CHAPTER 1

The History and Scope of Pronunciation Teaching

In his very comprehensive history of language teaching, Kelly (1969) dubs pronunciation the "Cinderella" area of foreign language teaching. He shows that Western philologists and linguists have studied grammar and vocabulary much longer than pronunciation. For this reason, grammar and vocabulary have been much better understood by most language teachers than pronunciation, which began to be studied systematically shortly before the beginning of the twentieth century.

The field of modern language teaching has developed two general approaches to the teaching of pronunciation: (1) an intuitive-imitative approach and (2) an analytic-linguistic approach. Before the late nineteenth century only the first approach was used, occasionally supplemented by the teacher's or textbook writer's impressionistic (and often phonetically inaccurate) observations about sounds based on orthography (Kelly 1969).

An ***intuitive-imitative approach*** depends on the learner's ability to listen to and imitate the rhythms and sounds of the target language without the intervention of any explicit information; it also presupposes the availability of good models to listen to, a possibility that has been enhanced by the availability first of phonograph records, then of tape recorders and language labs in the mid-twentieth century, and more recently of audio- and videocassettes and compact discs.

An ***analytic-linguistic approach,*** on the other hand, utilizes information and tools such as a phonetic alphabet, articulatory descriptions, charts of the vocal apparatus, contrastive information, and other aids to supplement listening, imitation, and production. It explicitly informs the learner of and focuses attention on the sounds and rhythms of the target language. This approach was developed to complement rather than to replace the intuitive-imitative approach, which was typically retained as the practice phase used in tandem with the phonetic information.

When we look at the various language teaching methods that have had some currency throughout the twentieth century, we must acknowledge that there are methods, such as ***Grammar Translation*** and ***reading-based approaches,*** in which the teaching of pronunciation is largely irrelevant. In such methods grammar or text comprehension is taught through the medium of the learner's native language, and oral communication in the target language is not a primary instructional objective. In the following overview of methods we focus on those methods and approaches for which the teaching and learning of pronunciation is a genuine concern.

Direct Method and More Recent Naturalistic Approaches

In ***Direct Method*** foreign language instruction, which first gained popularity in the late 1800s and early 1900s, pronunciation is taught through intuition and imitation; students imitate a model – the teacher or a recording – and do their best to approximate the model through imitation and repetition. This instructional method was grounded on observations of children learning their first language and of children and adults learning foreign languages in noninstructional settings. Successors to this approach are the many so-called ***naturalistic methods***, including comprehension methods that devote a period of learning solely to listening before any speaking is allowed. Examples include Asher's (1977) Total Physical Response and Krashen and Terrell's (1983) Natural Approach. Proponents maintain that the initial focus on listening without pressure to speak gives the learners the opportunity to internalize the target sound system. When learners do speak later on, their pronunciation is supposedly quite good despite their never having received explicit pronunciation instruction.

The Reform Movement

The first linguistic or analytic contribution to the teaching of pronunciation emerged in the 1890s as part of the ***Reform Movement*** in language teaching. This movement was influenced greatly by phoneticians such as Henry Sweet, Wilhelm Viëtor, and Paul Passy, who formed the International Phonetic Association in 1886 and developed the ***International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)***. This alphabet resulted from the establishment of phonetics as a science dedicated to describing and analyzing the sound systems of languages. A phonetic alphabet made it possible to accurately represent the sounds of any language because, for the first time, there was a consistent one-to-one relationship between a written symbol and the sound it represented.

The phoneticians involved in this international organization, many of whom had also had experience teaching foreign languages, did much to influence modern language teaching by specifically advocating the following notions and practices:

- The spoken form of a language is primary and should be taught first.
- The findings of phonetics should be applied to language teaching.
- Teachers must have solid training in phonetics.
- Learners should be given phonetic training to establish good speech habits.

The 1940s and 1950s

Many historians of language teaching (e.g., Howatt 1984) believe that the Reform Movement played a role in the development of ***Audiolingualism*** in the United States and of the Oral Approach in Britain during the 1940s and 1950s. In both the Audiolingual and Oral Approach classrooms, pronunciation is very important and is taught explicitly from the start. As in the Direct Method classroom, the teacher (or a recording) models a sound, a word, or an utterance and the students imitate or repeat. However, the teacher also typically makes use of information from phonetics, such as a visual transcription system (modified IPA or some other system) or charts that demonstrate the articulation of sounds.

