

# GIVING IS BETTER THAN RECEIVING: TEACHING PRONUNCIATION WITH PEER FEEDBACK

**Ines A. Martin**, U.S. Naval Academy

It has been shown that peer feedback can facilitate second language (L2) development in various domains, including pronunciation (Martin & Sippel, 2021a). Therefore, peer feedback appears to be a viable alternative or addition to teacher feedback (Martin & Sippel, 2021b). Recent research further suggests that metacognitive instruction as well as training learners to provide feedback has a significant impact on ultimate learning gains when a peer feedback intervention is used in instructed L2 acquisition (Fujii, Ziegler, & Mackey, 2016; Sato & Lyster, 2012). This teaching tip aims to translate these research findings into practice by providing a step-by-step guide on how to set up a successful peer feedback intervention for L2 pronunciation in any face-to-face or online learning environment. Special emphasis will be given to possible differences in learning gains based on whether students are providers or receivers of peer feedback.

**Cite as:** Martin, A. I., (2022). Giving is better than receiving: teaching pronunciation with peer feedback. In J. Levis & A. Guskaroska (eds.). *Proceedings of the 12th Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching Conference*, held June 2021 virtually at Brock University, St. Catharines, ON. <https://doi.org/10.31274/psllt.13339>

## BACKGROUND

Research and surveys have revealed that language learners ask for pronunciation instruction to be included in classroom learning (Couper, 2003) and that instructors believe it is important to incorporate pronunciation instruction in their teaching (Huensch, 2019), and yet, pronunciation instruction is often still neglected in L2 classrooms (Sturm, 2019). One of the biggest factors for this discrepancy seems to be rooted in a lack of time: both lack of in-class time as well as lack of instructors' time, e.g., in regards to providing individual feedback on learners' pronunciation errors (Darcy, 2018). This teaching tip will offer one possible remedy for this problem: using peer feedback (PF) as part of pronunciation instruction and training in L2 classrooms. As such, this teaching tip will provide a brief overview of how PF compares to teacher feedback (TF), describe why PF is beneficial to learners, and summarize what research findings have taught us about the best design of a PF intervention. This overview will then be followed by step-by-step instructions on how to design a PF intervention for an L2 classroom—whether this is a face-to-face or a virtual classroom.

### Can My Students Really Learn From Peer Feedback?

The goal in instructed second language acquisition is generally to help learners improve their L2 skills (Gass, Behney, & Plonsky, 2013). Therefore, when introducing a new teaching method such as PF, one might reasonably ask how effective it is or how it compares to more traditional teaching interventions. In the case of PF, the first question might target the comparison between PF and TF, that is, whether feedback from a peer is as helpful as feedback from a teacher. It has often been pointed out that PF is typically less focused than TF and that it is also more likely to be inaccurate

than feedback coming from the teacher (Philip, Adams, & Iwashita, 2014). Nevertheless, several studies have shown PF to be effective in improving learners' L2 skills in various domains, such as grammatical accuracy (Sato & Lyster, 2012), vocabulary development (Sippel, 2019), writing and composition skills (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009), and—most importantly for this teaching tip—pronunciation (Martin & Sippel, 2021a). Research that has directly compared the effectiveness of PF and TF suggests that PF is at least as effective as TF, if not even more effective (Martin & Sippel, 2021a; Sippel & Martin, 2022). In the domain of grammatical accuracy, for example, Sippel and Jackson (2015) found that a PF group outperformed a TF group, even though, when looking at the transcripts of the interactions, the researchers noticed that TF had occurred more frequently and was more accurate than PF. Similarly, for the domain of L2 pronunciation, Martin and Sippel (2021a) found that a group of learners that *provided* PF outperformed a group of learners that received TF on measures of L2 comprehensibility. It has to be pointed out, however, that they found smaller learning gains in a group that only *received* PF. This trend was even more salient when they compared the groups again eight weeks after the intervention—this time for perception skills (Sippel & Martin, 2022): only the group that had provided PF maintained their learning gains over time, whereas the groups that had received feedback from a teacher or from a peer appeared to have lost most of the learning gains they had shown directly after the intervention.

