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# THE “CINDERELLA” OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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An Insight to the Integration of Pronunciation in EFL Contexts



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
<b>1. Introduction</b>	1
<b>2. History of the teaching and acquisition of phonology</b>	4
2.1 A review of history of pronunciation instruction	4
2.2 Ultimate attainment and fossilization	5
<b>3. The teaching of pronunciation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century</b>	8
3.1 The current relevance of pronunciation in TEFL	8
3.2 The communicative approach	9
3.3 Form-focused instruction and pronunciation feedback	11
3.4. Evaluation of the learners' pronunciation	13
<b>4. A critical approach to pronunciation instruction</b>	15
4.1 The teaching of L2 phonology to English teachers	15
4.2 Sources of unintelligibility in EFL learners	16
4.3 The insertion of pronunciation instruction in the TBLT framework	17
<b>5. Conclusion and future directions</b>	20
<b>6. Works cited</b>	23

## **1. Introduction**

In the history of English teaching, L2 pronunciation has always been a neglected aspect, up to a point that researchers have regarded it as suffering from the “Cinderella Syndrome- kept behind doors and out of sight” (Celce-Murcia, 1996, p. 323) because it is the component of the English language which has been mostly excluded from all teaching programs, in comparison to other L2 skills. Nevertheless, currently, pronunciation instruction is growing in importance in the communicative-oriented EFL classroom, especially because the most sensible, justifiable and pressing objective of L2 pronunciation teaching is intelligibility.

Kenworthy (1987, p. 13) defines intelligibility as “being understood by a listener at a given time in a given situation”. If a listener is able to identify accurately and effortlessly words and expressions from a particular speaker and context, this person can be considered intelligible. In the case that the feature of language is not native-like, the speaker must aim for an expression that is close enough for the listener to establish a comparison and recognize the message thus, what matters is “the counts of sameness” (Kenworthy, 1987, 13). Learners need to be intelligible in order to communicate not only with English native speakers but also with non-native. As Smith (1987; op cit Taylor, 1991, 426) notes, “it is assumed that the non-native speaker should work towards a native speaker’s communicative competence”. However, this statement has been questioned because the native speaker’s phonology may not be the most intelligible and each speaker needs to be able to adapt to the phonological system of any speaker in the world. Smith (1987; op cit Taylor, 1991, p. 429) claims that phonology is often subscribed to standard norms written in dictionaries which only provide an “educational codification” based ostensibly on a native-like model. Therefore, interaction becomes a necessary tool for the attainment of intelligibility even if Smith and Nelson (1985; op cit. Brown, 1995, p. 4) state

that “given that intelligibility is essentially interactional in nature [...] the terminology should be made more precise” thus, concepts such as comprehensibility and interpretability must be also taken into account. Morley (1991, p. 449) goes a step further and declares that the four main goals of pronunciation instruction should be “functional intelligibility, functional communicability, an increased self-confidence and the development of speech modification strategies to use beyond the classroom”. Consequently, Pennington (1996) suggests specifying to whom these goals should be addressed. As far as EFL learners are concerned, she includes international business personnel, college professors and students who wish to enter English-speaking universities. Celce-Murcia (1991) adds two more groups: teachers of English as a Foreign Language and people in non-English-speaking countries. The completion of these goals develops a great proficiency in the target language, specifically in the ability to recognize isolated words from speech continuums, a better comprehension of rhythmic stretches and a higher intelligibility of words and expressions, as well as considerable improvement in other areas of the second language such as grammar, morphology and syntax.

Considering the great importance of L2 phonology in foreign language acquisition, the aim of this paper is to determine the most appropriate ways of teaching pronunciation in the classroom by analysing the different methodologies in the history of TEFL, to provide models for the evaluation and testing of pronunciation, and to encourage further research in the field of L2 pronunciation and task-based language teaching.

The first block of the present study traces the evolution of the teaching of pronunciation from the 1900s until nowadays, and it analyses the possible factors concerning ultimate attainment and fossilization in L2 phonology by selecting the most relevant variables. The second and central block of this project tackles the current importance of pronunciation

instruction in TEFL contexts and concentrates on the most successful approaches to pronunciation teaching, which are the communicative approach and form-focused instruction, both thoroughly discussed by Celce-Murcia (1996), Pennington (1996) and Saito (2011, 2013a & 2013b). In addition, block 2 provides a final paragraph on evaluation and testing, which analyses the most adequate way of assessing learners' pronunciation and intelligibility. Finally, the third block conveys a critical view on some of the aspects discussed throughout the study; for instance, it suggests promoting the training of teachers by analysing their essential role in the classroom, investigates the strategies causing learners' unintelligibility, and identifies some unexplored areas of pronunciation teaching in the TBLT framework, in order to devote attention to L2 phonological features in meaningful conversations.

