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INTEGRATING FLUENT PRONUNCIATION USE INTO CONTENT-BASED ESL INSTRUCTION: TWO CASE STUDIES

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This paper examines the teaching practices of two ESL teachers who integrated pronunciation instruction into intermediate-level, content/task-based, oral communication courses in an Intensive English program. These practices are analysed according to five categories of pronunciation instruction: Language Awareness; Controlled Practice; Guided Practice, Fluency Development and Free Practice. The fourth category, Fluency Development, is defined based on the work of Nation and Newton (2009), who list, among several criteria, pressure to perform at greater speeds or at least “more smoothly” as central to improving learner fluency. Based on classroom observations, interviews with teachers and student questionnaires, the degree to which the teachers integrated pronunciation according to each of these five categories is investigated. Findings demonstrated that systematic integration of pronunciation instruction into content-based curriculum can be problematic in general and that specific focus on fluency development seems to receive relatively little attention in the classroom. Preliminary recommendations for enhancing systematic pronunciation integration and increasing pronunciation fluency development into curriculum are provided.

The last decade has witnessed increased interest and growth in pronunciation teaching in ESL curriculum due, at least in part, to continued advocacy from not only specialists in this area (Levis & Grant, 2003), but also ESL students (Kang, 2010), for whom intelligible speech is an important goal. Prior to this time, there appears to have been a near 25-year gap where pronunciation pedagogy and focus-on-form in general were de-emphasized. The emergence of Communicative Language Teaching in the late 1970s was to varying degrees responsible for this trend, resulting in the relative exclusion of pronunciation in many language teaching circles (Brown, 2008; Derwing & Munro, 2005; Levis, 2006; Levis & Grant, 2003; Murphy, 1991; Naiman, 1992). Despite this neglect, it has regained ground in language education according to reports that an increasing number of teachers have received training in pronunciation pedagogy (Foote, Holtby, & Derwing, 2011).

During the past two decades, communicative approaches to teaching have evolved as well. Especially in programs focusing on English for Academic Purposes (EAP), communicative approaches such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Content-Based Instruction (CBI) have earned considerable currency. One important question that arises is how pronunciation instruction can be successfully integrated into such programs. As Celce-Murcia, Brinton, Goodwin and Griner (2010) note, “Usually, teachers must balance the needs of their students within a somewhat fixed curriculum. If this is the case, pronunciation is not always explicitly included even in a speaking course, and teachers need to find ways to integrate pronunciation into existing curriculum and textbook materials” (p. 381). From one perspective, it is difficult, if not impossible, to address all the difficulties that language learners experience with their speech; there is simply insufficient time to focus on the wide range of potentially problematic features of English pronunciation encountered by an entire class of L2 learners from a variety of L1 backgrounds in a single course (Munro & Derwing, 2006). In the case of EAP programs that offer courses that separate written and oral communication skills, however, there is greater opportunity to give more attention to sounds and prosody as combined with both general speaking and listening skills. Throughout the last

three decades, teacher educators have strongly advocated an integrated approach to pronunciation teaching in oral communication (OC) curriculum (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Chela-Flores, 2001; Gilbert, 1987; Murphy, 1991; Wong, 1987). In fact, several of these specialists have also argued for enhanced incorporation of pronunciation in OC courses, and not simply treating it as an isolated module (Scales, Wennerstrom, Richard, & Wu, 2006). Brown (2008) explains that:

Many learners, and unfortunately many teachers, treat pronunciation as if it were a separate aspect of language learning. If pronunciation is explicitly handled at all, it is often covered in class slots divorced from the rest of the syllabus. However, given that pronunciation is an indispensable aspect of communicating in speech, and given that successful communication is the basic aim of language learning, pronunciation should be seen as relating to various other communicative aspects of language (p. 203).

To gain a better understanding of how phonology can be integrated in the EAP classroom, an examination of teachers' cognitions (i.e., beliefs and knowledge) and actual teaching practices can provide invaluable insight. To date, several studies have investigated teachers' cognitions, but most have relied on questionnaire (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010; Saito, 2011; Saito & van Poeteren, 2012; Sifakis & Sougari, 2005) or interview data alone (Baker, 2011a; Jenkins, 2007; Macdonald, 2002), and none have examined how pronunciation may play an integral role into EAP programs specifically.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How (and to what degree) do ESL teachers who teach the same intermediate-level OC course integrate pronunciation into content/task-based teaching?
2. What types of pronunciation activities¹ do they use and how frequently do they use them?
3. What do teachers believe about integrating this skill into their courses?

RESEARCH DESIGN

Participants

Two teachers who taught the same OC course in an Intensive English Program in the USA participated in this study². The two teachers, Abby and Ginger (pseudonyms), were both experienced ESL teachers with six and 14 years teaching experience respectively, and both had taught this course at least three times in past semesters. In addition, Abby was bilingual in Portuguese and English, having grown up in Brazil.

