Pronunciation Teaching

History and Scope

Celce-Murcia, et. al., 1996
Two general approaches to the teaching of pronunciation:

1. An intuitive-imitative approach  
   (before the late 19th century)  
   Occasionally supplemented by the teacher’s or textbooks writer’s impressionistic  
   (and often phonetically inaccurate) observations about sounds based on  
   orthography (Kelly, 1969)

   An intuitive-imitative approach  
   (1) 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;  
   (2) presupposes the availability, validity, and reliability of good models to  
   listen to.
2. An analytic-linguistic approach

(1) 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.

(2) explicitly informs the learner of and focuses attention on the sounds and rhythms of the target language.

(3) 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.
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.

First language acquisition → Second language acquisition

Naturalistic methods, including comprehension methods that devote a period of learning solely to listening before any speaking is allowed, e.g., Asher's (1977) Total Physical Response and Krashen & Tenell'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.
International Phonetic Association founded in 1886 by phoneticians such as Henry Sweet, Wilhelm Viëtor, and Paul Passy. International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) was developed to describe and analyze 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, also teachers specifically advocated the following notions and practices:

(1) The spoken form of a language is primary and should be taught first.
(2) The findings of phonetics should be applied to language teaching.
(3) Teachers must have solid training in phonetics.
(4) Learners should be given phonetic training to establish good speech habits.
Audiolingualism in the United States and of the Oral Approach in Britain during (1940s & 1950s),

(1) pronunciation is very important and is taught explicitly from the start (as in the Direct Method classroom, the teacher / recording models a sound, a word, or an utterance and the students imitate or repeat).

(2) the teacher also 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.

(3) 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.

e.g., sheep – ship green – grin Did you at least get the list?
Audiolingualism in the United States and of the Oral Approach in Britain during (1940s & 1950s),

(3) the minimal pair drill—drills that use words that differ by a single sound in the same position.

Types of minimal-pair training
(a) Word drills:
   sheep – ship  green – grin
(b) Sentence drills:
   (b-1) Syntagmatic drills (contrast within a sentence)
      Don’t sit in that seat.
      Did you at least get the list?
   (b-2) Paradigmatic drills (contrast across two sentences)
      Don't slip on the floor. (It’s wet.)
      Don't sleep on the floor. (It’s cold.)
From perception to production:

1. Perception:
   (1) Same or different? (Students listening sheep, sheep; ship, sheep)
   (2) A, B, or C? (Students listening ship; ship; sheep)

2. 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 Cognitive Approach, influenced by transformational-generative grammar (Chomsky, 1959, 1965) and cognitive psychology (Neisser, 1967), viewed language as rule-governed behavior rather than habit formation.

It deemphasized pronunciation in favor of grammar and vocabulary because

(1) native-like pronunciation was an unrealistic objective and could not be achieved (Scovel, 1969);

(2) time would be better spent on teaching more learnable items, such as grammatical structures and words.
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Various methods and approaches placed pronunciation 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).
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 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?

(1) The teacher speaks as little as possible, indicating through gestures what students should do.

(2) It 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.

(3) The Silent Way teachers have to use several indispensable tools of the trade such as a sound-color chart, the Fidel charts, word charts, and colored rods.
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.

The example of Word Chart:

```
a rod  -s  -s  blue
green  yellow  black
brown  take  red  give
as  to  it  and  not
back  here  her  is  the
them  two  him  an  me
orange  the  are  one  he  another  these  white
put  end  two  his
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Review

The Silent Way: Color & Word Chart

1. rod
2. s
3. s
4. blue
5. green
6. yellow
7. black
8. brown
9. take
10. red
11. give
12. as
13. to
14. it
15. and
16. not
17. back
18. here
19. is
20. her
21. the
22. them
23. two
24. him
25. an
26. me
27. orange
28. the
29. are
30. one
31. he
32. another
33. these
34. white
35. put
36. end
37. too
38. his

No. 1 of 12 English charts
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.

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.

1. 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.

2. 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.
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 & Bailey, 1980).
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.
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. 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 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)

   **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:

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8. **Practice of vowel shifts** and stress shifts related by affixation: A technique based on rules of generative phonology (Chomsky & 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.

**Vowel shift:** mime (long /i/)  mimic (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.
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.
When the Communicative Approach to language teaching began to take over in the mid- to late 1970s (see Brumfit & 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 & 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.
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 /i/ 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. 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.
Thank you!

Comments and suggestions, please!