## **2. History of the teaching and acquisition of phonology**

### 2.1 A review of history of pronunciation instruction

In order to organize the historical review of the teaching of pronunciation, two general approaches by Celce-Murcia (1996) need to be considered. Firstly, the intuitive-imitative approach consists of listening and imitating the sounds of the target language without the teacher's explicit focus on form. Secondly, the analytic-linguistic approach gives prominence to declared interventions from the instructor so students consciously pay attention to sounds and rhythms. Finally, a third approach has been developed by Morley (1991), where she defines the integrative-approach as a way of practicing pronunciation through meaningful task-based activities, the focus of which, is more on suprasegmental features such as stress, rhythm and intonation.

Taking the preceding approaches into consideration, different methods have been developed for the acquisition of pronunciation throughout history. In the early 1900s, the main technique in the teaching of EFL was the Direct Method, which involved the teaching of pronunciation through listening and imitation and it was thought to "give learners the opportunity to internalize the target sound system" (Celce-Murcia, 1996, p. 3). In the 1940s and 1950s, Audiolingualism focused on the repetition of utterances from the teacher or recordings through visual transcription systems or charts so that learners could picture the sounds that they were producing and instructors had the assistance of a structurally-based teaching device: the minimal pair drill. Within these naturalistic methods, Asher's (1977) Total Physical Response invited learners to speak when they were ready to produce sounds and Krashen's (1983) and Terrell's (1983) Natural Approach gave learners the opportunity to internalize the target sound system before their actual production. Unfortunately, in the 1960s, the cognitive approach emerged with a non-essential notion of pronunciation in FL acquisition which highlighted "the

teaching [of] more learnable items”, such as grammar and vocabulary (Celce-Murcia, 1996, p. 5). In the 1970s, the Silent Way was introduced as a technique whose emphasis was on the accuracy of sound production and the structures of the target language so learners established their own criteria of sound production without being explicitly exposed to phonetic alphabets or any kind of linguistic information. Community language learning (Curran, 1976), whose pronunciation syllabus was student initiated and designed, involved the teacher’s supplying of phrases and their repetition by students. Later on, it was recorded on a tape for learners to produce the target item. Celce-Murcia (1996, p. 7) stated that CLL was a technique known as “human computer” because the student could “turn on” the counsellor whenever he/she needed to know the correct pronunciation of a given phrase and the teacher would answer with raw data to be mimicked.

With regards to more recent pronunciation methods, the communicative approach, which was born in the mid-late 1970s, holds that the ultimate goal of language is communication and, hence, the teaching of pronunciation should be emphasized for this communicative purpose and intelligibility. Therefore, “if [learners] fall below this threshold level, they will have oral communication problems no matter how excellent and extensive their control of English grammar and vocabulary might be” (Celce-Murcia, 1996, p. 7). Concerning current new directions on pronunciation instruction, other fields such as drama, psychology and pathology are giving phonology a more central role. As will be further discussed below, the practice of fluency and accuracy-oriented exercises as well as adaptations from authentic materials will certainly provide a new outlook on L2 pronunciation.

## 2.2 Ultimate attainment and fossilization

When analysing the issue of exceptional outcomes in L2 phonology, Moyer (2014, p. 3) defines exceptionality as “the ability to perceive and/or produce new sounds like a native speaker



would, verified through relevant tasks which are often isolated or decontextualized". Specifically, Moyer (2014) identifies several key factors for the development of exceptionality in phonology: a metacognitive approach, a strong identification with the language, a deep desire to sound native, an outgoing orientation and the use of L2 across multiple domains (Moyer, 2014, p. 4) thus, the exceptional learning of L2 pronunciation is the result of a constellation of cognitive, psychological, social, and experiential factors.

