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Effective Ways to Improve the Intermediate English Learners' Pronunciation: A Conceptual Paper

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Abstract

It should be borne in mind that pronunciation is an important skill in learners' L2 competence. Researchers are constantly trying to come up with techniques to make their students' pronunciation abilities better. This paper aims to examine how corpora and two teaching techniques can be used to improve students' pronunciation skills in a more effective manner. A review of the literature is provided in this paper, with a particular focus on the impact of corpus materials, critical listening, and shadowing on pronunciation teaching. The review indicates that students L2 competence can be enhanced by using corpus materials, critical listening, and shadowing separately. Hence, a C-CLASH (Corpus-based Critical Listening And Shadowing) model has been developed to assist in the instruction of pronunciation. Additionally, the limitations of C-CLASH are discussed.

Keywords: Corpus-based Research, Pronunciation Teaching, Critical Listening, Shadowing

Introduction

There have been developments in pronunciation instruction over the past 150 years, alongside the teaching of other English skills, such as listening and speaking. When communicating with others successfully, it is important to have a good pronunciation (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Pennington & Rogerson-Revell, 2019). Although pronunciation is one of the most important skills for people learning a second language (L2), research and academia have generally ignored it. Several studies have demonstrated that pronunciation instruction increases learners' actual production and improves their awareness and practice of pronunciation as well. After the corpus was introduced in these decades, scholars began using it to analyse, assess, and annotate students' pronunciations (Ernestus & Warner, 2011; Livescu & Glass, 2004). As a matter of fact, corpus was one of the most helpful tools used by the researchers to assess the students' pronunciation production, but its importance for pronunciation training should not be understated. However, there was little research that focused on this topic. A new type of corpus-based pronunciation training was introduced by Gut (2005) based on learner corpora as opposed to the majority of corpora used in earlier corpus-based pronunciation research. She demonstrated that when students participated in the corpus-assisted pronunciation training course, they had significant improvements in their prosodic knowledge and correct stress placement.

Based on Gut’s research, a pronunciation teaching model called C-CLASH (Corpus-based Critical Listening And SHadowing) was developed. In the following sections, using conceptual research methodology (see e.g., Gilson & Goldberg, 2015; Jaakkola, 2020), based on the structure proposed by McGregor (2017), we review pronunciation teaching and corpus-based teaching research, as well as the concept of critical listening and shadowing. The next step is to identify the theoretical underpinnings of the research. A conceptual model is presented and explained next, followed by a discussion of the limitations of the research.

Literature Review

Pronunciation Teaching

According to the evolution of English, the method of teaching English has changed over the years. There have been shifts in focus in teaching priorities and concerns regarding pronunciation over time as a result of various pedagogical trends (Pennington & Rogerson-Revell, 2019).

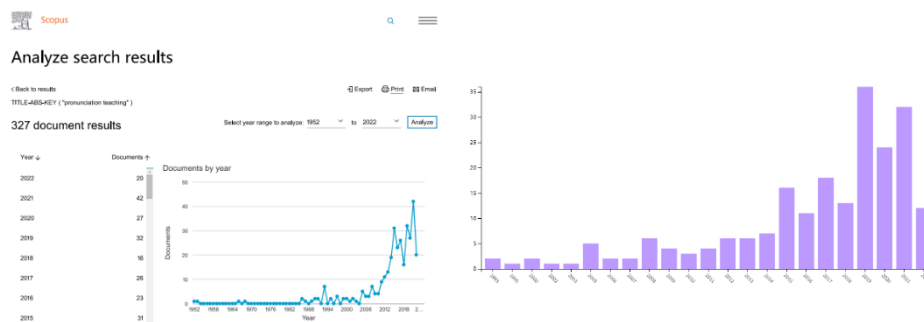


Figure 1 Scopus and WOS publications on pronunciation teaching

According to Figure 1, pronunciation teaching has attracted an increasing amount of attention since 2015. In other words, more and more researchers are beginning to realize how important pronunciation really is. Studies on pronunciation teaching can be concluded in Table 1 in the early half of this decade. Although some of these topics may have overlapped, they were the scholars’ top priority.

Table 1
 Research on Pronunciation Teaching from 2011 to 2016

| Research Focuses | Studies |
|------------------------------|---|
| Intelligibility | Saito, 2016; Kang, 2012; Crowther, 2015; Levis, 2016; Munro, 2015; Buss, 2016 |
| English as a Lingua Franca | Walker & Zoghbor, 2015; Wach, 2011; Rahimi, 2016; Lim, 2016; Jenks, 2013; Ketabi & Saeb, 2015; O’Neal, 2015 |
| Online Teaching and Learning | Mompean, 2016; Schaik & Lynch, 2014 |
| Language Anxiety | Szyszka, 2011; Lee, 2016; Baran-Łucarz, 2014; Baran-Łucarz, 2016 |
| International Communication | Ketabi & Saeb, 2015; Gilakjani, 2012; Wach, 2011; Kanoksilapatham, 2013 |

Towards the end of this decade, intelligibility continues to be the top priority, and English as a lingua franca remains a major concern. As is shown in Table 2, the topics and the researchers

who are interested in them are listed. Few of these major currents of pronunciation research have combined corpora with pronunciation training even after Gut (2015) proved that corpus-based pronunciation training is effective.

