Engaging research: Empowering ESL/EFL teachers to teach pronunciation

Anastazija Kirkova-Naskova

Kirkova-Naskova, A. (2023). Engaging research: Empowering ESL/EFL teachers to teach pronunciation. In A. Henderson & A. Kirkova-Naskova (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on English Pronunciation: Issues and Practices* (pp. 122–137). Université Grenoble-Alpes. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8232364.

Engaging research: Empowering ESL/EFL teachers to teach pronunciation

Anastazija Kirkova-Naskova
Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje

The ongoing debate about the research-practice link has raised the point that research advances are far more progressive and teaching practice is failing to keep up. An important aspect that has received little attention is understanding teachers' classroom reality – a reality that for many involves an ever-increasing workload, limited resources, and a lack of autonomy and self-confidence. It is evident that teachers should be encouraged to address pronunciation in their teaching more frequently. However, they also need support to navigate the personal and institutional challenges.

This paper proposes a conceptual agenda which empowers teachers to learn how to reflect on their pronunciation teaching practices. Current issues in pronunciation research relevant for the teaching context are discussed, followed by an overview of the most effective research findings that can be successfully applied in the classroom. These insights are then contrasted with preliminary results from a qualitative study that investigates teachers' experience with pronunciation teaching. In the last section, ways of providing support for teachers' learning and professional development are explored.

Keywords: pronunciation research, pronunciation teaching, research-practice link, classroom practices, professional development

1 Introduction

Pronunciation is without doubt as important as any other language skill. Yet, with the rise of communicative language teaching (CLT), its equal presence in coursebooks and in classrooms has been overlooked, as traditional pronunciation activities did not fit ideally within the CLT framework and new ones were not adequately implemented (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). One particular reason why L2 pronunciation will always matter to L2 learners is the fact that it is not only a cognitive skill but it is also a motor skill. As such, it has a physical reality that results in the speech produced by learners, which is often L1-accented. From a linguistic perspective, having accented speech results in pronunciation that may lead to communication breakdowns. From a social perspective, such speech may have social consequences on the learners, who may experience stereotyping, bias, and discrimination in personal communication or in the workplace (Lippi-Green, 1997).

Traditionally, foreign accent (FA) was treated as a by-product of L2 pronunciation and its elimination was the end goal of pronunciation learning. However, three aspects lurked over this conceptualisation, making it difficult for teachers to know what to do. Firstly, the complexity of the FA phenomenon was difficult to grasp despite authors investigating the predictors of FA (Piper & Cansin, 1988; Purcell & Suter, 1980) and factors affecting the degree of FA (see overview in Piske et al., 2001). Secondly, globalisation processes led more and more people to communicate in English as a lingua franca, which made it clear that L2 pronunciation does not always prevent successful communication. Thirdly, the diversity of English varieties posed a serious problem when choosing a native variety as a reference model for L2 learners. A conceptual breakthrough came with the work of Munro and Derwing (1995) when they deconstructed the phenomenon of foreign accent and demonstrated that it consists of three perceptual phenomena: accentedness (i.e., how different a pattern of speech sounds when it is compared to the local variety), comprehensibility (i.e., how easy/difficult a listener finds it to understand someone's speech), and intelligibility (i.e., to what degree a listener actually understands an utterance). Munro and Derwing's (1995) oft-cited study was followed by two influential developments, in 2000 and 2005. Jenkins (2000) observed interactions between non-native speakers (NNS) and concluded that the assumption that L2 learners of English communicate solely or even mostly with native speakers (NS) is not accurate; in fact, NNSs are more likely to communicate with other NNSs than with NSs. She proposed a Lingua Franca Core (LFC), i.e., a set of pronunciation features that are likely to cause breakdowns in intelligibility (p. 158–160), hence, they could be given precedence in pedagogy. Furthermore, Levis (2005) addressed the issue of pronunciation models and goals and made a distinction between the Nativeness vs. Intelligibility Principle, suggesting that intelligibility is the way forward; while it is possible to achieve native-like pronunciation in the foreign language classroom, learners more importantly need to be understandable and to communicate successfully despite a noticeable or a strong foreign accent.

Such a change in viewpoints has prompted a re-examination of traditional teaching approaches. Pronunciation research has flourished with many studies investigating the development of L2 pronunciation, the potential of various teaching methods and activities, as well as various social and individual factors that affect successful speech acquisition. New avenues in the interplay of speech phenomena have been explored to provide answers to relevant questions such as:

- Is pronunciation instruction effective?
- Should the focus of pronunciation instruction be on the auditory mode (perception) or the articulatory mode (production)?

- Which is more important, teaching segmental features or teaching suprasegmental features?
- What kind of pronunciation techniques do teachers use in the classroom?
- What types of pronunciation tasks are most effective: controlled or spontaneous?
- How do teachers address pronunciation errors?
- Is pronunciation learned more effectively if taught separately or combined with the other language skills?
- Is pronunciation integrated in coursebooks and national curricula?
- Do teachers teach pronunciation regularly? Do they feel competent to teach pronunciation (Foote et al., 2011; Henderson et al., 2012; Macdonald, 2002)?

All in all, the results overwhelmingly show that pronunciation instruction is effective (see Lee et al., 2015; Saito & Plonsky, 2019; Thomson & Derwing, 2015). However, are these promising research findings applicable in the classroom?

2 Effective pronunciation teaching: Research findings and recommendations

In their comprehensive overview of 150 years of pronunciation teaching, Murphy and Baker (2019) define emerging trends in empirical research about pronunciation teaching. They classify the following macro-level themes: a) explorations on *what* features of English phonology are necessary to teach; b) explorations on *how* to teach L2 pronunciation effectively; and c) teachers' cognitions (beliefs and knowledge) and learners' views on pronunciation instruction (p. 56–58). This paper only focuses on the second theme with its specific micro-level subthemes (priorities, instruction, strategies), presenting positive research findings (from a selection of empirical and review studies) and analysing their implications for the L2 classroom in §2.1–§2.4.

