

FACILITATING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE  
FOR ADULT NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS

by

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Eliza Doolittle in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* and later in Lerner and Lowe's *My Fair Lady* is an interesting phenomenon for language teachers especially those interested in pronunciation. Eliza became the ultimate success for Professor Higgins because within three months he was able to take a Londoner who spoke cockney and pass her off as a high society duchess by changing her speech. In the play Eliza's cockney dialect told us where Eliza was born, what her social status was, and how educated she was. In other words her speech gave her identity. In the play Eliza was aware that her speech was not high society; however, Eliza's motivation for changing her speech was not revealed nor was Eliza's attitude toward the language or the high society of London.

Eliza's transformation fascinated me many years ago when our senior class had to read *Pygmalion* in high school. The change in Eliza's speech also hit a cord close to home. In the 1950's there were two major cliques in our high school: the city kids and the farmer kids. The farmer kids were usually the Bohunks whose ancestors came from Czechoslovakia. Those kids spoke oddly sometimes saying things like *Nor Dakoda* instead of *North Dakota*, lived on farms in the Veseli and Lonsdale area, and presumably never went to college. I was one of the farmer kids; however, I wanted to go to college. I couldn't change where I was born and I didn't want to. But I could change how I said my words. That was my goal and my motivation: raise my awareness of what words I was pronouncing differently and then make a conscious effort time after time to

pronounce those words like the college-bound kids. Unlike Eliza my goal and motivation were clear: learn to pronounce the words that would make me sound like the college-bound kids. My attitude toward the college-bound students and their speech was also clear: Becoming part of the college-bound community was important and positive for me.

Later as an adult I encountered other experiences that made me keenly aware of pronunciation. One was when I taught English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the Czech Republic. In that country requests of any kind were acknowledged more readily if made in the native language with just the right trill of the /r/ and the correct configuration of the mouth to produce multiple consonants as in *ctvrtek* meaning *Thursday*. Three months after I arrived in the Czech Republic I wanted to move into a larger room at the teachers' house. I asked one of my Czech students how to pronounce the language I needed to make the request. I practiced the precise language for three days before I got up the courage to ask the manager of the teachers' house if he would allow me to move into the larger room. I recall how gratifying it was to hear the manager grant the permission and comment on my pronunciation of the Czech words. As in my high school experience with pronunciation, my goal and motivation were clear; for both Eliza and me, learning the pronunciation of the needed language provided an access for us.

Another experience in the Czech Republic reinforced the need for good pronunciation. The price of all tickets for concerts, museums, and other events was on a two-tier system: a price for the natives and a price for the foreigners. The inequity of that system gave me the incentive to learn to pronounce three words--*two tickets, please*--well enough to pay the ticket price that the native Czechs paid. Again I became aware of what language I needed and I learned how to pronounce that language.

Reflecting on Eliza Doolittle and my experiences throughout different times of my life made me cognizant of how powerful speech is. It made me realize that how we say things gives us an identity and allows us access to some of the things we want. Certainly the goal that Professor Higgins set for Eliza was daunting; my goals in high school and in the Czech Republic were much more realistic and attainable. Those goals had instrumental motivation -- instrumental because at the time my motivation for learning the second language (L2) was self-oriented and utilitarian (Schuman, 1975). The need to acquire the L2 was short-term; however, the short-term need was a basis for further learning of the L2. In *My Fair Lady* Professor Higgins drilled Eliza on changing the /a/ to /ai/ (The rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain.); in high school I added the final consonants (North Dakota); in Prague I exercised my mouth to produce multiple consonants and I trilled the /r/. I detected a pattern of improving pronunciation emerge from the situations I related. If one became aware of particular pronunciation problems and learned skills and strategies to change those problems, some improvement in pronunciation could be achieved. I saw raising awareness of pronunciation problems and teaching the skills to change those problems as the key that could possibly make the non-native speakers (NNS) in my English language learner (ELL) class intelligibly competent. This, in turn, could improve the status of the non-native English-speaking students in the community and in the workplace. It was the challenge I undertook in this research and study.

The ELL class that I teach and used for my study is part of an Adult Basic Education (ABE) program much like is found in many communities. Classes are held five days a week for four hours a day. Open enrollment allows students to enter the class

at anytime. The adult education setting has adult learners with differing needs and diverse cultural backgrounds, a broad span of age, a disparity in education, and a varying length of time in this country. In this heterogeneous setting learners are focused and bring a great deal of life experience with them. They are in the ELL class by their own volition, often juggling English classes, a second or third shift working schedule, and family issues to further their language proficiency. The learners believe that becoming more effective communicators will improve their chances of obtaining better-paying jobs and/or job advancement (Belfiore & Burnaby, 1995). Regularly students relate incidents of a native-English speaker (NS) having difficulty understanding them. The anecdotes tell of their child's teacher misunderstanding them; of a receptionist growing impatient in a doctor's clinic as explanations are attempted; of a supervisor shouting at a NNS in an assembly line because a problem can not be explained intelligibly; of an NNS employee being moved from the cashier position to the kitchen because of customer complaints about comprehensibility. In the classroom students frequently indicate that they do not understand one another. Even my 'English language instructor ear' has difficulty comprehending my students. The ESL (English as a Second Language) students are an intermediate/advanced level class. They have an English vocabulary and a grasp of English grammar that allows for reasonable communication. Why, then, are these students experiencing so many difficulties when communicating with native-English speakers?

The accounts of frustration and fear of speaking to NS that my ESL learners depicted and observations in class indicate that a strong pronunciation component is needed in my life skills ELL class--a component that goes beyond what the program

curriculum includes. Yet I struggle with adhering to the program objectives of teaching life skills and work readiness and helping students attain their number one education goal of improving pronunciation. With the requirements of teaching the language skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing it is difficult to know how much emphasis to place on specific pronunciation instruction and whether the instruction will effect a perceptible change. My personal experience as a language learner and my professional experience as a language instructor guided me in devising a plan for helping my students become communicatively competent. Therefore the purpose of this study is to determine whether raising the awareness of the most predominant pronunciation problems of the learners in my class and teaching them the skills to self-monitor and adjust their pronunciation can make my students communicatively competent and to determine whether this can be done within a multi-skills curriculum. In this project I define communicatively competent as having the skills to produce and self-monitor the features of the English language well enough for others to understand them.

Acquiring the ability to communicate effectively is a complex process. NNSs have great hurdles to overcome in that communication process. English language instructors need to examine many facets of pronunciation and teach students the skills and strategies that will improve the intelligibility of the NNS. The following chapters examine pronunciation from many perspectives. Chapter two reviews and discusses the research and literature related to the issues surrounding teaching pronunciation effectively to adult non-native English speakers. The next chapter reports on the methodology I employed during a 12-week study that I undertook with a group of NNS students. Chapter four reviews the results of the 12-week study and shows how the study

impacted the students. Finally in chapter five some conclusions are drawn and recommendations are made.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of the Research and Related Literature

#### Introduction

Generally, pronunciation is perceived as the articulation of sounds. In Second Language Acquisition (SLA), pronunciation goes beyond the sounds of syllables and words. It encompasses the sounds of a language as well as rhythm and intonation, what Gilbert (2001) refers to as “the music of English” (p.8). Marques (1997) refers to pronunciation as how words are spoken in context. It includes the articulation of individual sounds of a language and how these sounds are connected, accented, and varied in pitch. In an effort to understand the realm of pronunciation instruction and how best to help NNSs become intelligibly competent speakers of English, a review of research and related literature was conducted. In chapter two the research and literature review addresses the following issues as pertaining to pronunciation instruction:

- Insight into the adult learner
- Factors that influence the pronunciation acquisition process
- Importance of pronunciation instruction
- Effectiveness of pronunciation instruction

#### Insight into the Adult Learner

Several issues are considered when addressing the problem of helping NNSs become intelligibly competent. The first issue is the importance of having an insight into the adult learner. Advocates of effective pronunciation instruction believe that English language instructors need to understand what adult learners are like and what they need and want in a learning situation. This understanding is important because of its

implication on pronunciation instruction. First, adults are used to making their own decisions. Bello (1996) indicates that adults spend their lives making decisions and know themselves better than anyone. They need to put the maturity of decision-making to use in the language classroom. Brod (1995) describes adults as learning best and remaining in programs longest when they participate in establishing their own educational goals. Adults who come to English language classrooms have a sense of direction and a focused set of goals often wanting to take charge of their own learning (Hilles, 1991); therefore, instructors need to involve adult learners in setting realistic goals and objectives for their pronunciation improvement, thus, investing themselves in their own learning.

Another aspect that impacts pronunciation instruction is that adults are very busy. Researchers agree that attending school is a luxury and a personal sacrifice for adult learners (Tanaka, Dennis, & Gaer 2001; Hilles, 1991). Many of these learners are voluntary learners with families and young children, struggling to survive in a culture very different from their own (Gabb, 2000). The desire to learn is almost always inconvenient and often is interrupted by the demands of family and job responsibilities. In the light of these obligations Tanaka, Dennis, & Gaer (2001) stress always welcoming students back no matter how long they have been absent. In addition, the researchers articulate the necessity of engaging adult students in their own learning and involving them in meaningful activities that are relevant to their lives, enriching the language learning experience, and making pronunciation an expedient way to spend their time.

