation is not emphasized. The desired goal of the approach is communicative competence. Accuracy is an aspect tied to the context. To be intelligible in a given situation is what matters. Comprehensible or intelligible pronunciation is aimed at. As Moy (1986) mentions, pronunciation receives a secondary emphasis compared with other skills, no pronunciation drills take place. Learners are not expected

to acquire native-like pronunciation. Pronunciation is not neglected but is contemplated "as a small part of linguistic competence, which itself is a limited part of communicative competence" (Moy, p. 82). In fact, fluency is more important than error correction. Within this approach, some genuine communicative pronunciation activities have been developed (Pica, 1984; Celce-Murcia, 1987). Nevertheless, in the 1980's, there were practically no materials to teach pronunciation with an emphasis in communication. Recently, some new materials with pronunciation communicative activities have been published e.g. Grant (1993), Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (1996), and Hewings and Goldestein (1998).

The Natural Approach (NA) was introduced by Terrel in 1977. Very little attention to pronunciation is paid in this approach. Its objective consists in helping beginners become intermediates. The focus in the classroom is on listening and reading while speaking is allowed to emerge. Errors are considered natural (Richards & Rodgers, 1986) and the correction of speech errors is considered unhelpful (Ommagio, 1986). As accuracy is not very important for this method fossilization may arise easily (Ommagio). Thus this is possible to conclude that pronunciation is not relevant in the context of this approach.

Suggestopedia (S) is a method introduced by Lozanov in 1978 (Ommagio, 1986). It aims to develop advanced conversational proficiency in short time. The important thing for learners is to understand and give creative solutions to problems. A major technique in this method is the dialog reading by the instructor ("teacher"). The instructor's pronunciation is very important, but not explicit pronunciation instruction is given. Learners are exposed to pronunciation with certain repetition since a long dialog is read three times per session with specific music: classical or pre-classical (Larsen-Freeman, 1986), Baroque (Moy, 1986), particularly Baroque largo (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Errors as in other methodologies are tolerated. For S the content is central; not the form (Larsen-Freeman, 1986).

Of all these methodologies, the communicative approach is the most influential nowadays. Many teachers and curriculum designers follow this approach. Therefore they give a secondary role to pronunciation. However, to be influential does not necessarily mean to be on the right track. Two studies carried out by the author (Correa, 1995; 1997) question the approaches and methods in which accent reduction is discarded without taking into account the learners necessities. A subjective and objective needs analysis carried out in a communicative program at college level question the communicative approach considering the low scores in intelligibility of pronunciation and the learners' needs concerning accent reduction (Correa, 1997).

On the following pages there is a table that summarizes all what has been said before about pronunciation teaching.

The table reveals that pronunciation was, in fact, largely ignored in the nineteenth century, became central in the first sixty years of the twentieth century and then lost importance again in the 1960's. Just the Silent Way continued to attach importance to

pronunciation after these years. It is also clear that native-like pronunciation was pursued (over mere intelligibility) from the 1880's to the 1960's. No method introduced later sought for their students to acquire native-like pronunciation. Looking at the table it is easy to perceive that initial tolerance to pronunciation errors became a marked intolerance over a period of almost 80 years (1880 to 1960). In the 1960's tolerance to pronunciation errors emerged again. However, note that the Silent Way aims at correct pronunciation by using self-correction mainly. The methodologies that were introduced later have a wide tolerance of pronunciation errors, some completely freely. It is evident that the teacher-learner correction common in the first methodologies became less important. Next, peer correction and self-correction were introduced and were considered much more effective than teacher-learner correction. Besides, one may see that accent reduction was abandoned for all the methods and approaches that emerged in the 1960's or later except for the Silent Way.

The effectiveness of each approach to pronunciation may be determined by thorough evaluation. It seems that none of the approaches has been carefully assessed except for the communicative approach (see Correa, 1997) which has been, at least, researched in depth in a communicative language program at university level. It is recommended that the approaches that are influential nowadays be carefully evaluated in order to determine whether they are truly efficient, i.e., if learners are intelligible and have a foreign accent according to their needs.

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PRONUNCIATION IN ESL METHODOLOGIES						
APPROACH/ METHOD	PERIOD	ROLE OF PRONUNCIATION	NATIVE-LIKE PRONUNCIATION			
MOVEMENT REDUCTION	MAIN GOAL	PRONUNCIATION AS AN AIM	CORRECTION OF ACCENT PRONUNCIATION			
1. GTM	Popular 1840's-	Read the literature	—	Minimal importance	—	Not important
1940's						
2. RM	Began late 1880's	Speaking	+	Central	+	Not specified *
+						
3. DM	Popular late 1800's	Communication	+	Central	+	Errors undesired T-L correction
+						
1900's						
4. OA	Emerging 1930's costs	Command of 4 basic	+	Central	+	Errors avoided at all
+						
		Continued 1980's skills				T-L & peer
corrected						Error immediately
5. AM	Late 1950's	Oral proficiency	+	Central	+	Errors never imitated
+						
	Prevailed 1960's					T-L correc-
tion						
6. CCL	Influential 1960's	Develop language skills	—	Little importance	—	Errors are tolerated
		native-speakers have but native-like ac-				
cent						
7. SW	Introduced early 1960's	Native-like fluency	—	Very important	—	Self correction
+		popular				
1970's						
8. TPR	Developed mid	Oral proficiency at	—	Very little importance	—	Errors fully tolerated
....						
	1960's	the beginning level				at the beginning
9. CLL	Developed early	Communicative	—	Learners imitate the "knower"	—	No correction takes

place at 1970's	competence	(T) pronunciation as much as they	at he beginning
10. CLT important	Emerged mid 1970's Communicative competence	Secondary. Intelligible pronunciation is aimed at	Fluency more than error correc-
11. NA unhelpful	Introduced 1977 Help beginners to become intermediates	Minimal importance	Speech errors are considered natural and correction
12. S late 1978	Advanced conversation proficiency	Instructor's pronunciation has to be good. Pronunciation teaching not ex-	Not specified *
plicit			

1. GTM= Grammar-Translation Method 4. AM=Audiolingual Method 7. TPR=Total Physical Response 10. CLL= Community Language Teaching
2. RM=Reform Movement 5. OA=Oral Approach 8. SW=The Silent Way 11.
- CLT=Communicative Language Teaching 3. DM=Direct Method 6. CCL=Cognitive Code 9. S=Suggestopedia
12. NA=The Natural Approach Learning
- + = yes -- = no T = teacher L = learner * Not specified in the literature reviewed