Furthermore, the teacher often uses a technique derived from the notion of contrast in structural linguistics: the ***minimal pair drill*** – drills that use words that differ by a single sound in the same position. This technique, based on the concept of the phoneme as

a minimally distinctive sound (Bloomfield 1933), is used for both listening practice and guided oral production:

SAMPLE MINIMAL PAIR TEACHING MATERIALS

Word Drills

A	B
/iy/	/i/
sheep	ship
green	grin
least	list
meet	mitt
deed	did

Sentence Drills

I. Syntagmatic drills (contrast within a sentence)

Don't sit in that seat.

Did you at least get the list?

II. Paradigmatic drills (contrast across two sentences)

Don't slip on the floor.

Don't sleep on the floor.

Is that a black sheep?

Is that a black ship?

Using such ***minimal pairs*** the teacher first has the students practice listening skills.[1] The teacher says two words (e.g., "sheep, sheep" or "sheep, ship") and asks the students to decide if they are the same or different. Alternatively, the teacher might read a word or words from either list A or list B and ask the student to identify which sound (A or B) is being produced.

Listening

1. Same or different? (*sheep, sheep; ship, sheep*)
2. A or B? (*ship; ship; sheep*)

Such listening discrimination practice is followed by guided oral production practice. Following a teacher model, students practice lists A and B first in isolation (i.e., reading list A and then list B), then in contrast (i.e., reading across columns A and B).

Guided Oral Production

1. Read down column A, then column B (*sheep, green,* etc.)
2. Read across the columns (*sheep, ship,* etc.)

Finally, the teacher asks individual students to read the lists without a model.

THE 1960s

In the 1960s the ***Cognitive Approach***, influenced by transformational-generative grammar (Chomsky 1959, 1965) and cognitive psychology (Neisser 1967), viewed language as rule-

[1]This technique can be adapted to all minimal pair contrasts involving vowel or consonant discrimination.

governed behavior rather than habit formation. It deemphasized pronunciation in favor of grammar and vocabulary because, its advocates argued, (1) nativelike pronunciation was an unrealistic objective and could not be achieved (Scovel 1969); and (2) time would be better spent on teaching more learnable items, such as grammatical structures and words.

THE 1970s

As can be seen from the preceding discussion, the language teaching profession changed positions many times with respect to the teaching of pronunciation. Various methods and approaches placed this skill either at the forefront of instruction, as was the case with Reform Movement practices and the Audiolingual/Oral Method, or in the back wings, as with the Direct Method and naturalistic comprehension-based approaches, which operated under the assumption that errors in pronunciation (and other errors, for that matter) were part of the natural acquisition process and would disappear as students gained in communicative proficiency. Other methods and approaches either ignored pronunciation (e.g., Grammar Translation, reading-based approaches, and the Cognitive Approach) or taught pronunciation through imitation and repetition (Direct Method), or through imitation supported by analysis and linguistic information (Audiolingualism).

The methods that came to attention during the 1970s, such as the Silent Way and Community Language Learning, continued to exhibit interesting differences in the way they dealt with pronunciation. This aspect of both methods is described in the following two sections.[2]

THE SILENT WAY

Like Audiolingualism, the ***Silent Way*** (Gattegno 1972, 1976) can be characterized by the attention paid to accuracy of production of both the sounds and structures of the target language from the very initial stage of instruction. Not only are individual sounds stressed from the very first day of a Silent Way class, but learners' attention is focused on how words combine in phrases – on how blending, stress, and intonation all shape the production of an utterance. Proponents claim that this enables Silent Way learners to sharpen their own inner criteria for accurate production. The difference between Audiolingualism and the Silent Way, however, is that in the Silent Way learner attention is focused on the sound system without having to learn a phonetic alphabet or a body of explicit linguistic information.