2.1 Priorities in pronunciation teaching

Establishing priorities in pronunciation teaching is the first logical step in helping teachers make research-informed decisions. This includes shedding light on issues such as foreign-accented speech, gravity of pronunciation errors, effectiveness of pronunciation instruction, and L2 identity (teacher and learner).

Results from research studies investigating foreign-accented speech show that L2 speech can be accented, yet remain intelligible and comprehensible (Munro 2008). This is an important insight because it supports the view that accent reduction should not be the goal of pronunciation teaching and learning. Various linguistic aspects also play different roles when it comes to processing L2 speech. For instance, Trofimovich and Isaacs (2012) identified that accent is related to aspects of phonology (rhythm, segmental accuracy, and syllable structure accuracy), while comprehensibility is related to grammatical accuracy and lexical richness.

Research has also pointed out that some but not all phonological errors cause communication breakdowns, especially when L2 speakers use English as a lingua franca (ELF) in NNS–NNS interactions. Jenkins (2000), for instance, defined the core phonological errors as LFC (here presented in a simplified way): all consonants except /r/, /t/, /θ/, /ð/, [ɬ], aspiration, fortis/lenis consonant distinction due to their effect on vowel length, consonant clusters (initial not simplified; medial/final simplified), vowel length contrasts, nuclear stress placement, and division of speech. Many authors immediately recognised the practical potential of LFC and explored ways applying it in the classroom (e.g., Walker 2010). Even so, more important was the conclusion that in such interactions intelligibility should be prioritised; hence the

recommendation that the goal of pronunciation teaching and learning is acquiring intelligible speech (Levis, 2018; McAndrews & Thompson, 2017).

Understanding the impact of pronunciation instruction was also given meticulous attention in research studies. Results show that pronunciation instruction is indeed effective and should be integrated in coursebooks and in teacher training programs (see Darcy, 2018; Derwing & Munro, 2005; Derwing & Rossiter, 2003; Jones, 2016; Lee et al., 2015; McGregor & Reed, 2018; Saito & Plonsky, 2019; Thomson & Derwing, 2015)

As for developing acceptable L2 identity, studies show that raising awareness of native and non-native varieties should also be addressed in the classroom, preferably through comparison and discussion. Teachers still see native accents as necessary reference models; on the positive side, there is a wider awareness and acceptance of non-native accent diversity (Červinková Poesová & Lancová, 2021).

To summarise, these findings have the following classroom implications:

- teachers should accept intelligible L1-accented pronunciation;
- teachers should create opportunities for NNS–NNS interaction practice;
- teachers should promote intelligibility and positive attitude to non-native accents;
- teachers should teach pronunciation as frequently as all other language skills in any educational context regardless of learners' age and proficiency level.

As simplified as they seem, implementing these aspects in the teaching practice might require a change in teachers' mentality, especially in terms of diverging from the nativeness principle, but also in prioritising pronunciation when necessary over other language skills. Valuable pronunciation practice time should not be systematically sacrificed for other language skills to be practised.

2.2 Choices to make in pronunciation instruction

Giving priority to pronunciation instruction in the classroom implies that teachers make instantaneous choices and decisions about: 1) the type of phonological feature their students struggle with and which needs to be taught and practised; 2) the most appropriate type of approach they should adopt; and 3) the types of techniques/activities they should choose in order to practise specific pronunciation features. The implications of research findings related to these aspects are discussed in §2.2.1, §2.2.2, and §2.2.3.

2.2.1 Type of phonological feature

Addressing learners' pronunciation difficulties is a daunting task – teachers cannot attend to every potential mispronunciation but have to decide which aspects of pronunciation are most important and which ones should be tackled at a later stage. This challenge has been acknowledged by research, especially when it comes to which should be taught first, segmental or suprasegmental features. Research findings show that neither should be neglected or given precedence. In fact, the overall conclusion is that it is important to address both segmental and suprasegmental features at once (broad framework suggested), with prosodic features (suprasegmentals) given priority over segmental features when aiming for general improvement in oral communication (Derwing et al, 1998; Levis & Muller Levis, 2018). Moreover, teachers should select phonological features for instruction and practice based on their learners' goals, L1 backgrounds, and proficiency levels (Saito, 2012).

A concept that has been revisited in empirical research with regard to its effects on listeners is the Functional Load Principle (Brown, 1988; Catford, 1987), or ranking phonemic contrasts

according to their frequency and importance in English pronunciation. High functional load errors largely affect comprehensibility and accentedness, whereas low functional load errors have only minimal impact on comprehensibility (Munro & Derwing, 2006). In addition, errors with high communicative value help listeners distinguish between low- and mid-level proficiency learners, while errors with low communicative value help listeners distinguish between mid- and high-level proficiency learners (Suzukida & Saito, 2022).

An aspect of pronunciation that has also been given prominence in research is the relevance of connected speech. For example, Cauldwell (2013, 2018) advocates teaching learners how to decode rapid informal spontaneous speech, emphasising that it should be the goal of learning listening and that it can also help to improve oral fluency.

From a teacher's perspective, these findings indicate the following classroom implications:

- teachers should address segmental and suprasegmental features in a balanced way;
- teachers should assess learners' pronunciation and identify learners' goals;
- teachers should focus on errors that impede communication more frequently;
- teachers should explain connected speech phenomena as an example of where good listening skills can go hand-in-hand with pronunciation work.

To make effective use of these implications, teachers are expected to have a certain level of phonological competence and knowledge of key concepts. It is assumed that they are sufficiently trained and skilled to teach pronunciation.