In contrast, fossilization occurs when second language learners retain incorrect pronunciation features in their interlanguage, which are different from the learners' native language and also target language. The role of the learner's L1 may cause fossilization of L2 phonology and, in Szalkowska-Kim's view (2014, p. 142), learners need to "reject the associations between the phonological aspects of L1 and L2 and therefore minimize the transfer of phonological features from one language to another". Other hypotheses such as the Error Analysis Hypothesis hold that fossilization may be caused by developmental errors which cannot be attributed to transfer and, in Odlin's studies (1989), he concludes that developmental errors are very common with fricatives and they do not occur at the early stages of acquisition but once learners have made some progress. Thanks to Selinker's (1972) Interlanguage Hypothesis, phonology becomes part of the learner's interlanguage and L2 pronunciation learners often experience more difficulty with marked structures (more language specific) rather than with unmarked ones (more universal) regardless of their linguistic background.

Affective factors such as the learners' age, exposure to the language, aptitude, attitude and personality, language beliefs and outcomes, are crucial factors affecting the ultimate attainment of L2 learners. Firstly, phonology may become fossilized as one grows older due to the fact that the capacity to segment and perceive sounds is greatly affected with age; the neurological plasticity is reduced after the critical period; and finally, the hours of exposure to the L2 language are progressively reduced (Segalowitz, 1997, p. 87). In fact, Jones (1997, p.

104) claims that “it is virtually impossible for adults to acquire native-like pronunciation in a foreign language [after the critical period]”. The amount of exposure to L2 language also seems to be a decisive factor in determining success in L2 pronunciation; however, a high exposure does not always guarantee a native-like pronunciation. MacCarthy (1978, p. 10) conducted a study on “the common fallacy of foreign residence” which portrays the deceptiveness about ‘the more exposure, the better’. As far as aptitude is concerned, researchers in the SLA field believe that learners with a strong phonetic coding ability achieve a higher degree of intelligible pronunciation in the L2 and also, “the desire to do well [in pronunciation] is a kind of ‘achievement motivation” (Kenworthy, 1987, p. 8). In addition, many studies tackle the issue of introversion and extroversion, self-esteem, anxiety, among others; in particular, Darcy, Mora and Daidone (2016, p. 26) carried out a study on inhibitory control and the results proved that the higher the inhibitory skill, the better acquisition of the phonological system thus, “inhibitory control might be implicated in L2 phonological processing and might contribute to explaining in part the large variation found in L2 learner’s perception and production performance”. Language beliefs and learners’ outcomes may also affect the individual learner differences and result in encouragement or frustration directly affecting the acquisition of a native-like oral production (Segalowitz, 1997, p. 92). Taking into consideration all these affective factors, it must be stated that phonological attainment is seldom addressed in terms of cognitive skills and, whereas Celce-Murcia (1996) considers them not to be as relevant as affective factors, Segalowitz (1997, p. 97) reckons that “when word [or sound] recognition is highly skilled, many of these processes [...] become [...] fast and stable in time of execution” due to the proceduralization of declarative knowledge. Finally, psychological resources such as memory, attention and perception should be further investigated in order to determine L2 phonological exceptionality or fossilization in FL acquisition.

### **3. The teaching of pronunciation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

#### 3.1 The current relevance of pronunciation in TEFL

Pronunciation has always been addressed as a subordinate goal compared to other L2 skills and it has progressively become “the Cinderella of language teaching” (Kelly, 1969; op cit Isaacs, 2009, p. 2) or “an orphan in English programs around the world” (Gilbert, 1994; op cit Isaacs, 2009, p. 2) due to the fact that it has always been marginalised and neglected in the TEFL mainstream. Celce-Murcia (1983) objects that the traditional methods on pronunciation caused serious trouble because students learning through drills could not apply the theory of the sound system to real-life situations and pronunciation practices were not promoted. Therefore, “when [her students] left the phonetics class and used English in spontaneous conversations, nothing [they] had done in class seemed to have any impact” (Celce-Murcia, 1983, p. 5). Nevertheless, with the rise of the communicative approach, the focus on pronunciation instruction has changed and so its importance, even if some contradictory findings have been exposed concerning its effectiveness. As a consequence, opinions are divided whether the communicative method has effects on pronunciation accuracy and can integrate L2 phonology in the classroom or whether this merger is impossible (See Morin, 2007, p. 334).

Researchers who do not believe in the incorporation of L2 pronunciation in the class perceive the absence of teacher training in the field of phonology due to the lack of emphasis of L2 pronunciation during the communicative era, where instructors did not have the incentive to expand their skills and knowledge. In addition, the materials used for the teaching of pronunciation lacked authenticity and contextualization, and thus, could not be incorporated in the communicative classroom. In fact, Levis (1999; op cit Isaacs, 2009, p. 4) maintained that “present intonation research is almost completely divorced from modern language teaching and is rarely reflected in teaching materials” because textbooks offer archaic conceptions of

intonation which are often devoid of context and communicative values. In addition, traditionally, pronunciation was viewed as a linguistic component rather than a communicative component and, therefore, it was not related to fluency, but only accuracy, and teachers “sacrifice[d] teaching pronunciation in order to spend valuable class time on other areas of the language” (Elliott, 1997, p. 95). Nevertheless, as the communicative approach is acquiring more relevance, so is L2 pronunciation instruction because the shift from more to less controlled communicative load will harmonize the relationship between communication and pronunciation.