How does the Silent Way work in terms of teaching pronunciation? The teacher, true to the method's name, speaks as little as possible, indicating through gestures what students should do. This includes an elaborate system in which teachers tap out rhythmic patterns with a pointer, hold up their fingers to indicate the number of syllables in a word or to indicate stressed elements, or model proper positioning of the articulators by pointing to their own lips, teeth, or jaw. The Silent Way teachers also use several indispensable tools of the trade such as a sound-color chart, the Fidel charts, word charts, and colored rods.[3]

The ***sound-color chart*** was created by Gattegno to bypass the ear (Gattegno 1985). This large rectangular wall chart contains all the vowel and consonants sounds of a target language in small colored rectangles. In the upper half of the chart are the vowels. The primary vowels are represented by one color each, the diphthongs by two colors. The consonants are located in the bottom half of the chart, and are divided from the vowels by a solid line. Colors for consonants are assigned randomly, although there is consistency in color from language to language when sounds overlap.

[2]See the excellent volumes by Blair (1982), Larsen-Freeman (1986), and Stevick (1980) for further details about all aspects of these methods, and not just their treatment of pronunciation.
[3]All tools are available from Educational Solutions in New York, the late Caleb Gattegno's company.

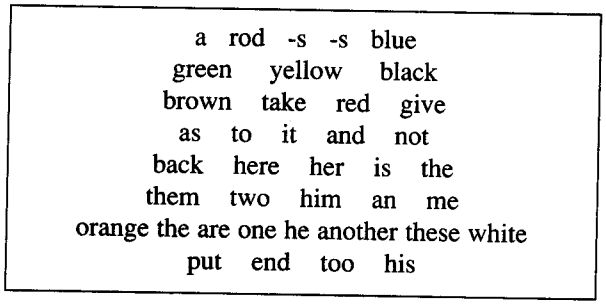

Figure 1.1 Word Chart 1 for English as a Second Language (Reproduced with permission from C. Gattegno, *Teaching foreign languages in schools: The Silent Way,* New York: Educational Solutions, 1972)

The set of ***Fidel wall charts*** contains all the possible spelling patterns for each sound in the language. Each letter or combination of letters is color coded: Sounds that are pronounced alike are colored alike. Because of the complex nature of English spelling, eight charts in the set represent sound–spelling correspondence.

The large colored word charts (1 to 12; see Figure 1.1) are similar in size to the sound-color chart; they reflect and reinforce the system used in the sound-color chart.[4] The wall charts contain common words of the target language, along with some words utilitarian to the method (e.g., rod). These are grouped semantically in a way that allows the leader (teacher or proficient student) to "silently dictate" or tap out phrases, which are then practiced orally and/or written down as a dictation. For example, the class might take several steps to progress from "Take a blue rod" to "Take a blue rod and a red rod. Give the blue one to him and the red one to her."

The final tool is a set of small colored blocks of wood or plastic of varying lengths, with all red rods being the same size, all white the same size, and so on. The rods are used for many purposes, but when the focus is pronunciation, the rods can be used to build and visually demonstrate intonation patterns, and to indicate the differing pronunciations of morphological endings (past tense, plural marker, etc.).

In one Silent Way lesson that we observed, the students were foreign-born professionals, advanced in English but with heavy accents. As an accent reduction exercise, the instructor was helping students to introduce themselves in a way that would be intelligible and acceptable to native English speakers. They first practiced giving their names (e.g., "My name is Christos Eliopoulos") by placing the colored rods on the table in front of them in a configuration that approximated the stress, intonation, and blending of the phrase. This visual configuration was adjusted as students discovered ways in which they could produce a more intelligible form of the phrase. For example, contracting *name* and *is* to produce *name's* was achieved by moving the small white rod representing *is* directly next to the red rod representing *name*. The teacher remained very much in the background, and there was intense peer assistance both in monitoring the utterances and suggesting alternatives. Once a high level of intelligibility had been attained for the first phrase, students then practiced their professions (e.g., "I'm a commercial real estate broker") in the same manner. Finally, they combined the two phrases and introduced themselves to their peers.[5]

The Silent Way is better understood if experienced rather than read about, since any description fails to capture actual learner engagement. The method appears to have a spe-

[4]Since the Fidel wall chart is not reproduced in color, some of the important clues to pronunciation are lost here.

