

UTILIZING PRONUNCIATION LEARNING STRATEGIES DURING SHADOWING PRACTICE: A TASK-ORIENTED APPROACH

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Abstract: Research on pronunciation learning strategies (PLSs) has gained attention in recent years but still lags behind studies on other language learning strategies (LLSs). Despite its importance, systematic pronunciation practice often receives little classroom attention, leaving students responsible for improving their own pronunciation skills (Pawlak & Szyszka, 2018). While various strategies can help with overall improvement, it's essential to examine PLSs in relation to specific tasks (Pawlak & Szyszka, 2018; Szyszka, 2021). This study contributes to PLS research by analyzing strategies used during shadowing, a technique known to enhance L2 listening, speaking, and pronunciation. The research involved 43 second-year English majors from a Hungarian university who practiced shadowing for two weeks and kept diaries reflecting on their experiences and challenges. A qualitative analysis of their reflections revealed that tackling shadowing challenges led students to use various cognitive and metacognitive strategies for overcoming difficulties and improving performance. The findings suggest shadowing not only aids independent pronunciation improvement but also offers insights into students' use of advanced PLSs.

Keywords: pronunciation learning strategy, shadowing, pronunciation learning, task-based language teaching.

Introduction: In their 2005 article, Derwing and Munro highlighted the lack of focus on pronunciation within applied linguistics research and teacher education resources, stressing the importance of giving more attention to this area of teaching. Despite this, research indicates that specific aspects of pronunciation instruction, such as stress and intonation, are often overlooked, and the teaching approach tends to be unstructured (Couper, 2016). Limited classroom time also makes it challenging to implement systematic teaching (Pawlak & Szyszka, 2018), and some elements are particularly difficult for teachers (Burns, 2006; Darcy, Ewert, & Lidster, 2012; Foote, Holtby, & Derwing, 2011), many of whom lack confidence in their pronunciation knowledge¹(Couper, 2020; MacDonald, 2002). According to Szyszka (2017),

¹ Foote, J. A., & McDonough, K. (2017). Using shadowing with mobile technology to improve L2 pronunciation. *Journal of Second Language Pronunciation*, 3(1), 34–56.

intelligibility is not only a goal for students but also essential for non-native English teachers, who should serve as strong pronunciation models for learners. Therefore, she stresses the importance of introducing teacher trainees to pronunciation learning strategies they can apply in their own practice and pass on to future students. Given the significance of mastering pronunciation for future English teachers and the noticeable gap in pronunciation learning strategy research, this study focuses on a targeted task designed to help teacher trainees better understand their use of pronunciation strategies. At the University of Szeged, English teacher trainees study phonetics and phonology; however, their understanding of speech theory and pronunciation remains basic, with far less time dedicated to pronunciation compared to other language skills in general courses. Currently, students complete one semester of phonetics and phonology, providing a foundation for teaching pronunciation concepts, though it lacks sufficient time for hands-on practice that integrates pronunciation into teaching. This research highlights how reflective practice, through shadowing exercises, can be beneficial. Specifically, it employs a “paced auditory tracking task” (Lambert, 1992, p. 266), requiring students to immediately vocalize auditory stimuli, which helps achieve key pronunciation teaching goals for future educators. The primary goal is to focus students’ attention on specific pronunciation and speech elements emphasized in academic literature for English teachers. The second goal is to offer opportunities for students to evaluate their progress in pronunciation skills. Finally, this study aims to deepen understanding of the pronunciation strategies used by students, encouraging them not only to reflect on these methods but also to apply them creatively while sharing their experiences and insights. According to Seargeant (2016), since most English speakers around the world begin learning the language through some form of formal education, the ELT (English Language Teaching) profession plays a crucial role in shaping how learners are introduced to the language (p. 20). Nevertheless, in practice, pronunciation instruction often receives little attention in the classroom. Research suggests this may be because teachers struggle to teach it systematically or focus on specific elements of pronunciation for various reasons (Burns, 2006; Darcy et al., 2012; Foote et al., 2011; Levis, Sonsaat, Link, & Barriuso, 2016). In an in-depth interview with eight Australian ESL teachers, MacDonald (2002) identified four key reasons why pronunciation is not systematically taught: the absence of formal curricula, the challenge of evaluating students’ pronunciation progress, uncertainty about the teacher’s role in the process, and the difficulty of incorporating pronunciation into communicative teaching methods, alongside a lack of appropriate teaching materials.

Couper’s (2020) research found that both native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) acknowledged gaps in their knowledge of phonetics and phonology, as well as a lack of instructional expertise. Additionally, NNESTs often reported low confidence in their pronunciation

skills. Besides these issues, insufficient time and limited resources also hinder pronunciation instruction. Consequently, teachers who feel unprepared to address these challenges might either neglect pronunciation teaching altogether or fail to approach it systematically.

