

On the Teachability of Pausing Strategies in Foreign Language Learning

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THEORIES AND IDEAS AGAINST AND FOR TEACHING PHONOLOGY

Before proceeding with the introduction, we would like to cite a passage from Jostien Gaarder's world-wide famous novel *Sophie's World*:

"Once upon a time there was a centipede that was amazingly good at dancing with all hundred legs. All the creatures of the forest gathered to watch every time the centipede danced, and they were all duly impressed by the exquisite dance. But there was one creature that didn't like watching the centipede dance—that was a tortoise."

"It was probably just envious."

"How can I get the centipede to stop dancing? thought the tortoise. He couldn't just say he didn't like the dance. Neither could he say he danced better himself, that would obviously be untrue. So he devised a fiendish plan."

"Let's hear it."

"He sat down and wrote a letter to the centipede. 'O incomparable centipede,' he wrote, 'I am a devoted admirer of your exquisite dancing. I must know how you go about it when you dance. Is it that you lift your left leg number 28 and then your right leg number 39? Or do you begin by lifting your right leg number 17 before you lift your left leg number 44? I await your answer in breathless anticipation."

Yours truly, Tortoise."

"How mean!"

"When the centipede read the letter, she immediately began to think about what she actually did when she danced. Which leg did she lift first? And which leg next? What do you think happened in the end?"

"The centipede never danced again?"

It seems that every native speaker of a language is able to master the phonology of his/her native language and is able to exhibit phonological features of the language in his/her speech quite perfectly. If we were to ask a question similar to that of the tortoise, would a native speaker cease to exhibit those phonological features in his/her native language.

Nunan (2002) calls listening the Cinderella skill in language learning because listening has remained in the shadow of speaking and most people equated knowing a

language with being able to speak and write in the target language. However, we believe that teaching pronunciation is at least as important as listening is. After all, during the post grammar translation era, listening has always been treated as one of the four basic skills, and rarely has it been given a secondary role in the teaching of foreign languages.

Ideas regarding the teaching of phonology have swung at the extreme ends of the language teaching pendulum; while some believe that phonology is a core component of language teaching activities (for example as will be discussed below, Caleb Gattegno was in favor of teaching phonology even to the starting learners), some, like Stephen Krashen, believe that there is no room for the teaching of phonology because it is not learned, rather, it is acquired.¹ In addition to Krashen, advocates of Critical Period Hypothesis also believe that it is virtually impossible to teach phonology to adults because phonological features of a language can only be acquired.

From a slightly different perspective, Carmichael (2014) discusses the question in relation with segmental and supra-segmental phonology. Carmichael argues that second language learners do tend to achieve differential pronunciation success in segmental and supra-segmental components of speech, age being a determinant factor. An early Age of Acquisition is pre-requisite for supra-segmental success in L2, in that, decline of an L2 learner's ability to acquire native-like intonation appears to begin at a very young age.

Despite the presence of counter evidence Hill (1970) and Neufeld (1977) believe that second language productive phonology is attainable regardless of the learner's age and first language. To those scholars, there are methods that can enhance the teaching of L2 pronunciation and that can help students acquire native or near native proficiency in pronunciation.²

SIGNIFICANCE AND FUNCTIONS OF PROSODY AND PAUSING IN SPOKEN DISCOURSE

Literature on phonology of L2 users dwells on two basic foci: segmental and supra-segmental phonology. We believe it is appropriate to discuss the underlying reasons of idiosyncrasies of L2 phonology before we proceed to discuss the significance and functions of pausing. Due to economic reasons, we will not cite the results of several studies;

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1. J. C. Richards and T. S. Rodgers, *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching: A description and analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
 2. J. Warsi, Effects of Visual Feedback on Second Language Productive Phonology. Online Documents at http://jilaniwarsi.tripod.com/first_comp.pdf. [12.03.2014].

instead we will refer to the discussion of a review study. Upon their review of research on L2 sounds, Broselow and Kang (2013) observed that three main topics appear in those studies:

1. whether L2 acquisition patterns should be understood as effects of L1 transfer or of universal preferences for particular linguistic structures;
2. whether acquisition patterns should be explained at the level of abstract phonology or at a phonetic level, and
3. whether patterns in L2 production correlate with patterns in L2 perception.

The answers to the questions above suggest that in some cases transfer from the native language is the main reason underlying the idiosyncrasies of the second language learners, and in some cases, speech patterns of the L2 speaker seem to be stemming from neither L1 nor L2.

As for the second question, while there are some L2 patterns which are accounted for with reference to abstract phonological structures, there are some L2 patterns which are believed to be caused by phonetic salience and/or articulatory ease.