2.2.2 Type of pronunciation instruction

In terms of what type of instruction is most effective, many attempts have been made to test different approaches. For example, Saito and Plonsky (2019) conclude that explicit pronunciation instruction at a controlled level allows teachers to explain detailed phonetic information, which enables learners to notice and practise the accurate production of segments, syllables, prosodic, and temporal features of speech in a careful manner. Saito (2012) shows that Focus on Form (FonF) instruction in meaning-oriented communicative contexts enables learners to improve both during controlled and spontaneous practice (meaning that these learners can more easily generalise their knowledge), while Focus on Forms (FonFs) instruction yields improvement only in controlled contexts (with focus on accuracy via mechanical drills and choral repetition) and does not allow learners to transfer what they learnt in the classroom to outside of the classroom. Such approaches develop perceptual and noticing skills in learners, and these seem to be as necessary as practising L2 productive skills, i.e., perception-based pronunciation instruction is equally important as production-based instruction (Lee et al., 2020).

Concerning the communicative focus of L2 pronunciation, it has been shown, for instance, that regardless of whether task-based pronunciation teaching directs attention either to form or to meaning (depending on the task instructions), it leads to better accuracy in the long run (e.g., Mora & Levkina, 2017). Within the discourse-pragmatic approach (Pickering, 2018), findings show that intonation (pauses, prominence, pitch) is easier to understand through discourse contexts as opposed to isolated or partial utterances. Levis (2018) argues that in both ESL and EFL contexts the intelligibility-based teaching approach (i.e., focus on pronunciation features that affect intelligibility) is more appropriate.

These findings are particularly relevant for guiding teachers' choices as they reflect on the following classroom implications:

- teachers should be able to explain the sound system in detail but with simple language appropriate to their learners' age and proficiency level;
- teachers should vary activity types between controlled and communicative;
- teachers should work on both speech perception and speech production;
- teachers should integrate pronunciation through task- and project-based activities;
- teachers should work on pronunciation at both utterance and discourse level.

Perhaps these implications, if regularly implemented into the teaching practice, will seem to impose a heavy burden onto teachers' otherwise busy professional lives. They might need to develop skills such as being resourceful, being creative with developing materials, and becoming efficient time managers.

2.2.3 Type of pronunciation teaching technique

The effectiveness of various pronunciation teaching techniques has also been investigated, because not all activities which are often recommended in coursebooks and practice resources give favourable results and thus valuable classroom time may be wasted on them. One such activity that has proven most beneficial is High Variability Phonetic[1] Training (HVPT). Research has shown that HVPT used with nonwords and real words is effective and results in long-lasting improvement in learners' pronunciation (Ortega et al., 2021; Thomson, 2018). Another activity frequently employed in the classroom is the use of phonemic symbols or keywords to focus on segmental differences. Both serve as effective reference labels for developing and consolidating perceptual sound categories, as shown by Fouz-González and Mompeán (2021).

The usefulness of critical listening has been confirmed, in terms of raising learners' awareness of acceptable vs. unacceptable L2 speech (Couper, 2011). Its benefits are especially enhanced if oral corrective feedback is provided in the form of reformulations (recasts and explicit correction) and prompts for self-repair (elicitation, metalinguistic clues, clarification requests, repetitions) – strategies which are favoured by learners (Lyster et al., 2013).

The potential use of technology for teaching and learning pronunciation has also been examined. Research shows that technology-based activities such as shadowing (Foote & McDonough, 2017) or Automated Speech Recognition (ASR) dictation (McCrocklin et al., 2019), to name but a few, improve learners' comprehensibility and fluency and promote authentic language use.

In sum, such findings lead to the following classroom implications:

- teachers should use HVPT to enhance L2 sound discrimination;
- teachers should teach phonemic symbols to develop sound-to-symbol connections;
- teachers should record and analyse learners' speech and give corrective feedback frequently;
- teachers should integrate the use of online tools and resources, both in the classroom and for self-learning.

To use these activities with learners , teachers are expected to first understand their benefits, then familiarise themselves with step-by-step procedures, and finally employ them regularly in L2 lessons.

[1] The term 'phonetic' in HVPT is sometimes optionally replaced by 'pronunciation' (see Thomson, 2018) or 'perceptual' (see Qian et al., 2018).

2.3 Pronunciation strategies

Another avenue of research has considered the effectiveness of pronunciation strategy use. For instance, Osbourne (2003) concluded that advanced ESOL learners employ self-monitoring strategies to repair their mispronunciations by using imitation, paralanguage (speed, volume, clarity), voice quality settings, and by focusing on individual sounds/clusters or syllable/words, and on prosodic structure. Other studies show that high- and low-achieving learners use different pronunciation learning strategies (PLSs) and these differ depending on the task (Szyszka, 2021). Szyszka (2021) noted that the most frequently used PLSs by both groups of learners were checking pronunciation in the dictionary and reading words and texts aloud. Sardegna (2022) conducted a strategy-based instruction and tested its efficacy. She found out that such instruction promotes learner autonomy and self-regulated learning – learners trained to use pronunciation strategy protocols demonstrated: a) greater success when they practised frequently; b) higher motivation to continue practising after instruction ended; and c) a high sense of self-efficacy.

With obvious learning potential, these findings suggest the following classroom implications:

- teachers should train learners to use various pronunciation learning strategies;
- teachers should teach their learners to use self-monitoring strategies;
- teachers should encourage autonomous learning.

Familiarising their learners with pronunciation learning and self-monitoring strategies may be far from a simple task – it might, in fact, require devoting class time to train learners in the appropriate use of strategies.

2.4 The reality clash: Teacher and learner challenges

Recent calls for more research-informed pronunciation practice (e.g., Derwing & Munro, 2015; Pennington & Rogerson-Revell, 2019) and the ensuing re-evaluation of the research-practice link have brought to light a frustrating state of affairs: even with such a wealth of findings, the connections between L2 pronunciation research and L2 pronunciation teaching have become more blurred, with "many interesting studies today [that] do not have clear implications for teaching, and many practically oriented publications [that] show minor grounding in research" (Levis, 2021, p. 18). In addition, research into L2 pronunciation has continued to advance with impressive strides, while at the same time, there are few observable improvements in developing and adapting teaching materials (in the form of publications, e.g., Jones, 2016; or in the form of online resources, e.g., English Accent Coach 3.0 by Thomson, 2012–2023[2]). In other words, pedagogy is failing to keep pace with research progress.

