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REVIEW

L2 Pronunciation Instruction: A Proposal Considering Nativeness in the Field of L2 Linguistics

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ABSTRACT

This article examines some central aspects of L2 pronunciation instruction, such as nativeness, foreign accent, types of instruction, and strategies for pronunciation instruction. First, it reflects on the native and non-native dichotomy as pillars to understand its implications on the theorization of L2 speech. Secondly, it addresses the phenomenon of foreign accents and their relationship to the native and non-native dichotomy for L2 speech, taking into accounts cognitive and social variables related to foreign accent as well as critically reflecting on the construct. Thirdly, it discusses bottom-up and top-down approaches to L2 pronunciation instruction in relation to the native and non-native dichotomy and foreign accent. Notably, it describes two different types of instruction according to LaScotte et al.: one that focuses on the imitation of native-like speech, which is labeled as bottom-up instruction, and one that focuses on intelligibility and meaning negotiation, which is called top-down instruction. Later, it explains key concepts for top-down pronunciation instruction, such as intelligibility, communicative competence, and speakers' identities. Next, it suggests activities to implement top-down instruction in the L2 classroom, which allows for developing communicative competence while considering intelligibility and speakers' identities in the target language. Lastly, it reflects on the importance of teaching pronunciation as an interactional phenomenon in the L2 classroom.

Keywords: L2 Pronunciation; Pronunciation Instruction; Foreign Accent

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1. Introduction

Gut^[1] states that speakers have traditionally been classified as native and non-native speakers in dichotomous terms. Thus, native speakers are those who have been exposed to the language since birth, acquire it fully, and use it daily. In contrast, non-native speakers are those who come into contact with a language later in life. Thus, they do not usually fully acquire the target language or continue to use it for daily activities^[1]. The native and non-native dichotomy has not been exempt from controversy in L2 linguistics. Two main positions exist regarding this dichotomy. Some authors adhere to and perceive the term concerning linguistic processing and native competence in Chomskyan terms^[2]. Other authors adhere to the use of the term partially or are completely against its use and align with Hymes' ideas about communicative competence ^[3, 4].

Researchers in the former group who adhere to the use of these terms are mostly found in the fields of psycholinguistics. They use experimental methods to research language based on Chomsky's [2] ideas about native speakers and their innate grammatical knowledge of their native language [3, 5]. For instance, some of the papers published in 2024 that followed this line of thought were Shehata's [6] work on the perception of spoken Arabic by native and non-native speakers, Bao et al.'s [7] research on novel word learning in native and non-native adult speakers of English research concerning vowel recognition by native and non-native speakers in noisy environments. In most of these studies, the underlying premise was that non-native speakers could potentially have a disadvantage compared to native speakers when it comes to linguistic processing in the target language.

Research in the latter group is more diverse. These researchers usually work in applied linguistics, which is found at the interface between linguistics and education. In contrast to the former group, these researchers' views are based on Hymes' concept of communicative competence [4, 5]. Thus, these researchers are more interested in communicative success than in achieving nativeness or researching deviations from the target language. Some authors in this group agree with the use of the native and non-native dichotomy and suggest that it should be looked at as unproblematic or by defined what being a native speaker means [5]. For instance, Medgyes [8] argues that in the case of teachers of English as a foreign language, the substantial advantage derived from

having learned English from birth cannot be overcome and that this should not be considered a disadvantage but rather an opportunity. Schmitz^[5] notes that the debate regarding native and non-native speakers of English has brought to light different varieties of English, such as Singapore and Malaysian English. Finally, in the same group, there are those who believe that the term should stop being used due to its political implications. Cheng, et al. [9] argue that the use of the terms native and non-native speaker is "both unhelpful to rigorous theory construction and harmful to marginalized populations by reproducing normative assumptions about behavior, experience, and identity." Similarly, Dewaele [10] indicates that the term non-native speakers are biased toward monolingualism and that the dichotomy implies a deficiency in non-native speakers and a prejudicial connotation to languages in at least one of its meanings. The discussion about this dichotomy is rich, and no categorical answer to this puzzle can be expected in the near future.