So, if one admits that PF is often less focused and less accurate than TF, why is it still effective and helpful for our learners? The answer to this question lies in the fact that improvement does not seem to stem from the feedback that learners *receive*, but rather from the act of *providing* feedback (Sato, 2017). One of the unique advantages in PF is that the learners assume a more active role and engage in deeper processing while they provide feedback. In his dual model of PF, Sato (2017) explains that PF providers must first identify an error in their peer's speech, compare this error to their own knowledge of the L2, correct it internally, and then monitor their feedback internally and externally. The process of receiving feedback from a teacher (or a peer), on the other hand, is more passive and less involved for the learner, which could explain the benefits the researchers found for providing feedback to a peer.

Finally, some instructors hesitate to use PF in their classroom because they think that learners do not like it or that learners might feel uncomfortable when corrections stem from a peer, rather than from a teacher. To address this concern, Martin and Sippel (2021b) extensively investigated learners' beliefs and feelings about PF and found that, overall, learners held very positive beliefs about PF interventions and that learners who had received feedback from a peer reported not feeling uncomfortable at all when being corrected. Therefore, it seems well-founded to include a PF intervention in any L2 classroom.

### **What Makes a Peer Feedback Intervention Effective?**

Now that it has been shown that PF interventions are effective and regarded positively as a feedback approach by learners, the question remains how a PF intervention should be designed to maximize learning gains. The last decade of research on PF has shown that there are a few things an instructor should do to make the PF intervention as effective as possible. First and foremost, it has become evident that training learners to provide feedback to a peer seems to be crucial for the success of the PF intervention. Sippel's (2019) study on vocabulary learning, for example, found that learners who were trained to correct each other's errors improved more than learners who had

not received such a training. Sato and Lyster (2012) found similar outcomes in the domain of grammatical accuracy. It appears that without feedback training, PF tends to occur less frequently and therefore does not always have an effect on L2 acquisition (Adams, Nuevo, & Egi, 2011).

Another important component in the design of a PF intervention is to include an element of ‘awareness raising’—sometimes also referred to as ‘metacognitive instruction’ (Fujii, Ziegler, & Mackey, 2016). That is, learners should not only be taught how to provide PF, but their knowledge about PF should be increased as well. This usually entails teaching learners what PF is, how it functions from a theoretical perspective, and why it is useful and effective in language learning. It can even be helpful to synthesize for them research findings that demonstrate that learners have improved their L2 skills by use of a PF intervention. It appears as if learners hold more positive beliefs about PF if they know why and how it works, which in turn is important seeing that Martin and Sippel (under review) found a positive correlation between learner beliefs about PF and the magnitude of their learning gains.

## **HOW TO DESIGN A PEER FEEDBACK INTERVENTION**

After having seen research findings that suggest that PF is effective and knowing what elements should be included in a successful PF intervention, in this second part of the teaching tip, step-by-step instructions on how to design a PF intervention for any L2 classroom will be provided. These instructions will be the same whether the instructor plans to design the PF intervention as a homework component for a face-to-face learning environment, or as an asynchronous component in an online learning environment. That is, both are based on learners recording their pronunciation and peer feedback, rather than in-class interaction or real-time feedback.

The design outlined below is the exact procedure that was used in Martin and Sippel (2021a). Following this design that showed significant gains in L2 comprehensibility in a peer-reviewed research study provides some reassurance that learners will benefit from the PF intervention. However, this is not the only way to design a PF intervention and everyone is encouraged to adapt it to make it work for their own learners and learning environment.

