

Intelligible Pronunciation: Towards an Approach Focused on Classroom Instruction

Pronúncia Inteligível: Em Busca de uma Metodologia Centrada na Sala de Aula

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ABSTRACT: It is an accepted fact in the fields of Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition that most people who learn a second language after puberty do not acquire a native-like accent, showing non-native patterns in their pronunciation (DERWING, 2003; GASS and SELINKER, 2008; BROWN, 2007). As a result, in the past few decades scholars have argued for the implementation of more realistic goals for pronunciation and speaking instruction, such as intelligibility and comprehensibility, in the ESL/EFL fields. However, despite the numerous studies discouraging the pursuit of native-like accents and promoting more realistic goals, the number of students who desire to sound like native speakers is still overwhelming (DERWING, 2003; DERWING; MUNRO, 2005; JENKINS, 2005; LEVIS, 2005; WATERS, 2007). Moreover, it is clear that several schools and language institutes, among other educational institutions, value native speakers over

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non-native professionals. Another very current manifestation in the field is the constant promotion of programs that strive for accent reduction and of pronunciation materials that promise native-like pronunciation (LEVIS, 2005; MUNRO; DERWIN; SATO, 2006). The lack of empirical research and of materials that are applied to teachers' and students' needs in the classroom is also a major problem encountered in current pronunciation instruction (DERWING; MUNRO, 2005). Lastly, non-native accents generate social evaluations, which are usually negative. Accordingly, in this work, in order to better understand this debate, I briefly review the history of pronunciation instruction, focusing on the issues of intelligibility, comprehensibility, and identity, and analyze the societal evaluations underlying the complex and social phenomenon of pronunciation. Furthermore, I propose directions I believe could be taken in attempt to improve the present situation for pronunciation teaching and beliefs about native-like/non-native accents.

KEY WORDS: pronunciation instruction; intelligibility; accent; identity; discrimination.

RESUMO: É um fato aceito em Linguística Aplicada e Aquisição de Segunda Língua que a maioria das pessoas que aprendem uma segunda língua depois da puberdade não adquirem um sotaque nativo, apresentando padrões não nativos em suas pronúncias (DERWING, 2003; GASS; SELINKER, 2008; BROWN, 2007). Consequentemente, nas últimas décadas estudiosos têm proposto a implementação de objetivos mais realistas para o ensino de pronúncia e conversação, tais como inteligibilidade e compreensibilidade nas áreas de inglês como segunda língua e língua estrangeira. Entretanto, apesar dos vários estudos desencorajando a busca de sotaques nativos e

promovendo objetivos mais realistas, o número de alunos que desejam soar como falantes nativos ainda é exorbitante (DERWING, 2003; DERWING; MUNRO, 2005; JENKINS, 2005; LEVIS, 2005; WATERS, 2007). Além disso, está claro que várias escolas e institutos de línguas, entre outras instituições educacionais, dão mais valor a falantes nativos do que não nativos. Outra manifestação recente nessa área é a promoção constante de programas que se empenham em redução de sotaque e de materiais de pronúncia que prometem pronúncia nativa (LEVIS, 2005; MUNRO, DERWIN; SATO, 2006). A falta de pesquisa empírica e de materiais que sejam aplicados às necessidades de professores e alunos nas salas de aula é outro sério problema encontrado em ensino atuais de pronúncia (DERWING; MUNRO, 2005). Finalmente, sotaques não-nativos geram avaliações sociais, que geralmente são negativas. Portanto, para melhor entender esse debate, no presente trabalho brevemente reviso a história de ensino de pronúncia, focando nos pontos de inteligibilidade, compreensibilidade, e identidade, e analiso as avaliações sociais subjacentes ao fenômeno complexo e social que é a pronúncia. Ademais, proponho direções que acredito que devem ser tomadas na tentativa de melhorar a presente situação do ensino de pronúncia e crenças sobre sotaques nativos e não-nativos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: ensino de pronúncia; inteligibilidade; sotaque; identidade; discriminação.