[5]We thank Judith Weidman for allowing us to observe and videotape her 818 class at the American Language Center of UCLA Extension.

cial focus on teaching pronunciation, and many language educators agree that the principle of sound–color correspondence, which the Silent Way invokes, provides learners with an "inner resource to be used" (Stevick 1980: 46), which helps to establish a true feel for the language, "its diction, rhythm, and melody" (Blair 1991: 32).[6]

COMMUNITY LANGUAGE LEARNING

Rooted in the humanistic client-centered learning exemplified by Carl Rogers (1951), ***Community Language Learning*** (CLL) is a method developed by Charles A. Curran (1976) for teaching second and foreign languages. A typical lesson in a CLL classroom proceeds as follows. Students sit around a table with a tape recorder – a key tool of the method. The counselor (i.e., the teacher) stands behind one of the students, with hands on the student's shoulders. After speaking reassuringly, the counselor asks the student to say something in the native language he or she wishes to be able to say in the target language. This utterance is then provided by the teacher in the target language, who takes care to phrase it idiomatically. The counselor provides the phrase (broken into chunks for ease of repetition), the student repeats, and once the student can produce the whole utterance fluently, it is recorded on tape.

In the next phase of the lesson, the utterances are played back and students match the new target language with the word-for-word translation provided by the counselor. Next, the teacher asks if the students wish to further practice the pronunciation of any of the new utterances they have learned. If they do, the counselor again stands behind the student who requests further practice and engages in a technique known as ***human computer***. The counselor/computer can be turned on or off at will by the student, who can request the correct pronunciation of a given phrase or piece of a phrase from the computer. This provides the raw data for the student to mimic and repeat until he or she is satisfied with the pronunciation.

Several tools and techniques are critical to the treatment of pronunciation in CLL. First, the audiotape recorder not only captures what is said in the student-generated utterances but also provides a way for students to distance themselves from what was said so they can focus on how it was said and compare their pronunciation with that of the counselor. Second, the human computer technique, which gives no overt correction of pronunciation, allows the student to initiate pronunciation practice by selecting the item(s) to practice and deciding the amount of repetition needed. In this way, students are able to approximate the target pronunciation to the extent that they desire. Thus the teaching approach is intuitive and imitative as in the Direct Method, but its exact content and the extent to which practice takes place are controlled by the learner/client rather than the teacher or textbook.

PRONUNCIATION TEACHING TODAY

The ***Communicative Approach***, which took hold in the 1980s and is currently dominant in language teaching, holds that since the primary purpose of language is communication, using language to communicate should be central in all classroom language instruction. This focus on language as communication brings renewed urgency to the teaching of pronunciation, since both empirical and anecdotal evidence indicates that there is a threshold level of pronunciation for nonnative speakers of English; if they fall below this threshold level, they will have oral communication problems no matter how excellent and extensive their control of English grammar and vocabulary might be. (For research supporting this claim, see Hinofotis and Bailey 1980).

[6]The same principle could, of course, be a limitation for those 10% of male learners who are color blind.

Morley (1987: 2) suggests that there are currently at least four groups of English language learners whose oral communication needs mandate a high level of intelligibility and therefore require special assistance with pronunciation:

1. foreign teaching assistants – and sometimes foreign faculty – in colleges and universities in English-speaking countries
2. foreign-born technical, business, and professional employees in business and industry in English-speaking countries
3. international business people and diplomats who need to use English as their working lingua franca
4. refugees (adult and adolescent) in resettlement and vocational training programs wishing to relocate in English-speaking countries

To Morley's four categories we should add at least two more groups:

5. teachers of English as a foreign language who are not native speakers of English and who expect to serve as the major model and source of input in English for their students
6. people in non–English-speaking countries working as tour guides, waiters, hotel personnel, customs agents, and the like, who use English for dealing with visitors who do not speak their language

The goal of teaching pronunciation to such learners is not to make them sound like native speakers of English. With the exception of a few highly gifted and motivated individuals, such a goal is unrealistic. A more modest and realistic goal is to enable learners to surpass the threshold level so that their pronunciation will not detract from their ability to communicate.