### **Step 1: Awareness Raising**

Start by talking to your students about PF. This can be a short (3-5 minutes), informal presentation, followed by a quick discussion during which learners should get a chance to ask questions. The background information provided above can guide you through this conversation, which might need to take place in the L1, unless learners are at an advanced proficiency level. You could begin by explaining that, traditionally, feedback comes from a teacher (or an interlocutor in an authentic conversation in the L2), but that PF has also been shown to help students improve their language skills. You could further tell your learners about the results of L2 research studies that revealed that PF is as helpful (or sometimes even more helpful for long-term learning) as TF (e.g., Martin & Sippel, 2021a; Sato & Lyster, 2012; Sippel & Jackson, 2015; Sippel & Martin, 2022). Then, ask the learners why they think that PF is effective. Learners might bring up the concept of “While we teach, we learn.”—which goes back to the Roman philosopher Seneca. If the learners do not get there themselves, guide the discussion in this direction by talking about the difference between

providing and receiving feedback. As a reminder, PF allows learners to assume an active role in the learning process, whereas TF forces them to take on a more passive role. Finally, ask learners about their beliefs about PF and whether they would feel uncomfortable receiving feedback from a classmate. Address their doubts and give them room to express their beliefs. It might be helpful for a student who is going to provide feedback to hear that they are not going to hurt their classmate's feelings by correcting an error they detect. You can download and use the "Metacognitive Instruction" unit that was designed for awareness raising on the IRIS database ([www.iris-database.org](http://www.iris-database.org)) if you search for Martin and Sippel (2021b) or directly if you go here: <https://www.iris-database.org/iris/app/home/detail?id=york%3a939336&ref=search>. This unit is in English.

## Step 2: Pronunciation and Feedback Training

Choose a segmental or suprasegmental target that will be the focus of the PF intervention. In Martin and Sippel (2021a), two features that impede L2 German learners' intelligibility were targeted, one on the segmental level and one on the suprasegmental level. Both were included in each round of feedback (rather than doing two separate rounds of feedback) which worked well. Be careful to keep your focus narrow though as you might over-burden the learners if they have to give feedback on a range of pronunciation targets.

Next, give learners a quick refresher on the importance of the chosen target and how to correctly produce it. This can be a short pronunciation training in the classroom, or if you want to save in-class time, it can be a homework-based pronunciation training, such as an iCPR unit (Martin, 2017; 2020a, 2020b), which is a form of pronunciation training delivered in the form of Microsoft PowerPoint with embedded native speaker recordings. The goal of this pronunciation training is actually less the training or practice itself, but rather, to refresh learners' memory on the pronunciation target and provide them with helpful terminology to use when they give feedback to their peers. Here is a practical example: on the segmental level, the focus was on the pronunciation of the German letter <z> (as in German *Zimmer* 'room') which is pronounced as a sharp [ts] in German (as in English 'pizza'), but is often pronounced as a soft [z] (as in 'zoo') by American learners of L2 German, which strongly affects comprehensibility. By refreshing the learners' memory on this pronunciation problem and providing an example of what the letter <z> should sound like in German, learners were given the terminology to use when they correct their peer's utterances. In their feedback, they would for example say "Your <z> in *Zimmer* did not sound like <z> in *pizza*. Try saying it like the sharp hissing sound in *pizza*. Like this: [ˈtsɪmɐ]". It can further be helpful to provide the learners with some written guidance to use while they give feedback (see Step 3). Figure 1 shows what this could look like. This is a worksheet that the learners could use to follow along through the sentences their peers had recorded as a previous homework (see Step 3 below). However, learners were not asked to submit this worksheet or to check it for accuracy. The purpose of such a worksheet is simply to serve as guidance and remind the learners what to focus on in providing feedback.

**Figure 1**

*Sample worksheet guiding learners through the process of providing feedback.*

Listen to your peer's recording for the first time. Pay attention to the words that contain the letter „z“ (written in bold in the sentences below). As you know, „z“ should be pronounced „ts“ in German. For each word, decide if „z“ in your peer's recording sounded like „ts“ and check the appropriate box in the column on the right.