1 Introduction

“It is well established that foreign accents are a normal consequence of second language learning” (DERWING; MUNRO, 2005, p. 383). It is also an accepted fact

among scholars that most people who learn a second language after puberty do not acquire a native-like accent, showing non-native patterns in their pronunciation (DERWING, 2003; DERWING; MUNRO, 2005; MUNRO; DERWING, 2006; JENKINS, 2005; BROWN, 2007). Consequently, in the past few decades numerous scholars have argued for the implementation of more realistic goals for pronunciation and speaking instruction in the ESL/EFL¹ fields. Scholars have advocated that intelligibility and comprehensibility should be the goals pursued by teachers and students (MURPHY, 1991; GOODWIN, 2001; DERWING, 2003; DERWING; MUNRO, 2005; JENKINS, 2005; MUNRO; DERWING, 2006; LEVIS, 2005; BROWN, 2007; KENNEDY; TROFIMOVICH, 2008).

However, the reality of pronunciation instruction is not quite so simple and still presents drawbacks. Despite the numerous studies discouraging the pursuit of native-like accents and promoting more realistic goals, the number of students who desire to sound like native speakers is still overwhelming (DERWING, 2003; DERWING; MUNRO, 2005; JENKINS, 2005; LEVIS, 2005; WATERS, 2007). Moreover, it is clear that schools and language institutes, among other educational institutions, value native speakers over non-native professionals. In fact, requirements for ESL teachers or even tutors often read: native or native-like speakers only (GOLOMBEK; JORDAN, 2005). Additionally, a very current manifestation in the field is the constant promotion of programs that strive for accent reduction and of pronunciation materials that promise native-like pronunciation (LEVIS, 2005; MUNRO, DERWIN; SATO, 2006). The lack of empirical research and of materials that are applied to teachers' and students' needs in the classroom is also another major problem encountered in current pronunciation

¹ The term ESL is used throughout the paper and includes the terms ESL and EFL interchangeably.

instruction (DERWING; MUNRO, 2005). Lastly, non-native accents generate social evaluations, which are usually negative. These negative evaluations often turn into serious discriminations non-native speakers encounter, adding to the debate in the studies of pronunciation.

The widely acknowledged notion that it is acceptable and even expected for non-native speakers to have an accent in their second/foreign language leads us to question the reasons and consequences for the still pursued and somewhat over valued native-like accents. In order to better understand this debate, in the present work I briefly review the history of pronunciation instruction, focusing on the issues of intelligibility, comprehensibility, and identity, and analyze the societal evaluations underlying the complex and social phenomenon that is pronunciation. Furthermore, I will cite and propose directions I believe could be taken in attempt to improve the present situation for pronunciation teaching and beliefs about native-like/non-native accents.

2 The history of pronunciation teaching

Before analyzing the changes that have occurred in the instruction of pronunciation, it is imperative that we understand the overall transformations the ESL field has undergone in the past decades. According to Morley (1991, p. 482), “The first observation that must be made in any reflection on the ESL profession today is one that recognizes at the outset its extensive growth and development - in size, in diversity, in complexity of learner clientele and of professional substance”. Morley made this statement over 15 years ago, and the ESL profession has continuously grown and developed since then. The estimated number of people who use English for communication purposes daily around the world surpasses 1 billion. More important to

our field is the fact that only about 300 million of them are native speakers (MORLEY, 1991). Still according to Morley, this astounding number of English non-native speakers and the “turn of events” have brought about significant instruction changes in the ESL field, such as the focus on specific students’ needs and “the design of more effective instructional programs” (482). The teaching of pronunciation has, therefore, followed the development in the field and changed its paradigms especially in the past 25 years (MORLEY, 1991; LEVIS, 2005). Before discussing the new directions of pronunciation teaching, however, it is important to understand its development.