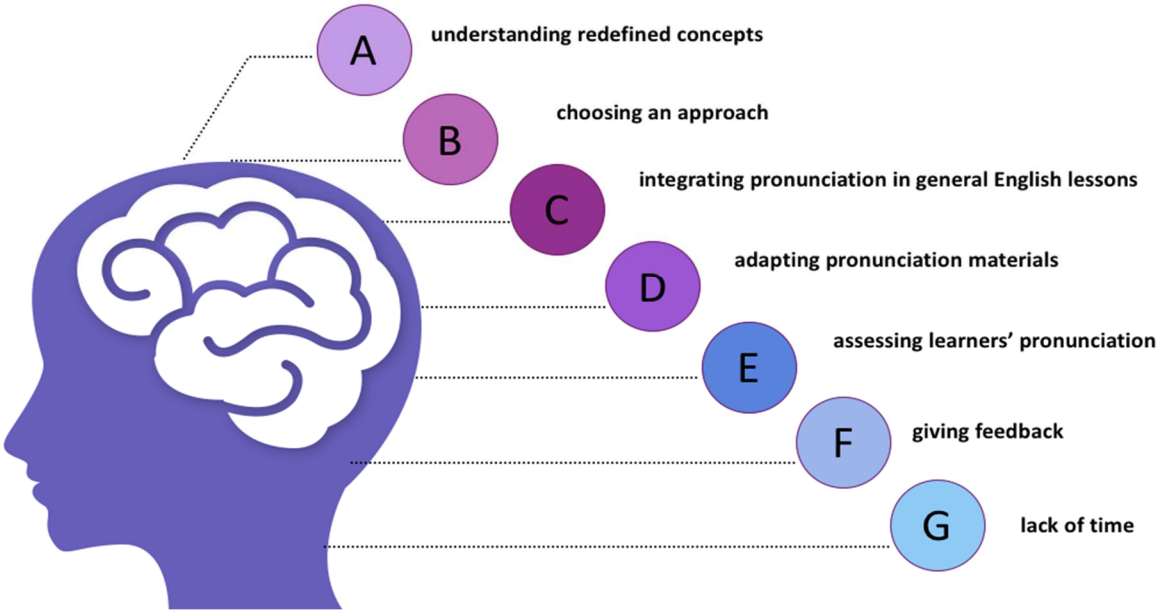
Despite the latest attempts to narrow this gap by promoting publications that devote special sections to practical applications of key research findings (e.g., Kirkova-Naskova et al, 2021; Levis et al., 2022; Sardegna & Jarosz, 2023), pronunciation is still marginalised in the classroom and teachers are left to rely on their own intuitions and experiences as L2 learners. They struggle with real challenges (see Figure 1), including: a) difficulty grasping *re-defined concepts* such as intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accent; b) dilemmas on *which approach* to adopt given that there are so many (conflicting) ideas and techniques; c) a lack of competence on *how to integrate* pronunciation features in general English lessons; d) not knowing *how to adapt materials* to learners of different proficiency levels and ages; e) a lack

[2] https://www.englishaccentcoach.com/

of self-assurance on *how to assess* their learners' pronunciation; f) being uncertain about *how to give feedback* on their learners' pronunciation goals, given their varied linguistic experience and developing L2 identities; and g) inability to cope with a *lack of time*.

Figure 1

Challenges Teachers Face



Another angle that needs to be considered is that applying research findings in the teaching practice is not always straightforward, for example, the LFC and intelligibility. From teachers' perspective, LFC was interpreted as a set of features that should be *the only* focus of pronunciation instruction and was widely accepted by teachers as the much-needed tool that would provide that quick fix to all problems. In fact, the LFC only lists the phonological errors that are most likely to occur and cause misunderstanding when NNS of various L1 backgrounds interact. It does not mean that *all* features are problematic for a given group of learners that share the same L1. From learners' perspective, the LFC diminished the importance of practising pronunciation. Unless properly trained, learners do not easily comprehend the complexity of the intelligibility concept and thus interpret the LFC and being intelligible as a free pass to use 'whatever' pronunciation. As a result of such extremes, neither improvement nor successful implementation are achieved, leaving teachers and learners struggling with L2 pronunciation issues. It seems that putting research-based classroom implications into effect, as suggested in our analysis in §2.1–§2.3, is not a simple undertaking and demands teachers devote substantial effort to familiarising themselves with current research findings and, maybe more vitally, being creative and motivated to try out new ideas.

3 A case in point: Teachers' views on their pronunciation teaching practices

3.1 Aims and a research question

In a larger on-going study, I am investigating teachers' views on their formal pronunciation instruction and current teaching practices. More specifically, the study explores: a) their reflections on the relevance of pronunciation vis-à-vis nativeness/intelligibility principle; b) their knowledge of the English sound system prior to university; c) their views on the formal pronunciation instruction they received during their English Phonetics and Phonology undergraduate course; d) the type of teacher training they received for teaching pronunciation; and e) their current pronunciation teaching practices. The analysis presented below focuses on the last section only, i.e., their practical experience with teaching pronunciation, addressing the following research question:

> **RQ**: What kind of practices do teachers employ when they teach pronunciation with reference to: frequency of teaching; type of approach used; pronunciation features taught; pronunciation activities used; and type of corrective feedback given?

3.2 Participants, instruments and data analysis

Twenty-nine Macedonian teachers of English as a foreign language (F = 23; M = 6) had participated in the study by April 2022. Their age ranges from 24–39 years old and their teaching experience from 2–16 years. They work in varied teaching contexts: a) in state schools (elementary and high); b) in private language schools (all levels); and c) a private international school (elementary, middle, high). Qualitative data was elicited through semi-structured interviews and then analysed with thematic category analysis. The participants were coded MK01–MK29 for anonymity.