|  | Did „z“ sound like „ts“?   |
|--|--|
| Der Kandidat kauft einen neuen <b>Anzug</b> für sein Interview.      | <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> not sure <input type="checkbox"/> no   |
| Die <b>Zeitung</b> berichtet über den Konflikt im Nahen Osten.       | <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> not sure <input type="checkbox"/> no   |
| Im Islam feiert man nicht Weihnachten, sondern das Ende von Ramadan. | [no „z“ in this sentence]  |
| Der nette Muslim Erkan wird im Mai <b>siebzig</b> Jahre alt.         | <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> not sure <input type="checkbox"/> no   |
| Das neue Instrument steht im kleinen <b>Zimmer</b> neben dem Bad.    | <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> not sure <input type="checkbox"/> no   |
| Im <b>Rezept</b> steht, man soll viel <b>Zimt</b> nehmen.            | <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> not sure <input type="checkbox"/> no<br><input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> not sure <input type="checkbox"/> no |

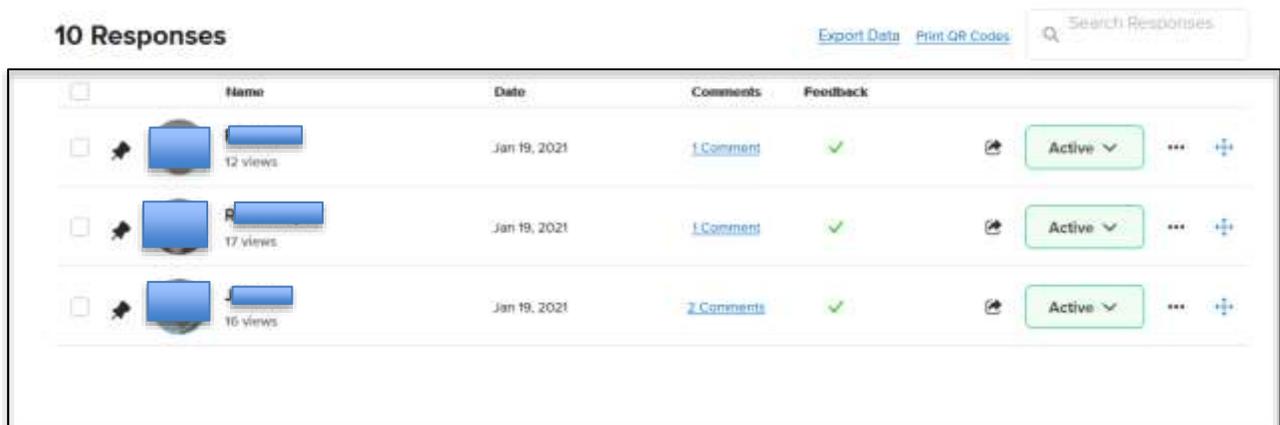
### Step 3: Organization of Peer Feedback Tasks

Now that the students have learned about the value of PF and had a short pronunciation training refresher, they are ready for the actual PF intervention. Again, this could either be assigned as homework or as an asynchronous learning component in online instruction. The intervention involves several steps, ideally assigned on different days. Before looking at these steps, there are two practical issues to address: a) audio recordings and b) a platform to share recordings so that learners can provide and receive feedback. As for the former, since the PF intervention targets pronunciation, you need a sample of the learner speaking in the L2, so that a peer can provide feedback on their pronunciation. Since this PF intervention is designed as a homework or asynchronous task, this sample should come in the form of an audio recording. Luckily, submitting an audio recording does not seem to cause difficulty for learners anymore. You can either recommend Audacity ([www.audacityteam.org](http://www.audacityteam.org), Audacity Team, 2022) as a free recording software, or encourage the students to record themselves using their phones. Another great solution is to use Flipgrid ([www.flipgrid.com](http://www.flipgrid.com), Iona, 2017), which is a free and very user-friendly video discussion community for educational purposes. In Flipgrid, students can record themselves either using audio or video recording and their classmates can comment directly on the submission (again using audio-only or video). As an instructor, you can access all recordings and responses and even see an overview that shows you how many comments were submitted for each learner submission (see Figure 2). If you use Flipgrid, you solve both the issue of audio recordings and providing a platform for learners to access each other's work in one simple interface. Moreover, having the option of a video recording can be helpful if the pronunciation target benefits from visual feedback, for example, showing the correct degree of lip rounding or the position of the tongue in the mouth. However, if you choose not to use Flipgrid and have students record an audio-file on their phones instead, there also is an easy solution to make these recordings accessible for all learners: Google's Shared Drive. You can create a shared drive for your learners for free if you have a Gmail account.

