‘She’ll be right’: Development of a coaching model to clear and fluent pronunciation in Australia

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Teaching and learning pronunciation can be challenging for second language (L2) teachers and learners alike. Many people may even adopt that attitude that, ‘She’ll be right’, thinking that L2 learners’ pronunciation difficulties will likely sort themselves out in time. Yet many learners consider pronunciation to be the most difficult oral communication skill (Yanagi & Baker, 2016). To address these issues, this paper discusses two models, Baker’s Pronunciation Pedagogy Model: From Awareness to Clear and Fluent Pronunciation (derived from the work of Baker, 2014) and Kaufman’s (2010) P.E.R.F.E.C.T. model of coaching, and combines them to produce a more holistic, yet pronunciation skill-specific ‘Coaching Model to Clear and Fluent Pronunciation’. This innovative model provides teachers with a well-rounded approach for developing learners’ pronunciation skills while simultaneously taking into consideration the psychological variables that may either enhance or inhibit this development.

Introduction

With over 7.5 million migrants living in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020) and the number of international students matriculating into Australian universities on the rise (Robinson, 2018), ESL programs are struggling to meet the diverse needs of L2 learners. This is especially true with regard to oral communication (OC) skills. Research has demonstrated that ESL students continue to view not only oral presentations and whole-class discussions as particularly challenging (Ferris, 1998, Kim, 2006), but also interacting with lecturers and classmates, listening to lectures and understanding instructions (Campbell & Li, 2008). Research has shown this for decades, but these problems persist.

A critical component of successful OC is intelligible pronunciation (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Clear pronunciation plays a central role to meaningful OC (Darcy, 2018), both from the perspective of the listener, who needs to understand a spoken message, and of the speaker, who needs to convey that message. Both teachers and students

alike face several challenges in the development of intelligible pronunciation skills. After first exploring these challenges, this paper proposes a 'Coaching Model to Clear and Fluent Pronunciation' to better support teachers in improving the pronunciation skills of L2 learners in their classrooms.

Current state of the field

From the perspective of the learner, pronunciation is a critical area to address. Learners view both pronunciation in general, and explicit pronunciation instruction, as important. They want teachers to teach pronunciation (Couper, 2003; Derwing & Rossiter, 2002), especially as they lack confidence in this area (Yanagi & Baker, 2016) and have identified it as one of the major causes of communication breakdowns (Derwing & Rossiter, 2002). Furthermore, despite decades of research advocating the value of non-native accents, students continue to strive to achieve native-like accents (Levis, 2015; Scales et al., 2006; Timmis, 2002). However, some students may instead wish to maintain a particular non-native accent, as they may strongly value their pronunciation, considering it an integral part of their identity within their own ethnic or community group (Gatbonton, Trofimovich & Magid, 2005). To complicate the situation further, learners may view pronunciation as an obstacle to advancing within their professional careers (Levis, 2015). Conflict may thus exist between the learners' personal and professional identities, making it difficult to improve their pronunciation. Pronunciation may be viewed 'as a tool, not a way to socially interact beyond very basic needs' (Levis, 2015, p. A-50).

Furthermore, a number of external factors might affect learners' success with developing clear pronunciation. These include: emotional and psychological problems (Andrade, 2006), embarrassment about low English language ability (Braine, 2002), difficulties adapting socioculturally (Fenton-Smith et al. 2017), poor living conditions (Braine, 2002), and even differing perceptions of 'how to become a successful student' in the home country versus the country of study (Briguglio & Watson, 2014, p. 71). Teachers, for their part, need to consider these issues in order to effectively support learners to develop clear pronunciation skills.

The current state of the field, from the perspective of the teacher, also needs to be taken into consideration. Teachers experience their own frustrations when trying to tackle problematic pronunciation. A lack of knowledge of both the English phonological system (Burri, Baker & Chen, 2017) and how to teach it (Couper, 2017) may lead to a lack of confidence in teaching pronunciation (Baker, 2011; Foote et al., 2011), which ultimately results in its neglect in many classrooms (Foote et al., 2011; Macdonald, 2002). There is an expressed need for more training in how to provide feedback on student pronunciation, how to explain pronunciation, and how to

scaffold teaching effectively (Baker, 2011, 2014; Baker & Burri, 2016; Couper, 2017). There are also concerns about the lack of systematicity in teaching pronunciation (Foote et al. 2016), how to integrate it successfully into the curriculum (Couper, 2016), what models to use (Couper, 2017; Jenkins, 2007), how to sufficiently value diverse varieties of English (Burri, 2015), how to address teachers' insecurities regarding their own pronunciation (e.g., Couper, 2016), and how to obtain quality teacher training in this area (Foote et al., 2011; Murphy, 2014).