To address these challenges, MacDonald (2002) highlights the importance of giving greater emphasis to pronunciation in educational curricula. This involves redefining the teacher's role in pronunciation instruction, monitoring speech, providing feedback, and enhancing the teacher's ability to incorporate pronunciation into activities designed for teaching other skills. This is particularly relevant for non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), who are often underrepresented in pronunciation-focused research, with a few exceptions (e.g., Buss, 2016; Couper, 2016, 2020). Research suggests that NNESTs can be just as effective in teaching pronunciation as native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) ²(Levis et al., 2016), highlighting the importance of their knowledge rather than their linguistic background (Aslan & Thompson, 2017). Gordon (2020) argues that it is essential to examine NNESTs' foundational knowledge of pronunciation instruction and how this influences their classroom practices. The significance of these findings, according to Gordon, lies in understanding teachers' cognitive processes in pronunciation instruction. This could be beneficial in teacher training programs, along with theoretical instruction in phonetics, phonology, and second language (L2) speech development. Teacher education programs play a vital role in raising awareness of the importance of pronunciation teaching. Such programs should also offer trainees both theoretical knowledge and methodological tools to help them consciously address pronunciation-related issues during their future teaching practice.

Improving pronunciation skills often falls outside the classroom, becoming a task for learners to handle during their own time. Pawlak and Szyszka (2018) suggest that, more than any other language skill, mastering pronunciation demands learner autonomy. Whether the objective is perfect pronunciation or simply being understood, individual learning involves setting achievable goals, selecting suitable learning methods, regularly monitoring progress, and conducting valid self-assessments (p. 294).

Engaging in self-assessment allows language learners to take control of their learning journey (De Saint Léger, 2009), develop greater awareness of their speaking abilities (Castaneda & Rodríguez-González, 2011), and potentially refine their pronunciation skills (Lappin-Fortin & Rye, 2014). Dłaska and Krekeler (2008) further argue that self-assessment can heighten learners' awareness of their performance, boost

² Buss, L. (2016). Beliefs and practices of Brazilian EFL teachers regarding pronunciation. *Language Teaching Research*, 20, 619–637.

motivation, and shift decision-making power toward the learner, while advanced learners might find it easier to evaluate their pronunciation, self-assessment can be challenging for most learners. The same study revealed that even highly proficient L2 learners struggled with identifying inaccuracies in their pronunciation. Foote (2010) also found that both self-assessment and external evaluations of students' accents produced similar outcomes. Improving pronunciation skills often falls outside the classroom, becoming a task for learners to handle during their own time. Pawlak and Szyszka (2018) suggest that, more than any other language skill, mastering pronunciation demands learner autonomy. Whether the objective is perfect pronunciation or simply being understood, individual learning involves setting achievable goals, selecting suitable learning methods, regularly monitoring progress, and conducting valid self-assessments (p. 294). Engaging in self-assessment allows language learners to take control of their learning journey (De Saint Léger, 2009), develop greater awareness of their speaking abilities (Castaneda & Rodríguez-González, 2011), and potentially refine their pronunciation skills (Lappin-Fortin & Rye, 2014). Dłaska and Krekeler (2008) further argue that self-assessment can heighten learners' awareness of their performance, boost motivation, and shift decision-making power toward the learner.

However, while advanced learners might find it easier to evaluate their pronunciation, self-assessment can be challenging for most learners. The same study revealed that even highly proficient L2 learners struggled with identifying inaccuracies in their pronunciation. Foote (2010) also found that there was a mismatch between learners' self-assessments and external evaluations of their recorded speech. As a result, both studies highlight the need to guide students' focus and offer training. Dłaska and Krekeler (2008) argue that it is likely unhelpful to let students rely solely on self-assessment, especially if they tend to judge many correct sounds as incorrect.

Conclusion: The shadowing diaries provided valuable insights into aspects of the shadowing process that might not be visible in a classroom setting. While some students had not yet fully grasped phonetic and phonological concepts, the diaries showed that others became more aware of pronunciation-related elements like stress patterns, intonation, and specific issues tied to certain vowels and consonants. Students also became more conscious of their pronunciation challenges and explored ways to improve. For some, shadowing led to deeper reflections on the nature of imitating speech and whether adopting a specific accent was an achievable goal. When it came to strategies, students primarily used cognitive strategies and, to a lesser extent, metacognitive strategies, including some memory and compensation tactics. This aligns with earlier research, as the nature of the task demands repetition, reading aloud, practicing pronunciation and intonation, and careful planning. The variety of tactics required for the task gave participants practical experience, preparing them for future

independent practice. Applying these strategies also helped students transfer their skills to other areas of pronunciation learning and enhanced their understanding of relevant theoretical concepts.

Lastly, consciously reflecting on their strategies and tactics could benefit students' future teaching practices, encouraging them to prioritize pronunciation improvement. The analysis revealed that information from the diaries was sometimes unclear or incomplete, potentially leading to gaps in the learning process. However, deeper reflections through interviews could help students gain broader perspectives on their experiences, refining their approaches for future practice.

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