A third aspect that affects the adult learner is the importance of creating an environment that feels safe and comfortable. Morgan (1995-1996) states that kindling a strong sense of community in the classroom is a way of developing this secure and

agreeable learning haven. The researcher also believes that adult NNSs experience feelings of insecurity and viewing them as valued and respected assets and contributors to society enables the language learners to more readily experiment with the language and move toward the goal of improving pronunciation. Avery and Ehrlich (1992) agree with Morgan (1995-1996) and argue for the necessity of building confidence in the learners—a feature that is possible to foster in a safe learning environment and gives learners the impetus to express themselves in conversation. These researchers observed two different cycles present in pronunciation instruction classrooms. One is a cycle of nervousness. Students get nervous in discourse with a NS; they fear that people will not understand; the muscles of articulation (tongue, lips, mouth) do not respond appropriately; the NS does not understand the NNS; the NNS gets more nervous and more insecure: proficient communication is impeded. In a safe pronunciation environment students are taught to put themselves into a positive cycle. Learners speak slowly; the NNS feels confident; the NS understands the NNS; articulation muscles relax; the NNS sounds confident: proficient communication is enhanced.

Schuman (1975) concurs that a learning situation be characterized by warmth and acceptance. The researcher found that students who experience anxiety in class are not as proficient as those who relax. His findings reveal that anxiety depresses achievement if students feel threatened. In addition Schuman (1975) emphasizes the necessity for language instructors to communicate empathy for the learners. In other words, instructors need to have a deep understanding and acceptance of the learners' inadequacies, anxieties, and insecurities. Within this kind of environment NNS flourish

and take their confidence in their pronunciation beyond the classroom into the workplace and the English-speaking community.

#### Factors that influence the pronunciation acquisition process

As indicated, researchers acknowledge the importance of language instructors having an understanding of what adult NNS need and want in a learning situation to enhance pronunciation improvement. Of equal importance is that language instructors have an awareness of the factors that impact pronunciation teaching. Researchers have identified several factors that influence the pronunciation acquisition process of the adult learner: age; learner's first language and culture; learner's attitude toward the target language, people, and culture; learner's sense of identity; and learner's motivation.

Age. Researchers believe that age influences pronunciation acquisition in both a positive and a negative way. Florez (1998) states that adult NNSs are beyond the age of producing native-like pronunciation, thus making age a negative prevalence because adults have a difficult time distinguishing between sounds. This difficulty prevents adult NNSs from ever losing their accents completely and from ever reaching native-like pronunciation; however, Florez (1998) reiterates that having adult learners set realistic and attainable pronunciation goals and having them bring the experience of language into the classroom offset this limitation. The experience and awareness of language that adult learners possess and bring to the classroom are a great resource and aid the pronunciation process (Bolitho, 1998).

Schuman (1975), Eskenazi (1999), and Brown & Nation (1997) also analyzed age as a factor in the pronunciation acquisition process. The analyses disclose that the age of the adult learners is a deterrent to the process. Schuman (1975) speaks to the lose of

flexibility of some brain functions after the completion of puberty. Even though not all linguists agree, Schuman believes that many of the difficulties that adult language learners encounter are the result of some kind of neurological maturation. Eskenazi (1999) reports that very young learners produce new sounds easily, whereas in older and adult learners the ease of producing and perceiving new sounds decreases. The findings of Brown & Nation's (1997) research are aligned with other research: teaching and correcting pronunciation of learners who are past the age of puberty is a difficult task. Schuman (1975) and Eskenazi (1999) add that their findings give evidence that adult learners need to feel self-confidence in order to produce new sounds, thus minimizing the age limitation. Learners who are ill at ease have a higher risk of performing poorly and abandoning the language learning completely.

Role of the native language. In addition to the age factor, a learner's first language plays an influencing role in pronunciation according to researchers and linguists. Many times the mother-tongue transfer is positive and facilitates the learning for the NNS, especially if a particular feature is common in the native language or appears to be similar (Wong & Esling, 1983). Florez (1998), on the other hand, believes that the native language creates a negative transfer, interfering in the pronunciation of a learner by causing problems in segmental features (the inventory of vowel and consonant sounds) and in suprasegmental features (those which transcend the level of sound production) such as intonation and the rhythm of the English language. Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin (2000) hold the premises of both Wong & Esling (1983) and Florez (1989) that the second language (L2) filters through the learner's first language (L1)

facilitating acquisition when the target pronunciation features are similar and interfering with acquisition when the features are dissimilar or non-existent.

The role of the native language in pronunciation acquisition has been the focus of a growing body of research and related literature. Derwing & Munroe's (1997) research focuses on accents of NNS and the link accents have to intelligibility and comprehensibility. Even though their study confirms that the L1 of the NNS is a significant factor affecting pronunciation accuracy, other factors such as NS's familiarity with the NNS's language and correct grammar play a more significant part. Celce-Murcia & Goodwin's (1991) writings about the role of the native language point out that the L1 of an adult learner is more pervasive in pronunciation than in other areas of language learning; therefore, knowing something about the sound system of the languages the learners speak is an aid for language instructors in order to anticipate pronunciation problems, understand the source of errors, and guide learners toward intelligible pronunciation. An investigation by Brown & Nation (1997) shows that being knowledgeable about the difficulties that Asian language speakers experience in pronouncing the sounds of /l/ and /r/ as well as the initial and final consonant clusters would be beneficial in addressing the needs of that language group.

Gilbert (2002) also investigated the role of the native language as it influences pronunciation. The linguist examined the sound systems of other languages, as Celce-Murcia & Goodwin (1991) suggested, to understand and anticipate pronunciation problems. One problem the NNSs have, particularly at the beginning level, is the inability to sound out the English letters of the alphabet. This is because the sounds are not part of the learner's mental inventory of language sounds, making it impossible for

the learners to produce the sounds. A second problem caused by the interference of the L1 is final consonants. Gilbert (2002) finds that many languages do not allow final consonant sounds or allow a very limited number. This is troublesome when the grammar depends on the presence of a final consonant, but causes significant intelligibility problems when final consonants or consonant clusters are eliminated in English pronunciation. Another problem that affects pronunciation, according to Gilbert (2002), is choppy speech. The L1 of some NNSs separates words with silence. If the NNS learned English through print, the choppy speech is exacerbated by the 'white space' between words. Gilbert (2002) considers a final problem in the investigation of L1 interference. English language learners often add or subtract syllables depending on the rules of their L1. An L1, which does not allow consonant clusters, causes learners to add a vowel to break up the cluster (for example: gifuto shopu [gift shop]). Alternately, learners drop syllables completely (for example: gahment [government]). Intelligibility is undermined whether learners add syllables or delete them.

In other related literature Dixo-Leiff & Pow (2002) and Hill & Beel (1980) examined the impact of the L1 from the perspective of the written language. For the NNS the English spelling system fails to correlate accurately the sounds they hear and have to produce with the letters they see on paper. The boundaries between spoken words when compared to those between written words tend to be obscured. In most English speech, words form a continuous stream of sound with relatively few pauses. Learners, whose L1 is more phonetic, relies on the more familiar pattern of their L1 to convert letters into speech signals. According to Dixo-Leiff & Pow (2002) when NNS

start learning English, exposure to the written form precedes speaking. Students are influenced by the visual written language. As a result pronunciation is affected.

Learner's attitude and sense of identity.

In English language programs language instructors have no control over such factors as the age of the learners and the speech patterns of the first language that affect the L2. Instructors also have little control over the learner's attitude toward the target language, the people, and the American culture or over the learner's sense of identity. A number of studies were conducted which examined learners' attitude and sense of identity and evaluated whether these two factors enhanced or hindered the acquisition of intelligible pronunciation. Some researchers saw the factors as pulling learners in different directions. According to Bolitho (1998) learners have an emotional and intellectual relationship with the target language as well as their own making it difficult to find a satisfactory balance between the two. The balance is necessary for acquisition to be enhanced. Marques (1977) comes to the same conclusion: learners need to seek acculturation by which they adopt the new culture while maintaining the identity of the old one. Remaining tightly enclosed in the native culture, socializing exclusively with people from the group, and speaking the native language at home and in the communities limits the NNS's ability to gain in English fluency and intelligible proficiency. Florez (1998) states that learners who unconsciously cling to the identity of the L1 while seeking acceptance by the new culture sometimes internalize inaccurate pronunciation that they hear around them. This, then, develops habitual and fossilized pronunciation that is particularly resistant to change.