Proponents of the communicative approach defend that the increasing amount of input in communicative lessons will improve adults and young learners’ pronunciation because “given sufficient auditory exposure before communicating increases the likelihood of achieving native-like pronunciation” (Elliot, 1997, p. 96) and, in this way, interaction in the lesson will provide the sufficient L2 phonological features for its implicit acquisition. However, Elliot’s study (1997) demonstrates that Spanish learners of English benefit from pronunciation instruction only when engaged in activities which focus on the language sound system, hence, focus on meaning triggers high success but some formal phonological instruction is also required.

### 3.2 The communicative approach

The communicative approach, born in the 1980s, was articulated by Brumfit, Johnson and Widdonson, among other researches, and it is currently prevailing in the field of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). This approach uses language for communicative purposes and it has brought renewed urgency to the teaching of pronunciation with the objective of avoiding communicative problems by performing learner-centred activities so students “[are] better motivated to make their English speech clearer and more comprehensible” (Celce-

Murcia, 1983, p. 6). The teaching of this approach needs to take into account that L2 pronunciation features must be closely linked to the functions of communication and the contents of pronunciation should be illustrated in the communicative acts where rich and meaningful output is produced. Therefore, the first thing to elaborate is a needs assessment in order to set the priorities in pronunciation instruction. Celce-Murcia and Godwin (1991) propose different evaluation materials such as questionnaires, listening discrimination tests and some production samples so that English teachers know the segmental and suprasegmental features in the sound system which need improvement.

In the late 1970s, the techniques and materials designed for pronunciation instruction were at the segmental level and the communicative approach at that moment was based on Celce-Murcia's techniques developed in 1983. For instance, she designed a strategy for the teaching of the phoneme /θ/ in English, where she instructed body parts such as "mouth, tooth, throat..." (Celce-Murcia, 1983, p. 7) through a role-play between a doctor and a patient. However, thanks to more modern techniques and material designers, there is a shift towards the teaching of suprasegmental features such as rhythm, stress and intonation since "they have the greatest impact on the comprehensibility of the learner's English" (Mc Nerney and Mendelson, 1992; op cit Celce-Murcia, 1996, p. 10). In the 1990s, new directions as regards communication appear and Celce-Murcia abandons the traditional way of teaching English to develop purely oral techniques which resemble real-life practices such as activities that highlight the musicality of sounds and teach real speech patterns and signals. For instance, Celce-Murcia (1996) uses *Effective Listening Exercises*, *Fluency Workshops*, *Discussion Wheels*, *Values Topics*, among others, to trigger L2 phonological output while communicating.

As far as multisensory modes are concerned, they are techniques addressed to learners who may want to maintain their foreign accent. By using this method, learners are able to break down their ego boundaries and avoid fossilization. As an example, Celce-Murcia (1996) studies

visual and auditory reinforcement, tactile reinforcement and kinaesthetic experiences. In addition, FL acquisition depends on the degree of confidence of the speaker, thus techniques from areas such as psychology (i.e. neurological programming) and dramatization may rise the students' comfort because "experimental subjects in an induced, relaxed frame of mind [are] better able to produce target-like sounds in the second language" (Celce-Murcia, 1996, p. 305).

Apart from Celce-Murcia's strategies for the teaching of pronunciation, Pennington (1996) elaborates the design of lessons which shift from mechanical to real pronunciation activities. Her proposal is the creation of a unit which begins with the presentation of the phonological features and a following focus on the features in linguistically rich contexts. For instance, "A meaningful pronunciation activity might require a student to decide whether [certain] minimal pairs [...] [are] used correctly in a sentence" (Pennington, 1996, p. 227). However, although the method is meaningful, it is not clearly communicative so practicing pronunciation in realistic but structured situations is more effective (i.e. role plays) and, even more adequate is the focus of pronunciation in real life contexts practiced in or outside the class. In short, Jones (1997, p. 108) notes that "a language learner needs to attend to [...] meaningful correlates of those articulatory features in the immediate linguistic context, as well as the larger context of human communication".

