

FOUNDATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN PRONUNCIATION TEACHING: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

The English language is known for very complex pronunciation, influencing the overall communicative competence and all four language skills. Perhaps due to the fear of this complexity, teaching pronunciation is often considered daunting and relegated to the background of teaching priorities. This literature review investigates the historical background of pronunciation instruction, updated methodological approaches, and current trends in the area. New studies deal mainly with the use of digital technologies and computer- and mobile-assisted training. Attention is also given to the rising use of artificial intelligence and augmented reality in pronunciation teaching. By linking the theoretical foundations with the empirical findings of this review, the need for continuous efforts for innovation and quality teacher training in the field of pronunciation teaching arises. It is also possible to identify a research gap in the insufficient application of neuroscience findings to pronunciation teaching practice, which calls for future research in this matter.

Key words

Pronunciation teaching, learners, EFL, approaches, digital technologies

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Introduction

It is impossible to deny the importance of pronunciation's role, which is intertwined in all four language skills and extends even into thinking as such (Underhill, 2010). Broad and compound pronunciation is one of the enumerated characteristics of the English language.

Intonation, word stress, and rhythm are essential components of the English language that frequently influence the efficacy and clarity of communication (Roach, 2009). Teaching pronunciation is surely one of the more challenging aspects that English language teachers must go through during their active careers (Pourhosein Gilakjani, 2012).

Accurate pronunciation is essential for learners' communicative competence and overall confidence in using English (Modesti, 2015). Ensuring that pronunciation is consistently addressed in lesson planning and teacher training programs is vital in fostering more effective language learning outcomes (Harmer, 2015).

Teachers act as role models for their learners and pronunciation imitation is no exception in this area. The accuracy of pronunciation is essential for all learners of English, and as such, the proficiency of future teachers of the English language should be perceived as paramount (Levis & McCrocklin, 2018).

Regarding trends in pronunciation teaching today, it is possible to observe a shift from the necessity of native-like pronunciation to intelligibility (Zarate-Sandez, 2021). Already in the 1980s, authors spoke about the fact that few teachers directly aimed for nativeness, while intelligibility was considered the "sensible goal" in pronunciation learning (Kenworthy, 1987: 13). However, a modern authority in English phonetics

and phonology, Peter Roach, warns that without the background knowledge of specific pronunciation aspects, intelligibility is at risk and thus the ultimate understanding of foreign learners (Roach, 2009).

This paper will review ten studies from the last 5 years dealing with current trends in pronunciation teaching while bridging the findings with the theoretical background of pronunciation teaching. As has been and will be mentioned many times, pronunciation teaching is one of the most complex aspects of the English language, and it is necessary to constantly examine the shortcomings, challenges, and opportunities in this area.

The History of Pronunciation Teaching

As stated by Kelly (1969), Sanskrit grammarians in India established a robust network of phonology in the eon before Christ, which served as some of the inspiration and contribution to the growth of popularity of the European school of phonetics towards the latter part of the nineteenth century. The methods in the 19th century were mainly characterized by an emphasis on the written language while speaking and pronunciation were not considered necessary in language learning (Murphy & Baker, 2015). However, over the past 150 years, there has been a notable improvement in pronunciation teaching (Qian & Deris, 2023).

A significant turning point in pronunciation teaching emerged with the Reform Movement of the 19th century (Giesler, 2021). The contributions of figures like Henry Sweet, Wilhelm Viëtor, and Paul Passy (Passy, 1897; Sweet, 1877; Viëtor, 1882) were crucial in applying phonetics to language instruction and subsequently extended to the development of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and the foundation of the International Phonetic Association (Hirschhorn, 2017).

According to Celce-Murcia et al. (2010), the movement introduced several fundamental principles such as prioritizing spoken language, language instruction making use of phonetic research, strong phonetic background for teachers, and fostering proper phonetic guidance in order to develop positive speech patterns.

As observed by Kelly (1969), the study of pronunciation and language education is regarded as a recent area of academic inquiry and thinking, only gaining momentum for its development as a distinct subject in the 20th century thanks to applied linguistics and psychology. Unlike regions with more advanced phonetic understanding, European pronunciation teaching was primarily based on imitation and spelling (Kelly, 1969).

Updated Approaches to Pronunciation Teaching

The field of modern pronunciation teaching in the 20th century encompasses two general approaches: the intuitive-imitative approach and the analytic-linguistic approach (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). The former relies on the learner's capacity to mimic the rhythms and sounds of the target language without the direct need for explicit information (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). It also assumes that there are suitable models available for mimicking, a possibility made more likely by the introduction of phonograph records, tape recorders, and language labs in the middle of the 20th century, and recently with modern technology (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996; Jones, 1969; Lado, 1964).