Table 2

Research on Pronunciation Teaching from 2017 to 2022

| Research Focuses | Studies |
|----------------------------|--|
| Intelligibility | Gluhareva, 2017; Galante, 2017; Suzukida & Saito, 2021; Yenkimaleki & Heuven, 2019; Isaacs, 2018; Jung, Kim & Murphy, 2017 |
| Speech Recognition | Kim et al., 2017; Haikun, et al, 2019 |
| Computer Aided Instruction | Chen & Li, 2016; Spaulding & Chen, 2018 |
| Orthographic Learning | Li, Li & Wang, 2020; Wegener, et al, 2020 |

Corpus-based Teaching Research

Many corpus-based and corpus-assisted studies were found in the WOS and Scopus databases. However, not all of them had anything to do with teaching or research related to it. Figure 2 illustrates the topics of these studies. It appears that researchers are more interested in academic writing (Shin et al., 2018), data-driven learning (Crosthwaite et al., 2019), learner corpus (Davidson et al., 2020), vocabulary and lexical issues (Lu & Dang, 2022), and teacher training (Chen et al., 2019; Ma et al., 2021). It should be noted that few of these studies included pronunciation instruction.

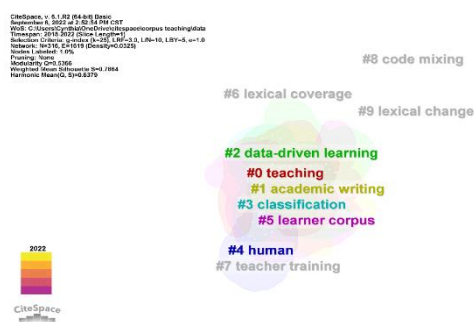


Figure 2 Corpus-based Teaching Research from WOS and Scopus (2018-2022)

Critical Listening

In critical listening, the learner is responsible for identifying the difference between two productions: “one that is acceptable and another that is not” (as cited by Pennington & Rogerson-Revell, 2019, p. 215). Several studies have been conducted by Fraser (2009) and Couper (2011, 2015) using critical listening as a method for categorising phonemes, changing perceptions, and removing undesirable sounds.

Currently, critical teaching is applied primarily to the teaching of music (Lehmann et al., 2007; Otondo, 2016), listening skills (Ferrari-Bridgers & Murolo, 2022; Kazu & Demiralp, 2017), and pronunciation (Couper, 2015; Fraser, 2009). The results of their studies demonstrated that critical listening had a positive impact on the teaching field respectively. Since the current research is relatively limited, the method requires more empirical studies.

Shadowing

Shadowing traditionally has been used as a tool for developing second-language learners' ability to listen clearly, and repeat it verbally as accurate as possible while listening attentively to the messages that are being received (Kadota, 2019). Cherry (1953) first described it in reference to repeating the words you hear like a shadow as quickly and accurately as possible. As a technique, it was frequently used in the training of simultaneous interpreters (Lambert, 1992), although it had also proved beneficial to the acquisition of foreign languages.

Despite the increased number of papers discussing the shadowing technique, especially in Japan, many of them have not yet been peer reviewed, so there is still room for further empirical research in this area (Pennington & Rogerson-Revell, 2019). Furthermore, few of these studies have incorporated both critical listening and shadowing into pronunciation teaching, so it might be worthwhile to investigate the efficacy of combining these techniques.

The C-CLASH Model

A C-CLASH model is developed based on the findings of the literature review by incorporating three separate concepts—corpus (the learner spoken corpus), critical listening, and shadowing—into pronunciation teaching.

To begin with, we would discuss why we chose audio materials from learner spoken corpus. Corpora can be classified into several types. A learner spoken corpus is a collection of speech data (audio or video) of learners who are acquiring a second language. The pre-recorded audio of the non-native speakers suggested by Fraser (2001) could be replaced by corpus audios.

In addition, we want to clarify why critical listening is still another crucial component of this model. According to the cognitive phonology perspective, L2 learners should constantly be exposed to the Native Language (NL) since simple explanations and practice are insufficient to help them understand the discrepancies between the NL and L2 phonological systems (Fraser, 2006, 2010). In accordance with the cognitive phonology theory, critical listening is more effective in improving learners' phonological awareness when utilizing learner spoken corpora.

Finally, we elucidate the necessity of shadowing in this model. Krashen placed a strong emphasis on the role that language input has in the learning of a second language and he believed that the combination of sufficient comprehensible input could facilitate the acquisition of a second language. In 1985, Swain proposed the output hypothesis which could be considered as a complement of the input hypothesis. Gass (1988) improved the model by suggesting that there were five levels in a learner's conversion of ambient speech (input) to output: (1) apperceived input, (2) comprehended input, (3) intake, (4) integration, and (5) output.