### 3.3 Form-focused instruction and pronunciation feedback

In order to analyse whether form-focused instruction (FFI) has positive effects on L2 phonology, several studies will be discussed but, before tackling this approach, researchers have investigated the positive outcomes of explicit instruction and the advantages of decontextualizing pronunciation. De Keyser (2003; op cit Saito, 2011, p. 46) defines explicit instruction as "the rule explanation [which] forms part of the instruction (deduction) or [when] learners are asked to attend to particular forms and try to find the rules by themselves" and Saito

(2011) analyses the effects of this type of instruction in FL contexts by focusing on accentedness and comprehensibility. His study concludes that although participants improve in the area of comprehensibility, learners do not reduce their foreign accents and, to some extent, this affects their intelligibility. Another research carried out by Trofimovich and Gatbonton (2006) questions the incompatibility of L2 sound repetition with meaningful activities and thus, they put emphasis on form-focused instruction as a way to draw students' attention to problematic phonological features. As a consequence, "learners will perceive the discrepancy (the gap) between the linguistic feature in the input and their own (often non-target-like) conception of it" (Schmidt, 1990; op cit Trofimovich and Gatbonton, 2006, p. 520). Explicit instruction and focus on form have a great impact in L2 phonology and thus, instead of divorcing these two techniques, a utopic model might be "a focus on form where attention to form by definition does not detach from the overall [communication] of the classroom" (Isaacs, 2009, p. 6). In a communicative context, repetition of L2 patterns accelerate fluency and this fact is essential for the completion of tasks because, in fact, communication is based on formulaic expressions. Following the same train of thought, Saito (2013a) defends that, in order to achieve intelligibility and L2 pronunciation success, learners need to repetitively practice the target features through production and then, use the language in authentic contexts so as to be internalized. In Saito's (2013a, p. 25) words, "L2 learners should then be given communicative tasks in which they can further process the target sound either receptively or productively in meaningful lexical contexts, to help learners develop and internalize the phonetic representation". When Saito and Lyster (2012a) tackle the effects of FFI in Japanese learners of English, they also confirm that L2 phonology is acquired better when it is implemented in the communicative context and also, Saito and Wu (2014) favour the quick integration of suprasegmental features. Furthermore, an increased attention to form in meaningful situations improves the learners' accuracy because "the speakers' control of [pronunciation] requirements

of the task allows them to manage their cognitive and intellectual resources and thus improve the accuracy of their L2 performance” (Salaberry & López-Ortega, 1998, p. 528).

Concerning feedback in meaning-oriented classrooms, focus on form is an excellent technique for the improvement of L2 accuracy. To start with, self-monitoring is very effective and gives learners the freedom to be responsible for their own mistakes whereas peer feedback serves to provide and receive corrective feedback from other learners as well as triggers focused feedback in unfocused practice (i.e. role plays, debates, among others). This is what Celce-Murcia (1996, p. 148) refers to a “state of development that occurs with some learners as they become more self-conscious about the accuracy in their speech”. In addition, teachers are also the main source of feedback and, during classroom activities, they write down the problematic forms of the students’ performances or give on-the-spot corrections which can be more or less explicit. One of the best ways to provide negative evidence is through recasts, which enable teachers to draw attention to form without stopping speech and trigger repairs in the learners’ utterances. Saito (2013b) explored the integration of recasts in FFI and realised that recasts generated not only a focus on lexical units but also on phonetic aspects and hence, learners began “establishing phonetic categories at a segmental level” (Saito, 2013b, p. 28) and modifying their output (See also Saito and Lyster, 2012b).

### 3.4 Evaluation of the learners’ pronunciation

Similar to the teaching of pronunciation, FL testing has also been a neglected area in the history of TEFL because it has always been considered unreliable, superficial and subjective. Traditionally, tests, which focused on reading ability, did not capture the idea of pronunciation at the word, phrase or sentence level and did not include any suprasegmental feature of speech. In 1989, Buck developed a test which consisted of recording the learners’ production but did not distinguish the ability of producing and perceiving pronunciation when, actually,



“recognition often runs ahead of production” (Lado, 1961; op cit Koren, 1995, p. 390). Consequently, nowadays’ researchers in TEFL conclude that tests must be reliable and objective, must include the degrees of proximity towards native pronunciation, and must make a distinction between production and perception. Tarone (1985) created a model called “the Continuum Paradigm” which takes the theory of interlanguage development where each task increases the level of difficulty, shows perfect variability, integrates segmental and suprasegmental features, and “reflect[s] construct and content validity” (Koren, 1995, p. 398). General tests occur more frequently than classroom tests but evaluation in class needs to be continuous, realistic and achievable so students can benefit from hearing and analysing their own productions.