After World War II, two major approaches that focused on the oral-aural skills were developed in the US and in Great Britain: the *audiolingualism* and the *oral-situational approach* (CELCE-MURCIA 2001). These approaches were heavily based on structural linguistics and psychology and “elevated pronunciation to a pinnacle of importance” (LEVIS, 2005, p. 369). According to Morley (1991), throughout the decades that followed the war, 1940’s, 1950’s, and 1960’s, both systems highly prioritized precise pronunciation with drills, extensive repetition and correction focusing mainly on phonemes, allophones, and phonetics rules. As Brown (2007, p. 339) argues, “the pronunciation component of a course or a program was a mainstay”. Furthermore, another prevailing goal of these approaches was the “nativeness principal”. According to Levis (2005, p. 370), “The nativeness principle holds that it is both possible and desirable to achieve native-like pronunciation in a foreign language”.

In the 1970’s, however, the role of pronunciation teaching in the classroom changed radically as did the language teaching profession. The foci of classroom instruction shifted from being highly based on grammar and pronunciation accuracy to “nondirective let-it-just-happen approaches”

(BROWN, 2007, p. 339). In other words, little or no attention was given to students' pronunciation, and its teaching was relegated to minor positions in certain programs and dropped completely from others (MORLEY, 1991; BROWN, 2007).

Yet, although these were the pronunciation principles generally held in the course of study in the 1970's, not all scholars agreed with them. Morley (1991) argues that a group of professionals began to develop new theories on pronunciation and advocate for different emphasis in the classroom instruction. For instance, research was conducted on issues related to phonetics versus phonemics, intonation, and contextualizing practice in the classroom.

It was in the 1980's that pronunciation started to be viewed as vital to the thorough achievement of communicative competence (BROWN, 2007). Pronunciation teaching was continuously revisited in this decade and in the 1990's, and the number of works published in these generations was overwhelmingly higher than in the 1970's (MORLEY, 1991). Examples of new perspectives investigated by these movements were pronunciation developments in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), a re-evaluation of how pronunciation stood in language teaching and "a call for a broader focus on pronunciation within the context of discourse in both second language acquisition (SLA) research and ESL teaching" (MORLEY, 1991, p. 487).

The research carried out in the past decades has served as the foundation to current approaches to pronunciation. First, the most crucial change in the pronunciation field was the discredit of the nativeness principle as research has shown that native-like pronunciation is "biologically conditioned to occur before adulthood" (LEVIS, 2005, p. 370). Several studies have been conducted on the relationship between the acquisition of second language pronunciation and age with robust findings showing

that children under the ages of 12 or 13 (or puberty) stand a great chance of speaking like native speakers, while people who learn the language after this critical age period almost always maintain a foreign accent (GASS; SELINKER, 2008). This discovery has deeply influenced the course of adult pronunciation teaching, leading current approaches to prioritize more realistic goals for pronunciation instruction.

Furthermore, the shift to a broader communicative approach in language teaching brought about significant changes in pronunciation instruction. Pronunciation is now “seen not only as part of the system for expressing referential meaning, but also as an important part of the interactional dynamics of the communication process” (PENNINGTON; RICHARDS, 1986, p. 208). As a result, scholars have advocated pronunciation top-down approaches, replacing the focus on segmentals (phonemes) to suprasegmentals (stress, intonation, rhythm) (PENNINGTON; RICHARDS, 1986; MURPHY, 1991; GOODWIN, 2001; DERWING; ROSSITER, 2002; LEVIS, 2005). These new perspectives are based on the intelligibility principal, which “holds that learners simply need to be understandable” (LEVIS, 2005, p. 370). According to this principal, accents, even strong ones, do not necessarily impair communication given that no evident relationship has been found between accents and listener understanding (LEVIS, 2005). The ultimate goal for pronunciation teaching “should therefore be more realistically focused on clear, comprehensible pronunciation” (BROWN, 2007, p. 340).

