

Roccamo, A. (2014). Effective pronunciation instruction in basic language classrooms: A modular approach. In J. Levis & S. McCrocklin (Eds). *Proceedings of the 5th Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching Conference* (pp. 183-189). Ames, IA: Iowa State University.

TEACHING TIP

EFFECTIVE PRONUNCIATION INSTRUCTION IN BASIC LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS: A MODULAR APPROACH

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Pronunciation skills in a second language (L2) are a significant component of communicative competence, yet are notoriously difficult to acquire. Most L2 learners seem unable to identify and improve their pronunciation on their own (Derwing & Munro, 2013; Derwing & Rossiter, 2002; Dlaska & Krekeler, 2008); therefore it seems necessary to provide them with instruction in pronunciation. Instruction programs have been shown to be effective in improving pronunciation skills, by reducing accent and increasing comprehensibility (e.g., Derwing, Munro & Wiebe, 1998; Elliott, 1995; Hardison, 2004; Lord, 2008; Saito & Lyster, 2012). Yet it remains uncommon to encounter a pronunciation training study implemented in beginner or intermediate four-skills classrooms, despite the fact that researchers are beginning to promote the idea of beginning pronunciation training as early as possible (Counselman, 2010; Derwing & Munro, 2013; Eskenazi, 1999; Munro, 2013). This is not for lack of concern, however; many foreign language instructors recognize the importance of pronunciation skills, but do not teach them because they are worried about time constraints or are unsure of how to get started.

The following article provides information to counteract both of those worries, providing suggestions for a module-style pronunciation instruction unit that uses warm-up activities to teach pronunciation in just ten minutes per class period. This modularized unit has been tested with L2 learners of German and was successful at providing them with the tools to improve their comprehensibility and reduce their accentedness to a greater extent than learners who did not receive training. The first section of this article explains the motivations behind using a modular design. The basic structure of each module is outlined in the second section, and information about classroom instruction and sample activities can be found in the third. It is hoped that interested instructors can use the information found here as a springboard to introduce similar modules into their own basic language classrooms.

Incorporating Pronunciation Instruction into Beginner-Level Classrooms

Three things are of utmost importance when incorporating pronunciation instruction into basic language courses: the issues of time, adaptability and teacher confidence. So much needs to be learned in beginner and intermediate four-skills language classrooms that instructors are often pressed for time, which is why a modular design is useful. Students receive two weeks of intensive instruction on one aspect of pronunciation without taking too much class time away from grammar, vocabulary and cultural lessons. Within each module, pronunciation activities are designed to be used as a warm-up activity for the first ten minutes of class each day, leaving the rest of class time free. Ideally, pronunciation activities in the module combine the practice of many language skills with pronunciation practice, including speaking, listening, reading, writing,

grammar and vocabulary. The activities used in the pronunciation modules can also be custom-tailored to correspond to the course themes currently being covered. Instructors can easily combine a review of what was just learned with a pronunciation warm-up before continuing with a new topic.

Another important feature of the modular pronunciation unit is its adaptability. Each module is self-contained, which allows for instructors who are particularly pressed for time to implement the modules in an a-la-carte manner. Instructors can choose one or two modules to focus heavily on the needs of their particular courses and students. Once the basic format of the module is learned, it can be adapted to whichever languages, course goals, or first language (L1) groups an instructor encounters.

The pronunciation training unit described here also addresses the issue of teacher confidence. Many foreign language instructors who were not trained in linguistics or phonology may feel that they simply do not know enough to teach pronunciation. The activities involved in a unit of this type are designed to avoid technical phonetic instruction, focusing instead on familiar classroom activities that instructors already have practice implementing. Instructors can thus help their students improve their pronunciation without getting caught up in terminology and work within a realm that feels comfortable to them.

Module Design

When designing modules for use in the basic-level language classroom, it is vital to provide L2 learners with two skills: 1) the ability to produce what is currently being trained in a more accurate manner, and 2) the ability to notice and attend to their own pronunciation and that of others. Through this type of instruction, students can improve their pronunciation by noticing the differences between what they produce and what native and advanced speakers do, and by learning how to actually produce the new or similar sounds themselves.

A number of factors are involved in setting up modules for a particular course. Each module lasts for two weeks and focuses on one aspect of pronunciation that needs attention. There are no limits to what can be trained; instructors should choose features based both on students' needs and L2 problem areas typical for learners with a certain L1. Research findings recommend that at least one prosodic aspect be chosen for focus, such as placement of stress or intonation, as errors in prosody can be more detrimental to comprehensibility than errors in individual sounds (Hirschfeld, 1994). Once the topic for each module has been chosen, instructors can design pronunciation activities that can be used as a warm-up for the first ten minutes of class time each day.