3.3 Preliminary results

At the beginning of the interviews, the participants were asked about their impressionistic view on teaching pronunciation, in particular, whether they find it necessary to teach and whether they find it teachable at all. All participants (n = 29) gave favourable responses to both questions, indicating that they regarded pronunciation as a relevant language skill.

However, when asked how much class time on average they spent on teaching pronunciation features, most of them replied that they sporadically address pronunciation in class (n = 13) and a few responded that they regularly address pronunciation, especially with young learners (n = 4). The rest of the participants specified the approximate time they usually spend on pronunciation issues (n = 11), with 10 minutes on average. Those who mentioned that they do not pay enough attention to pronunciation gave the following reasons: lack of time (n = 5) and pronunciation not being addressed in the national curriculum (just one mention), therefore, not being required to assess it (n = 3). The following remark by one participant best exemplifies this viewpoint:

> … Pronunciation is one of the most important elements of language learning but it's been really neglected by us as teachers. First of all, because we don't want our students to feel down if we correct them all the time about their pronunciation. Second, our pronunciation is not as good as it should be I think, and third, the curriculum does not give us enough space

> to teach pronunciation. We teach grammar, we teach reading, we teach writing, we teach listening, but, teaching pronunciation is not accentuated in the programs. (MK05)

When pronunciation is addressed in the classroom, it is rarely addressed separately, e.g., a whole lesson being devoted to explaining and practising pronunciation features (n = 5); it is typically integrated in the L2 lesson (n = 24). This is mostly done when new vocabulary is introduced (accurate pronunciation presented), when speaking is practised (mispronunciations corrected), when reading is practised (mispronunciations corrected), or when listening is practised (the focus being more on listening comprehension exercises in the coursebook than discriminating sounds in speech). Apparently, they do not systematically teach pronunciation and barely mention pronunciation aspects; the presentation of various pronunciation features is rather unplanned. Only a selection of features are taught, predominantly word stress, then vowels (long vs. short, /æ – e/), diphthongs, consonants (mainly /θ, ð, t, d/, i.e., consonants that are difficult for Macedonian learners of English), intonation patterns (e.g., in tag questions or the meaning of rising and/or falling tones), and the pronunciation of <-s> and <-ed>. Phonemic symbols and letter-to-sound connections are seldom taught, as well as syllable division. It was interesting to notice from their responses that they frequently used the term *understandable* to mean intelligible and/or comprehensible.

The type of pronunciation activities that are practised is varied. When the focus is on specific speech sounds, the activities are more controlled and include elicited imitation (listen and repeat), individual sound identification/categorisation, minimal pairs for sound discrimination, reading-aloud, dictation with phonemic symbols, and tongue twisters. When the aim is to make the lesson more interactive and fun, then communicative activities are practised, such as games, quizzes, and dialogues in the form of role-plays (not necessarily with a strong focus on pronunciation practice). One participant mentioned organising a debate club and mock trial courts (MK06), and another a drama studio (MK24) – these teachers use such activities to address pronunciation issues in context. Several teachers sometimes use activities from a coursebook (n = 13), few create materials or use other resources in addition to the coursebook activities (n = 7), and some do not even have coursebooks, as in some schools teachers are required to create their own materials and do not use coursebooks at all (n = 9). Those teachers who use coursebooks but do not practise pronunciation activities in the coursebook, reported that they do so because it is not required in the curriculum. Several teachers (n = 10) make use of resources that are incidentally found online and the online resources they select are chosen in relation to their learners' age, including short stories, songs, listening activities, interactive minimal pair activities, etc. Many teachers (n = 16) consult specific sites, for instance, Kahoot![3], online dictionaries, Live Worksheets[4], slam poetry websites – to name a few. One teacher (MK23) reported that when she noticed that her learners struggled with a particular pronunciation aspect, she would consult specialised teacher development sites; it is important to point out here that this teacher enjoys institutional support in this respect (the institution covers the subscription cost but this is only the case in the private international schools). Three teachers reported not using online resources at all.

With respect to the ways they correct their learners' pronunciation, the responses were mixed. In general, the teachers use reformulations (predominantly explicit correction, occasionally recasts) and prompts for self-repair (mainly repetition). Corrective feedback is given mostly individually and immediately when the mistake is made. Some teachers prefer giving delayed feedback (they wait for the learners to finish the task and then they clarify the

[3] Kahoot! https://kahoot.com/
[4] Life Worksheets https://www.liveworksheets.com/

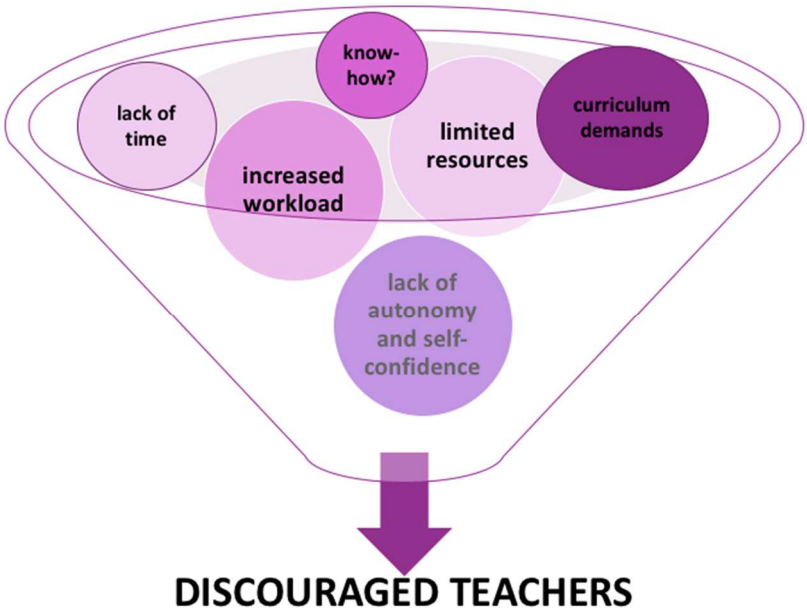
mispronunciation either to the learner who made the mistake or as a general correction in front of the whole group).