Nonetheless, as aforementioned, although the current developments on teaching pronunciation are remarkable, the so called “nativeness” is still desired by students and encouraged by certain programs focused on accent reduction and by pronunciation materials that aim for native-like pronunciation. Moreover, Zielinski (2006, p. 22) points out that “findings of previous studies

investigating the relationship between speech production and intelligibility in speakers of English as a Second Language (ESL) are far from conclusive”. Likewise, Derwing and Munro (2005) observed that the research on intelligibility is often not empirical and not applied to classroom instruction issues, widening the gap between research and what is actually practiced in the field. Therefore, another setback encountered currently in the field of pronunciation teaching is the lack of resources for classroom instruction based on research (LEVIS, 2005). According to Derwing and Murno (2005), this lack of applied research has accounted for intuition to be the primary source teachers rely on to address pronunciation in their classrooms.

As we can see, there is a controversy between the progress that has been made in applied linguistic research on pronunciation teaching and the reality of the matter in classroom instruction as well as regarding students’ perceptions. This controversy in pronunciation instruction, the principle of intelligibility (which is closely related to the notions of comprehensibility and accentedness), identity, and discrimination issues are analyzed in more details in the next sections.

3 Intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness

It is clear that our goal as ESL teachers should be to promote communication in the classroom and, with respect to pronunciation, help prepare our students to communicate in a clear and intelligible manner so that they can be understood by a wide range of interlocutors. At the same time, in Kennedy and Trofimovich’s words: “attaining this goal does not necessarily require that students become native-like in an L2. Students whose L2 production is not entirely native-like but who are able to communicate effectively are clearly successful L2 users” (2008, p. 460).

However, the extent to which L2 users' discourses are considered intelligible does not depend entirely on the speakers' performance, but also on the listeners' comprehension. This complex aspect of foreign accents has an impact on the social interaction of how speakers and listeners perceive and produce language (DERWING; MUNRO, 2005). Based on this interaction between speakers and listeners, Derwing and Munro (2005, p. 385) defined the terms intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness as follows:

- (a) the extent to which the speaker's intended utterance is actually understood by a listener (intelligibility),
- (b) the listener's perception of the degree of difficulty encountered when trying to understand an utterance (comprehensibility),
- and (c) how much an L2 accent differs from the variety of English commonly spoken in the community (accentedness).

The full understanding of these terms is of extreme importance for teachers to identify and prioritize the students' needs in the classroom. In other words, second language learners often present several pronunciation problems and teachers most likely do not have enough time to assess all of these issues, what makes the recognition of these problems essential (MUNRO; DERWING, 2006). Munro and Derwing also stress that pronunciation instruction should concentrate on intelligibility and comprehensibility and not on accentedness as research has shown that even heavy accented speeches can be fully understood (intelligible) and easy to understand (comprehensible). Again, the nature of accent is not considered as impairment to communication, and the pursuit of native-like accents can cause students to feel discouraged. As Munro and Derwing (2006, p. 384) put it, "though all learners should be encouraged to reach their full potential, which may well exceed the minimum required for basic intelligibility, it may do more harm than good for teachers to lead learners to believe that they

will eventually achieve native pronunciation”. Accordingly, students should be encouraged to spend time and energy on achievable and realistic goals, such as intelligibility and comprehensibility.

4 Identity, social discrimination, and students’ perceptions

The main dilemma with the promotion of intelligible/comprehensible pronunciation does not rely on the principles of these concepts, which have been accepted as “the paramount concerns for second language learners” (DERWING; MUNRO, 2005, p. 380), but on the difficulty of breaking stereotypes and beliefs that have for long been held in our societies. Hence, two other major issues in the current perspectives of pronunciation instruction are the L2 speakers’ identity and the social discrimination towards their foreign accent.