Training in both perception and production should be provided, as well as activities that heighten attention and noticing of the feature in focus. The activities in each module are intended to follow the optimal progression for pronunciation training as outlined by Chun (2002). Students begin each training module with active listening exercises and end with production exercises. Listening and perception training consists of awareness training, which outlines what the feature is and how it is used in the L2, followed by discrimination and identification training, respectively. In discrimination training, students hear two words and decide whether these words

were the same or different. Identification training is when students hear a word and must use their knowledge to decide exactly which word it was that they heard. In all perceptual training activities, students should be provided with authentic speech samples from many different speakers that vary in length from individual words to longer dialogues and texts.

After thorough perceptual training, students should then begin practicing how to produce the individual pronunciation features. This stage makes selective use of traditional pronunciation training methods, such as drills and mimicking, to help students realize what their mouth is doing when they produce new sounds. Afterwards, students will progress to more active controlled speech exercises that practice the targeted features in a variety of different contexts. During this stage, students will work from more simple utterances, such as those with just one or two words, through sentence- and paragraph-level speech to spontaneous speech contexts that are modeled after natural language situations in which their L2 would be used.

As designed, each module begins with an activity to focus attention and heighten awareness of the aspect being trained and ends with a free speech activity. A sample of the progression of each of the activities is outlined below.¹⁵

Day 1:	Awareness Training
Days 2-3:	Discrimination Training
Day 4:	Identification Training
Day 5:	Production Training—Individual Sounds/Individual Words
Day 6:	Pronunciation in Individual Words/Sentences
Day 7:	Pronunciation in Sentences and Paragraphs
Day 8:	Free speech practice

The progression of the module is important because it addresses two L2 problems that influence pronunciation skills: perceptual skills and production of the targeted feature. Chun (2002) argues that it is important to first aid the development of L2 perception and listening skills before beginning any practice with production. Production activities move from more simple to more complex in order to promote stabilization of the speech patterns that are being learned. Ending with spontaneous speech contexts provides room for instructors to incorporate plenty of communicative language practice that demonstrates the importance of the pronunciation feature in question for communicating meaning.

A key component of these pronunciation modules is the concept of noticing. Throughout all of the modules and activities, students' awareness both of the targeted features and differences in pronunciation between the L1 and L2 should be raised as much as possible. Form-Focused Instruction can make use of enhanced input in communicative contexts to draw students' attention to the relevant features and how they affect comprehensibility, intelligibility, and meaning. Students should focus on the pronunciation of their peers as well; research has shown that by attending to another students' pronunciation and offering feedback, students can improve

¹⁵ The pronunciation unit was originally designed to take place in a classroom that meets four days a week, but could easily be shortened or extended. In addition, less time could be spent on perception training if students seem to have no problems with it, in order to spend more time on production training.

their own (Counselman, 2010; Lord, 2008). Explicit examples of activities making use of peer feedback and partner work within the frame of the training progression are outlined below.

Classroom Instruction and Example Activities

In the classroom, pronunciation instruction should be completed as a warm-up at the beginning of the class period. The sample activities presented in this section are meant to combine pronunciation practice with various language skills. Each of the following activities can be adapted to train a variety of segments and prosodic patterns.

The first three activities presented are listening and perception activities meant to be used in the first week of each module. Activities four through seven provide examples of production training in which students practice producing target features in many different communicative situations and discourse levels. Many of the production activities require partner work so that students can test their listening and speaking abilities within the same activity. As mentioned previously, critical to all partner work is the aspect of feedback.

Awareness Training

Sample Activity: Listening to a Text

For this activity, students listen to a text (poem, short story, song) and read along. Target sounds or prosodic features are made prominent in the text in order to focus students' attention. Attention can be focused on orthographic-phonetic connections, the possible sounds that can be used in different contexts, or differences between L1 and L2 pronunciation of similar sounds. After the listening phase, the instructor can ask students about the targeted features and their representation in the text. The primary goal of this activity is to raise students' awareness about the pronunciation of a certain feature in the L2, its characteristics, and how it is marked orthographically. Authentic texts are especially useful here, as they can be worked into the rest of the lesson after the pronunciation exercise is completed.

Discrimination Training

Sample Activity: Discrimination Game

Students playing a discrimination game will hear a pair of words pronounced out loud. Their task is to decide whether the pair consists of the same word said twice or two different words. Students can mark their answer in a number of different ways: by circling "same words" or "two different words", by checking a box, or by responding with a clicker or computer. A very useful way for instructors to see who can hear the differences and who cannot is to have students hold up cards with one color for "same" and another for "different". Instructors can make the back of the cards white so that students will not feel shy or wait to see the others' answers.

Instructors should choose words for this game that are identical except for the sounds that are being contrasted, such as the example *thin* and *tin*. This is a particularly versatile game, as it can be adapted to stress patterns and individual sounds in any language that has phonological contrast. Words can be contrasted both within and across languages. For instance, one could contrast short and long vowels within English words (e.g., *bit* and *beat*), or one could contrast the

diphthongized American English pronunciation of /e/ with its pronunciation in Spanish or German, which both make use of the monophthong (e.g., English *zone* and German *Sohn*). When creating a discrimination game, an instructor must make sure to include not only pairs that are different, but also pairs that are the same. Goals of a discrimination game are raising awareness of the contrasts between two L2 sounds or prosodic features, or between L1 and L2 pronunciation of a similar feature. This type of activity can also be adapted to intonation patterns, such as statements and questions.