This consequently raises the question: what does all of this mean for the future of pronunciation teaching? At present, it may seem that we have adopted a 'She'll be right' attitude toward pronunciation teaching and learning, thinking that whatever pronunciation difficulties may exist will eventually sort themselves out in time despite evidence to the contrary (Yanagi & Baker, 2016). There is an obvious need to address the complexities of learning and teaching clear and fluent pronunciation. This paper will present two models which, when combined, may provide an effective way to achieving this goal.

Pronunciation Pedagogy Model – From Awareness to Clear and Fluent Pronunciation

The first model is focused on techniques specific to teaching pronunciation as derived from the findings of my earlier research (Baker, 2014). As part of this research, a taxonomy of pronunciation-oriented techniques was identified, drawing on the work of Crookes and Chaudron (1991) and their discussion of different degrees of communicative techniques, but also influenced by Brown's (2007) taxonomy of techniques as well as the work of Richard-Amato (2010), Wajnryb (1992) and Celce-Murcia et al. (2010). The more expanded pronunciation-technique-oriented model represented here provides a series of techniques that can be used in a systematic way to progress a learner's pronunciation competence from basic awareness of a variety of pronunciation features (e.g., vowels, consonants, intonation, stress, rhythm, etc.) to automated, intelligible pronunciation. (For a detailed description of all the pronunciation techniques, refer to Baker, 2014). Ultimately, what we want is to help learners to produce speech that is articulated clearly for a target audience (in this case, fellow interlocutors in Australia) and in a manner unimpeded by undue hesitations or disfluencies. To achieve this, teachers require a broad knowledge of pronunciation techniques (Baker, 2014), and thus the Pronunciation Pedagogy Model – From Awareness to Clear and Fluent Pronunciation has been developed (see Figure 1).

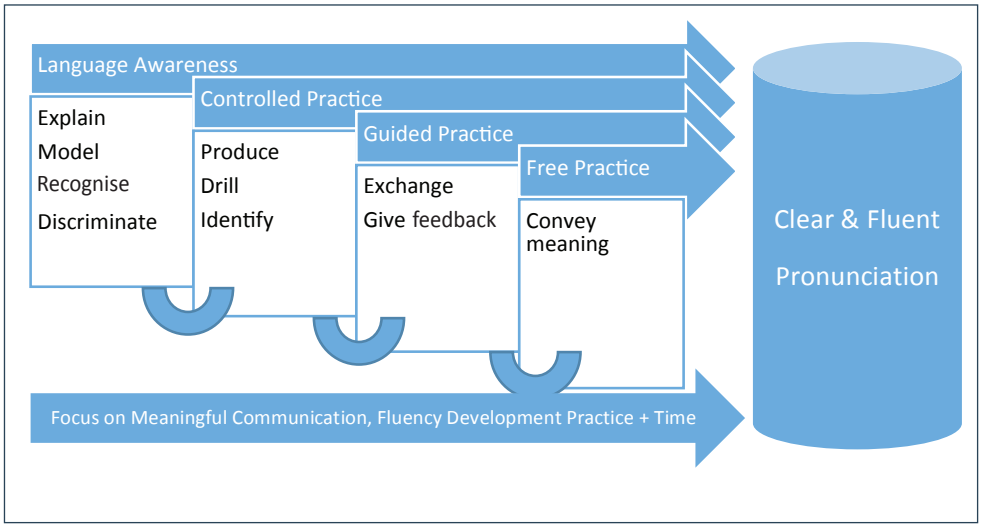

Figure 1. The Pronunciation Pedagogy Model – From Awareness to Clear and Fluent Pronunciation

This model comprises four components: Language Awareness, Controlled Practice, Guided Practice and Free Practice. The first component, Language Awareness, includes teacher-centred or controlled techniques that explicitly focus on enhancing the learners' awareness of a target phonological feature (e.g., vowels, stress). Techniques such as explanations and modelling of target features, listening discrimination activities and visual recognition activities are all examples. Visual recognition activities require no verbal production from the learner, but rather students respond by using a gesture in response to a visual prompt or other text-based material to select a particular pronunciation feature that they have been asked to identify.