Context and Curriculum

¹ The terms activities and techniques are used, for the most part, interchangeably throughout this paper. While "activity" generally refers to everything that students may do in the classroom, the term "technique" is a "subordinate" term referring to activities that are "planned and deliberate" that either students or teachers may do (Brown, 2007, p. 180).

² The study discussed here was a subcomponent of a larger project that included an examination of the beliefs and practices of five experienced ESL instructors (Baker, 2011b, 2013). However, this paper focuses on the two teachers who both taught the same course to facilitate the analysis of their beliefs and practices.

This intermediate-level EAP course focused on teaching listening, speaking and pronunciation skills using content and task-based instruction with American History serving as the subject matter for the course. The OC course consisted three, 50-minute lessons/week over a 14-week period. The course followed a mainly fixed, structured curriculum based on an in-house study guide plus additional content and activities developed by the individual teachers.

Methods

Three types of data were collected from the teachers: three semi-structured interviews (SSIs) held at approximately the beginning, $\frac{3}{4}$ point and end of the semester; four classroom observations; and two stimulated recall interviews (SRIs). Two consecutive lessons in the first half of the semester and two consecutive lessons in the second half of the semester were observed, video-recorded and transcribed by the researcher/author. From these video-recordings, the researcher identified segments related to pronunciation instruction. With 48 hours of the second of the two consecutively observed classes, an SRI was conducted, which involved the viewing of the selected pronunciation-oriented segments. During the SRI, the teacher was asked to comment on what she remembered thinking at the time the video recording took place.

Data Analysis

The analysis and coding of pronunciation activities is discussed in detail in Baker (2013) and based on Crookes and Chaudron's (2001) taxonomy of language teaching techniques with each technique being classified as either as controlled, guided (semi-controlled) or free technique. In this paper, these techniques are re-categorized into five broader categories as follows:

1. Language Awareness
2. Controlled Practice
3. Fluency Development
4. Guided Practice
5. Free Practice

The reason for this re-categorization is to focus on the teaching purpose of the technique as it relates to understanding, practice and fluent use of a feature of language, in this case different elements of English pronunciation. Subsumed under *Language Awareness*, any technique that involves the explanation and modelling of pronunciation features, listening discrimination activities, visual recognition activities and actual instructions for other types of pronunciation-related activities is included. Under *Controlled Practice*, repetition drills, including those done accompanied by a specific physical movement or in response to a visual or text-based prompt are included. *Guided Practice* activities can involve information gap activities, referential question-answer activities, preparation work for presentations or dramas, and other semi-structured activities. *Free practice*, in comparison, involves less structured activities such as games, dramas, presentations and discussions. Finally, *Fluency Development* activities are structured or semi-structured activities that focus on helping learners to achieve "automated fluency," which Gatbonton and Segalowitz (2005) define as "the smooth and rapid production of utterances, without undue hesitations and pauses, that results from constant use and repetitive practice" (p. 326). For an activity to be categorized as *Fluency Development*, Nation and Newton's (2009, pp. 152-153) three conditions were used:

1. The activity is meaning-focused.
2. The learners take part in activities where all language is within their previous experience.
3. There is support and encouragement for the learner to perform at a higher than normal rate.

Using a transcription and analysis program called *Transana*, the video footage was coded according to the categories described above. *Transana* then provided a visual display of the timeline of different activity types used in each lesson as well as summarized the duration of each activity (Figure 1).

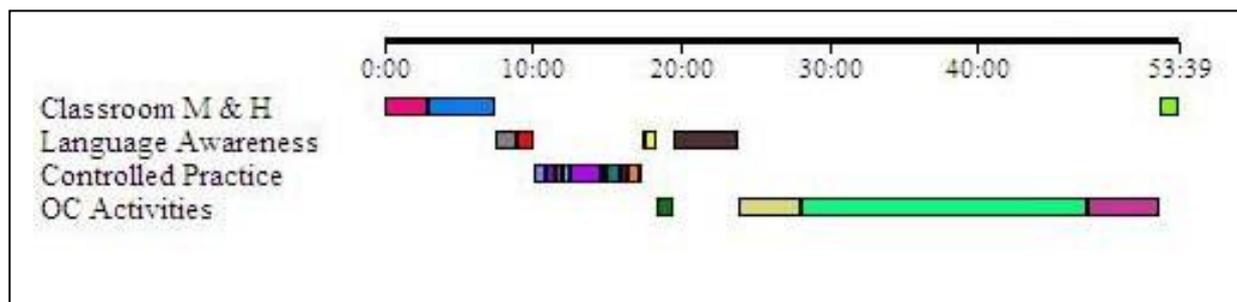


Figure 1. Ginger - Lesson 3 timeline.