Identification Training

Sample Activity: Bingo

Identification and discrimination are similar tasks, because they can be adapted to train similar contrasts and require similar responses from students. Yet there is one major difference—in identification games, students hear different words pronounced and have to indicate *which* word or sound was heard, instead of just deciding if the words were the same or different. One creative type of identification game is Bingo. In Bingo, each student receives an individual Bingo board. They must listen carefully to words pronounced aloud and then put a marker on the correct word on their Bingo sheet. This is a great game to help students listen for contrasts between similar sounds, and is also a useful tool for language instructors, as recent vocabulary items can be tested at the same times as valuable L2 contrasts. Goals for identification games are to test contrasts between the students' two languages, to raise awareness of the differences in those contrasts, and to train students' perceptual and word identification abilities.

Producing Individual Words

Sample Activity: Telephone

Once students have practiced some critical words involving the target pronunciation feature, they can play “Telephone”¹⁶. Students split into two or three groups, depending on the size of the class, and form lines from the front of the classroom to the back. The student at the head of the line receives a slip of paper with a word on it that uses the targeted contrast. They must say this word to the next person in line, who must say it to the next person, and so on until the end. If the last person in line produces the same word that the person at the beginning of the line has on the paper, that team wins a prize. In this game, students must both listen carefully to the relevant contrasts and pay close attention to which sounds they are forming as they speak.

Pronunciation in Sentences

Sample Activity: Question and Answer Sessions

In this controlled production activity, each partner receives a list of questions and a list of answers. Their answers correspond to their partner's list of questions, not their own. Students listen to their partner ask the questions, and choose one of their answers in response. Both partners give feedback to the other after they have asked and answered all questions.

¹⁶ This is called “Whisper Down the Lane” or “Operator” in some regions.

This activity is particularly useful for highlighting the connection between pronunciation and meaning, as students must listen closely to their partners' pronunciation before they can choose an appropriate response. Having students attend to their partners' pronunciation can be beneficial for them as well. This activity is particularly well suited to modules that focus on sentence accent and contrastive intonation patterns, but is useful to train individual sounds in questions and sentences as well.

Pronunciation in Paragraphs

Sample Activity: Poetry Reading

After practicing their pronunciation in sentences and questions, students can move on to larger texts, like poems. In this sample activity, students receive a poem and practice performing it while focusing on their pronunciation. The poem may be the same as was used for the first day's listening activities, and the target features can be made prominent in the text once again. This activity can be given a competitive slant, wherein students listen to and critique each other's performances. One could also have intermediate students write their own poems before they perform them for a partner or the class. Goals for this activity are to be able to focus on pronunciation and accurately produce the targeted feature even as the discourse level becomes more complex.

Free speech practice

Sample Activity: Describing a Picture

It is important to end a module with at least one free speech activity, in order to practice pronunciation of the target features in a complicated speech situation. Only one activity is described here, but instructors and students have great freedom when designing and completing free speech tasks. The connections between other lessons in the classroom and pronunciation are strongest with the free speech activities; culture can be incorporated by using authentic materials from the target culture, and recently learned vocabulary or grammar topics can be reviewed.

For this sample activity, each student receives a picture depicting something related to their chapter lessons and they take turns describing it in some way. Based on ability level, students may name the objects and actions they see, talk about their physical properties, continue the story beyond what is pictured, or make cultural comparisons. This activity can also easily be turned into a game where students describe something from the picture and their partner has to guess what it is. What is key is that students are practicing the target pronunciation features while they are actively using their L2 without reading aloud.

Conclusion

The module-style pronunciation instruction unit described above is unique in that it teaches pronunciation in just ten minutes per class period, and is a successful technique for teaching beginner- and intermediate-level students in basic language classrooms. The guidelines outlined here can provide instructors with a springboard to overcome their concerns about implementing pronunciation instruction in four-skills classrooms, including worries about comfort level or time restrictions. It is hoped that through this short tutorial, instructors who value pronunciation skills

in L2 learning can begin to recognize both the feasibility of providing pronunciation instruction in beginner- and intermediate-level basic language classrooms and can feel more comfortable getting started.

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Ashley Roccamo received her Ph.D. in German Applied Linguistics with a Dual Title in Language Science from Penn State University in May 2014. She is currently the Associate Director of Articulation and Assessment at the University of Southern California Language Center. Her research interests lie in the effects of instruction on second language German pronunciation, particularly for learners in their first few semesters of language learning. Secondary interests include: the role of motivation in the acquisition of pronunciation skills and language contact between English and German. She has presented at multiple conferences, including at the Germanic Linguistics Annual Conference, New Sounds, and PSLLT, and has a publication forthcoming in *Die Unterrichtspraxis*.