Levis (2005) argues that identity might influence L2 speakers’ accents as much as biological factors, being a fundamental evidence of social belonging. According to the Levis (2005, p. 374), “speakers speak the way they do because of the social groups they belong to or desire to belong to”. This important desire or perhaps necessity to fit in is shown in the study of Gatbonton, Trofimovich, and Magid (2005) on the influence of ethnic group affiliation on learners’ accents. They argue that inaccurate pronunciation tends to represent pressures from home communities, and that speakers negotiate their identities on a daily basis depending on with which group they interact. “For example, black Dominican American teenagers manipulate their speech to emphasize their blackness in one instance and their Latin origins in another, thereby expressing the identity that fetches the better social rewards from their

interlocutors” (BAILEY, 2000², *apud* GATBONTON, TROFIMOVICH; MAGID, 2005, p. 491).

With regard to pronunciation teaching, Goodwin (2001) posits that L2 speakers’ accents acknowledge their L1 identities and should not be eradicated; as a matter of fact, foreign accents show the individuals’ background and add uniqueness to their discourse. Yet, this desire to belong or at times to exclude contributes to the complexity of identity issues and is intertwined to social discriminations (LEVIS, 2005).

On the one hand, the acceptance of one’s identity and accent are desirable goals scholars have advocated for pronunciation instruction and should by all means be taken into consideration by teachers, students, and members of our society. On the other hand, however, accents elicit a variety of responses from the general public, including “social evaluation and even discrimination” (MUNRO, DERWING; SATO, 2006, p. 67).

According to Gatbonton, Trofimovich and Magid (2005, p. 491), “accent (the most “visible” aspect of pronunciation) has been documented to elicit various stereotypical judgments of socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, gender, and personality”. Further, several studies have shown the alarming notions that students are judged as incompetent, incapable, and not intelligent because of their foreign accents. Goodwin (2001) reported these feelings of discrimination from an undergraduate student in an ESL pronunciation course: “I feel that I am judged by my way of talking English. In other classes, teachers often treat me as inferior or academic disability because of my muttering English” (117).

In their study with two MA TESOL students from Taiwan conducted in Pennsylvania, United States, Golombek

² BAILEY, B. Language and negotiation of ethnic/racial identity among Dominican Americans. *Language in Society*, v. 29, 555-582, 2000.

and Jordan (2005, p. 524) reported parts of the participants' interviews in which one of them claimed she felt discriminated against because of her accent:

"I don't want to be thought as stupid or clumsy because of the way I pronounce English... I always, I always think of myself as very smart, but I sometimes I feel frustrated because I look stupid here, just because I can't speak fluently or or speak with those, mm preferred pronunciation... sometimes people are just impatient"

These cases of intolerance reported by ESL students depict classic accent bias patterns identified by Derwing (2003). She claims that accented speeches provoke attitudes in people and that most individuals hold biases with regard to accents. Additionally, she points out that "the further the accent is from their own, the more likely they [people] are to experience a negative reaction to it" (DERWING, 2003, p. 548-9). In her study conducted with 100 ESL immigrant students in Alberta, Canada, she reported that several learners felt they had been treated with disrespect, rudeness, impatience, mockery, and even anger due to their foreign accents. Following are examples of some of the participants' responses: "People ignore me if I ask for directions"; "A clerk swore at me in a store; strangers are rude to me"; "They don't listen as carefully to people who have an accent"; "When I work for a company my colleagues don't understand. They joke. I feel bad very often"; "A doctor got mad at me; it hurt me" (DERWING, 2003, p. 557).

As an ESL student living in the US for the past three years, I have personally experienced these sentiments of discrimination and not belonging. I do not recall having a conversation with a single person in this country who has not asked me where I come from or where "my accent is from". Of course, in words reminiscent of Goodwin's, my accent plays an important part of whom I am, my identity, and there should be

no reasons for embarrassment in having people notice it. However, when you are simply trying to communicate or have your ideas heard, it is very disturbing to see others paying more attention to your non-native like accent than to the message you are trying to convey. Thus even when accented words are perfectly understood by the interlocutors, they still notice and comment on them; that is, even if there is no communication breakdown, accents still have a great impact on the listeners' attitudes.