In the case of L2 pronunciation, the previous discussion was transferred to definitions provided for L2 speech. Notably, research on L2 speech reports foreign accents as a pronunciation phenomenon associated with non-native speakers' speech in L2 research and L2 pronunciation instruction. Thus, non-native speakers are speakers with accented speech, whereas native speakers are speakers who lack this condition due to the exposition of the target language from birth. This review examines L2 pronunciation instruction, considering the effect of this disciplinary dichotomy in the field of L2 pronunciation instruction. Section 2 refers to accent and foreign accent constructs, considering the native and non-native dichotomy. Sections 3 discusses pronunciation instruction from bottom-up and top-down orientations, linking it to the aforementioned dichotomy. Section 4 addresses key concepts related to top-down pronunciation instruction and explains their relevance to an interactional approach to L2 pronunciation instruction. Section 5 discusses activities that may be implemented for L2 pronunciation instruction from a top-down approach. Finally, Section 6 concludes with reflections on the implications of theoretical constructs on instructional practices in L2 classrooms.

2. Accent and Foreign Accent

In the case of non-native speech, the phenomenon of accent has been referred to as foreign accent or accentedness,

which is defined by the linguistic community as deviations in the pronunciation of non-native speech compared with standard native speech norms [1, 11-15]. In other words, having a foreign accent means sounding different from speakers who are considered to speak the standard variety of that target language. However, the concept not only reflects deviations in pronunciation in non-native speech but also involves cognitive and social variables. Concerning cognitive variables, Scovel^[11] and Munro & Derwing^[16, 17] indicate that the phenomenon of a foreign accent is based on the ability of native speakers to recognize the oral production of their interlocutor as the oral production of a non-native speaker. In recent studies, foreign accents have been defined as the closeness of non-native speech to native speech [18, 19] or as the perception of native listeners regarding L1 transfer in non-native speech^[20]. In all these studies, the raters were native speakers of the target language. Thus, a foreign accent is not necessarily linked to a specific degree of acoustic accuracy in the target language; rather, it is defined by native speakers' perceptions of non-native speech.

Concerning social variables, Moyer^[21] indicates that non-native speakers must make themselves audible enough to be acknowledged in a second language to participate fully in the target language community. Lippi-Green [22] also notes that when we refer to L2 speakers, speech constraints are not just linguistic but also involve complex internal and external factors, such as social and racial prejudices. For example, Rubin^[23] showed that a specific population of students did not rate international student assistants' speech based on their accent; rather, they rated their speech based on their appearance. Notably, Caucasian instructors were perceived to have a higher degree of comprehension and a lower degree of perceived accent than their Asian-looking peers [23]. Furthermore, in 2010, the Arizona Department of Education in the United States persecuted teachers who were considered to have a strong accent and removed them from L2 English instruction courses [24]. In other words, non-native speech is not only a linguistic perceptual phenomenon but also a social one in which ideology and politics come into play.

Thus, whether the variables are cognitive or social, the definition of a foreign accent depends on native speakers' perceptions of and attitudes toward non-native speech. In other words, the concept of a foreign accent draws from the same perspective as the native versus non-native dichotomy [25].

In this respect, if we return to the initial concept of accent proposed by Scovel^[11] and Moyer^[21], we note that divergent speech equates to different things depending on who is speaking. Those considered native speakers by the language community have an accent, whereas those considered non-native speakers by the same community have a *foreign* accent^[26]. However, the accent construct was inherently the same in both cases.

In this regard, if the accent is inherently the same for native and non-native speech, we propose that, when it comes to L2 pronunciation instruction, the accent should be considered a natural phenomenon^[5] that includes dynamic segmental and suprasegmental habits that convey linguistic, social, and situational meanings that may or may not be divergent [21, 27]. Hence, for non-native speech, the (foreign) accent should not be viewed as something that should be abandoned; rather, pronunciation instruction should focus on overall language proficiency, particularly on the development of communicative language competency^[28–31]. In the next section, we discuss the two main approaches to non-native speech in L2 pronunciation instruction in order to understand how the teaching community has regarded the phenomenon of foreign accents with respect to the native and non-native dichotomy and how this has been reflected in L2 pronunciation instruction.