During the interviews teachers made unsolicited remarks: the majority reported forgetting core pronunciation knowledge (phonetic/phonological rules). With this weakness in mind, they observed that they would benefit from specialised courses for teaching pronunciation. Such incidental findings ring alarm bells about teachers' self-identified needs for systemic guidance and opportunities for continuing professional development.

These preliminary results reveal some of what actually goes on in classrooms and provide insight into an important aspect that has received little attention in research: genuinely understanding classroom reality – a reality that assumes increased workload, limited resources, and a lack of autonomy and self-confidence (see Figure 2). Such a constraining professional context inevitably leads to teachers being discouraged to engage in teaching pronunciation and who, in truth, need support to navigate the personal and institutional challenges. They also need to be encouraged to address pronunciation issues in their teaching more frequently.

Figure 2

Professional Contextual Constraints Discouraging Teachers from Engaging to Teach Pronunciation



4 Discussion

The findings presented in this analysis at least hint that perhaps one way of addressing teachers' discouragement with regard to teaching pronunciation is to have researchers understand their harsh reality and make their research more accessible and comprehensive – research should empower teachers to develop a proactive approach to teaching pronunciation rather than a reactive one. The ideal teacher profile is a competent teacher who is trained to teach pronunciation and informed about the latest research evidence of what is effective. Equally important, teachers should be skilled and confident to make more spontaneous decisions in the classroom. This is, of course, easier said than done, but it *is* in truth achievable. Instead of

overwhelming teachers with a profusion of theoretical information, recommendations could be made on how to take small steps of action. For instance, it is paramount that teachers be equipped with a reasonable phonological know-how on which they can build their teaching practice. Table 1 shows initial recommendations on how a teacher who is assumed to know little about pronunciation teaching or feels discouraged about it might enhance their competence and classroom routines over time.

Table 1

Approaching Pronunciation Teaching in the Classroom

Having the know-how	Noticing the problem	Addressing the problem
• Inform yourself about the L2 sound system. • Do a diagnostic assessment of your students' speech.	• Observe your classroom context and start with one pronunciation activity (research-grounded). • See what works best for your students and build on that experience.	• Foster intelligible pronunciation for communication. • Encourage autonomous learning and use of online resources.

It is important to highlight that providing support, collaborating, and partnering are key elements for nurturing a successful approach to pronunciation teaching.

In terms of the circulation of information, new knowledge needs to be regularly disseminated and shared through various fora and publications. A perfect example of a successful connection between research and practice are teachers' associations. In particular, the following deserve a special mention: the IATEFL Pronunciation Special Interest Group (PronSIG), the TESOL Speech Pronunciation Listening Interest Section (SPLIS), and the CATESOL Teaching of Pronunciation Interest group (TOP-IG).[5] These associations boast a community of enthusiasts who are active researchers and practitioners and who regularly organise conferences and online webinars (both theoretical and practical), share professional development content, publish their own journals[6], as well as share pronunciation-related teaching tips via podcasts, blogs, and social media reels. Furthermore, other good practices are promoted via various platforms where resources for teachers and learners are available such as (among others): Speech Accent Coach[7] for practising L2 perception through HVPT exercises; task banks, e.g., TBLT Language Learning Task Bank[8]; SLA Speech Tools[9] website, which offers a variety of tools for research and teaching; PhoTransEdit[10] application for practising

[5] IATEFL Pronunciation Special Interest Group – PronSIG https://pronsig.iatefl.org/
TESOL Speech Pronunciation Listening Interest Section – SPLIS https://www.tesol.org/
CATESOL TOP-IG: Teaching of Pronunciation Interest group https://www.catesol.org/
[6] Speak Out! https://pronsig.iatefl.org/journal/
TESOL Quarterly https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/15457249)
The CATESOL Journal http://www.catesoljournal.org/
[7] https://www.englishaccentcoach.com/
[8] https://tblt.indiana.edu/tasks/details.html?id=73
[9] http://sla-speech-tools.com/
[10] http://www.photransedit.com/

phonemic transcription, etc. Recently, publications with a specific focus on enhancing teachers' pronunciation knowledge – Liu et al. (2023) being a notable example – have captured publishers' attention. Practically-oriented publications with detailed descriptions of courses with an integrated pronunciation component (Murphy, 2017) have also been available on the market. These are examples of already successful practices that should continue to be encouraged.

These achievements – in creating communities and resources – could be combined in an all-inclusive multi-content platform that would serve as a reference point for researchers, teachers, and learners. Such a platform – call it a Pronunciation Core - could serve as a medium for teaching and learning English pronunciation. It would aim to provide professional help to English language teachers by joining the two worlds of research and practice and narrowing the existing gap, where ideas and practical suggestions based on research findings could be offered, thus assisting teachers in making research-informed decisions and improving their teaching practices. These recommendations could be written in non-technical, simple language so that they address pre-service and in-service teachers' immediate needs. The platform would be an ideal spot where various points of interests could intersect: a) concepts explained; b) research updates and practical implications shared; c) useful links and resources for the classroom linked; d) typical features of diverse native and non-native accents described; e) professional development instructional videos uploaded; f) social media networks built; etc.

Finally, one aspect that begs for urgent action is opening a conversation between researchers and teachers, on the one hand, and coursework developers on the other. It is crucial that pronunciation as a language skill is given equal treatment in published teaching materials. After all, pronunciation should not be treated as an optional element in the classroom – it needs to be part of every lesson so that teachers can accommodate to their learners' needs.

5 Conclusion

This chapter examines aspects of the on-going debate on how to link pronunciation research and practice. It evaluates effective research findings related to important pronunciation issues, which pedagogy needs to take into consideration. It also considers their implications in the L2 classroom, especially from teachers' point of view, and discusses the challenges they face in their professional lives. In doing so, the paper has a two-fold aim: to invite researchers to reflect on how they see pedagogy and to redefine how teachers approach research.