Other researchers also identified the factors of attitude and identity as having a great impact on pronunciation and examined the factors to gain insight. Gabb (2000) describes language as the communicative skin of the adult learner. It cannot be ripped away and replaced without some transformation. Kallenbach (2000) agrees that language is an integral ingredient in the learner's sense of self, anchoring the NNS in a new world. The L1 is a comfortable haven for NNSs; it is a part of the NNS's native land; they carry it in their hearts and mind. Both linguists communicate two realities:

- A. Native language is an inherent quality of our learners because it gives them an identity.
- B. Language instructors need to understand the dilemma of the learners as they work through the acculturation process.

Miller (2000) concurs that speech is closely tied to feelings of identity. Often learners who are uncomfortable trying out new speech rhythms and patterns equate their discomfort with a negative portrayal of themselves. They are, then, less likely to adopt the new language.

Schuman (1975) analyzed the impact of attitude on pronunciation several years earlier. The analysis discloses that NNSs often feel rejected by the speakers of the target language. This rejection transfers to the language creating a negative attitude which in turn raises a barrier to acquisition. Learners who have returning to their country in the back of their mind sabotage the commitment to the American culture, which is necessary for successful acquisition of English. The analysis further reveals that homesickness plays a part in the attitude factor. The NNS spends so much energy on foods, holidays, and amusement of the home country that there is little left to expend on acquiring the

language. Often times coping mechanisms and problem-solving strategies that the learners had in their own country do not get the expected results in this country. Routine activities such as finding an affordable place to live, buying food, and getting a driver's license require a great deal more energy producing fear, anxiety, and depression.

Schuman (1975) also analyzed the attitude of the learner's community as an influencing factor on pronunciation. Because of the added responsibility a learner needs to take to improve pronunciation, the researcher found that if the learner's community positively values the target language, the acquisition of intelligible pronunciation will be enhanced. On the other hand, if the learner's community views the target language negatively or conveys the idea that the language is impractical or undesirable, the acquisition is inhibited.

#### Motivation.

Improving pronunciation, most often, involves change for the NNS. The reasons for changing or not changing speech patterns are complicated by many factors including age, the learner's first language, their sense of identity, and their motivation (Miller, 2000). These factors are beyond the control of the language instructor and in the case of age and first language also beyond the control of the learner. Motivation and concern for good pronunciation, however, can be controlled by the learner and greatly influences the potential change in speech. The change is directly affected by how much responsibility the learner takes in the acquisition process, how much the learner practices outside of the classroom, and how ready the learner is to expend time and energy (Miller, 2000). If the learner's motivation to improve is strong and if the investment of time and effort is genuine, there will be perceived improvement (Celce-Murcia & Goodwin, 1991).

All researchers that were reviewed recognized that motivation is a key factor in whether adult learners make strides in improving pronunciation (Marques, 1997). The motivation stems from the various reasons learners have for improving. Brod (1995) listed several of these reasons:

- Learners simply want to improve themselves.
- Learners have a desire to be effective in United States society.
- Learners need to speak to their children's teachers in an intelligible way.
- Learners hope to improve their employability.
- Learners want to function better with everyday language such as shopping and conversing on the telephone.

Lukmani (1972) and Schuman (1975) categorize the reasons learners give as motivating them to acquire intelligible pronunciation of a new language as integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation is described as one in which the learners want to identify with or become part of the new culture or society. Learners are interested in meeting and communicating with valued members of the target culture and community. Both researchers indicate that integrative motivation usually results in greater success. It seems to be more powerful and more likely to sustain a long-term effort of language learning. Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, is more directed and is a matter of immediate concern. The learner has little interest in the people who speak the target language but want to acquire acceptable pronunciation for specific, functional, and utilitarian reasons. Lukmani (1972) gives getting a good or better job and using English as a means to career advancement as the number one motivational factor. Pronunciation

proficiency comes from a need to use English and as a tool to cope with everyday language demands, not as a "means of entry into a culture" (p. 271).

### Importance of Pronunciation Instruction

Insight into the adult learner and the factors that influence pronunciation of adult NNSs are variables that sometimes enhance and sometimes impede the acquisition of reasonable pronunciation in English (Celce-Murcia & Goodwin, 1991). Of equal significance is the amount of importance and value placed on pronunciation in the English language curriculum. MacDonald, Yule, & Powers (1994) state that the development of L2 pronunciation is a primary goal of many learners. Subsequently, instructors need to give high priority to pronunciation because poor pronunciation is a prevalent barrier to good communication with NSs. Even if syntax, the grammar of the language, and vocabulary are completely correct, effective communication cannot take place without reasonable pronunciation. Poor segmental articulation and poor suprasegmental production distract the listener and impede comprehensibility of the message (Eskenazi, 1999). Morley (1999) adds that NNSs who have severe intelligibility problems find themselves "at risk educationally, occupationally, professionally, and socially" (p.2). The researcher continues to say that NNSs who do not have comfortable intelligibility avoid speaking with NSs and deprive themselves of the learning and practice effects of such interaction. Therefore, instructors, who have a genuine concern about students' pronunciation problems, in particular, their poor speech intelligibility and inarticulate speaking skills, need to incorporate a strong pronunciation component in the English language curriculum (Morley, 1994).

The writings of Morley (1994) and Gabb (2000) examine the importance of pronunciation instruction from other adult learner perspectives. Many NNSs reveal in Morley's (1994) study that they have not picked up pronunciation on their own. Neither have they developed into confident oral communicators, nor have they been given help in developing learning strategies. According to Gabb (2000) many learners have minimal formal language instruction. They learn pronunciation in the streets, from friends, and with a dictionary. The NNSs capture and internalize a phrase here and there and develop a fossilized pronunciation that is resistant to change and prevents students from being understood. Accents develop that follow the patterns of L1 pronunciation. Even though accents are a unique and valued feature of an individual's speech, often times the accents interfere with communication (Marques, 1997). Thus, pronunciation instruction needs to be a force that addresses the pronunciation needs of the adult learners.

Further research and literature indicate that limited pronunciation skills are detrimental to adult learners. Self-confidence is damaged, social interaction is often limited, and a negative light is shed on the abilities and intelligence of the speaker (Florez, 1998). Non-Native speakers are judged to lack credibility and their speech does not stimulate confidence in the NNS's knowledge or in the person. Negative judgments about personality are the result (Morley, 1994). Moreover, this value judgment makes an assumption about the social status that commonly carries with it a stereotype (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994). Often job advancement, promotion, and salary increases are affected by poor evaluation based on verbal communication. Morgan (1995-1996) concurs that these negative side effects of poor and/or limited pronunciation skills impair opportunity for the NNSs. Additionally, students are often judged within unfamiliar discourses when

they look for employment, access government services, or talk to their children's teachers (Morgan 1995-1996). Therefore, language instructors need to teach language that can suggest what might be possible for the learners and the learners, in turn, can use language to change where their language ability and pronunciation has placed them. Language instructors need to teach the pronunciation skills that will give NNSs the ability to speak English intelligibly, to understand English, and to interact within the American culture. This can give learners access to a growing number of jobs that are dependent on strong communication and interpersonal skills (Gillespie, 1996).

#### Effectiveness of Pronunciation Instruction

Research literature and related literature cites the importance of pronunciation instruction. Likewise it gives significant evidence that multiple strategies need to be employed and some basic components need to be implemented to raise the effectiveness of pronunciation instruction.

In a study conducted by MacDonald, Yule, & Power (1994) the researchers found that no one kind of intervention fixes or eliminates the pronunciation problems for all learners. Instructors have to draw from many resources to effect a change. Pennington & Richard (1986) caution instructors about making claims that pronunciation instruction is effective because their findings do not clearly indicate that the positive effects, which can be achieved in a classroom setting over a relatively short period of time, will carry over to other situations or persist over time. Nevertheless, the researchers acknowledge that the acquisition of intelligible pronunciation is a viable possibility if it involves teaching both segmental and suprasegmental features and includes the teaching of cognitive processes such as speech awareness of pronunciation problems, self-monitoring, and self-

correction (Morley, 1994). These two components are required in pronunciation if improvement is to be realized.

#### Goal setting.

Morley (1999) and other researchers add another necessary component to the area of effective pronunciation instruction: realistic goal setting for learners. The primary focus of instruction according to Morley (1999) shifts from the perfect and near-native pronunciation goals of past pronunciation training to helping students achieve improved intelligibility. Miller (2000) also emphasizes intelligible speech and effective communication as a primary goal for learners. These are attainable and reasonable expectations for students and instructors alike. For the student this is functional intelligibility developed as clear spoken English, which is easy to understand and is not distracting to listeners. Eliminating a noticeable accent, which is a sign of a learner's L1 and culture, is not a realistic goal for adults according to Miller (2000) nor can it be the intent of pronunciation instruction. For the instructor, helping learners set realistic goals provides a focus and helps optimize the context and condition for learning intelligible pronunciation (Grant, 1999).