Moreover, according to Munro, Derwing, and Sato (2006, p. 68), discrimination problems seem to also be recurrent in classroom practices provided that "even people who are generally accepting of diversity, including teachers, may subconsciously hold prejudicial reactions to certain types of accented speech, perhaps because they have not critically examined their own susceptibility to media influences". Additionally, they point to specialists in TESOL who have claimed that students should strive for native-like pronunciation, free of distracting non-native patterns. Munro, Derwing & Sato (2006, p. 70) also point out that there are several pronunciation reduction programs/materials in the market and that this elevation of native-like pronunciation has led to "the common practice of hiring only native speakers as teachers of English as a Foreign Language or ESL, even where there are trained non-native teachers available who have extremely high proficiency in English and who may be more sensitive to the difficulties of L2 students".

With all these negative social evaluations, discriminations, and pervasive prejudice against non-native accents, it is more than expected that the great majority of L2 speakers want to sound like native speakers. Derwing (2003) argues that due to these negative attitudes, "one would also expect these same learners to seek out pedagogical opportunities

to eliminate their accents as a response to social pressure” (549). In her study, among the 100 students who participated, 95% said they would like to have a native like accent. Interestingly, when asked if having a native-like accent would jeopardize their identities, the students responded that their identities were related to their L1 and would, therefore, be kept intact even if they acquired the so desired native-like accent. Such a statement shows that the wish to belong to L2 cultures and acquire native-like pronunciation might be stronger than the speakers’ concern with their own identities. As a result, pronunciation reduction programs appeal to this desire people have to achieve native-like accents and to “fit in”, adding to the social stigma that having an accent is bad or wrong and contributing to the perpetuation of the native myth (551). This creates a vicious cycle of discrimination that, according to Derwing (2003), will not be resolved until the attitudes of the general public, and of some teachers, are deeply changed and people start to become willing to listen to non-native accents.

5 Recommendations for pronunciation instruction

Along with the aforementioned social problems related to foreign accents, pronunciation instruction also struggles with the lack of empirical research and appropriate material in the field, leaving teachers to rely on their intuitions and beliefs, which have been shown to be biased. Derwing and Munro (2005) assert that the work carried out on pronunciation is not practical to classroom instruction and “rarely cited or interpreted in teacher-oriented publications” (382). Moreover, the authors sustain that researchers and material designers have not provided pronunciation teachers with enough directions to address the most suitable issues in the classroom given the wide range of pronunciation problems L2 learners face. “In fact,

teachers show a great deal of confusion about what is possible and what is desirable in pronunciation instruction, despite some quite definitive research findings on this topic” (2005, p. 384). Accordingly, research has shown that most ESL teachers lack formal training to teach pronunciation, which brings about serious consequences to classroom instruction, such as students not receiving any instruction or being “directed to focus on the most salient characteristics of their accents, regardless of their influence on intelligibility” (DERWING; MUNRO, 2005, p. 389).

In order to address these shortcomings in pronunciation instruction and help determine pedagogical priorities, Derwing and Munro (2005) have proposed a series of directions that need to be taken in the field. First, more research should be conducted on intelligibility, the role of suprasegmentals and segmentals, and priorities for pronunciation teaching. Moreover, it is imperative that this research be more empirical and pertinent to the classroom instruction, being incorporated into teacher training materials and student texts. Furthermore, teachers need to have opportunities to learn about pronunciation pedagogy, and this instruction needs to be based on robust research findings that address specific students’ problems. In other words, “teacher trainers need to help instructors develop the skills to critically evaluate materials and curriculum on the basis of empirical research” (DERWING; MUNRO, 2005, p. 391).