In contrast, the analytic-linguistic approach supports listening, imitation, and production with the help of various tools. For instance, a description of articulators, the International Phonetic Alphabet, or a diagram of the human vocal apparatus (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). Created to accompany the intuitive-imitative approach, it specifically alerts the learner to concentrate attention on the target language's sounds and rhythms (Abercrombie, 1982; Catford, 2001; Kelly, 2000).

Curricular Background of Pronunciation Teaching

Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) remark on numerous learner-related elements that must be taken into account while developing the pronunciation syllabus. Learner variables, such as age, linguistic background, proficiency level, and sociocultural attitudes toward the target language, play a pivotal role (Kenworthy, 1987). For instance, the design of a course syllabus for young learners in compulsory education will take on a very different form and focus from a pronunciation improvement course for healthcare workers (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

Linguistic variables also impact pronunciation acquisition, as first-language (L1) transfer can affect learners' perception and production of second-language (L2) sounds, while this phenomenon is known as sound interference (Cook, 2003; Ellis, 1997; Kralova, 2011; Ritchie, 1968; Weinreich, 1979). In order to minimize errors, teachers should focus on the sounds absent in the learners' L1 and highlight allophonic or distributional differences (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010).

The convictions at the institutional level and linguistic policy inherently constrain the design of the pronunciation syllabus, thus forming methodological variables (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). While some contexts focus on explicit practice and correction, others may de-emphasize pronunciation teaching, favoring exposure to native discourse instead (Kenworthy, 1987).

Integrating Pronunciation into Lessons

Since listening and speaking are mutually inclusive acts, Marks (2002, as cited in Harmer, 2015) implies that pronunciation is an integral part of every lesson. "Nevertheless, how and when we deal with pronunciation is a major issue for the way we conduct our classes" (Harmer, 2015: 281). Harmer (2015) divides the pronunciation teaching into four different categories:

- **Whole Lessons:** Committing entire lessons to pronunciation practice, while incorporating listening or vocabulary exercises.
- **Discrete Slots:** Including short sections on specific pronunciation aspects within more generally focused lesson plans.
- **Integrated Phases:** Incorporating pronunciation practice into broader exercises, e.g., highlighting stress or intonation patterns during listening exercises.
- **Opportunistic Teaching:** When pronunciation problems occur during class, the teacher addresses them spontaneously without previous preparation.

Pollard (2008) reveals that regular practice of pronunciation is indispensable and highlights the fact that novice teachers should be advised to regularly practice pronunciation with quick assignments. Scrivener (2011) supports these ideas by stating that teachers should incorporate phonemic exercises into all their grammar and lexis lessons.

Teaching Different Aspects of Pronunciation

Sounds

Harmer (2015) reports that teachers frequently instruct learners to concentrate on a single sound, which enables them to illustrate how it is formed and how it might be pronounced. The use of well-known games and their variations, such as phonemes bingo, phonemic crosswords, or anagrams, is also encouraged (Scrivener, 2011). Pollard (2008) gives several tips on how to teach and practice individual sounds:

- a) **Through demonstration** – The teacher can overemphasize the production or point to their lips when producing certain sounds.
- b) **Through explanation** – The teacher explains the background of the production of a certain sound.
- c) **Through diagrams** – The teacher explains the creation of individual sounds using diagrams showing the oral cavity (Figure 1).

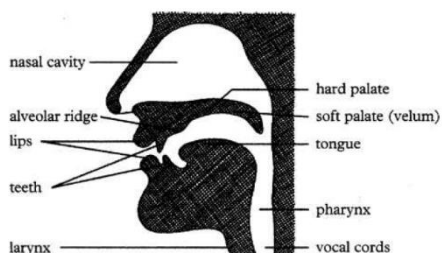


Figure 1: The Vocal Tract (Underhill, 2005: 2)

Word stress

Harmer (2015) indicates that teachers are expected to use the standardized approach of marking the word stress whenever learners encounter new terms in class. “Young learners are very good at imitating – especially their teachers. And we can help them hear and think about the way words are pronounced by involving them in games and actions” (Harmer, 2015: 287). The following activity created by Walker (2014, In: Harmer, 2015) is an excellent example of the above-mentioned. The teacher informs the learners that they will create words by standing and squatting. Learners must consider how many syllables a word has before creating the word "statues." If the word is a *photographer*, for instance, one learner stands and three learners squat, as in Figure 2 below.