#### Metacognitive strategies.

The process of learning the pronunciation of an L2 is one of the most difficult aspects of language acquisition. It is additionally challenging to facilitate the transfer of pronunciation accuracy into everyday communication (Grant, 1999). Teaching metacognitive strategies to adult NNSs makes the acquisition and transfer more plausible. Experts in the field (Acton, 1984; Yule & Hoffman, 1987; Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994; Miller, 2000) agree that clear, intelligible pronunciation is not a natural sequel of learning

to read and write English nor is it something learners pick up by exposure. Learners' attention needs to be drawn to what has to be changed before any change can be effected. Berkowitz (2002), Wennerstrom (2002), and Acton (1984) found that analysis of problematic sounds and language features is a prerequisite and a highly effective tool to pronunciation improvement: being aware of a problem, being able to analyze it, and determining how to correct it. Building awareness and raising consciousness are the first and crucial steps toward the goal of intelligible communication.

Bolitho (1998) addresses the language awareness issue from a broader perspective. The researcher recognizes that adult learners understand the power and usefulness of language. This understanding is a resource that affects all aspects of language acquisition and pronunciation in particular. Having learners talk about the complexity and diversity of English and their emotional relationship with the language combines both cognitive and affective dimensions and helps most learners toward communicative competence (Bolitho, 2002; Morley, 1999).

Several researchers identify self-monitoring and self-correction as essential metacognitive strategies that will enable learners to enhance intelligibility beyond the classroom. Yule & Hoffman (1987) define self-monitoring as a learner's ability to recognize when communication with an interlocutor has broken down and an identification of the problem is made. To learn this self-monitoring strategy, Marques (1997) recommends that learners produce the target sounds, the stress patterns, and rhythm on tapes after instruction. They should, then, listen to themselves, try to hear how their speech differs from the target, and attempt to produce intelligible speech. In addition, Marquis (1997) advocates that students keep dialogue audiotapes and language

logs as part of the self-monitoring process. The tapes allow students more opportunity to express themselves and adjust their speech as needed. This self-monitoring encourages learners to take more responsibility for their own speech production and correct the speech errors that interfere with listener comprehension (Marques, 1997).

Berkowitz (2002), Brown & Nation (1997), and Morley (1999) further explored metacognitive strategies that aid effective pronunciation instruction. As does Marquis (1997), Berkowitz (2002) promotes the use of audiotapes by students and documenting in personal pronunciation journals what they hear themselves say and what they hear others say. This allows learners to actively notice the differences between their speech and that of native speakers. Then applying error correction will help learners become autonomous learners. Brown & Nation (1997) encourage learners to observe how native speakers form their mouths or place their tongues, for example when pronouncing /sh/ as in *shoes* or /th/ as in *then*. Giving learners guidance in what to look for when observing people using English does not actually teach the correct pronunciation forms, but it makes the learner more aware of the English language sounds (Brown & Nation, 1997). Morley (1999) emphasizes setting the metacognitive strategies within a communicative framework. In that way the learners' individual communicative needs are served and real-life communicative interaction is incorporated.

#### Pronunciation features.

A variety of strategies incorporating both segmental and suprasegmental features of English are recommended by researchers to effect a change in pronunciation. Morley (1999) and Marques (1997) suggest first identifying the learners' pronunciation problem areas in terms of level of speech intelligibility. By differentiating between those areas

that are most distracting and most likely to interfere with intelligibility and those that are least distracting, problem areas can be prioritized (Morley, 1999).

Several researchers cite a variety of pronunciation features that they deem important to effective pronunciation instruction. Crawford (2002) sees syllable stress as a highly productive aspect of pronunciation particularly when working with students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The researcher further highlights instruction of sentence stress and reduced words in order to teach students the distinction between 'content' and 'function' words. Dauer (2002) also places importance on stress of syllables and sentences. His findings reveal that a small improvement in pausing and linking words together in chunks can lead to a great improvement in intelligibility. A common error of the NNS is speaking too quickly and not pausing in the right places. The researcher recommends teaching the NNS to pause in the appropriate places because pausing gives the listener time to process and reprocess speech, thus aiding intelligibility. In addition, pausing at the end of phrases and clauses results in fewer final consonants being dropped since there is time to pronounce them.

Another contemporary linguist (Chan, 2001) notably believes that suprasegmental pronunciation features such as stress, rhythm, and linking words aids comprehensibility. It follows that if the NNS's perception of stressed and unstressed syllables is weak, the learners will have difficulty producing the rhythm of words and phrases with the correct stress. Teaching NNSs to produce the appropriate stress and emphasizing its importance will, then, help to improve intelligibility, particularly for fluent speakers whose stress and rhythm patterns are ingrown or fossilized and in need of dramatic change.

Because a sense of rhythm is a universal human trait, all cultures and languages have a rhythmic foundation. That perspective of rhythm is Wennerstrom's (1999) and Marques' (1997) approach to effective pronunciation instruction. The researchers maintain that in English the stressed syllables of content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) follow a regular rhythmic beat and identify the important information of a sentence. This rhythm can be difficult for English language learners from language backgrounds in which every syllable carries a rhythmic beat. Therefore explicit instruction in syllable and word stress is necessary to effect improved intelligibility.

A few of the researchers reviewed place some importance on the segmental features of pronunciation in reference to intelligibility. None of them, however, see teaching individual sounds in isolation as an expedient use of time. Gierut (1988) simply states that a speaker's knowledge of producing specific segmentals is a factor that influences intelligibility. Marques (1997) views consonants as the most troublesome intelligibility problem, yet one that is relatively easy to correct. Morley (1999) analyzes vowel and consonant problems along with problems of prosody, stressing that explicit attention needs to be given to both. Gilbert (1993) sides with Morley (1999). Both researchers give equal importance to segmentals and suprasegmental features of pronunciation. Gilbert (1993) recommends first teaching rhythm which includes the number of syllables and syllable length; then teaching stress and linking; finally teaching difficult consonant groups especially those in word final position. Zerna (2002) compares one aspect of the English language with Spanish and provides a rationale for teaching specific consonant sounds especially to Spanish speakers. The researcher points out that English speech uses more consonants than Spanish speech. Since most Spanish

words end with vowels, it feels right for those language learners to leave out the consonants at the end of many English words. Therefore to improve intelligibility instructors need to look at pronunciation holistically.

#### Modes of teaching.

A strategy that many researchers recommend for learners is to be physically involved in the pronunciation process. Florez (1998) encourage instructors to have learners touch their throats to feel the vibrations of the sound production. This will help learners comprehend pronunciation kinesthetically and auditorily. Learners need to learn how it feels to talk English because often the NNSs are not able to distinguish audibly between two vowel sounds, but can remember the physical way it feels to produce them (Acton, 1984). A kinesthetic correction focuses on how the sound feels and not on how it ought to sound, a particularly effective strategy for changing fossilized pronunciation (Acton, 1984). According to Eskenazi (1999) it is believed that learners have to physically experience the articulation of the sound and be able to produce it before they can hear it as a separate, significant sound. The idea is to get students to feel when the articulators are in place correctly. By relating what the learners hear to what they feel their muscles doing, they can train their ears to recognize the new sounds as distinct entities.

The auditory and kinesthetic components of effective pronunciation are enhanced by a visual association (Esling & Wong, 1983; Brown & Nation, 1997; Florez, 1998; Miller, 2002; Zerna, 2002). Florez (1998) and Gilbert (2001) recommend the use of mirrors to see the placement of the tongue and lips and the shape of the mouth. The researchers also see the value of stretching rubber bands to give the sense of elongating

vowels and stressing words in a sentence. Both segmental and suprasegmental problems can be addressed in this way. Miller (2000) and Brown & Nation (1997) approach learning a new way of speaking as being similar to training new muscles. The muscles have to be exercised repeatedly until the motor skill becomes automatic. Seeing it visually helps make the automation happen. Miller (2000) further recommends the use of body movement, such as tapping and clapping to help students internalize the rhythm of English. Esling & Wong (1983) report that even a slight change in the articulators can effect a change in pronunciation. Spreading the lips as in a slight smile and opening the mouth more produced vowel and consonant sounds that are more readily understood by English-speaking listeners. Zerna (2002) relates to instructors who have Spanish speakers in their classes by encouraging students to use the tongue to touch the teeth, the lips, and the top of the mouth, really feeling the consonants especially at the ends of words.

Improving the intelligibility of most learners through effective pronunciation instruction is a great challenge for instructors. Motivation is rarely a problem among adult learners, but convincing the learner that a significant change is possible is often more difficult and more complex (Acton, 1984). An effective instructor will place the success of the lesson on the learners, helping them develop their abilities and exploit their strengths while recognizing all of the influencing factors that impact L2 pronunciation. Morley (1994, 1999) is an advocate of individualizing instruction in an attempt to eliminate distracting speech elements. Within the larger syllabus for the whole class individual goals can be customized to meet the personal needs of each student and to guide the learner in a unique development of effective communication.