You can then invite your students to the drive and make them ‘editors’, which allows them to upload their recordings and their feedback.

## Figure 2

*Sample of the Flipgrid overview interface.*



Once you have set up a mechanism for your learners to share audio recordings with each other (Flipgrid, Shared Drive, or your school’s course management system), they are ready for the PF intervention:

**Day 1:** Have all learners in the course submit an audio recording (or a video recording on Flipgrid). If you are targeting one or two specific pronunciation features, you might want to give your learners prompts that ensure they will produce the targeted features. With beginning learners, you may simply choose to give them sentences or a text to read aloud. This could be in the form of a PowerPoint presentation with one sentence presented on one slide at a time (see Figure 3). Breaking up the prompts into several smaller prompts or sentences will make it easier for their peers to provide feedback.

**Figure 3**

*Sample set-up for recording prompts.*



**Day 2:** Divide the class in two groups (a “Provider Group” and a “Receiver Group”) and pair learners up so that every learner in the “Provider Group” has a partner in the “Receiver Group”. On Day 2, only the learners in the “Provider Group” complete an assignment (this will be balanced out with Day 3): that is, ask the learners in this group to listen to their partner’s recording from Day 1 and record a response providing feedback on their partner’s pronunciation. Again, it helps to guide learners in this process by providing them with a checklist as shown in Figure 1. It is important that this feedback comes in the form of an oral recording (rather than written feedback), so that learners can model the pronunciation target.

**Day 3:** The next day, only the learners in the “Receiver Group” complete an assignment: that is, ask them to listen to the feedback they received from their partner the previous day and prompt them to use this feedback in re-recording the original prompt from Day 1.

This concludes one round of the PF intervention. However, Martin and Sippel (2021a) showed that the learning gains in a PF intervention seem to stem from *providing* rather than from *receiving* PF. Therefore, to balance out the differences between the “Provider Group” and the “Receiver Group”, you should repeat the process of Day 1-3 again with a new prompt, reversing the group assignment. Finally, seeing that providing PF seems to be most beneficial to learners, you might even consider designing a PF intervention in which *all* learners provide PF on one sample recording, making all learners providers of PF and no learner a receiver of PF. It has to be pointed out, however, that this design has not been empirically tested and might not have the same effect as an authentic PF intervention, where the learners make great effort in providing feedback because they know that their partner will actually listen to the feedback and take it seriously.

## CONCLUSION

Using PF to give learners the opportunity to improve their L2 pronunciation can lead to comparable learning gains as TF, but it has the additional advantage of saving in-class time and ensuring that learners receive feedback on their pronunciation without burdening the instructor to give individualized feedback to every student. In this teaching tip, best practices for designing a PF intervention in any L2 classroom were outlined.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The materials shared in this teaching tip were developed together with Liese Sippel (Yale University) as part of a larger research project investigating the efficacy, long-term benefits, and beliefs about Peer Feedback in Instructed Second Language Acquisition. I am truly grateful to Liese for all her work in this collaboration and her role in the design of the study and development of the materials described above.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Ines A. Martin** is an Assistant Professor of German and Linguistics at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD. She earned her PhD in Applied Linguistics and Language Science at the Pennsylvania State University. Her research focuses on pronunciation teaching and learning with the goal to address the gap between research findings in pronunciation instruction and teaching practice. Contact her at [imartin@usna.edu](mailto:imartin@usna.edu) or visit her homepage [www.ines-martin.weebly.com](http://www.ines-martin.weebly.com) to learn more about her research and teaching, or to watch the original video presentation of this teaching tip.