On the whole, pronunciation seems a crucial factor for L2 proficiency and teaching and testing should be fundamental aims in the context of TEFL. De Jong, Steinel, Florijn, Schoonen and Hulstijn, (2012, p. 29, emphasis added) support this idea by observing different learners performing speaking tasks and concluding that “knowledge of vocabulary and the ability to *produce correct sentence intonation* turned out to be the best predictors of speaking proficiency”.

## **4. A critical approach to pronunciation instruction**

### 4.1 The teaching of L2 phonology to English teachers

First of all, English teachers are required to have enough understanding of pronunciation in order to describe the target language phonological features, diagnose sound problems in the learners' speech and convert this information into effective classroom teaching strategies for their students to overcome these major phonological difficulties. Secondly, teachers need to distinguish phonological and phonetic errors because while phonetic errors complicate interaction but do not cause a breakdown in communication, phonological mistakes do. Thirdly, teachers are suggested to instruct pronunciation within a context and regard suprasegmental features as highly important for the understanding of segments. As a result, teachers will need an acute awareness about syllabic structures, rhythm, word and sentence stress, and, especially, intonation because "using inappropriate intonation contour can lead to misunderstanding in the same way that segmental errors can" (Morin, 2007, p. 350). Lastly, teachers are encouraged to use appropriate tools and materials in the classroom in order to expand their phonological explanations and be able to answer questions with adequate modern support such as computer-based pronunciation teaching programs or updated instructional software. Although teachers do not need to memorize the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet, they need to have a detailed understanding of the principles of transcription and the accurate nature of the relationship between transcription and pronunciation. Consequently, English teachers should be encouraged to take Applied Phonetics courses in order to implement their knowledge in elementary, middle and secondary classrooms and "narrow the focus towards more detailed phonetic knowledge [...] taking into account all the other factors, grammatical, semantic, discourse and [...] pragmatic factors involved in transactions, interactions and communication generally" (Taylor, 1991, p. 434).

By acquiring the necessary and sufficient L2 phonological knowledge, English teachers will be able to perform an appropriate role in the foreign language classroom where they must help learners recognize and distinguish important features of L2 pronunciation as well as produce a wide variety of sounds and rhythms. In addition, teachers should present the critical features of the English language and establish priorities within the linguistic system so they are aware of the students' strengths as well as the weaknesses which need improvement so as to achieve an effective fluid communication. Finally, they need to provide enough practice so learners recognize the second language sounds in context and produce them accurately when addressed explicitly or implicitly. However, English teachers, whose intentions must match with the learners' actions for a successful pronunciation acquisition, should consider some goals in advance and make changes in the syllabus whenever new evidence of modification emerges.

#### 4.2 Sources of unintelligibility in EFL learners

When learners of English encounter great difficulty in getting their messages across, they employ different strategies which, instead of triggering a higher level of understanding from native speakers, cause a higher unintelligibility. Sound substitutions may pose problems for the listener especially when the sounds are close enough in the articulatory system so as to create confusion; for instance, the phonemic sounds /s/ and /θ/ may be fused in the learners' speech and give rise to misunderstanding. In English, word boundaries are key to identify the sounds in isolated words and learners should make proper use of linking sounds (i.e. "go in" /gəwɪn/), sound mergers (i.e. "nice shoe" /naɪʃu:/) and composite sounds (i.e. "this year" /ðɪfiə/), otherwise English listeners may find difficult to recognize the phrases in the learners' utterances and greatly complicate communication (Kenworthy, 1987, p. 17). The same applies to learners who do not stress the words adequately and trigger confusion in the native speakers' comprehension by the erroneous stress patterns (i.e. "written" /'rɪtɪn/ vs "retain" /rɪ'teɪn/). Rhythm and intonation also become important factors for intelligibility. On the one hand,

listeners expect to hear all speakers use the characteristic rhythm of English which contain an alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables but, when the rhythm becomes unnatural, listeners are “placed in the position of someone who walks out onto the dance floor with a partner, expecting to waltz, but finds that the partner starts some strange set of syncopated steps which are thoroughly unpredictable and impossible to follow” (Kenworthy, 1987, p. 19). On the other hand, a proper intonation, which is mainly used to express intentions, also avoids situations of misunderstandings and unintelligibility. Nevertheless, non-native English teachers in classroom contexts cannot truly judge the aspects that cause intelligibility because the constant exposure to non-native accents turns them into “atypical listeners and therefore unsuitable as judges of intelligibility” (Kenworthy, 1987, p. 20). Therefore, the ideal helpers of unintelligibility are those listeners who have not had a great exposure to non-native speech or have the status of native speakers.