The second component, Controlled Practice, is similar to Language Awareness in that the teacher continues to play a dominant role in the activities. Thus, activities such as production practice (e.g., reading a text aloud), drills (e.g., repetition work), and identification activities are largely evident here. Identification activities involve students responding to either a visual or audio prompt of some kind, but unlike recognition activities, they respond verbally as opposed to kinaesthetically.

Using the first two components as building blocks to more communicative-oriented language production, Guided Practice enables students to participate in activities with less teacher-dominated instruction. It encourages students to produce language somewhat more creatively, while still providing some structure to communication. This frequently includes partner work involving a structured exchange of information (e.g., information gap activities), or even preparation work for much less structured

activities that students will produce later on (e.g., students discussing the creation of a presentation or drama). This then leads to the final component, Free Practice, which represents the culmination of the work that students might do after engaging in Guided Practice. Activities typical of this category include student-led games (e.g., Taboo, 20 Questions, Fact or Fiction), drama, presentations, and discussions, in which language is not scripted by the teacher/textbook, but rather produced more creatively by the learner.

Throughout the use of all of these four types of activities, it is important to maintain and remind students of the focus on meaningful communication in relation to the target feature of pronunciation. It is the combination of each of these four activity types, and their systematic use in the classroom, that enables students to develop clear and fluent pronunciation over a period of time. Frequently, however, Guided Practice tends to get overlooked (Baker, 2014) in the drive to more quickly engage students in Free Practice; however, cutting short this essential step or bypassing it altogether makes it more difficult for the student to achieve their communicative goals. But using these activity types together, moving between the types systematically from one activity to the next, is more likely to enable learners to achieve these goals.

Supporting the pronunciation development of learners, however, requires more than just a toolkit of techniques, even if systematic in design. Many contextual and personal factors play a strong role in how successfully a learner can develop his or her pronunciation skills and thus must also be addressed. It makes sense to turn to other disciplines for more robust ways to support language learners.

A positive model for coaching pronunciation teaching

In this case, we will turn to the discipline of coaching in an effort to develop a holistic model for pronunciation teaching. This is particularly important for pronunciation instruction due to the potentially high emotional load attached to pronunciation, and the high-stakes, real-world repercussions that problematic pronunciation may incur, such as difficulties finding and maintaining employment (e.g., Carlson & McHenry, 2006; Seggie et al., 1986). Like typical pronunciation teaching practices, contemporary coaching practices have also been referred to as a kind of 'unsystematic eclecticism', using techniques that draw on diverse bits and pieces of coaching-related theories and models (Grant, 2012, p.33). However, one particular model that may lend itself well to the area of pronunciation teaching (as well as other aspects of language learning) is Carol Kauffman's (2010) P.E.R.F.E.C.T. model. Her model attempts to pull together the pieces into a more coherent whole. This model may have the potential to help teachers to become better pronunciation teachers. It consists of the following seven components:

- Physical – Biological
- Environmental
- Relational
- Feelings
- Effective Thinking
- Continuity
- Transcend

In the next section, each of these components will be discussed in relation to how they fit in tandem with the Pronunciation Pedagogy Model (Figure 1) discussed above.

Bringing together two systems to better pronunciation learning and teaching

Brought together, Kaufman's (2010) P.E.R.F.E.C.T. model of coaching and the Pronunciation Pedagogy Model – From Awareness to Clear and Fluent Pronunciation may provide a comprehensive model for effective pronunciation teaching or coaching. The Pronunciation Pedagogy Model offers specific techniques that may assist teachers in supporting learners to develop intelligible and fluent pronunciation skills, and the coaching principles represented by Kaufman's P.E.R.F.E.C.T model serve to guide this overall process (see Figure 2).