3. L2 Pronunciation Instruction and the Tensions Regarding the Native and Non-Native Dichotomy

In L2 pronunciation instruction, a connection exists between the ideas linked to native and non-native dichotomies. On the one hand, instructors adhere to the use of native and non-native dichotomies in comparative terms and also view native speech as a pronunciation model for non-native speakers. On the other hand, instructors who view the dichotomy of native and non-native speakers as deprived of their negative connotations are interested in achieving intelligibility in the target language rather than native-like pronunciation. Levis [32] comments on tensions related to foreign accents in the field of L2 pronunciation instruction. Notably, he indicates that since the 1960s, a shift has occurred in pronunciation instruction, leading to two approaches: (1) a focus on nativeness and (2) a focus on intelligibility. The first

has standard native speech as its end goal, including accent reduction, whereas the second is oriented toward intelligible speech and does not aspire to adjust to standard native speech but rather to increase the comprehensibility of non-native speech, achieving successful meaning negotiation between interlocutors. LaScotte et al. [33] address these two opposite orientations and label them bottom-up and top-down approaches to L2 pronunciation teaching. The main characteristics of bottom-up and top-down approaches, according to LaScotte, et al. [33], are presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Bottom-up and top-down orientations to L2 pronunciation instruction.

Dimension	Bottom-Up	Top-Down
L2 speech goal	Accurate emulation of an imagined and idealized native speaker of the L2	Intelligibility, identity, and cultural allegiance
View of L2 speech learning	Individual process	Interactional process
Role of context in L2 speech learning	Irrelevant to speech production	Key to speech production
Description of L2 speech learning	Formal	Functional
Language learning	Cognitive	Social

Note. Based on LaScotte, et al. [33].

These two opposing views also align with the native and non-native dichotomy presented at the beginning of this piece. Bottom-up approaches to L2 pronunciation instruction focus on achieving native-like speech, which also involves reducing or fully eliminating foreign accents. Furthermore, in line with Chomsky's ideas about language, they posit that speech learning can be an individual cognitive process that is unrelated to social context. Thus, their approach to L2 pronunciation instruction is formal and focuses on isolated structures in L2 speech, such as learning the vowels of the target language in isolation and using minimal-pair drills. Following Hymes [4], top-down approaches to L2 pronunciation instruction have focused on intelligibility, identity, and cultural allegiance. As such, L2 speech learning is conceived of as an interactional process that entails communicating with others, including speakers' identities and cultural allegiances. Context is the key to this approach, and language is understood beyond its form. For instance, a top-down approach would privilege teaching intonation within oral language use rather than in isolation. Therefore, bottom-up approaches focus on learning L2 phonology and pronunciation in isolation, and their goal is to achieve a native-like accent. The topdown approaches focus on communication and emphasize social contexts; the end goal is comprehensibility rather than native-like speech. Our proposal for teaching L2 pronunciation is linked to the latter. In the next section, we will present some key concepts to the teaching of L2 pronunciation from a top-down approach.

4. Proposal for Teaching L2 Pronunciation from a Top-Down Approach

As noted above, a foreign accent is a social construct that does not differ from the construct of an accent. Moreover, we presented two approaches to L2 pronunciation instruction; a bottom-up approach and a top-down approach. One focuses on the cognitive processes linked to L2 speech learning acquisition, with nativeness as an end goal for L2 speech, and the other focuses on the interactional process of language acquisition, with intelligibility, identity, and cultural allegiance as its end goal for L2 speech. Concerning the second orientation, we will introduce key central topics to the teaching of pronunciation from a top-down approach, based on LaScotte et al. [33] and Pennington & Richards [34].

4.1. Key Concepts to the Teaching of L2 Pronunciation from a Top-Down Approach

4.1.1. Intelligibility

Intelligibility, as defined by LaScotte et al. [33], is related to the ability to negotiate meaning with an interlocutor in a successful manner; notably, it entails the mutual understanding by interlocutors in a given social context. Thus, being intelligible means being understood successfully in different contexts, regardless of one's accent. Considering the growing number of speakers of English as an international language [35, 36], and the fact that foreign accent has proven to be the least relevant factor for L2 speech intel-

ligibility^[37], L2 pronunciation instructors should focus on the critical factors that are relevant to L2 pronunciation and affect communication between interlocutors in a given social context. For instance, Jenkins^[27] proposes focusing on segmental features relevant to communication with speakers of other languages, such as using rhotic instead of non-rothic dialects of English. A rhotic dialect corresponds to Scottish or American English and a non-rhotic dialect corresponds to standard British English, also known as Received Pronunciation^[38]. Similarly, LaScotte et al. ^[33] suggest activities that focus on suprasegmental rather than segmental features to improve L2 intelligibility. Both proposals emphasize intelligibility rather than reducing foreign accent, which is key to a top-down approach.

4.1.2. Communicative Competence

International teaching assistants' research has shown that they are more intelligible when speaking about topics related to their disciplines and fields of expertise^[33]. Hence, at basic levels, pronunciation should target improving learners' communicative competence with respect to their actual daily activities within the target language community. In other words, it should focus on meaningful interactions [39]. For instance, an airport employee may need to learn different language functions to do their job compared to a primary school teacher. Of course, both types of learners need to learn to interact with the target language communities; however, the types of interactions they engage in daily are potentially different, meaning that focusing on segmental and suprasegmental aspects of the target language that may affect their communicative competence is critical for their communicative success.

In this same respect, pronunciation has long been regarded as an isolated part of L2 instruction. Scarcella & Oxford^[39] propose that L2 pronunciation should be taught communicatively. Moreover, Pennington & Richards [34] indicate that pronunciation should be taught in addition to other aspects of language use such as grammar, vocabulary, and pragmatics. Thus, the L2 instructor can highlight the value of intelligible speech and depart from an accent reduction approach while also enabling his or her students to interact successfully with the L2 community.

4.1.3. Speakers' Identities

According to Munro & Derwing [16, 17], the success of

speaker's (foreign) accent. In this sense, letting learners focus on intelligibility rather than aspiring to sound like native speakers encourages them to develop their own intelligible variety of speech in the target language. This does not mean eradicating the influence of the native language on the speaker's pronunciation in the target language [34]. Furthermore, allowing learners to maintain their accents provides them with a chance to reaffirm their identity while engaging with the target language community.

In this same line, we suggest that speakers should be able to choose the variety of the target language they would like to speak whenever possible [27]. This allows them to be an active part of their learning process and sheds light on the diverse and dynamic nature of languages. Furthermore, L2 pronunciation instruction should include pronunciation trends in the target language community, such as the specific phenomenon of a creaky voice in American English, for example^[40], and global variations of English, such as world English^[41, 42]. Considering the diversity found in language, such as different varieties of the same language or specific language phenomena, is central if we want for teaching pronunciation as an interactional phenomenon that occurs in real-life situations. In the next section, we propose different activities for pronunciation instructors to consider in the L2 classroom to depart from the native and non-native dichotomy and start teaching pronunciation from a top-down approach. Notably, we provide ideas to teach pronunciation integrated into the foreign language classroom instead of teaching it in isolation.

5. Intelligibility and Speakers' Identity to Develop Communicative Competence in the Foreign Language Classroom

Different activities can be used in the foreign language classroom to allow students to achieve intelligibility and maintain their identity while developing communicative competence from a top-down approach. First, to achieve intelligibility and forge identity in the L2 classroom while developing communicative competence, pronunciation activities should not be isolated but integrated into lessons in L2 classrooms. Let us remember that the central idea of a top-down approach communication in a target language is not dependent on the is to focus on interaction and the social aspects of communication to convey meaning and mutual understanding between interlocutors. Thus, this entails that all dimensions of a language, such as grammar, vocabulary, communicative functions and pronunciation should be integrated during the lesson and not taught in isolation. With respect to pronunciation instruction, activities such as (a) Intonation practice, (b) Stress and rhythm exercises, (c) Shadowing exercises, (d) Contrastive stress activities, (e) Pitch range expansion, and (f) Role-playing, can be integrated into a lesson instead of being taught in isolation. While these activities have been typically used in isolation to teach pronunciation, they also may be used to teach communicative functions, which are crucial to developing communicative competence in the target language. For example, let us think about the use of the simple past tense to share an experience.

With respect to (a), intonation practice can be done using short scripts of texts in the past tense, allowing students to practice different intonation patterns related to the communicative function of sharing experiences from the past. In the case of the simple past tense, the teacher could focus on falling intonation for statements, for example. To do so, visual aids, such as acoustic software, can be used to help students visualize their intonation patterns and the expected intonation pattern while also practicing specific vocabulary and grammar to share an experience from the past. To reinforce students' identities, the teacher may insist on students narrating stories that reflect their cultural backgrounds or experiences with the target language.

Concerning (b), stress and rhythm exercises, teachers can use poem extracts in the simple past tense to train students' perception of English stress and rhythm patterns and improve their segmental pronunciation of -ed endings for regular verbs in the past tense. The poems may be from different authors from different cultures to reinforce the idea of different identities in the L2 classroom. As to (c), shadowing exercises, students can mimic different model speakers narrating an experience in the simple past tense. In order to let students forge their identity in the target language community, this model speaker should be chosen by them, and they may be either a native speaker or a highly proficient speaker of the target language. This way, students may imitate the model speaker's speech and their overall pronunciation both at the segmental and suprasegmental levels.

Regarding (d), contrastive stress, teachers can create utterances in the simple past tense where the meaning changes based on stress; notably, utterances may have different meanings depending on which words are stressed, and this is particularly relevant when narrating a story. Students can practice mimicking these utterances as well as discussing the change in meaning when there is a change in stress. These utterances may related to topics that are culturally significant to students.

Concerning (e), pitch change expansion, teachers should encourage their students to exaggerate intonation patterns, which basically means expanding their vocal range when speaking the target language. In the case of the simple past tense, students may write a short personal story using the simple past tense and then narrate it in an exaggerated manner. These types of exercises should be done carefully and should not be done in groups if the group of students is particularly sensitive to public speaking. With respect to (f), role-playing, in the case of the simple past tense, there are many options for implementing role-play activities. It is known that role-playing allows for the creation of communicative scenarios where learners have to convey meaning through their oral production, which includes the correct use of segmental and suprasegmental features. Thus, roleplays are a great activity to forge an identity in the L2 as well as to produce segmental and suprasegmental features in the target language.

In sum, there are different activities that may be implemented for L2 pronunciation instruction in the L2 classroom from a top-down approach. The activities mentioned above are just some of the many activities that may be used to teach pronunciation in the L2 classroom. Furthermore, the activities suggested above may be used to teach pronunciation from a bottom-up or a top-down approach, depending on the instructor. Thus, if the instructor is interested in teaching pronunciation from a top-down approach, which focuses on meaning negotiation to achieve intelligibility, implementing these activities should align with the development of communicative competence and not focus on the imitation of native-like speech. In the case of the proposed activities all of them were centered around developing the communicative function of sharing an experience, which is a key function for learners of L2 early developmental levels.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we have discussed that the dichotomy of native and non-native speakers has certainly impacted the understanding of L2 speech and the instructional approaches to L2 speech. On the one hand, when L2 speech is understood as a deviation of the standard spoken variety of the language, instructional approaches, such as bottom-up approaches, center around accent reduction, and the teaching of pronunciation is usually isolated because the goal is not communication but imitation of model speakers. On the other hand, when L2 speech is understood as a natural phenomenon, such as language variation, the focus is placed on intelligibility, and the approach focuses on meaning negotiation and interaction. The second approach, which aligns with the suggested activities presented in this paper in section 5, allows students to develop their communicative competence through intelligibility without losing their identity. We posit that by focusing on intelligibility, communicative competence and speakers' identities, the teaching pronunciation in the L2 classroom can escape ideas surrounding the native and non-native dichotomy. Hence, the main message for L2 pronunciation instruction is that a (foreign) accent, regardless of its origin, is merely a speech phenomenon that needs to be embraced and dealt with in communicative terms.

Author Contributions

Two authors contributed equally to this study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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