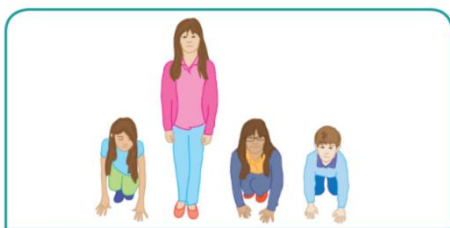


Figure 2: An activity for teaching word stress (Walker, 2010, as cited in Harmer, 2015: 351)

Pollard (2008) adds several other ways of teaching and practicing word stress:

- 1) Have learners repeat words after the teacher while accentuating the pronunciation and punching the air in time with the stressed syllables to practice word stress. If the teacher can find a rhythm, such activities might be enjoyable.
- 2) While calling out words, demonstrate to them which syllable is stressed (e.g., with the help of a whiteboard or flashcards).
- 3) Grouping words with the same syllable of stress is another way of practicing. Show the learners the words and ask them to sort the words into groups based on the stressed syllable.

However, Kenworthy (1987) criticizes the tactic of using gestures, choral repetitions, and chants, which are all extremely common and suggests the use of analytical tasks, which can be even more effective. The author continues by stating that these activities call for active engagement, integrate a meaning component, and may be especially helpful for adult learners.

Intonation

As reported by Scrivener (2011), English speakers utilize intonation as a sort of oral counterpart to written punctuation, frequently referred to as the "music" of the language. In addition to having a noticeable impact on meaning, intonation reveals the speaker's attitude (Kenworthy, 1987). Although there are some common patterns and a few unambiguous principles, it is challenging to teach intonation in a systematic way since many people with an "unmusical" ear find it challenging to identify or classify intonation patterns (Scrivener, 2011).

Pollard (2008) reveals several tips for teaching and practicing intonation:

- a) Use arrows to indicate rising or falling intonation on the board.
- b) Say the statement with an emphasis on intonation or use your hand to make a rising or falling motion at the intonation's high and low points. Always ask the learners to repeat.
- c) Asking learners to listen to recordings of words while also studying their written forms can help them improve their intonation. They must indicate if the intonation rises or falls on the phrases. The sentences can then be practiced aloud.
- d) Teachers can read out several phrases and ask learners to identify the message they are trying to express through the tone of voice as a way to practice intonation that carries feeling (Pollard, 2008).

Scrivener (2011) adds several other tips:

- a) Humming, singing, or whistling the sentence before actually saying it.
- b) Motivate learners to convey their emotions through their speech.
- c) In contrast with Pollard (2008), Scrivener (2011) advises using the trick of exaggerating lack of intonation and adds that it can be very amusing for the learners.

Current Trends in Pronunciation Teaching

Digital Technologies

Nasim et al. (2022) described the importance of digital technologies in teaching pronunciation and their effectiveness compared to traditional methods. Student

engagement, motivation, and autonomy can be supported by the use of digital technologies and the implementation of tools such as videos, audio animations, or authentic materials. In their research, the authors found a significant shift in pronunciation learning using digital technologies in contrast to traditionally used teaching methods. The study also emphasized the integration of digital technologies into the curriculum as well as the importance of ongoing research in this area (Nasim et al., 2022).

Gilakjani et al. (2019) investigated the attitudes of Iranian EFL teachers towards the use of Pronunciation Power 2 (PP2) software in teaching pronunciation. The authors noted that a positive attitude towards technology is crucial for its implementation in the curriculum, which was also confirmed in the results of the study. The findings emphasized the continuing importance of implementing computer technologies into teaching practice and at the same time the need for continuous innovative teacher education. By paying attention to the aforementioned aspects, it is possible to increase the readiness and motivation of EFL teachers and thus ultimately improve pronunciation teaching (Gilakjani et al., 2019).

Podcasting and Web-Based Training

Kafes and Caner (2020) pointed out the benefits of using podcasting in teaching pronunciation to EFL students. Their study found several benefits, including linguistic, psychological, social, and most importantly in the context of this review, pedagogical. The authors saw the possibility of self-study in the comfort of an out-of-classroom context as an advantage. The findings showed that podcasting helps overcome language anxiety, fosters positive relationships towards pronunciation, and encourages teachers to incorporate podcasting into their teaching practices (Kafes & Caner, 2020).

Alsuhaibani et al. (2024) called attention to the effectiveness of using web-based pronunciation training to improve English pronunciation. Unlike traditional methods such as “listen and repeat”, this innovative method allows learners to naturally move from perception to production, thanks to intensive audiovisual input focused on target words. The results of the study showed the benefits of web-based pronunciation training in English language teaching, promising the potential for significantly improved learning outcomes (Alsuhaibani et al., 2024).