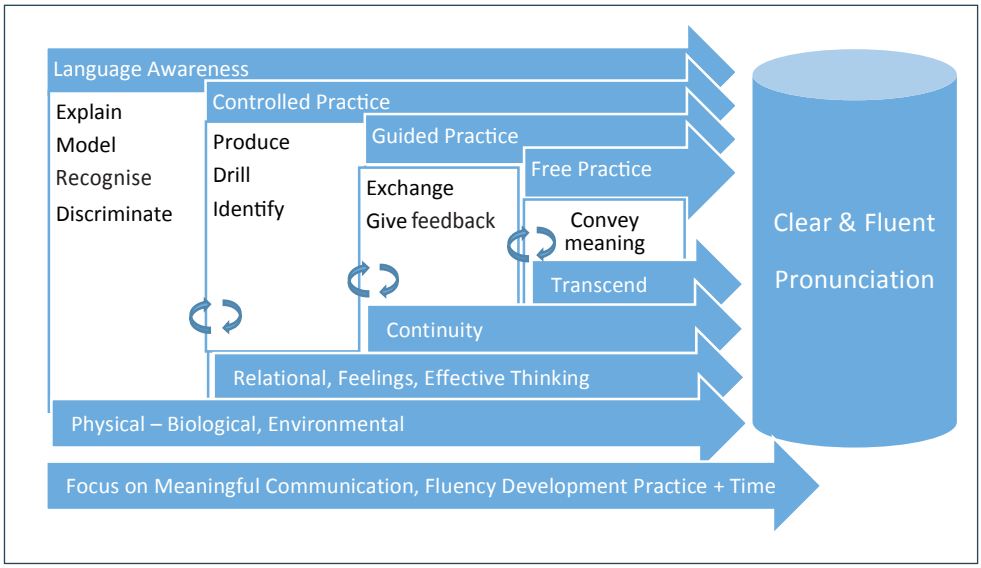

Figure 2. The Coaching Model to Clear and Fluent Pronunciation

During the initial stages of building Language Awareness, how the teacher explains or models phonological features is foundational to learners' pronunciation development. The Physical-Biological and Environmental dimensions of Kaufman's model appear to mesh well with this first pedagogical step. As part of this groundwork with pronunciation, the role of the teacher is to understand the biological-linguistic challenges experienced by the learner such as the impact of the first language on the second (Physical-Biological). For example, if teachers understand how a feature of English pronunciation is similar or dissimilar to pronunciation features in a learner's first language, this information can then be conveyed to learners and help them to better understand or recognise the feature when encountered in English. Language teachers may find it beneficial to refer to the work of Swan and Smith (2001) and Yates and Zielinski (2009) to develop a more comprehensive understanding of these cross-linguistic influences. Similar to the Physical-Biological dimension, the impersonal Environment such as institutional factors (e.g., curriculum, language policy and availability of teaching resources) and cultural factors can all have an impact on a learner's willingness and ability to modify their pronunciation or other aspects of their language. As a teacher, understanding these factors and raising students' awareness of them through openly discussing them in class may have a positive impact on students' willingness to modify their pronunciation later on. If students are reluctant to modify their pronunciation due to cultural issues, for example, they are unlikely to change, and thus asking them about their concerns (if they are willing to do so) and then discussing the benefits of making changes to their pronunciation (e.g., better employment) are key if any future enhancements of their pronunciation are to be achieved. Taken together, Physical-Biological followed by Environmental dimensions (as depicted in Figure 2) are critical components that never cease in importance throughout students' development of clear and fluent pronunciation.

With this foundational Language Awareness work accomplished, Controlled Practice may begin more effectively. Integrating the next three components of Kaufman's model, Relational, Feelings and Effective Thinking, can begin to take a stronger role in the pronunciation learning and teaching process at this point. Controlled Practice tends to be teacher-dominated with the teacher encouraging students to produce more and more language, making frequent recommendations on how to adjust their pronunciation. Teachers need to be particularly sensitive about the student perspective here. To support this process, Kaufman's third dimension, Relational, seems to fit well as it considers interpersonal factors that impede or enhance the client's, or in this case the learner's, experience. These include 'the obstacles and resources that exist in the realm of personal connection preferences, interpersonal

effectiveness, conflict management and of course, the coaching relationship and how we can use it to effect change – our Relationships' (Kaufman, 2010, p. 89). As discussed earlier, students need to develop relationships with instructors and classmates (Braine, 2002) to enhance their language learning experience. The better the rapport is between teachers and learners, the more likely that learners will be willing to adjust their pronunciation.