### Contact:

U. S. Naval Academy  
Languages and Cultures Department  
Dr. Ines Martin  
105 Maryland Ave  
Mail Stop: Mahan Hall, Room 327  
Annapolis, MD 21402  
410-293-6355  
[imartin@usna.edu](mailto:imartin@usna.edu)

## REFERENCES

- Adams, R., Nuevo, A. M., & Egi, T. (2011). Explicit and implicit feedback, modified output and SLA. Does explicit and implicit feedback promote learning and learner-learner interactions? *The Modern Language Journal*, 95, 42–63.
- Audacity Team (2022). Audacity®: Free Audio Editor and Recorder (Version 3.0.0) [Computer application]. Retrieved from <https://audacityteam.org>

- Couper, G. (2003). The value of an explicit pronunciation syllabus in ESOL teaching. *Prospect*, 18, 53–70.
- Darcy, I. (2018). Powerful and effective pronunciation instruction: How can we achieve it? *The CATESOL Journal*, 30, 13–45.
- Fujii, A., Ziegler, N., & Mackey, A. (2016). Peer interaction and metacognitive instruction in the EFL classroom. In M. Sato & S. Ballinger (Eds.), *Peer interaction and second language learning: Pedagogical potential and research agenda* (pp. 63–89). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Gass, S., Behney, J., & Plonsky, L. (2013). *Second language acquisition: An introductory course*. New York: Routledge.
- Huensch, A. (2019). Pronunciation in foreign language classrooms: Instructors' training, classroom practices, and beliefs. *Language Teaching Research*, 23, 745–764.
- Iona, J. (2017, Winter). Flipgrid. *School Librarian*, 65, 211. <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A521290397/AONE?u=anon~2d7cff9c&sid=googleScholar&xid=cecbf94a>
- Lundstrom, K., & Baker, W. (2009). To give is better than to receive: The benefits of peer review to the reviewer's own writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 18, 30–43.
- Martin, I. A. (2017). Teaching pronunciation through homework assignments: The method of iCPRs. In M. O'Brien & J. Levis (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 8th Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching Conference*, (pp. 216-223). Ames, IA: Iowa State University.
- Martin, I. A. (2020a). Pronunciation can be acquired outside the classroom: Design and assessment of homework-based training. *The Modern Language Journal*, 104, 457-479.
- Martin, I. A. (2020b). Pronunciation development and instruction in distance language learning. *Language Learning & Technology*, 24, 86-106.
- Martin, I. A., & Sippel, L. (2021a). Is giving better than receiving? The effects of peer and teacher feedback on L2 pronunciation skills. *Journal of Second Language Pronunciation*, 7, 62-88.
- Martin, I. A., & Sippel, L. (2021b). Providing vs. receiving peer feedback: Learners' beliefs and experiences. *Language Teaching Research*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F13621688211024365>
- Martin, I. A., & Sippel, L. (under review). Do beliefs matter? The relationship between beliefs about peer feedback and peer feedback effectiveness.
- Philip, J., Adams, R., & Iwashita, N. (2014). *Peer interaction and second language learning*. New York: Routledge.
- Sato, M. (2017). Oral peer corrective feedback. Multiple theoretical perspectives. In H. Nassaji & E. Kartchava (Eds.), *Corrective feedback in second language teaching and learning: Research, theory, applications, implications* (pp. 19–34). New York: Routledge.
- Sato, M., & Lyster, R. (2012). Peer interaction and corrective feedback for accuracy and fluency development: Monitoring, practice, and proceduralization. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 34, 591–626.
- Sippel, L. (2019). The impact of peer corrective feedback on vocabulary development. *Foreign Language Annals*, 52, 595-611.
- Sippel, L., & Jackson, C. N. (2015). Teacher vs. peer oral corrective feedback in the German language classroom. *Foreign Language Annals*, 48, 688-705.

- Sippel, L., & Martin, I. A. (2022): Immediate and long-term improvement in lexical stress perception: The role of teacher and peer feedback. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*. Advance online publication. doi.org/10.1515/iral-2021-0175
- Sturm, J. L. (2019). Current approaches to pronunciation instruction: A longitudinal case study in French. *Foreign Language Annals*, 52, 32-44.