Computer and Mobile-Assisted Pronunciation Training

Saleh and Gilakjani (2021) further followed the trend of using computer-assisted pronunciation training (CAPT) and investigated the impact of the use of Accent Master Software (AMS) by Iranian intermediate EFL learners. Findings indicated a significant improvement in pronunciation, while CAPT promoted stress-free, autonomous practice and immediate feedback. According to the authors of the study, CAPT significantly outperforms traditional teaching methods and targets limitations in pronunciation teaching, such as limited classroom assets and teacher readiness. However, it is important to note that the authors themselves do not reject the use of traditional methods in teaching English pronunciation, but rather, they recommend their collaboration with CAPT to maximize positive results (Saleh & Gilakjani, 2021). Lan (2022) decided to examine the contrast between CAPT and mobile-assisted pronunciation training (MAPT) in more depth, and the findings revealed significant

pronunciation improvements in students using MAPT. The author states the main advantages of MAPT are that it supports autonomy and heightened involvement of learners, as well as promotes a motivating and student-centered environment. The English Pronunciation Tutor (ETP) application with its interactive materials has proven to be particularly effective. However, the author warns that using MAPT without proper instruction for teachers and students can be counterproductive, so it is necessary to choose user-friendly applications and have proper usage training to achieve results in pronunciation teaching (Lan, 2022).

Brain-Friendly and Multisensory Approaches

Burri (2023) highlighted the importance of implementing neuroscience findings into pronunciation teaching while ensuring that effective and brain-friendly principles are used. The problem, however, is that traditional pronunciation teaching often ignores the principles and their interconnectedness, which leads to ineffective teaching. The author emphasized the use of haptic pronunciation teaching, which is considered holistic, engaging, and effective. It involves the systematic integration of movement, touch, emotion, and repetition (Burri, 2023).

Task-Based Pronunciation Teaching (TBPT)

Mora and Mora-Plaza (2023) examined the use of task-based pronunciation teaching (TBPT), which is characterized by the integration of pronunciation instruction into communicative language instruction through the use of meaning-based tasks that emphasize phonetic forms. TBPT follows a three-stage process: pre-task preparation, interactive task performance with pronunciation focus, and post-task reflection. The authors found that TBPT improves L2 perception, production, and intelligibility while manipulating variables can increase learners' attention to pronunciation aspects. The authors also recommend collaborative activities, such as map tasks, where pronunciation features are crucial for task completion (Mora & Mora-Plaza, 2023).

Artificial Intelligence

Kemelbekova et al. (2024) investigated the potential of using AI tools in English language teaching (ELT) while focusing on the pronunciation impact. In the study, several AI-driven applications were used, e.g., chatbots, Elsa Speak, Text Cortex, and Grammarly. It has been revealed that AI applications have the potential to promote autonomous learning, provide personalized feedback, and improve pronunciation by using tailor-made exercises, all while being engaging for the learners. Elsa Speak has proven to be effective in improving pronunciation and the findings showed that it helps with increased self-confidence. Just as previous authors have pointed out the pitfalls of using digital technologies, the authors of this study also state the inability of AI tools to process complex inputs, which confirms the need to combine non-conventional methods with traditional ones (Kemelbekova et al., 2024).

Augmented Reality

Wang (2025) investigated the use of an augmented reality (AR) app in impacting EFL learners' oral proficiency. Participants in the study utilized an AR app while acting as museum tour guides. Among the findings of the study were pronunciation enhancement, broader vocabulary usage, improvements in content, and eagerness to

use AR in future practice. The author concludes that further research is needed in this area to ensure that all learner needs are met (Wang, 2025).

Discussion and Conclusion

It is almost certain that everyone in the space of pronunciation teaching came across countless claims that pronunciation teaching does not receive sufficient attention in the educational space, supported by the well-known comparison to Princess Cinderella by Celce-Murcia et al. (1996). However, it is possible to observe an increasing trend in publications dealing with this issue. In Figure X (source), it is possible to see a relatively stable growing trend with a significant increase in 2017. However, Zarate-Sandez (2020) argues that despite the availability of data from a large amount of research, this is often overlooked or ignored by L2 pedagogy.