### Summary

The review of research and related literature indicates that the acquisition of intelligible pronunciation is influenced by several issues: insights into the adult learner, factors that affect the pronunciation of the adult learner, the importance of pronunciation, and the components of effective pronunciation instruction. These issues are examined and provide background information that will help instructors plan for pronunciation instruction. The issues also lay the foundation for the methodology that is implemented in Chapter three. However, certain aspects of the issues were found to be significant in helping to shape the 12-week study that was conducted. One was setting realistic goals that could be attained with the 12-week time frame. The attainment of a goal, albeit small, raises the self-confidence of learners and raises the likelihood of continued pronunciation improvement. Another aspect that was found to be significant was the influence of the L1. Pointing out the differences between the L1 and the English language provides learners with a rationale for helping them improve pronunciation. The most significant aspect in helping to shape the study was teaching metacognitive strategies. Learners become aware of problem areas, learn how to identify their problems, and acquire skills to correct the problems.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

#### Introduction

The literature reviewed in Chapter Two affirms the uniqueness of the adult non-native English learner and reveals the variables that impact the pronunciation acquisition process. Facilitating communicative competence for adult non-native English learners is a challenging undertaking particularly in an adult life skills English language program. Several reasons account for this: one is that several different languages are spoken in the classroom of learners; a second is that students tend to have sporadic attendance; a third is that the individual communication needs of the students vary; a fourth is that all language skills need to be taught. To accomplish communicative competence for the adult NNS, instruction needs to be goal oriented and methodical. It needs to provide learners with skills to help give them control over their own lives. Research suggests that adult NNSs can acquire intelligible pronunciation.

To reach this end, an action research study was conducted in an adult English language program. The intent of the study is to determine whether raising the awareness of the most predominant pronunciation problems of the learners and teaching them the skills to self-monitor and adjust their pronunciation could make the adult NNSs communicatively competent. This chapter describes a study which recognizes the necessity of understanding the adult learner, acknowledges the factors that influence the pronunciation acquisition process, realizes the importance of pronunciation instruction, and implements multiple strategies to raise the effectiveness of pronunciation.

## Rationale

In the last two decades pronunciation gained importance in adult English language curriculum. Renewed interest is the result of more and more adult English language learners (ELLs) needing better communication skills in a diverse workplace and community. Adult non-native English learners are coming to adult English language classes to improve their communication skills. They realize that they need to have intelligible pronunciation to become communicatively competent raising their chances of finding a better job, getting a job promotion or advancement, scoring better in a verbal job evaluation conducted by a native English-speaking supervisor, and being regarded more highly by the community (Morley, 1998). Researchers have found that this can be attained by giving pronunciation a cognitive, communicative, and functional focus, by involving learners in setting realistic goals, and by making them aware of the factors that may influence their pronunciation learning (Morley, 1991).

Before embarking on this action research project, the pronunciation component of my language instruction was insignificant. The integrated-skills curriculum that was being used in the program devoted approximately fifteen minutes to pronunciation in each unit. This brief amount of time yielded very little perceptible improvement in intelligibility; neither did the repetition and drill of words with specific initial consonant sounds or vowel sounds. The words lacked a context and were often unfamiliar to the learners. The frustrations voiced by the students continued: Others had difficulty understanding what they were saying. The problem of unintelligibility needed to be confronted. The process of an action research project lent itself well to addressing the

problem in my classroom. As the instructor of adult NNSs, I had identified a problem and proceeded to devise strategies to alleviate the problem.

### Setting

The action research study to investigate the many facets of helping adult NNSs become communicatively competent was set in an ABE English language program that is part of an educational institution located in a southern county of the 7-county metropolitan area. Its focus is to integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing using a life skills and work-related curriculum. The program has an open enrollment policy; new students are registered, assessed, and integrated into the classrooms as they arrive at the school. Instruction within the program strives to help learners participate more fully in their communities, their families, and their workplace. Classes in this program are held for four hours each day Monday through Friday. Specific pronunciation for the study was taught three days a week, usually Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, for one and a half hours each of those days. The length of the study was 12 weeks.

### Subjects

The subjects for the study were a class of 18 adult ELLs ranging in age from 19 to 58. The class was comprised of ten women and eight men from several different countries: Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Mexico, Peru, El Salvador, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Kyrgyzstan. They were assessed at the intermediate and advance level of English proficiency with the CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System) test. The CASAS test is the language proficiency assessment tool used by many Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs throughout the state of Minnesota. The class included CASAS scores from 215 to 256. Most of the students fell into the 220 to 230

range. Only one student scored at the 256 level. That placed the students in a reading grade level of four to twelve. Information from the CASAS administration manual indicates that students with a score of 215 can follow oral directions in familiar contexts. They have limited ability to understand telephone discourse. In the workplace these adult learners can handle jobs that involve following basic oral and written instructions. At the other end of the spectrum the students with a score of 256 can participate effectively in social and familiar work situations. They can meet work demands with confidence and interact with the public. Those in the middle range can satisfy most survival needs and social demands. They have some ability to understand and communicate on the telephone on familiar topics. In the workplace they can handle jobs that involve following oral and simple written instructions and multi-step diagrams.

Participation in the study was voluntary; however, all of the students agreed enthusiastically to complete the questionnaire and all agreed to provide speech samples at the beginning and at the end of the study.

### Methodology

Research methodology.

In his text *Research Methods in Language Learning*, Nunan (1992) defines action research as “a form of self-reflective inquiry carried out by practitioners, aimed at solving problems, improving practice, or enhancing understanding” (p. 229). He outlines the process of action research and sites some advantages and disadvantages of this type of research. The most significant advantage is that the research is situational. The action research in my study begins with a problem in my particular classroom with a group of learners: Adult English language learners in my class are unintelligible and improved

pronunciation is an educational goal the learners identified. Background data is collected and recordings of students' speech are made. The hypothesis is that the adult learners are not clearly aware of what their pronunciation problems are and don't know how to correct them. A number of strategies is then devised to raise the awareness of the most predominant pronunciation problems and teach the learners the skills to self-monitor and adjust their pronunciation. After twelve weeks the speech of the learners is recorded again.

At the end of the study one of the notable disadvantages of action research becomes evident: The reliability and validity of the research is doubtful (Nunan, 1992). Any claim to improvement in the communicative competence of the students as a result of specific intervention strategies is subjective. However, the problem that I address is typically found in many adult life-skills English language programs and therefore of interest to other instructors. The way in which data is collected and the strategies that are employed to bring about a change in the pronunciation can be replicated easily.

Instructional methodology.

Nunan's (1992) steps of the action research cycle provide a framework within which data is collected, strategies and activities are implemented, and an evaluation is conducted. This framework becomes the instructional methodology that is used to carry out the study.

- I. Information Elicitation
  - A. Initial Intake
  - B. Elicitation Questionnaire
- II. Diagnosis and Analysis

- A. Speech Samples
  - 1. Reading aloud
  - 2. Free speaking
- B. Teacher Observation
- III. Individual Consultation
  - A. Identification of Pronunciation Problems
  - B. Realistic Goal Setting
- IV. Instruction Implementation
  - A. Direct Instruction in Specific Segmentals and Suprasegmentals
  - B. Communicative Speech Practice
  - C. Metacognitive Strategies
  - D. On-going Teacher Feedback
- V. Evaluation

The components of the instructional methodology are separated into a step-by-step process. In reality, however, facilitating communicative competence of adult NNSs is an integrated and an on-going process. English language instructors must never become so preoccupied with the components that the issues of pronunciation instruction are obscured; therefore, the components of effective pronunciation instruction must be inter-related and must emphasize intelligibility and communicative competence.

#### Information Elicitation

Perhaps one of the most important considerations of English language instructors in the effective pronunciation instruction process is the need to be informed about the learners themselves (McKay & Tom, 1999). Nunan (1992) refers to it as background

data that aids and guides the instructor in devising intervention strategies. In this study information about the learners was collected from the Personal Education Plan (PEP) that was completed during the intake process (Appendix One). This PEP provided information about learner short-term goals, potential barriers, and assessment scores. More specific information was collected from a questionnaire that was filled out as a whole class activity at the beginning of the action research study (Appendix Two). The items in the questionnaire were both closed and open-ended. The closed questions provided specific factual information and the open-ended questions more closely related to the learner's attitudes about pronunciation (Nunan, 1992). The following data was gathered about the learners:

- Pronunciation goals
- First language
- Length of time in the US
- Years of education and English instruction
- Number of days of attendance per week
- Kind of EL class attended
- Exposure to pronunciation instruction
- Problematic pronunciation situations
- Motivation for pronunciation improvement
- Perception of pronunciation problems
- Perception of how to improve pronunciation
- Importance of near-native pronunciation
- Reasons for pronunciation problems

- Attitude toward English language
- Occasions of discourse with NS

Having an understanding of the adult learners and being aware of the factors that impede or enhance the pronunciation acquisition process provided a partial basis for making appropriate instructional decisions.

### Diagnosis and Analysis

Diagnosis and analysis to determine where to begin pronunciation instruction was done informally. Speech samples and teacher observation along with students' perceptions of their problems obtained from the elicitation questionnaire completed the basis for instructional focus.

