5 Things to Know About Teaching Pronunciation with Technology

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Have you thought about incorporating pronunciation instruction in your language classes? Technology may be a great asset to do so. Here are 5 things to consider before you get started.

1. Research tells us that explicit instruction of second language sound systems can lead not only to improved pronunciation but also to better attitudes towards pronunciation, and more learner confidence (e.g., Boomershine & Ronquest, 2019; Elliot, 1995; Lord, 2008). Instructors and students repeatedly indicate that they want and appreciate the inclusion of pronunciation in their language classes (e.g., Cortés Moreno, 2002; Foote et al., 2011; Morin, 2007; Scarcella & Oxford, 1994).

2. A focus on comprehensibility and intelligibility (e.g., Munro & Derwing, 1999) has resulted in less discussion of segmental and suprasegmental aspects of language pronunciation. In fact, most teaching and learning guidelines don’t mention pronunciation except for cases in which problems with pronunciation interfere with effective communication. However, pronunciation is often the first thing interlocutors notice, and there are sociopragmatic, not just communicative, consequences to nonnative like utterances (e.g., Oyama, 1982; Polinsky & Kagan, 2007).

3. As with any technology, it is crucial to have a clear goal in mind before implementing any tool. Instructors should assess learners’ pronunciation needs carefully: what are the sources of difficulty (e.g., L1 vs. L2 segments? L1 vs. L2 processes? suprasegmental differences?) and determine which challenges need to be addressed explicitly. With that in mind, it is important that the instructor establish specific goals for the instruction, understanding that it is unlikely that...
learners will achieve native-like perfection (Delicado Cantero et al, 2019; Kirkova-Naskova, 2019). Furthermore, while we may see immediate improvement after instruction (e.g., Bailey & Brandl, 2013), it is unrealistic to expect phonological restructuring over the course of just one semester or even year (e.g., Flege, 1995). The most appropriate tool will depend on other factors as well, such as the learner level and the native and target languages, as some tools are available in multiple languages, while others are only available for specific languages.

4. Three primary classes of tools are available to educators and learners. Each has advantages and disadvantages, so the best use will depend, again, on the desired goals.
   a. Tools created specifically to help language learners work on their own to improve their pronunciation. Examples include: Iowa Sounds of Speech Project, Tal Como Suena, Say It, ELSA Speak
   b. Tools designed for other purposes, such as communication or general language learning, that can be adopted to focus on pronunciation. Examples include: Forvo or YouGlish, LyricsGaps, social media (e.g., Twitter, podcasts)
   c. Tools designed for the analysis of speech sounds, which can be used to help learners self-assess. Examples include: Praat, iSprak, ultrasound

5. Finding reliable information on tools may be tricky and can seem intimidating. Joining communities of educators may help to find the right tool for your class and students, and to share resources and ideas. This is especially important since tools and apps change constantly. Organizations specializing in technology-enhanced teaching and learning, such as CALICO and IALLT are a great place to start. Many social media sites like Facebook and LinkedIn may also have groups specializing in aspects of teaching. In addition, a number of conferences either focus specifically on phonology and pronunciation (e.g., LabPhon, CASPSLaP), or on effective technology use (e.g., CALICO, IALLT, ISTE, Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching Conference, etc.) and can provide ideas and inspiration.

References


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