Future endeavours will reveal whether value-added relations are developed between these two communities, who do not always have overlapping roles. Just as much as teachers need support, in the form of highlighted research results and their incorporation into hands-on materials, researchers also need directions from teachers as to which pedagogical issues are more pressing and should be brought to their attention. Undoubtedly, more research should be focused on innovation and practical application in designing actual output resources that can be applied in the classroom. In addition, teachers should reflect on their teaching practice and context in light of current research findings, so that they can inform themselves, build on their existing knowledge, and strengthen their confidence to teach pronunciation. Such an approach is useful in the long run and will empower teachers to make more spontaneous decisions in the classroom about what and how to teach. In this way, they will be better able to help their learners reach their goals. By bringing in a reasonable amount of structure, and affording teachers enough opportunities for autonomous action, feelings of discouragement about teaching pronunciation could be minimised and better practices could be promoted and developed.

References

Brown, A. (1988). Functional load and the teaching of pronunciation. *TESOL Quarterly, 22*(4), 593–606.

Catford, J. C. (1987). Phonetics and the teaching of pronunciation: A systematic description of English phonology. In J. Morley (Ed.), *Current perspectives on pronunciation: Practices anchored in theory* (pp. 87–100). TESOL.

Cauldwell, R. (2013). *Phonology for listening: Teaching the stream of speech*. Speech in Action.

Cauldwell, R. (2018). *A syllabus for listening: Decoding.* Speech in Action.

Celce-Murcia, M., Brinton, D., & Goodwin, J. M. (2010). *Teaching pronunciation: A course book and reference guide* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Couper, G. (2011). What makes pronunciation teaching work? Testing for the effect of two variables: Socially constructed metalanguage and critical listening. *Language Awareness, 20*(3), 159–182. https://doi.org/10.1080/09658416.2011.570347

Červinková Poesová, K., & Lancová, K. (2021). In A. Kirkova-Naskova, A. Henderson, & J. Fouz-González (Eds.), *English pronunciation instruction: Research-based insights* (pp. 91–117). John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/aals.19.05cer

Darcy, I. (2018). Powerful and effective pronunciation instruction: How can we achieve it? *The CATESOL Journal, 30*(1), 13–45. http://www.catesoljournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CJ30.1_darcy.pdf

Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J. (2005). Second language accent and pronunciation teaching: A research-based approach. *TESOL Quarterly*, *39*(3), 379–397. https://doi.org/10.2307/3588486

Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J. (2015). *Pronunciation fundamentals: Evidence-based perspectives for L2 teaching and research*. John Benjamins.

Derwing, T. M., & Rossiter, M. J. (2003). The effects of pronunciation instruction on the accuracy, fluency and complexity of L2 accented speech. *Applied Language Learning*, *13*(1), 1–17.

Derwing, T. M., Munro, M. J., & Wiebe, G. (1998). Evidence in favour of a broad framework for pronunciation instruction. *Language Learning*, *48*(3), 393–410. https://doi.org/10.1111/0023-8333.00047

Foote, J. A, & McDonough, K. (2017). Using shadowing with mobile technology to improve L2 pronunciation. *Journal of Second Language Pronunciation, 3*(1), 34–56. https://doi.org/10.1075/jslp.3.1.02foo

Foote, J. A., Holtby, A. K., & Derwing, T. M. (2011). Survey of the teaching of pronunciation in adult ESL programs in Canada, 2010. *TESL Canada Journal*, *29*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v29i1.1086

Fouz-González, J., & Mompeán, J. A. (2021). Exploring the potential of phonetic symbols and keywords as labels for perceptual training. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 43*(2), 297–328. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263120000455

Henderson, A., Frost, D., Tergujeff, E., Kautzsch, A., Murphy, D., Kirkova-Naskova, A., Waniek-Klimczak, E., Levey, D., Cunningham, U., & Curnick, L. (2012). English pronunciation teaching in Europe survey: Selected results. *Research in Language*, *10*, 5–27. https://doi.org/10.2478/v10015-011-0047-4

Jenkins, J. (2000). *The phonology of English as an international language*. Oxford University Press.

Jones, T. (2016). *Pronunciation in the classroom: The overlooked essential*. TESOL Press.

Kirkova-Naskova, A., Henderson, A., & Fouz-González, J. (Eds.). (2021). *English pronunciation instruction: Research-based insights*. John Benjamins.

Lee, J., Jang, J., & Plonsky, L. (2015). The effectiveness of second language pronunciation instruction: A meta-analysis. *Applied Linguistics, 36*(3), 345–366. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amu040

Lee, B., Plonsky, L., & Saito, K. (2020). The effects of perception- vs. production-based pronunciation instruction. *System, 88,* 102185. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2019.102185

Levis, J. M. (2005). Changing contexts and shifting paradigms in pronunciation teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, *39*(3), 369–377.

Levis, J. M. (2018). *Intelligibility, oral communication, and the teaching of pronunciation*. Cambridge University Press.

Levis, J. M. (2021). Connecting the dots between pronunciation research and practice. In A. Kirkova-Naskova, A. Henderson, & J. Fouz-González (Eds.), *English pronunciation instruction: Research-based insights* (pp. 17–37). John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/aals.19.02lev

Levis, J. M., & Muller Levis, G. (2018). Teaching high-value pronunciation features: Contrastive stress for intermediate learners. *CATESOL Journal, 30*(1), 139–160. http://www.catesoljournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CJ30.1_levis2.pdf

Levis, J. M., Derwing, T. M., & Sonsaat-Hegelheimer, S. (Eds.). (2022). *Second language pronunciation: Bridging the gap between research and teaching*. Wiley Blackwell.

Lippi-Green, R. (1997). *English with an accent: Language, ideology, and discrimination in the United States*. Routledge.

Liu, D., Jones, T., & Reed, M. (2023). *Phonetics in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.