Effective Controlled Practice, similarly, may be enhanced by intertwining the fourth component of Kaufman's model, Feelings. This dimension focuses on emotions and emotional intelligence, and understanding what kind of emotional triggers a learner might experience. From the perspective of pronunciation-focused Controlled Practice, teachers need to develop an awareness of how individual learners may respond to teacher feedback on their pronunciation. Do they remain calm, get overwhelmed, feel embarrassed, get depressed, become anxious, or are eager to learn more? Kaufman advocates that the 'optional ratio of positive and negative comments is 3:1' (2010, p. 89). In ELT circles, we typically promote a 'sandwich' approach to feedback which falls in line with Kaufman's view. Saying something positive about the learner's pronunciation, followed by one critical comment, and then ending with another positive comment helps to ensure that, as Kaufman describes 'positive emotions broaden and build skills' (p. 93).

The fifth component, Effective Thinking, brings us to the cognitive domain, an area of significant interest in ELT circles over the past few decades. Effective Thinking may begin in the Controlled Practice stage, although, like the other components, progresses into the later stages of the model as well. This component focuses on the ways in which both teachers and learners think and how they process information, including 'ways we potentially distort information, cognitive styles and preferences' (Kaufman, 2010, p. 89). As part of Controlled Practice, teachers might encourage learners to observe in an objective manner how they view their own pronunciation and what beliefs they have about their pronunciation. This could also include encouraging learners to observe the thoughts they have about their accent, their use of segmentals and/or suprasegmentals or how important or unimportant, useful or even silly they consider these features of pronunciation. In essence, this builds on the work started in the Environmental dimension as discussed earlier in the Language Awareness stage.

Once the nitty gritty of pronunciation instruction has been done to some extent, the next step is to develop student autonomy. One way of accomplishing this is by encouraging students to take increasingly more control of their own learning of pronunciation and to push themselves to articulate their enhanced pronunciation with greater automaticity or fluency over longer stretches of speech. Through Guided

Practice, which has less direct oversight by the teachers, the learner has more responsibility in taking the knowledge and skills they learned through Language Awareness and Controlled Practice work and implementing it into their own speech of their own accord. Kaufman's sixth component, Continuity of Past-Present-Future, may be integral to the success of this process. This dimension relates to the connection between time and self-development. From the point of view of pronunciation teaching, the teacher's role might include reviewing with students what they have learned thus far about pronunciation in general or of a specific feature and what obstacles and successes they have experienced. It may also include discussions of how these past experiences influence their pronunciation learning process now, and whether they have a clear picture of their pronunciation goals for the future, namely the overarching goal of achieving clear and fluent pronunciation as opposed to native-like pronunciation. The purpose of this is to support students in helping them to reflect on their pronunciation-specific goals and keep these goals in mind as they carry out Guided Practice pronunciation work. Asking questions such as 'What are your pronunciation goals?', 'What have you been practising?' and 'How are you going to continue to practise this in the next task?' can assist in this process. Through this, learners need to take increasingly more ownership in modifying their pronunciation to achieve their future communicative goals.

Finally, Free Practice, although largely driven by the learner, may be better supported or coached through intertwining the seventh component of Kaufman's model: Transcendent. Transcendent refers to the 'Spirituality, deep values, meaning, purpose and humor [that] are often utilised in coaching' (Kaufman, 2010, p. 89). These dimensions are considered 'pathways to Transcendence' (p. 89). From a pronunciation teaching perspective, we may ask questions such as how can we help learners to move beyond any obstacles or factors that inhibit them from achieving clearer pronunciation while performing real-world tasks? For example, how can we decrease the impact of their ego on their pronunciation development? How can we use humour to encourage a learner to work past their anxieties about their pronunciation development? How does a learner's faith or spirituality impact their pronunciation development?

Conclusion

The Coaching Model to Clear and Fluent Pronunciation provides a coaching-oriented model to systematic pronunciation development for L2 learners of English. Underlying this model is the idea that part of the role of the pronunciation teacher is to support the learner in developing the variety of English they need to be successful in the target academic or work setting while at the same time ensuring that the

home or community-based variety of English used is simultaneously valued. Such a coaching-oriented model enables teachers to push aside the sentiment that 'She'll be right' and replace it with a commitment to supporting students to achieve their communicative goals.

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