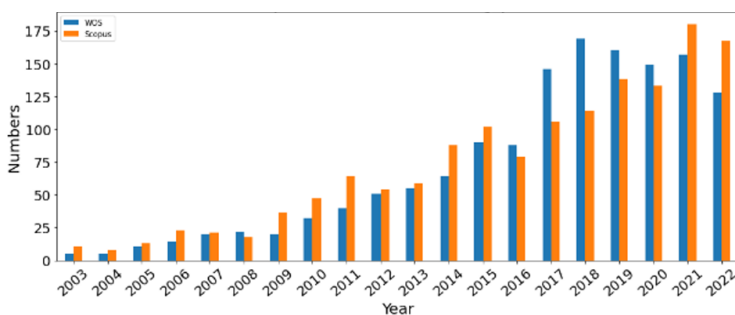


Figure 3: Trends of pronunciation teaching publications (Qian & Deris, 2023: 74)

Derwing (2009) argues about the usefulness of research data for direct users in teaching practice but adds that pronunciation is precisely the area where it would be appropriate to take research results seriously and implement them. Several authors have dealt with the views of teachers on teaching pronunciation, with findings often indicating a dismissive attitude, lack of preparation, or a problem with confidence in this area and thus suggesting reasons for avoiding pronunciation teaching (Henderson et al., 2012; Macdonald, 2000; Chen, 2016; In Vancova, 2020).

Vancova (2020) adds that another reason for the frequent neglect of pronunciation teaching is that teachers may lack the pedagogical methods required to teach it effectively. However, Zarate-Sandez (2020) notes that many teachers gain a certain confidence that pronunciation is naturally developed alongside teaching other areas of the English language, such as grammar or lexicology, and this presents another reason for the neglect.

Despite these findings, research in the field of pronunciation teaching has been gradually increasing over the past 7 years. In the last five years, there has been an increase in attention to the use of non-conventional methods in pronunciation teaching, as found in the 10 studies in the current trends section of this literature review. Studies by Nasim et al. (2022) and Gilakjani et al. (2019) were included in the section on trends in the use of digital technologies. Both studies highlighted their benefits and the need for their implementation in practice while emphasizing the need

for innovative teacher training to work with digital technologies to ensure effectiveness in teaching.

Studies by Kafes and Caner (2020) and Alsuhaibani et al. (2024) in the section on podcasting and web-based training have provided insights into the effectiveness of these non-conventional methods in overcoming language anxiety, creating a positive relationship with pronunciation, and promising significantly improved learning outcomes.

Findings in the area of computer and mobile-assisted teaching by Saleh and Gilakjani (2021) and Lan (2022) indicated improvement in pronunciation. Both studies mentioned significant outperformance of traditional methods by CAPT and MAPT, with Lan (2022) pointing out the importance of proper training in the use of these methods in practice.

Burri (2023) calls for a brain-friendly approach to pronunciation teaching while promoting haptic teaching, which incorporates movement, touch, emotion, and repetition to foster an effective and engaging learning environment. Mora and Mora-Plaza (2023) promote Task-Based Pronunciation Teaching (TBPT), in which pronunciation is incorporated into various communicative assignments.

Technology is shaping society as well as practices in modern pronunciation teaching. Kemebelkova et al. (2024) focused on the use of AI applications in promoting autonomous learning as well as boosting learners' confidence. Wang (2025) investigated the potential of augmented reality (AR) in pronunciation learning, resulting in improved pronunciation.

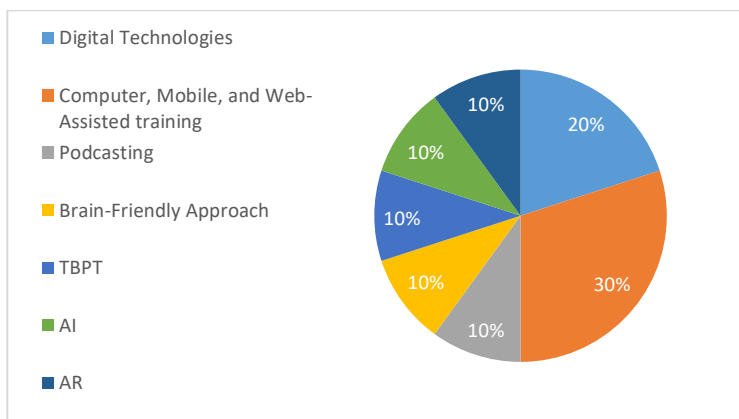


Figure 4: Research areas in the reviewed studies

In Figure 4 it is possible to see that up to 80% of the selected studies dealt with research in the field of digitalization, thus reflecting the trends of the current era. It is true that technology, such as computers, mobile phones, artificial intelligence, or robots are everywhere around us, but it is also necessary to reflect the needs of learners, especially with regard to findings from the field of neuroscience.

In conclusion, when sorting studies from the WOS and Scopus databases, a very small number of studies focused on brain-friendly approaches in pronunciation learning

were recorded. This finding can be described as a research gap, while research in this area is highly recommended.

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