Two different speech samples were acquired using a tape recorder and a separate tape for each student. One sample was a reading of approximately 80 words that was given to the students to rehearse the day before the recording (Appendix Three). The second sample was a free speech sample (Appendix Four) using a visual stimulus (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 2000). These speech samples were then analyzed to isolate language features that contributed to unintelligible speech for the NNSs and that could realistically be improved in a 12-week study.

The teacher observation to gather data that contributed to unintelligibility began about two weeks before the speech samples were collected. The instructor scripted student speech that was difficult to understand or that other students had difficulty understanding. No attempt was made at that time to correct the pronunciation of the students during that two-week period.

### Individual Consultation

After diagnosis and analysis, the component in the process toward effecting communicative competence was an individual consultation with the students to identify the most problematic pronunciation areas and to set goals. Speech samples were listened to. Some of the problematic areas in segmentals were transcribed before the consultation. Information about students' perception of problem areas from the elicitation questionnaire was also examined at the consultation. The instructor and student together identified two segmental features and one suprasegmental feature to work on.

The pronunciation features were identified as the specific and attainable goals for the student. The goals focused on improving the articulation of specific sounds and using features of stress and rhythm. In addition to the segmental and suprasegmental features, ways to improve pronunciation were elicited and documented. The latter focused on metacognitive strategies such as self-monitoring skills and speech modification skills (Morley, 1991). A pronunciation plan (Appendix Five) formalized the goal-setting process.

### Instruction Implementation

The next component of the instructional methodology in this action research study was instruction implementation. At this point it is necessary to underscore again that the elements of effective instruction cannot be clearly separated in the classroom. Many of them were implemented and in operation at the same time. Speech production was addressed at the onset. First discrete vowel and consonant sounds were taught. Those chosen were the ones that caused intelligibility problems for most of the students. Diagrams of the articulators (lips, mouth, tongue, teeth) and mirrors were used to give

students a clear idea of how to produce the sounds (Gilbert, 2000; Baker & Goldstein, 1990). During this phase of speech production some imitative drill was conducted. It was a controlled practice having students concentrate on where the articulators are and what the face looks like when a particular sound is produced. The next speech production focus was stress and rhythm. The stress feature concentrated on the number of syllables in multi-syllabic words and the syllable which received the stronger and longer stress. Capturing the rhythm of the English language was done by emphasizing the linking of words in a sentence and speaking in thought units and minute pausing.

After the discrete features were taught, the speech production was set in a communicative framework as recommended by Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin (2000). This meant that listening discrimination activities and all practice was set into a context relevant to the adult learners. Often times the sentences and conversations for pronunciation practice were generated by the students themselves. The framework set forth by Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin (2000) includes the following parts:

- a. Description and analysis of features to be taught
- b. Listening discrimination
- c. Controlled practice
- d. Guided practice
- e. Communicative or free practice

Some practice of both segmental and suprasegmental features began as teacher-fronted activities. Usually these were part of the description and analysis component of the communicative framework. Other times the practice evolved from a need to re-enforce the correct production of features or from the need to provide more guided and controlled

practice before students practiced more freely. Some of the activities included the following:

1. Discrimination of sounds as part of sentences
2. Using fingers or calling out a number to identify the number of syllables in a word
3. Raising a small sign indication specific initial and final consonant sounds or vowel sounds
4. Students identifying the number of syllables in weekly vocabulary/spelling words
5. Using total physical response (TPR) to practice syllable stress
6. Using rhymes to create a sense of rhythm
7. Holding strips of paper to visually demonstrate differences in some sound production
8. Using rubber bands to lengthen vowel sounds
9. Tapping the table to identify the number of syllables in a word

Moving from more teacher-fronted activities to controlled to guided to communicative and free speaking activities provided learners with a systematic continuity to achieve intelligible speech. The learners began with much support and were guided to autonomy. Students participated in a variety of activities to help them reach their goals:

1. Students worked in pairs. Student A read sentences.  
Student B responded according to what he/she heard.
2. Students participated in fluency exercises.
3. Students participated in information gap activities.

4. Students dictated sentences after marking syllables and word stress—first to a partner, then to the class.
5. Students gave very short presentations.
6. Students took part in peer correction.
7. Students composed simulated dialogues from the workplace and the community. They then role-played with a partner and for the class.

Thus far the process of helping NNSs become communicatively competent had come through several stages. First the most problematic areas of pronunciation were identified for each student. Then students were taught how to produce the specific segmental and suprasegmental features and were given opportunities to practice in listening discrimination, have guided and controlled practice and participate in communicative practice (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 2000). Students were made aware of their problems and were given the tools to correct the problems.

Students now had the skills to self-correct their speech if communication began to breakdown. The next stage was to make students aware of verbal and non-verbal cues of not understanding. Students were guided toward feeling comfortable with indicating that they did not understand and toward recognizing when others did not understand them. Coupled with that was to make students more aware of their speech and the speech of native speakers (Berkowitz, 2002). Students were given assignments to encourage 'hearing' themselves and really 'listening' to others. Students practiced phrases to use when they did not understand; they practiced non-verbal gestures of not understanding; they listened to themselves speak on tape every week of the study and consciously listened to native speakers and recorded in journals their observations and any speaking

problems they encountered. Journal sharing and discussion was scheduled every Tuesday and as questions and comments on observations outside the classroom were raised by the students.

A pronunciation checklist (Appendix Six) was introduced to help learners identify specific pronunciation features in the speech of others. This peer correction activity was first used in small groups to critique one another's pronunciation in short readings. The checklist was later expanded to pairwork activities.

Another important element of instruction was on-going teacher feedback. Charts and props were posted in the classroom as visual reminders for students to modify speech. Individual pronunciation instruction, monitoring, and encouragement spanned the entire language instruction time. Teacher correction was done immediately. Pronunciation reinforcement continued during reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities. On-going teacher pronunciation feedback became the thread that wove a four-hour lesson together each day.

### Evaluation

The final component of the pronunciation action research study was evaluation. The same reading and picture-prompted free speaking activity was used as in the initial diagnosis and analysis component. Students were again given the reading to practice before recording. Three evaluators listened to the speech samples that were recorded in the beginning and the end of the study. An evaluation sheet (Appendix Seven), which was reviewed before the listening, was completed by each evaluator for each student. The evaluation addressed language awareness, initial and final consonant sounds, the number of syllables in words, stress, rhythm, and self-correction.

## Summary

Attaining communicative competence is a necessary and realistic goal for NNSs who are motivated to function effectively in United States society. The instructional methodology for this action research study was developed to achieve that goal in a systematic way. Although the components were divided into a series of steps, the process had an integrated and interactive approach. First, information was elicited to provide relevant information about the learner. Then, speech samples and teacher observation identified problematic pronunciation areas and focused instruction. Next, the instructor conveyed the problematic areas in an individual consultation and set realistic goals with the learner. After that, instruction was implemented through direct instruction, communicative practice, and teaching metacognitive strategies. Finally, students' speech samples, recorded in the beginning and at the end of the study, were evaluated. Reflecting on this action research makes one realize that facilitating communicative competence for NNSs is a complicated process that requires skillful teaching and perseverance in an environment that feels safe for the learners and builds self-confidence in them. Hopefully NNSs learn the skills in the process that are essential to successful adaptation in American society.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results and Discussion

#### Introduction

The findings of the study presented in chapter four stem from the purpose of this study: to determine whether raising the awareness of the most predominant pronunciation problems of NNS learners and teaching them the skills to self-monitor and adjust their pronunciation could make the English language learners communicatively competent.

#### Information Elicitation

Educators have long acknowledged that instructors of adult NNSs can be more effective if they are informed about their learners. Information about the learners was elicited in two ways. One was during the initial intake process when students are registered and assessed. On the Personal Education Plan seventeen of the eighteen students indicated that better pronunciation was their reason for coming to English classes. As research points out and from general conversations with students, adult learners struggle to cope with the demands of family and job and with survival in a culture different from their own. Their time is precious; providing a significant amount of instruction time for pronunciation validates their understanding of themselves and helps enrich their language learning experience. In addition, a careful look at the attendance patterns of the students indicated that teaching pronunciation on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday would serve the greatest number of students. About forty percent of the students worked an end-of-the-week/weekend schedule or a

weekend/beginning-of-the-week schedule. This instruction plan gave those groups of students at least two days of pronunciation instruction.

The use of an elicitation questionnaire was the second way information about the learners was obtained. Of the students that initially began the study five spoke Russian as their first language; eight spoke Spanish; five spoke a Southeast Asian language: two spoke Vietnamese, two spoke Thai, and one spoke Cambodian. The length of time these students lived in the United States varied from four months to nine years: seven lived here eight or nine years; nine lived here one or two years; only two had arrived within the year.

All students had some education: two ended their education in elementary school; twelve completed high school; four had a university education in their country. The high education of the majority of the students made it easier to present the pronunciation concepts; they had an academic mindset. However, most of the students (73%) had one year or less of English language instruction. An even higher percentage of students (88%) attended multilevel adult ELL classes that provided little pronunciation instruction. That meant that the unintelligible speech that was causing problems had probably become habitual and would most likely be difficult to alter.