Note: Classroom M & H refers to Classroom Management and Housekeeping and pertains to activities such as giving announcements, taking attendance, etc. OC activities refers to any non-pronunciation activities that focused on other general listening and speaking skills, such as taking notes on a lecture or answering questions about a lecture.

FINDINGS

This study revealed how two experienced teachers, to varying extents, integrated pronunciation instruction in their TBLT/CBI oral communication courses. In response to the first research question, pronunciation was an integral component of their classes. This finding is not surprising given that the course curriculum requires pronunciation to be taught in each module of the course. However, although the two instructors teach the same OC course, they integrate phonological features in different ways and to differing degrees. Table 1 shows the percentage of time dedicated to developing pronunciation in the two classes, based on the observations and interviews.

Table 1

Observations and Reports of Integration of Pronunciation Instruction

	Abby	Ginger
Observation of 4 lessons	69.7% (160 min 30 s)	17.4% (37 min 42 s)
Teacher's Perception ³	60-70%	20% in-class (higher % outside class)

³During the second SSI, teachers were asked to respond to the following question: "What percentage of time do you think you spend on pronunciation in your class?"

The two data sources on the average time spent on pronunciation varied across the two classes, showing that Abby's class devoted considerably more time overall. These results indicate that pronunciation is integrated with other OC skills, but has a dominant role in her lessons. In her first interview, Abby explained this integration:

We use American government as the basis, so I try to do something with the content. Half the class content and half the class with pronunciation. There's only 50 minutes so sometimes it really doesn't work...but I try to stick in some kind of pronunciation aspect even like syllables. Either we're practicing syllables or we're counting syllables. Today word stress started - the rules for word stress; Friday [we will] continue that. And then part of the class next time on Monday, [we will] continue finishing up the rules. Today I also did the lecture, so Monday I repeat the lecture. That's just part of [this course in the] IEP. And so all the time I try to do something pronunciation and then something content based.

However, Abby also emphasized that she intertwined pronunciation with the course content whenever possible, and that "the content gives it a sort of continuum, something to link it to."

I think [pronunciation] should be just pretty much all the time...How I say the question or how the students are saying the question and reviewing that pronunciation or words within their answer, words within the question, word stress, endings if we are doing -ed endings, how to say that. Even in the PowerPoint, if there's the word "representative" up there...so where's stress...just very quickly while I'm doing the lecture...where's the stressed syllable? I guess any chance you get reinforcing what the pronunciation feature is for that unit or lesson or chapter.

She further noted that:

I have to say that with the content, [CBI] does make it easier to teach just simply because you have something to ... attach all these skills to [...] The content gives it a sort of continuum, something to link [pronunciation] to.

In comparison with Abby, Ginger spent less time teaching pronunciation; however, her lessons still reflected an integrated approach to teaching OC skills. Similar to Abby, she strove to merge pronunciation with the subject matter of the course, frequently focusing on key words from lectures on American history and having students practice their pronunciation. She explained that:

I have them repeat and they do drill and practice stuff...and then I do checks with them. I just call on them and they have to read the words and then if it's wrong, then I'll say something, and then I'll repeat it, and then I'll have the whole class repeat and not just that one student. I feel like it's my job in pronunciation time to highlight discrepancies, but otherwise I try to save that kind of thing for WIMBA.

Her reference to WIMBA refers to an online program that Ginger used to give students feedback on their pronunciation. The learners recorded key words and sentences using the audio record feature, and later she listened to the recording and then provided feedback on their pronunciation. She mentioned that she spent considerable time giving students feedback on their pronunciation, which may account for why the students reported spending a great deal of time on this skills in the course (Table 1).

In response to the second research question, the teachers used Language Awareness activities, Controlled Practice, Free Practice and Guided activities according to observational and interview data. Table 2 provides the results of the frequency of the activities based on observational data alone. It is important to note here that although the teachers' use of guided and free activities is almost nonexistent in the observational data, the use of these types of activities does surface in the interview data, albeit to a limited extent (see Baker, 2013, for an expanded discussion).

Table 2

Frequency of Activities in Observed Classes

Activity Type	Abby		Ginger	
Class. M & H	8.2%	20 min	10.6%	23 min
L. Awareness	49.4%	114 min	8.6%	19 min
Controlled P.	5.5%	13 min	6.8%	14.5 min
Guided P.	8.5%	19 min	0	
Fluency D.	0.5%	1 min	0	
Free P.	0		0	
OC Activities	27.8%	64 min	73.9	160 min
Total Time		230 min		216.5 min

Based on the combined data from the interviews and the observations, the one type of activity that appears to be virtually missing from the content-based ESL classes is Fluency Development. As described by Nation and Newton (2009, pp. 152-153), fluency development activities are "meaning-focused," include only language from "within their previous experience" and require students to "perform at a higher than normal rate." Based on this definition, activities specifically devoted to fluency development rarely, if ever, surfaced in the data, thus suggesting a possible missing link in the students' development of fluent language use.