#### 4.3 The insertion of pronunciation instruction in the TBLT framework

In the field of second language acquisition, research has experienced a dramatic growth in the construct of tasks due to the increasing interest in form-meaning mappings in natural conversations. The most ambitious goal in TBLT is to create plentiful opportunities for meaningful language use while promoting learners’ attention to L2 constructions, in this case, phonological patterns. In order to enhance attention to the students’ output through interaction-driven opportunities, researchers have manipulated tasks in a way that the target language features are triggered. First of all, tasks can be made more or less complex depending on the processing demands imposed by the design of the task such as the number of elements or several reasoning demands. While complex tasks demand a great focus on content and allow learners to devote less attentional resources to linguistic features, simpler tasks result in more attention available to L2 forms because content is already comprehended. However, sometimes, more complex tasks may also draw attention to L2 phonological forms. Solon, Long and Gurzynski-

Weiss, three researchers in the field of TBLT and L2 speech, claim that L2 pronunciation-focused language episodes may arise by increasing the complexity of the tasks and by making the target structure essential for the completion of a final outcome. Mora and Levkina's discussions in *The Sixth International Conference on Task-Based Language Teaching* (2015) conclude with a clear question "Is there any competition for attentional resources for monitoring output between lexico-grammatical accuracy, pronunciation accuracy and complexity in a cognitively more complex task?". The truth is that noticing and attention are essential for the learning of phonology through tasks; however, the effects of directing learners' attention to specific phonetic features need to be further researched. Moreover, in the same symposium in Belgium, Jung, Kim and Murphy put forward that the manipulation of task in terms of repetition can also have long-term impact on pronunciation because a high exposure to target-like forms directs attention from content and allocates it on the target phonological feature. According to Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Godwin (2010; op cit Jung, Kim & Murphy, 2015) "awareness-raising and perception activities should be preceded before providing learners with opportunities for communicative practice" because these will help learners shape cognitive representations on which learners base their L2 phonology and will be consolidated through procedural repetition. As an example, Mora and Levkina (2015) observe the significant positive effects of reoccurrences in target stress patterns appearing in EFL contexts. Last but not least, Ortega (1999) supports the introduction of planning before performing the tasks as a technique for learners' to devote conscious attention to the formal aspects of the language needed to accomplish a particular task. In Ortega's words (1999, p. 138), "the learners' attention is devoted to formal aspects of the code as they relate to the task, and opportunities for making form-function connections, noticing the gap, and so forth, enhanced" thus, planning yields indirect benefits to L2 phonology at all levels of proficiency. Nevertheless, further investigation

is needed to determine the effects of focus on L2 phonological features not only when planning time is provided but also when repetition and cognitive complexity are introduced in tasks.

Finally, another important issue is whether the learners' focus on form in tasks varies depending on learners' individual differences. Although little is known about the relation between the learner affective factors and L2 instruction, Mora and Levkina (2015) claim that the L2 mechanisms rely on processes affected by the nature of cross-language interaction. Moreover, L2 proficiency greatly affects the development of pronunciation, and motivation and anxiety cannot either be ignored. Robinson (2007; op cit Révész, 2011, p. 167) found that “individual differences in ability and affective factors relevant to the cognitive demands of tasks will increasingly differentiate learners' [...] interaction and uptake, as tasks increase in complexity”, therefore, learner factors moderate the quality of linguistic input and the quantity of learning opportunities on complex tasks and, only through the design of a wide variety of activities, which promote attention to phonetic form, the different affective components will be better integrated in the communicative classes, where the learners are required to interact with other learners.

To conclude, the perfect and ambitious merger of rich content and L2 phonological characteristics in task-based contexts is only possible if pedagogical tasks are cautiously designed and manipulated so as to enhance opportunities for the focus of phonological properties in meaningful L2 communication. Consequently, if learners feel integrated and succeed in task performances, individual differences among students will be reduced and communication will hopefully trigger uptake in the learners' L2 sound system.