In this framework, learners need not only comprehensible input, but also comprehensible output if they want to learn a second language naturally. In addition to comprehensible input, learners should be able to use language, and language output plays an important role in achieving language proficiency.

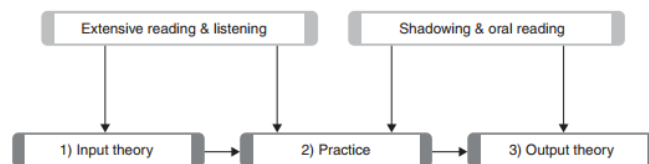


Figure 6.10 Input- and output-driven practice (Kadota, 2015, p. 36)

Figure 3 Shadowing as a part of Input and Output practice

Source: Adapted from Kadota (2019, p. 168)

Shadowing was identified as an output effect by Kadota (2019) as well as a potential source of sufficient output-driven practice in Figure 3. As a result of it, we believe that it can be viewed as a powerful method of improving learners' pronunciation outcomes.

Based on aforementioned points, the C-CLASH model is illustrated in Figure 4.

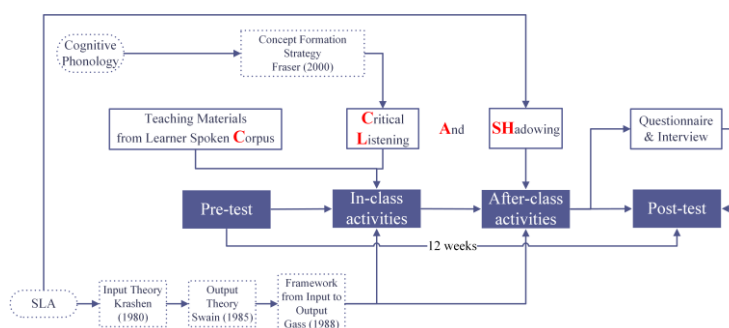


Figure 4 The C-CLASH model

Numerous researchers have demonstrated that computers, particularly corpora, are effective in the acquisition of a second language. However, only a few of them focused on language skills such as pronunciation. Shadowing and critical listening are both useful techniques for improving learners' listening, speaking, and translating abilities, but few have combined them. In this model, corpus-assisted teaching is combined with both of these techniques.

Figure 4 outlines several key concepts that will be explained. SLA-based input and output theory formed the theoretical foundation for the study, as previously discussed. Figure 4 depicted how the processes of the research affect the other and how the theories guide the comprising of the model. It is recommended that this model is taught over a period of 12 weeks. The blue box represents the entire teaching process: pre-test, in-class activities, after-class activities, and post-test. And the dashed box represents the theory that guided the study. Both the pre- and the post-test are developed so that a comparison can be made between the performance of the students before and after the teaching design will be implemented. The in-class activities are also based on the input and output SLA framework proposed by Gass (1988), with each step aligned with the five steps.

In addition, it is crucial to highlight that this process model includes the evaluation phase, which involves accessing and analysing the experiences of the students involved in corpus-assisted pronunciation teaching. In both the pre- and post-tests, oral and listening tests are included. To achieve an accurate and thorough comprehension of the phenomenon, it was required to employ a range of tools. The purpose of incorporating a questionnaire and an

interview with corpus-assisted pronunciation teaching is to assess the potential of the combination of critical listening and shadowing.

Conclusions

As a result, this paper explores a literature review of pronunciation teaching, corpus-based teaching, and critical listening and shadowing, all based on the thinking and arguments underlying the model presented. The objective of the C-CLASH model is to enhance the effectiveness of corpus-assisted pronunciation instruction through the integration of two techniques, so that students' pronunciation performance is significantly improved. A discussion of the limitations of the model was held at the end so that the teachers would be reminded to anticipate the challenges they may encounter when implementing the model.

Limitations

This conceptual paper has potential limitations. The model estimates the effect based on both quantitative and qualitative studies. Therefore, our model estimates may have been influenced by biases and confounding factors.

- Sample bias. Studying members of the same population in class will result in bias, since one group is more likely to be selected than another.
- Insufficient sample. Due to the fact that statistical tests often require a larger sample size in order to establish a representative distribution of the population and to be considered representative of groups of persons to whom the results can be generalized, small sample sizes will always pose a problem.
- Selection of corpus-assisted teaching materials. Even though there are many learner spoken corpora available today, most of them are not annotated. Choosing materials for teaching can be a challenging task for teachers. As time goes on, we hope that more and more pronunciation-annotated corpora will be available.
- The way to conduct and evaluate the pre- and post-test. Listening and oral tests are administered during the pre- and post-tests. It is important for teachers to consider how to conduct and evaluate the tests in the most effective manner.
- The quality of the after-class activities. The after-class activity is shadowing. The results of this activity cannot be predicted as it will be conducted without the monitoring of teachers.

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