One piece of data collected from the elicitation questionnaire did not give accurate information. Students said that they attended classes four to five days a week. Reality indicated that three days a week was more the norm. Only forty percent of the students received three days of pronunciation instruction in any given week.

Other information from the questionnaire laid the groundwork for communicative instruction and for building self-confidence. Specific problematic situations were on the

telephone, at work, in the stores, at the doctor, talking to their children's teachers, in the library, at a job interview, and everywhere. Improving their pronunciation would help them at work, go to college, get a better job, and communicate with people. The latter two were the most frequent responses and were tied to the hope of being viewed and valued as bright and intelligent beings. When asked how good pronunciation would help them, the responses were that they would speak more English, it would help them communicate, they would have more confidence, it would be easier to answer the phone, they would not be ashamed or afraid to speak English, they would not need an interpreter, and others would want to speak to them.

The pronunciation problems and the reasons for those problems as perceived by the learners contributed valuable information for the instructor. This information was discussed and used to set realistic goals during the individual consultation. Eleven students reported consonants as being a problem: t, th, r. Eight students stated that vowels were problematic; no examples were given. Eight said they had trouble with syllables. The most prevalent reason for pronunciation problems was that English was very different from their language (11). Another reason was that they had no previous pronunciation instruction (5). Four other reasons were also checked: too old (2), can't learn, don't like English, and want to remember their own language.

Two other questions tried to ascertain attitude toward the English language. Words that students liked were as follows: *love, family, best, good, beautiful, thank you, sorry, help, together, money, work, home, excellent, hello, can*. The reasons given for liking these words were generalities: short, polite, easy to pronounce, used anywhere, get what you want, necessary, warm, and like how they feel in mouth. Words that were

disliked included *lazy, crazy, must, marry, bills, work, can't understand, god, supervisor, ugly, war, hate, woman, chip, impossible*. The reasons for disliking these words were that they were negative, made one afraid, people don't understand, and they are used often.

The responses to the questions in the elicitation questionnaire and in particular the final question painted a very real profile of the adult learners in the class. The responses indicated that the adult learners were involved in many facets of life. They interacted with many people and were motivated to learn to pronounce the language spoken in their community appropriately.

#### Diagnosis and Analysis

Many of the responses from the questionnaire revealed how committed the learners were to wanting to improve their pronunciation. Even though recording their voices was very frightening, all of the students were very willing to participate in the recording of a speech sample. The recordings were conducted on a Wednesday and Thursday when a volunteer was able to facilitate the class lesson. A ten-minute block of time was allotted for each participant. This amount of time was adequate. It was strictly adhered to because the students had been prepped about what was required. Beginning instruction was important for both the learners and the instructor to keep momentum going. The program's open attendance policy brought two new students into the class. Their speech samples were also recorded. Putting them at the end of the recording schedule gave them time to practice their reading and be informed by the other students as to what they would be required to talk about in the picture-prompted free speaking component.

Segmental problem areas.

Both of the speech samples proved to provide more than adequate information about problematic pronunciation areas. This information coupled with the teacher observation samples furnished the data for instruction. In general all students had major segmental problems with / / and / /. The initial / / was most problematic. It became /t/, /d/, /s/, or /z/. Words like *think* became *sink*, *zink*, *dink*, or *tink*. For Southeast Asian speakers and some Spanish *think* became *ti* or *dim* making intelligibility impossible, especially when final consonant sounds were eliminated.

Other sounds that were problematic for many learners were / / and / /. The / / became / / in words such as *cheap*>>*sheep* and *watch*>>*wash*. The / / sound became / / in words like *shoes*>>*choes*.

The sounds /p/, /b/, /f/ were extremely problematic for the Southeast Asian speakers. There was no distinction of problematic pronunciation between those that had been living in the United States for a short time and those that had been living here for eight and nine years. Words such as *parents* and *program* were given /b/ as the initial sound. From teacher observation the word *people* was unintelligible. It became /biyb/ because the /p/ was replaced by /b/ and the final consonant sound was eliminated. Words beginning with the /f/ sound, such as *frustrated* and *fixing* in the speech sample, were given /p/ as the initial sound.

The /r/ sound was also problematic for all students. Russian speakers growled the /r/ sound; the Spanish speakers trilled it; the Southeast Asians replaced it with the /l/ sound. Even though growling and trilling the /r/ didn't impede intelligibility for Russian

and Spanish speakers, direct instruction of the /r/ sound was included because it dramatically hindered intelligibility for the Southeast Asian speakers.

All speakers had some problems with /v/. It became /b/ for the Spanish speakers and /w/ for the Russian and Southeast Asian speakers. All the students perceived the sound of /v/ as a problem area of pronunciation when conversing with native English speakers.

Eliminating final consonant sounds and especially final consonant clusters was also a barrier to intelligible competence. This segmental feature proved to be the greatest challenge because it had become a habitual speech pattern for all who had lived in the United States for two years or longer and was a first language transfer.

The most recurring vowel problem areas were the sounds of /æ/, / /, and /a/. The students were not accustomed to use their mouths and the mouth formations were not distinct enough to produce the vowels clearly. In addition those vowel sounds and others were generally very short and distorted the pronunciation.

Suprasegmental problem areas.

In addition to the segmental features that caused unintelligibility, several suprasegmental features that caused pronunciation problems became evident from the analysis of the speech samples. One was choppy speech. This might be the result of most students being taught in multilevel classes where a management strategy required more exposure to the written form of English rather than the speaking form. The choppy speech and inappropriate or the lack of syllable and word stress indicated the need to help learners create rhythm in their speech and improve intelligibility.

### Individual Consultation

The analysis of the speech samples was very time consuming; however, it was imperative that individual consultations begin as soon as possible. Consultation in 15-minute slots began the day after the first recordings were made. Three students volunteered to remain after class; others were asked to sign up for a consultation the next three days after class. The remainder of the students were scheduled the following Wednesday when a volunteer was available to facilitate a lesson during the consultation time. Flexibility for consultation with students was key because attendance was not always consistent.

During the consultation, part of the speech sample was listened to, examples from teacher observation were examined, and perceived problematic areas from the elicitation questionnaire were reviewed if relevant. Less than half of the students identified a problematic consonant that was aligned with what the instructor heard on the speech sample. This fact indicated that making adult learners aware of their pronunciation problems was of essence.

To point out specific problem areas a copy of the reading was used during the consultation. The most obvious problems with segmentals and suprasegmentals could be identified with specific examples from the reading. This process helped the instructor and the student collaborate to identify two segmentals and one suprasegmental to concentrate on improving during the study. To formalize the goal-setting process a Pronunciation Plan form was used. It visually identified the areas of concentration for each student. Ways to improve pronunciation were elicited from the students and recorded on the plan. For example, the segmentals that one student worked on were the

/p/ /b/ sounds and final consonant sounds; the suprasegmental feature for that student was linking words to eliminate choppy speech. The form served as a reminder of what students needed to do to help themselves continue to improve their pronunciation. Appendix Five is an example of a student's plan. It supported the concept of making the adult responsible for his or her own learning.

The pronunciation plan, the cassette for recording themselves, and extra paper for their journaling were put into a folder. This folder was given to the student during the consultation. Students were asked to keep the folders with them and bring them to class every day.

The individual consultation time was grueling and very time consuming. However, it was most important for students to become aware of what pronunciation problems kept them from being intelligible. Open enrollment posed a problem. By the end of week two several new students had entered the program and two original students had exited. A folder with journaling paper was given to the new students and an explanation of what they were to record on the tapes was given to each of them individually.

### Instruction Implementation

By week three all the learners knew what segmentals and suprasegmentals they were specifically working on to improve their pronunciation. Students were asked to share their pronunciation plan with two other students. Many of the learners had a quiet and reserved personality; however, a safe and comfortable environment existed in the classroom and students were observed to share their plan willingly. Each was encouraged to ask questions about one another's plan. Then the information that the

students gathered from one another was elicited and written on the board in three columns: sounds, other skills, and ways to improve. In reality the entire pronunciation course was visually presented to the students. They were asked to record it in their notebooks.

An essential part of providing learners with the tools to help improve pronunciation is to show them the parts of the face and mouth that produce the different sounds. A diagram of the speech articulators was drawn on the board. While the diagram was being drawn, students touched the different parts with their tongues. First they touched their lips, then their teeth, and slowly slid the tongue along the roof of their mouths as far back as possible. All the students were engrossed and seemed fascinated by the activity, especially when they heard the difference that the placement of articulators made (for example: *pan/ban/fan* and *very/berry/wary*).

After the lesson students were asked to reflect on the pronunciation lesson. Originally the plan was to have students spend reflection and writing time in class after each pronunciation lesson; however, this portion had to be revised because it became too time-consuming to do after each lesson. The reflection piece was incorporated once a week and was required as an outside writing activity in their journals along with the observations of their speaking and that of native English speakers.