With respect to accent discrimination, Munro, Derwing, and Sato (2006, p. 73) have suggested that “teachers should be exposed to consciousness-raising activities to help them determine whether they hold covert negative attitudes towards accented speech”. They argue that such activities would also clarify the processes of how stereotyped attitudes are constructed. Additionally, Derwing (2003) has addressed the importance of listeners’ awareness to non-native accents and

called for research that determines the correlation between native speakers' comprehension of non-native speeches through exposure to different accents. Finally, in a comprehensive study on students' perceptions of their own accents, Derwing (2003) advocated for the awareness of ESL students about their pronunciation. According to the author, "An understanding of the interrelationship of language, accent, and social factors may help learners to be more realistic in their goals" (562). When learners hold flawed beliefs about second language learning, it is crucial that instructors do not encourage such misconceptions but prove them false. Therefore, teachers should educate students on the nature of the learning process and pronunciation by promoting readings on accent and social issues in the classroom.

With regard to Applied Linguistics and TESOL master's programs, we believe – based on the studies mentioned in this work – that some of the above suggestions could be implemented into the richly diverse curricula they hold. For instance, echoing Derwing and Munro's works, instruction on pronunciation pedagogy would be of great value for graduate students in the field. Furthermore, it is imperative that graduate programs, as part of the academic community, strive for the eradication of prejudice against non-native accents. It is our right and duty as members of the TESOL field to advocate not only for more realistic goals in pronunciation instruction but for tolerance and acceptance of foreign accents. We can begin to do our part in changing these negative social evaluations, for example, by proposing changes in the policies concerning non-native teachers of several English language institutes at universities throughout the United States and other English speaking countries. It is well established that the great majority of these typically independent educational institutions (they are often not under the regulations of the universities' English departments) do not hire non-native

instructors, contributing to the social discrimination about accents. These policies portray the same discriminations previously reviewed in this study and go against the statement issued by the national TESOL organization in October 1991, which condemned “as discriminatory the employment of English language teachers on the sole basis of their being or not being native speakers of English” (TESOL, 1991³, *apud* CLARK; PARON, 2007, p. 408).

6 Final Considerations

The progress of pronunciation instruction is evident and of extreme importance for the Applied Linguistics and TESOL field. After being overemphasized with the pursuit of unrealistic goals such as native-like accents in the decades following World War II and relegated to minor roles in classroom instruction in the 1970's, the teaching of pronunciation has come to a position of more equilibrium and achievable goals that strive for communication. Research in the area has been more productive than ever and sensible principles of intelligibility and comprehensibility have been advocated, focusing on top-down approaches of suprasegmentals over segmental aspects only.

Like every movement that seeks for breakthrough changes, however, the field of pronunciation instruction still encounters problems and needs to be continuously developed and expanded. First, the studies conducted in the area tend to be to a certain extent distant to classroom realities and need thus to be more empirical and related to students' and teachers' needs. Second, instructors need to be exposed to pronunciation pedagogy grounded in consistent research findings.

³ TESOL, 1991. A TESOL Statement on Nonnative Speakers of English and Hiring Practices. *TESOL Matters*, p. 23. August/September 1991.

Furthermore, these research findings and the principles they hold must be applied to materials on pronunciation instruction, which are still heavily based on segmental aspects of language and on the promotion of native-like pronunciation. Finally, the issues of identity and the social discrimination non-native speakers encounter due to their accents pose a particular sensitive dilemma for the field, especially for non-native TESOL professionals, and need to be addressed.

It has been shown that non-native students who are discriminated against because of their accents will most likely desire to pursue a non-achievable native-like pronunciation, which fuels the market for materials that promise native-like accents and programs that reject non-native speakers as teachers. This vicious cycle not only causes students to feel disheartened when they are not able to sound like native speakers but also creates a complex discriminatory situation to non-native professionals who have specialized training in the field and are just as capable as native speakers. Measures that bring about awareness about this problem must be taken so that teachers, students, and the general public understand the complexities of accents and pronunciation instruction, contributing to the fight against discrimination.

Although changing intricate societal beliefs is noticeably challenging and enduring, we must not conform and accept discrimination when we have the chance to change them and to contribute to our field of study and to our society. Only when the issues encountered in the reality of pronunciation teaching are addressed, will we be able to focus on classroom instruction that is truly focused on intelligible pronunciation.

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