## **5. Conclusion and future directions**

In the history of L2 pronunciation pedagogy, many methods were developed in order to fill the void of phonological acquisition in EFL contexts but, unfortunately, none brought about any success. Pronunciation was often regarded as a mechanical linguistic activity which could not be applied to authentic communicative situations and could not easily be instructed. As a consequence, for many years, pronunciation was abandoned in most English instructional contexts around the world which supported the essential learning of grammar and lexis. In plain words, second language pronunciation, as the Cinderella of the English language, was marginalized and forgotten in the TEFL classrooms.

Nevertheless, recent research on L2 phonology has emphasized the teaching of pronunciation for the developing of intelligibility, which is vital for the understanding and production of L2 sounds in communication. In fact, learners who develop “an exceptional ear” are constituted by, according to Baran-Lucarz (2012; op cit , 2014, p. 17), “an ideal combination of cognitive tracts [...] strong intrinsic motivation, extensive exposure to authentic spoken language, good phonetic knowledge, and a strong belief that one is in control of progress in learning”. When learners are not naturally gifted, teachers need to think of techniques to avoid problems in communication, and this caused the emergence of communicative approach, which aims at drawing the learners’ attention to both structural and functional aspects of the English language. The implementation of this new approach facilitates the learning of suprasegmental features and, according to Castillo, Algara and González (2016), it does not involve an economic effort on the part of parents because teachers may convert their traditional grammar-based materials into more communicative-like. Furthermore, some studies in the SLA field have revealed that form-focused instruction has a very positive impact on L2 phonological acquisition because learners practice the target items of the English language in realistic contexts until they finally internalise them. This approach also prompts the use of recasts which

allow the learner to perceive the gap between their own utterances and the native-like model in the input. However, the evaluation of their speech should be evaluated weekly through objective tests that diagnose perception and production of L2 sounds, and the emphasis on L2 pronunciation as a clear sign of proficiency should be placed.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, some researchers in the SLA field and L2 speech sounds, have addressed the absence of pronunciation in the schools' syllabus, the lack of suitable pronunciation teaching and learning materials, and the general deficiency of teacher training programmes. By observing this evidence, specialists in TBLT are beginning to design and manipulate models of tasks in order to make phonological features of speech task essential and, hence, trigger conscious and unconscious focus on form. In addition, this study has encouraged the promotion of Applied Phonetics courses to English teachers with the hope that someday they will apply their knowledge to solve pronunciation problems in the classroom. Nevertheless, further exploration and experimentation is needed as regards the process of L2 phonological acquisition and the design of accurate pedagogical models so as to avoid unintelligibility in real-life communication.

In the future, it is my hope that teaching programmes are designed with the sole aim of capitalizing the skills that permit learners to transfer what they have acquired from the second language instruction to real-life language uses. TBLT research urgently needs empirical studies with a focus on L2 pronunciation because it has been shown that the features of task design generate a very positive impact in L2 speech. Tasks may be manipulated according to task complexity, which provides operational gains in pronunciation accuracy and fluency; task sequencing; task types, whose emphasis in intelligibility and comprehensibility generates pronunciation-related episodes; task modality; and, finally, task repetition, which far from being investigated, provides learners with repetitive practice for the processing of L2 speech (Mora & Levkina, 2015). In addition to TBLT, SLA researchers and English teachers may take



into consideration learner factors in the design of activities in diverse interactional contexts. Firstly, native languages tend to exert a significant influence in the acquisition of target language phonetics and phonology and may also cause negative transfer. Secondly, L2 proficiency is a variable that may affect the acquisition of phonological patterns because, for instance, learners with very low levels of proficiency may not benefit from Form-Focused instruction, where learners need to internalise L2 speech structures to be intelligible. Thirdly, affective factors such as motivation and anxiety may induce problematic phonological acquisition and, finally, cognitive factors such as working memory, attention and inhibition may also create a barrier in the learning of pronunciation. Therefore, the future lies in the appropriate matching of instructional options and ID's profiles.

As a final contemplation, teachers and learners of foreign languages should move beyond the Cinderella analogy permanently by showing the integration of L2 pronunciation in authentic communicative contexts. Nevertheless, "the accessibility of such frameworks to classroom teachers and their understanding of the purpose of the framework" (Isaacs, 2009, p. 10) are vital for success. Therefore, all the developments in L2 teaching and learning pronunciation ought to go hand in hand with the developments in teacher education so that second language learners are able to communicate fluently and accurately.

[6496 words]

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Barcelona, a 3 de juny, de 2016

Signatura:

