

REVIEW

The contribution of the instruction and phonetic training in L2 teaching

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ABSTRACT

This review presents the results of three works on instruction and training in second language (L2) pronunciation teaching. Currently, the phonetic training is aimed at improving the L2 learner's speech intelligibility. The researches were applied to speakers of different languages who were learners of either English or Mandarin as L2. The results of a series of pre- and post-training experiments indicate the efficacy of instruction and training in the L2 pronunciation teaching. The main goal of this type of practice is not only to make learners achieve phonological awareness in the target language, but also to facilitate their L2 learning process.



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RESUMO

Esta resenha apresenta resultados de três trabalhos sobre instrução e treinamento fonético no ensino de pronúncia de segunda língua (L2). Atualmente, o treinamento fonético está voltado para a melhoria da inteligibilidade da fala do aprendiz de L2. As pesquisas foram aplicadas com falantes de diferentes línguas que eram aprendizes de inglês ou de mandarim como L2. Os resultados de uma série de experimentos com pré e pós-treinamento apontam para a eficácia da instrução e do treinamento fonético no ensino de pronúncia de L2. O principal objetivo desse tipo de prática é não só fazer os aprendizes adquirirem consciência fonológica na língua-alvo, mas também facilitar seu processo de aprendizagem na L2.

KEYWORDS

Phonetics. Training. L2.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Fonética. Treinamento. L2.

During the panel discussion entitled “L2 Phonetics and Phonology: the role of the instruction and training”, which was moderated by Professor Ubiratã Alves from Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, the panelists elucidated how experimental studies on instruction and phonetic training are at service of the teaching of foreign and second language (L2, henceforth) pronunciation.

Currently, the teaching of L2 pronunciation is considered an important stage in the development of communicative abilities of learners and no longer a behaviorist mechanical training that has an aim in itself (CELCE-MURCIA et al., 2010; ALVES, 2015; KUPSKE; ALVES, 2017; LEVIS, 2018). This means an integrative approach of pronunciation teaching that combines the phonetic training of the L2 sounds – namely a focus on formal aspects of the language – and the communicative goal in pronunciation teaching, which is to improve learners’ intelligibility of L2 communication.

In this panel, three works were presented. The first one was delivered by Professor Anabela Rato from University of Toronto, Canada. The second work was presented by Professor Pedro Luchini from Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata, Argentina. The third presentation was delivered by Professor Xinchun Wang from California State University, United States.

Throughout the first presentation, whose title is “Assessing the efficacy of phonetic training: retention of learning”, Professor Anabela Rato focused on the capacity of the L2 learner – native Portuguese speakers who are learners of English – to retain the information acquired during the phonetic training in long-term memory, in order to apply this knowledge after the learning process.

The method of verification of effects from phonetic perceptual training is basically characterized by four stages, as in the test sequence used in Rato’s study (2013): pre-test, training, post-test, and delayed post-test. According to Anabela Rato, numerous studies in the literature (RATO, 2013; SAKAI, 2016; ALIAGA-GARCIA, 2017; CARLET, 2017; SAKAI; MOORMAN, 2017) suggest that the effects of phonetic training on production are verified in the perception. Nevertheless, the opposite is not always verified.

The results in Anabela Rato’s study (2013) revealed a long-term positive effect in Portuguese learners’ production and perception of English vowels (/i/-/ɪ/, /ɛ/-/æ/, /ʊ/-/u/) after the application of perceptual phonetic training. The learning of the target forms may occur even after the end of the phonetic training sessions, as highlighted by Rato.

In the second presentation, *Enseñanza explícita y incidencia de rasgos prosódicos en el desarrollo de una pronunciación en L2 cercana a la de hablantes nativos de inglés*, Professor Pedro Luchini reported the results of his research on the explicit teaching of prosodic features, such as the localization of pitch

accent, rhythm, intonation, speech rate, among others, focusing on intonation, in the development of the pronunciation of native Spanish speakers who are learners of English as L2.

The purpose of Luchini's study was to measure the level of accuracy in learners of L2 English compared to native English speakers, concerning the production of speech features. In order to achieve his goal, the professor used one didactic sequence designed to promote the students' linguistic awareness.

Professor Luchini had two groups of learners of L2 English. One of them would receive a phonetic training without a communicative component, which means only tasks of mechanical training, such as repetition and dictation. The other group, in addition to the traditional phonetic training, also received tasks with a communicative component, dedicating one part of the class to work exclusively on progressive communicative tasks with a focus on prosody.

After administering the phonetic training sessions to both groups, two types of results were found. In group A, there was an improvement in rhythm, speech rate, comprehensibility and fluency. In turn, in group B, the communicative tasks brought significant improvement in prosodic features, enabling a production closer to that found among native speakers of English, with regard to the localization of pitch accent, quantity and length of stops, as well as lowering the degree of foreign-accentedness of their speech.

Luchini concluded that the explicit training of L2 prosody brings advantages. Regarding the results of the study, he stated that if the aim of pronunciation teaching is to obtain improvements in a short term, the training applied to group A is recommended. On the other hand, if the aim of the teaching is to obtain long-term improvements, the treatment of group B is suggested. The professor also claimed that the inclusion of metacognitive strategies, such as self-reflection, self-evaluation and self-monitoring, during L2 pronunciation classes is beneficial.

In the last study of the panel entitled "L2 speech learning: perception, production and training", professor Xinchun Wang presented the results of her studies on the production and perception of Mandarin consonants with English speakers learners of Mandarin, phonetic training of Mandarin consonants and tones in syllable and sentence levels, as well as phonetic training of English vowels with Chinese learners.

Wang affirmed that her studies on phonetic training with vowels showed better results than the studies on consonants. On the one hand, comparing the results of the studies of L2 Mandarin consonants, regarding the perception of ten consonants (/tʂ/, /tʂʰ/, /s/, /tɛ/, /tɛʰ/, /ɛ/, /ts/, /tsʰ/, /ʂ/, /z/) and the production of eight consonants (/tʂ/, /tʂʰ/, /s/, /tɛ/, /tɛʰ/, /ɛ/, /ts/, /tsʰ/), a correlation between Mandarin learners' perception and production was found for only two consonants (/tɛʰ/, /tsʰ/), which shows a gap between production and perception. On the other hand, in the study of phonetic training with three pairs of English vowels (heed/hid, who'd/hood, head/had), which was applied to Mandarin and Cantonese speakers, learners of L2 English, indicated a positive effect on the perception of these three pairs of vowels (and the learning was retained), but not on the production.

In addition, the phonetic training of tones in the syllabic level showed an improvement in the learners' production and perception of L2 Mandarin. In turn, the training of tones in the sentence level was effective only to a better production of the learners. Nonetheless, the same did not occur in relation to perception.

According to the presentations and the final discussion of this panel, the studies on phonetic training, either in the segmental or in the suprasegmental levels, play an important role in L2 phonological awareness and, occasionally, the improvement of the intelligibility of the learners' pronunciation (MUNRO; DERWING, 1995; DERWING; MUNRO, 2015; LEVIS, 2005; 2018). Therefore, L2 teachers must address these formal language issues in their classes, aiming to improve the students' learning once they observe that their students have difficulties in either production or perception of L2 sounds.

In conclusion, the three studies offered high-quality investigations with a solid theoretical background followed by reliable methods and tangible results, along with exciting suggestions of further investigations based on the positive outcome of the analyses. The main message of this panel discussion was that the aim of teaching L2 pronunciation is not to reach the native pattern of the target language, but rather to focus on the intelligibility of the L2 learners' speech. The works presented in this panel confirm that practices of instruction and training can contribute to this goal.

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