In response to the third research question, one concern raised by the teachers during the interviews related to a struggle for balance. Both Abby and Ginger highlighted the difficulty of providing sufficient time to course content focus and to pronunciation. Ginger said:

I feel like I try to incorporate as much pronunciation as possible while still getting through the content of the course.... It's supposed to be a listening, speaking, pronunciation type course and I try to find balance among all of that.

Similarly, Abby explained that “The problem with this class is that you always have to juggle content time and pronunciation time.”

Another concern that was discussed in depth by Abby was how best to integrate pronunciation into the course. Over several semesters, Abby experimented with different ways to address pronunciation instruction. For some units, she tried to disperse pronunciation instruction throughout the entire unit. In other units, she used a sandwich approach, alternating content and pronunciation, before finally reviewing the content again at the end of a unit. At the end of the current study, Abby concluded that she preferred the sandwich approach, feeling that it seemed more effective. She said:

In this last unit, I introduced all the content first, and then I focused on the pronunciation. It seemed to work. I kind of liked that. So I'll try it again and see if I really do like it that way. Present all the content first and then the pronunciation, and then just kind of review content at the end.

That said, pronunciation instruction still occurred throughout the units, as noted by Abby earlier in this paper. Frequently she would take every opportunity to focus briefly on pronunciation even when teaching American History.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Overall, the observations and the teachers' perspectives indicate that in principle the classes follow an inclusive curriculum targeting not just general speaking and listening skills, but pronunciation skills as well. The position of pronunciation as integrated with other OC skills seemed to have especially high priority in the classes taught by Abby, the teacher who is the bilingual Portuguese-English speaker. Whether having a large or small focus in the teachers' courses, however, it is apparent that they both highlighted the importance of this skill. Their belief is likely shared by numerous teachers around the globe who work in EAPs, but particularly those EAPs that value focus on form, recognizing the critical role that prosody and sounds can play in intelligible speech.

The results also revealed a lack of activities specifically devoted to pronunciation-oriented fluency development within the TBLT/CBI classes. While pronunciation instruction and practice was integral to the course and to overall language development, the dearth of fluency-development activities in particular may likely inhibit learners' development of “automated fluency” (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005) of intelligible features of pronunciation. If it is the case that fluency may be negatively affected, or at least not advanced, it may be beneficial for teachers with similar OC courses to add activities that specifically focus on improving the fluency of intelligible pronunciation in learner speech. There are any number of possible activities that can aid in this area, including haptic (movement + touch) techniques such as the *Rhythmic Feet Fight Club* (Acton, Baker, Burri, & Teaman, forthcoming) or other general fluency activities such as the 4/3/2 technique (see Arevart & Nation, 1991) – as long as the learners are directed to focus on intelligible pronunciation (see Nation & Newton, 2009, for additional suggestions).

Finally, both teachers expressed a concern with the difficulty with maintaining balance between content and language development. Uniting pronunciation instruction with speaking and listening skill development, while at the same time teaching subject content matter, was considered a challenge. Nevertheless, they asserted that in their experience the content can provide a communicative anchor for pronunciation instruction. As research has yet to be conducted on how to effectively and efficiently integrate pronunciation instruction into CBI

or TBLT, the teachers' expressed need highlights another important "opportunity" for class-based research. Quasi-experimental research has explored the teaching of pronunciation in ESL classrooms (Couper, 2003), but comparisons are needed to explore different paths to fluency in the integrated L2 classroom.

To conclude, the results of this research indicate that pronunciation instruction has a definite role in the teaching of OC skills in CBI/TBLT, at least in the classrooms of these instructors. Future research needs to address not only how to integrate pronunciation effectively in CBI curriculum, but also how to incorporate activities that specifically target the development of fluent, intelligible pronunciation. For this target to be fully realized, however, particular attention must be given to the world beyond the classroom, that is, the robust development of pronunciation skills that are able to withstand the rigors of the local Starbucks (or elsewhere).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amanda Baker, PhD, is Coordinator of the TESOL program at the University of Wollongong in Australia. Amanda's research interests focus on the dynamic relationships that exist between second language (L2) teachers' knowledge, beliefs and practices, especially in the areas of L2 pronunciation, speaking and listening pedagogy. Classroom research and teacher education, as they relate to L2 oral communication, are primary areas of interest in her research. Some of her recent publications have appeared in *TESOL Quarterly*, *TESOL Journal*, and *TESL Canada*.

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