Regarding the third question, there is not a simple explanation for the relationship between production, perception and lexical representation emerged because while in some cases accurate perception precedes the productions in some cases vice versa is observed.

The answers above could also be given to the questions similar to the three questions cited above with a difference only in terms of a pausing component: thus pausing strategies and patterns of L2 speakers might be accounted for by the transfer from L1; and articulatory ease and accurate perception of pausing might precede or lag production. Finally, it could be argued that there is not a simple explanation for the relationship between production and perception of pauses.

Another researcher, Loritz (1999) also cites pronunciation as an aspect of language in which adult second-language learners most frequently fail to achieve the proficiency attained by young language learners, and lists five difficulties adults encounter in the acquisition of phonology.

In the first place, adults often simply do not hear the difference between two sounds. Secondly, there is the difficulty in pronouncing the sounds which are *different* from those of adult learners' native language. Thus, it becomes quite clear that English being a stress-timed language offers serious difficulties for speakers of other languages whose stress patterns are different. The second difficulty is also the underlying reason for the third difficulty in that first-language *interference* occurs when producing L2 utter-

ances. The fourth problem emerges from the difficulty in pronouncing the same problematic phones, also troublesome for L1 children. The fifth problem is maintaining accurate pronunciation in rapid speech. In trying to maintain accurate pronunciation, speakers may end up with idiosyncratic pausing patterns.

A few functions are attributed to the role pausing plays in the spoken productions. For one, it has been argued that prosody provides cohesion and coherence to a text: not only pitch boundaries but also pauses provide information about how lexical conjunctions are used to organize constituents.³ This shows that in Wennerstroms's view in addition to pronouns, elisions and repetitions, pauses prove to be another category of factors to be made use of in evaluating cohesion and coherence in a text and/or textual structure.

With pedagogical concerns in mind, Bada (2006) investigated pauses following and preceding "that" in noun clauses with the participation of native English speakers and Turkish speakers of English. Regarding the pause time preceding and following "that" in that-clauses in read speech he found that while pausing preceding "that" was much longer than in the following position in the production of native speaker group, it was observed to be just the opposite with the Turkish group.

Marotta (2014) investigated a specific issue in prosody. In her study, Marotta tried to find answers to the following questions: a) is the learning of new prosodic features more or less difficult for an adult speaker with respect to segmental features? and b) can a speaker-listener exposed to a foreign accent show the same or a different sensitivity towards the prosodic and segmental characteristics of L2? Marotta found that on the production side, a speaker of L2 can very hardly lose the phonetic-prosodic imprinting of his/her L1; on the perceptual side, the sensitivity of native speakers towards their mother tongue is so fine-grained that the perception of even one feature of a foreign language – segmental or suprasegmental – is sufficient to recognize the "foreign accent" in a learner's speech.

In a Turkish context, Kılıç (2013) focused his attention on the teachability of pausing strategies and conducted an experimental study in which non-native participants were divided into two equal groups: Target Group (TG) and Control Group (CG). The TG was provided with awareness training for 10 hours regarding their idiosyncratic pausing patterns, whereas the CG was not exposed to any kind of training at all. The post-test analysis of pausing durations preceding and following the conjunctions revealed that the treatment was effective in making the non-native participants in the TG aware of native-

3. A. Wennerstrom, *The Music of Everyday Speech Prosody and Discourse Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

like pausing patterns. The findings showed that they started to use the native speaker pausing norms, while CG L2 production in this matter remained idiosyncratic.

Again, in a recent study, Dłaska and Krekeler (2013) also focused on the teaching of pronunciation through computers. In their study, the researchers provided their participants with received implicit and explicit feedback; when learners listened to a repetition of their own pronunciation they received implicit feedback on their current performance. This did not necessarily enable them to draw relevant conclusions on how to improve it. The second feedback intervention all students received (listening to model pronunciation) could be regarded as a form of a recast. The results of the study showed that among different kinds of pronunciation teaching methods, explicit individual corrective feedback (ICF) should be implemented as a complement to listening only.

FILLED VS. UNFILLED PAUSES

There is another point to be considered in a discussion on the teachability of phonology in general and pausing in specific: the role of filled pauses. As known, filled pauses (FPs) are used when the speaker tries to decide what to say, and are considered as by-product of speech planning. Therefore, some believe that they are devoid of communicative value and should be thrown away from spontaneous speech. In addition, the fact that the use of FPs in speech, particularly in public speaking, is considered as a deficient use type, is the underlying reason of FPs' not been integrated into language teaching thus far.⁴

Despite these drawbacks, language learners may benefit from a training focusing on the use of FPS. Rose (1998) also investigated the possible effect of training in the use of FPs and found that such training was beneficial not only for speaking abilities but also for listening.