Having established that intelligible pronunciation is one of the necessary components of oral communication, the next issue is methodological: How can teachers improve the pronunciation of unintelligible speakers of English so that they become intelligible? This is a problem for Communicative Language Teaching, since proponents of this approach have not dealt adequately with the role of pronunciation in language teaching, nor have they developed an agreed-upon set of strategies for teaching pronunciation communicatively.[7]

We can begin to answer the question of how to teach pronunciation as part of the Communicative Approach by reviewing the kinds of techniques and practice materials that have traditionally been used – and are still being used – to teach pronunciation. The following is a fairly comprehensive list:

1. *Listen and imitate:* A technique used in the Direct Method in which students listen to a teacher-provided model and repeat or imitate it.[8] This technique has been enhanced by the use of tape recorders, language labs, and video recorders.
2. *Phonetic training:* Use of articulatory descriptions, articulatory diagrams, and a phonetic alphabet (a technique from the Reform Movement, which may involve doing phonetic transcription as well as reading phonetically transcribed text).
3. *Minimal pair drills:* A technique introduced during the Audiolingual era to help students distinguish between similar and problematic sounds in the target language through listening discrimination and spoken practice. Minimal pair drills typically

[7]See Celce-Murcia (1983) and Pica (1984) for some of the earliest practical suggestions for teaching pronunciation communicatively.
[8]This includes, for example, having a Spanish speaker imitate the accent of an English speaker in Spanish in order to then transfer that "accent" to English.

begin with word-level drills and then move on to sentence-level drills (both paradigmatic and syntagmatic).

4. *Contextualized minimal pairs:* Bowen's (1972, 1975b) attempt to make minimal pair drills responsive to Cognitive Approach criticisms of meaninglessness and lack of context. In the technique, the teacher establishes the setting (e.g., a blacksmith shoeing a horse) and presents key vocabulary; students are then trained to respond to a sentence stem with the appropriate meaningful response (a or b):[9]

   Sentence stem

   The blacksmith (a. hits / b. heats) the horseshoe.

   Cued student response

   a. with the hammer / b. in the fire.

5. *Visual aids:* Enhancement of the teacher's description of how sounds are produced by audiovisual aids such as sound-color charts, Fidel wall charts, rods, pictures, mirrors, props, realia, etc. These devices are also used to cue production of the target sounds.
6. *Tongue twisters:* A technique from speech correction strategies for native speakers (e.g., "She sells seashells by the seashore.")
7. *Developmental approximation drills:* A technique suggested by first-language acquisition studies in which second language speakers are taught to retrace the steps that many English-speaking children follow as they acquire certain sounds in their first language. Thus just as children learning English often acquire /w/ before /r/ or /y/ before /l/, adults who have difficulty producing /l/ or /r/ can be encouraged to begin by pronouncing words with initial /w/ or /y/, and then shift to /r/ or /l/, respectively:

/w/ → /r/		/y/ → /l/	
wed	red	yet	let
wag	rag	yes	less
witch	rich	you	Lou
wipe	ripe	young	lung

8. *Practice of vowel shifts and stress shifts related by affixation:* A technique based on rules of generative phonology (Chomsky and Halle 1968) used with intermediate or advanced learners. The teacher points out the rule-based nature of vowel and stress shifts in etymologically related words to raise awareness; sentences and short texts that contain both members of a pair may be provided as oral practice material:[10]

   Vowel shift: mi**m**e (long i) mi**m**ic (short i)

   Sentence context: Street *mimes* often *mimic* the gestures of passersby.

   Stress shift: PHOtograph phoTOGraphy

   Sentence context: I can tell from these *photographs* that you are very good at *photography*.

9. *Reading aloud/recitation:* Passages or scripts for learners to practice and then read aloud, focusing on stress, timing, and intonation. This technique may or may not involve memorization of the text, and it usually occurs with genres that are intended to be spoken, such as speeches, poems, plays, and dialogues.

[9]The Bowen technique is described more fully in Chapters 3 and 4.
[10]For a more comprehensive treatment of this topic see Chapter 9.

10. *Recordings of learners' production:* Audio- and videotapes of rehearsed and spontaneous speeches, free conversations, and role plays. Subsequent playback offers opportunities for feedback from teachers and peers as well as for teacher, peer, and self-evaluation.