Lyster, R., Saito, K., & Sato, M. (2013). Oral corrective feedback in second language classrooms. *Language Teaching, 46*(1), 1–40. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000365

Macdonald, S. (2002). Pronunciation – Views and practices of reluctant teachers. *Prospect*, *17*(3), 3–18. http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0012/230061/17_3_1_MacDonald.pdf

McAndrews, M. M., & Thompson, R. (2017). Establishing an empirical basis for priorities in pronunciation teaching. *Journal of Second Language Pronunciation, 3*(2), 267–287. https://doi.org/10.1075/jslp.3.2.05mca

McCrocklin, S., Humaidan, A., & Edalatishams, E. (2019). ASR dictation program accuracy: Have current programs improved? In J. Levis, C. Nagle, & E. Todey (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 10th Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching Conference* (pp. 191–200). Iowa State University. https://apling.engl.iastate.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/221/2019/07/10th-Annual-PSLLT-Proceedings-FINAL.pdf

McGregor, A., & Reed, M. (2018). Integrating pronunciation into the English language curriculum: A framework for teachers. *The CATESOL Journal*, *30*(1), 69–93. http://www.catesoljournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CJ30.1_mcgregor.pdf

Mora, J. C., & Levkina, M. (2017). Task-based pronunciation teaching and research: Key issues and future directions. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 39*(2), 381–399. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263117000183

Munro, M. (2008). Foreign accent and speech intelligibility. In J. Hansen & M. L. Zampini (Eds.), *Phonology and second language acquisition* (pp. 193–218). John Benjamins.

Munro, M. J., & Derwing, T. M. (1995). Foreign accent, comprehensibility and intelligibility in the speech of second language learners. *Language Learning*, *45*, 73–97. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1995.tb00963.x

Munro, M. J., & Derwing, T. M. (2006). The functional load principle in ESL pronunciation instruction: An exploratory study. System, *34*(4), 520–531. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2006.09.004

Murphy, J. (2017). *Teaching the pronunciation of English: Focus on whole courses*. University of Michigan Press.

Murphy, J., & Baker, A. (2019). History of ESL pronunciation teaching. In M. Reed & J. M. Levis (Eds.), *The handbook of English pronunciation* (pp. 36–65). Wiley Blackwell.

Ortega, M., Mora-Plaza, I., & Mora, J. C. (2021). Differential effects of lexical and non-lexical high-variability phonetic training on the production of L2 vowels. In A. Kirkova-Naskova, A. Henderson, & J. Fouz-González (Eds.), *English pronunciation instruction: Research-based insights* (pp. 327–355). John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/aals.19.14ort

Osburne, A. G. (2003). Pronunciation strategies of advanced ESOL learners. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, *41*, 131–143. https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.2003.005

Pennington, M. C., & Rogerson-Revell, P. (2019). *English pronunciation teaching and research: Contemporary perspectives*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Pickering, L. (2018). *Discourse intonation: A discourse-pragmatic approach to teaching the pronunciation of English*. University of Michigan Press.

Piper, T., & Cansin, D. (1988). Factors influencing the foreign accent. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, *44*(2), 334–342. https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.44.2.334

Piske, T., MacKay, I., & Flege, J. (2001). Factors affecting degree of foreign accent in an L2: A review. *Journal of Phonetics*, 29, 191–215. https://doi.org/10.1006/jpho.2001.0134

Purcell, E. T., & Suter, R.W. (1980). Predictors of pronunciation accuracy: A reexamination. *Language Learning, 30*, 271–287. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1980.tb00319.x

Quian, M., Chukharev-Hudilainen, E., & Levis, J. (2018). A system for adaptive high-variability segmental perceptual training: Implementation, effectiveness, transfer. *Language Learning & Technology, 22*(1), 69–96. https://dx.doi.org/10125/44582

Saito, K. (2012). Effects of instruction on L2 pronunciation development: A synthesis of 15 quasi-experimental intervention studies. *TESOL Quarterly*, *46*(4), 842–854. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43267893

Saito, K., & Plonsky, L. (2019). Effects of second language pronunciation teaching revisited: A proposed measurement framework and meta-analysis. *Language Learning, 69*, 652–708. https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12345

Sardegna, V. G. (2022). Evidence in favour of a strategy-based model for pronunciation instruction. *Language Teaching*, *55*(3), 363–378. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444821000380

Sardegna, V., & Jarosz, A. (Eds.) (2023). *English pronunciation teaching: Theory, practice and research findings*. Multilingual Matters.

Suzukida, Y., & Saito, K. (2022). What is second language pronunciation proficiency? An empirical study. *System*, *106*, 102754. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2022.102754

Szyszka, M. (2021). Pronunciation-learning strategies: A task-based perspective. In A. Kirkova-Naskova, A. Henderson, & J. Fouz-González (Eds.), *English pronunciation instruction: Research-based insights* (pp. 147–171). John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/aals.19.07szy

Thomson, R. (2018). High Variability [Pronunciation] Training (HVPT): A proven technique about which every language teacher and learner ought to know. *Journal of Second Language Pronunciation, 4*(2), 208–231. https://doi.org/10.1075/jslp.17038.tho

Thomson, R., & Derwing, T. M. (2015). The effectiveness of L2 pronunciation instruction: A narrative review. *Applied Linguistics*, *36*(3), 326–344. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amu076

Trofimovich, P., & Isaacs, T. (2012). Disentangling accent from comprehensibility. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, 15*(4), 905–916. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1366728912000168

Walker, R. (2010). *Teaching the pronunciation of English as a lingua franca.* Oxford University Press.

About the author

Anastazija Kirkova-Naskova is an Associate Professor in English phonetics and morphology in the Department of English Language and Literature, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, North Macedonia. She also teaches research methodology (MA level). Her research interests include English pronunciation teaching and learning, foreign-accented speech, speech perception, pronunciation learning strategies, and teacher cognition. Together with Alice Henderson and Jonás Fouz-González, she co-edited *English pronunciation instruction: Research-based insights* (John Benjamins, 2021). She was an assistant editor-in-chief for *The Journal of Contemporary Philology*.

Email: akirkova@flf.ukim.edu.mk