Swerts (1998) provides another rationale for the teaching of FPs: in his study he analyzed twelve spontaneous monologues (Dutch) and found that phrases following major discourse boundaries more often contain FPs and that there is a system in the way speakers produce FPs. Evidently, FPs may carry information about larger-scale topical units: stronger breaks in the discourse are more likely to co-occur with FPs than do weaker ones.

4. R. L. Rose, Filled Pauses in Language Teaching: Why and How. Online Documents at <http://www.roselab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/resources/file/teachingfps.pdf>. [12.03.2014].

THE PLACE OF TEACHING PHONOLOGY IN THE LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS

The teaching and learning of L2 phonology moves between the ends of a pendulum: while during the middle of the twentieth century, L2 sound system was considered the first priority for teaching and learning, it received much less attention during the second half of the century as major interest in linguistic theory shifted from phonology to syntax, and with general acceptance of the Critical Period Hypothesis. In recent years, however, there has been renewed interest in phonological perception and production from linguistic, cognitive, and social perspectives, and renewed emphasis is now placed on pronunciation in teaching second languages.⁵

Underlying reasons for the above changing attitudes towards the teaching of L2 phonology can be found in Richards and Rodgers' (1999) arguments. The researchers claim that there are two main motives causing changes in language teaching methods throughout history:

The kind of proficiency learners need changed; while reading comprehension was the goal of the language study in the past, nowadays oral proficiency is prioritized.

Theories regarding the nature of language and language learning have changed.

Thus our aim in the discussion to follow is to evaluate the place of teaching prosody in some of the language teaching methods.

AUDIOLINGUALISM: The father of the American behaviourist psychology John Watson thinks that thought and speech are inseparable because thought is in a sense covert speech.⁶ Drawing its major insights from behaviourist psychology, audio-lingual theory considers language primarily as speech, but, as can be expected quite naturally, speaking skills are themselves dependent upon the ability to accurately perceive and produce the major phonological features of the target language.⁷

SILENT WAY: Silent way draws our attention to the importance of grasping the "spirit" of the language and not just its component forms. To Gattegno the "spirit" of the language means the way each language is composed of phonological and supra-segmental elements that combine to give the language its unique sound system and melody. The

5. M. Saville-Troike, *Introducing Second Language Acquisition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

6. F. Tamura, *The Development of the Cognitive Code-Learning Theory: Trends in Language Methodology in the United States*. Online Documents at http://sucra.saitama-u.ac.jp/modules/xoonips/download.php/JOS-KJ00000164085.pdf?file_id=6111. [12.03.2014]

7. J. C. Richards and T. S. Rodgers, *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*.

learner must gain a “feel” for this aspect of the target language as soon as possible.⁸ As learners gain feel for phonological aspects of the target language, they will certainly become aware of pausing patterns inter and intra sentences.

TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE: TPR seems to be a perfect language teaching method serving as a means of teaching pausing patterns in the target language. Drawing heavily on the comprehension of imperatives such as “point to the desk; walk to the desk; walk to the door; touch the desk, touch the door; point to the chair; touch the chair,”⁹ TPR teaches learners pausing patterns of English in a way that Stephen Krashen describes as an acquisition process.¹⁰

LEXICAL APPROACH: Michael Lewis (1997), who coined the term lexical approach, is in favour of emphasizing words in language teaching because “instead of words, we consciously try to think of collocations, and to present these in expressions. Rather than trying to break things into ever smaller pieces, there is a conscious effort to see things in larger, more holistic, ways”.¹¹ Making a distinction between vocabulary—traditionally understood as a stock of individual words with fixed meanings—and lexis, which includes not only the single words but also the word combinations that we store in our mental lexicons; lexical approach emphasizes noticing and memorization of chunks of language.¹²

That Lewis draws our attention to holistic ways of seeing vocabulary in chunks implies that not only in teaching reading, writing or listening but also in teaching speaking, we should pay special care to the production of such whole chunks, which, in turn, lead us and our students to observe appropriate pausing times in intra sentential positions.

8. J. C. Richards and T. S. Rodgers, *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*.

9. D. Larsen-Freeman and M. Anderson, *Techniques & Principles in Language Teaching* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

10. J. C. Richards and T. S. Rodgers, *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*

11. M. Lewis, *Implementing the lexical approach: Putting theory into practice* (Hove, England: Language Teaching Publications, 1997).

12. O. Moudraia, Lexical Approach to Second Language Learning. Online Documents at <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED455698.pdf>. [12.03.2014].

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