With the exception of the last two techniques listed, we can see that the emphasis in pronunciation instruction has been largely on getting the sounds right at the word level – dealing with words in isolation or with words in very controlled and contrived sentence-level environments.[11] Although the last two techniques allow for practice at the discourse level, the practice material is often fully scripted and sometimes highly contrived. There is thus some doubt about whether such reading-aloud exercises can actually improve a learner's pronunciation in spontaneous conversation.[12]

When the Communicative Approach to language teaching began to take over in the mid- to late 1970s (see Brumfit and Johnson 1979; Widdowson 1978), most of the aforementioned techniques and materials for teaching pronunciation at the segmental level were flatly rejected on theoretical and practical grounds as being incompatible with teaching language as communication. Influenced by the discourse-based approaches and materials being used to teach language communicatively, materials developers and teachers began to search for more appropriate ways to teach pronunciation. They decided that directing most of their energy to teaching suprasegmental features of language (i.e., rhythm, stress, and intonation) in a discourse context was the optimal way to organize a short-term pronunciation course for nonnative speakers. McNerney and Mendelsohn (1992: 186) express this position very clearly:

> . . . a short term pronunciation course should focus first and foremost on suprasegmentals as they have the greatest impact on the comprehensibility of the learner's English. We have found that giving priority to the suprasegmental aspects of English not only improves learners' comprehensibility but is also less frustrating for students because greater change can be effected in a short time.[13]

Today we see signs that pronunciation instruction is moving away from the segmental/suprasegmental debate and toward a more balanced view. This view recognizes that both an inability to distinguish sounds that carry a high functional load (such as /ɪ/ in *list* and /iy/ in *least*) and an inability to distinguish suprasegmental features (such as intonation and stress differences in yes/no and alternative questions) can have a negative impact on the oral communication – and the listening comprehension abilities – of nonnative speakers of English. Today's pronunciation curriculum thus seeks to identify the most important aspects of both the segmentals and suprasegmentals, and integrate them appropriately in courses that meet the needs of any given group of learners.[14] In addition to segmental and suprasegmental features of English, there is also the issue of voice quality setting; that is, each language has certain stereotypical features such as pitch level, vowel space, neutral tongue position, and degree of muscular activity that contribute to the overall sound quality or "accent" associated with the language.[15]

This book represents our own best effort to compile a comprehensive volume on the teaching of North American English (NAE) pronunciation to nonnative speakers of

[11]A classic text of this "sounds-in-words" approach is Nilsen and Nilsen (1973).
[12]For a more detailed discussion of recitation and reading-aloud techniques as they relate to pronunciation training, see Chapter 10.
[13]One of the best-known textbooks that follows this line of thinking is Gilbert (1993).
[14]See the excellent volume by Morley (1994a) for an overview of recent pronunciation research and pedagogy.
[15]Chapter 2 reviews what is currently known about voice quality setting in English and some other languages.

English. As such, the text provides a detailed treatment of both the NAE sound system and a grounding in classroom methods and techniques for the teaching of pronunciation. The desired end result is to equip teachers who use the text (either as a course text or reference) with the background and skills to address the pronunciation needs of their students. We have selected the North American variety of English for rather obvious reasons: (1) it represents our own dialect and that of most of the teachers we train; (2) it is the target dialect of the many ESL students living, studying, or working in North America; and (3) it is a variety that has gained a strong foothold in much of the world, where English is taught as a foreign or additional language.

The underlying philosophy of this text is simple: Only through a thorough knowledge of the English sound system and through familiarity with a variety of pedagogical techniques, many of which should be communicatively oriented, can teachers effectively address the pronunciation needs of their students. It is our aim in this text to provide a rich knowledge base, as well as to assist teachers in correctly assessing their learners' pronunciation needs. Given this knowledge base, we believe that teachers can continue to improve their understanding of the English sound system and expand upon the instructional tools that are now – and will become – available to assist learners in this skill area.

EXERCISES

KEY CONCEPTS

Write a brief definition of the following key terms from this chapter. For each, give examples where relevant.

intuitive-imitative approach
analytic-linguistic approach
Grammar Translation/ reading-based approaches
Direct Method
naturalistic methods
The Reform Movement
International Phonetic Alphabet
Audiolingualism
minimal pair drill
minimal pairs
Cognitive Approach
Silent Way
sound-color chart
Fidel wall charts
Community Language Learning
human computer
Communicative Approach

INTROSPECTING ABOUT YOUR OWN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Think about a foreign language that you have learned in school.

1. What method (or combination of methods) did your teacher use? How did this method address the skill of pronunciation?
2. How successful was this method in improving your pronunciation?
3. Of the methods described in this chapter, which one(s) do you believe would help you most with learning pronunciation in a second language?