Teaching consonant and vowel sounds.

Subsequent lessons concentrated on teaching the correct production of the consonant and vowel sounds that were identified earlier. Students generated lists of words that contained the specific and contrasting sounds of the lesson to be taught. Each student first had to write three words; then each was asked to get other words from their

classmates until each had a list of ten words. Students wrote these on the board. Having students generate their own lists added authenticity of the lesson. Words came from the students' own observations and experiences.

The correct-production component focused on the placement of the articulators. Two or three mirrors were placed on each table of four giving students the opportunity to practice individually first. Monitoring was crucial. A volunteer helped in this monitoring phase. Then students worked with a partner. Each pair had pieces of paper with the sounds written on them. Student A said a word and student B raised the corresponding letter sound. Student A would adjust the articulator if student B misunderstood. Students were encouraged to exaggerate the sound, especially in the beginning stage of the study, in order to put the focus on the placement of the articulators. Those that had the greatest problem with intelligibility experienced immediate success. Instructor feedback and encouragement continued. At the onset the correction didn't carry over to the next day in most cases. There was minimal transfer for the students whose pronunciation had become habitual. It was encouraging to see, however, that the students adjusted pronunciation when intelligibility was in question.

The production phase moved from words to placing the words into sentences. Activities from Gilbert (2000) and Baker & Goldstein (1990) were used for pairwork and small group activities. A student read a sentences and the other student or other students indicated which initial sound was pronounced by answering the question. The following are examples of sentences:

- a. How do you spell *long*?
- b. How do you spell *wrong*?

- a. Please spell *shoes*.
- b. Please spell *chews*.
  
- a. How do you spell *think*?
- b. How do you spell *sink*?

Students were forced to listen very carefully and concentrate on adjusting their speech when misunderstanding took place.

Students then were asked to write their own sentences using the words that were generated at an earlier time. The list of words was posted to accommodate new students and students who were not in attendance on that particular day. Students were given a form to follow:

How do you spell \_\_\_\_\_? or Please spell \_\_\_\_\_.

This simple form allowed all students from the entire range of abilities to create appropriate sentences. Students worked with a partner or in a small group to try out their sentences.

Fluency activities.

The students also tried their sentences in fluency activities. Each student wrote a sentence, that they had created, on a small piece of paper. Students stood in two lines facing each other. One line of students was group one; the other was group two. At the command “Go” group one asked the student in front of them their question. If the response was incorrect, the question was repeated. The students of group two would move to face the next student and the next question and so forth until all of group two had responded to all the questions. Students switched and group two became the questioners.

Having students reflect on these activities was a natural follow-up. Students had to respond to two questions in their journals. One was “What did you have to do when the other students didn’t understand you?” Here are some excerpts from the journals:

- The L. I must tongue behind teeth.
- Put tongue between teeth for *think* not *sink*.
- Bite my lip when speak *very*.

The second question was “What did you do when you didn’t understand the other students? Here are some excerpts from the journals:

- I said repeat please.
- I said don’t understand.
- I shake my head no.

Students were being made aware of how to adjust their pronunciation and how to indicate that they didn’t understand.

Indicating lack of understanding.

The responses to the latter question prompted more instruction on indicating communication breakdown. Both verbal phrases and non-verbal gestures such as frowning, shaking of the head, shrugging shoulders, and putting a finger or hand to the ear were taught and practiced. This was done by modeling. A volunteer made a statement and the instructor indicated a lack of understanding non-verbally. Students named the non-verbal gesture. Students then were given the opportunity to practice. This activity was done several times during the study. The rationale was that if the learners knew the non-verbals of misunderstanding, they would have the confidence to indicate that they did not understand. According to the students this was particularly important for those who worked in a noisy assembly line at a manufacturing plant. One

student's example during a discussion of observation outside the classroom supported this.

Supervisor frown alway when speaking me. Before I no understan why.  
Now I slowly speak and open my mout.

Information gap activities.

Two different activities were used for controlled and guided practice. One was information gap activities. These were taken from many different sources. Specific target sounds were not necessarily stressed. Students were not allowed to show the information; it had to be spoken. Students were required to exchange information to complete the gaps and to ask for repetition and/or clarification if the information was unclear. The instructor was not involved in the activity other than providing feedback and encouragement.

Mingling activities.

Another activity for controlled and guided practice was mingling. Students had to ask many different students for information and record the student's name and a short response. The six to eight questions were formulated by the instructor and incorporated target pronunciation features, the grammar and theme of the unit being taught from the core curriculum text, and questions that were relevant to the students' lives. The following are examples of questions:

- What are you interested in?
- Do you have to wear safety glasses at work?
- Would you like to win a thousand dollars?

This mingling activity provided speaking practice, continued to build community in the classroom, and required adjustment of speech if information was not understood.

The information gap and mingling activities during the first weeks of the study indicated that suprasegmentals needed to be addressed. The speech of most of the learners had an obvious choppy characteristic. This was particularly distracting. To address this problem, learners were taught to link the final sound of one word with the initial sound of the next (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 2000). The linking of a final consonant sound with a following word that begins with a vowel was a readily perceived connection. Phrasal verbs and prepositions comprised a large part of the core curriculum text during the study. Both were natural opportunities for practice with linking. Students' sentences such as the following were used for practice:

- He'll pick up my daughter at the airport.
- We decided against going to church on Sunday.

Practice in linking.

Pairwork was primarily used in the controlled and guided component. A student dictated two sentences to Student B. That partner marked the linking as he/she heard it and read it back to Student A. The instructor's question to the pair always was about the words that were linked. This routine of sentence writing, dictating to a partner, and identifying the words that are linked became a part of each day's lesson. It also became a favorite because students could immediately feel the easy rhythm of the language. Journal entries indicated that linking words made in their speech was audible to the learners.

Syllable stress.

The learners in the study enjoyed practicing the suprasegmental feature of linking. They likewise enjoyed being made aware of the number of syllables in a word and being made aware that one syllable in a multi-syllabic English word always has a stronger

stress. The unpredictable stress in many English words was the most frustrating for the learners. Because they had difficulty understanding it, they resisted it at first and continued to apply the stress of their first language on English words. Because the learners were very interested in grammar, the pronunciation of regular past tense verbs was the introduction to stress. Knowing and understanding the rules that govern the pronunciation of regular past tense verbs greatly empowered the learners. Previously, many learners consistently pronounced words such as *worked, cleaned, called, paid, and laughed* with two syllables. During the sentence-dictation exercises students pointed out the mispronunciation and corrections were quickly made.

Many activities at different times during the study focused on syllable stress. Initially the students generated their own lists of one, two, three, and more syllable words. Students tapped out the number of syllables in each word emphasizing one strong syllable. In both whole class and pair groupings students indicated the number of syllables in a word using their fingers or calling out a number. This was particularly beneficial for students who put vowels between the consonants in consonant cluster (for example: Enagalisha for *English*). Counting the number of syllables in the daily vocabulary became an on-going assessment of this pronunciation feature. Students could be observed moving their heads from side to side to count the syllables as well as tapping their hand and counting on their fingers.

To help students internalize the concept of one strong syllable and other less significant syllables in English words, other kinesthetic activities, besides tapping, were practiced. One was using rubber bands (Gilbert, 2000). As students pronounced a word, the rubber band was stretched. Students delighted in pronouncing words like *MinneSOta*,

*arRANGEment, baNAna*. It was most effective when students practiced words that they understood and were familiar with.

Another kinesthetic activity involved having students stand up on stressed syllables and sit down on a chair on unstressed syllables. Even though the stressed syllables were identified by the students, the up and down movement seemed to be too distracting and too physically difficult for some because of age and physical problems incurred before they came to the United States.

The use of rhymes and limericks encouraged students to link words and appropriately stress syllables. Poems were read chorally with half the class reading one line and the other half reading the other. This was an effective exercise because students were pleased to be creating the rhythm of English so effortlessly.

Several learners had ‘pronounce final consonants’ as a goal. The elimination of final consonants was most problematic for the Southeast Asian speakers, especially those that had lived in the United States for several years. The most common final consonants that were eliminated were /s/, /z/, and /st/. No specific lesson was taught to address this problem; however, it was discussed and modeled during the instruction on peer correction. The instructor also gave repeated reminders for learners to self-correct when final consonants were not pronounced. Peers were able to easily identify this problematic area and point to a chart as a non-threatening reminder to pronounce the final consonants.

Peer correction.

Instruction in peer correction began very early in the study. A pronunciation checklist was used to focus students’ attention in particular areas. A short reading was delivered three times. Students were asked to answer two questions for each reading.

First the instructor modeled; questions were answered by the students. Then the volunteer modeled and students answered all of the questions on the pronunciation checklist. After that students were given a short reading slightly below their proficiency level to focus attention on the pronunciation rather than on the meaning of the reading. Each student had a different reading. In groups of three and four the peer correction activity was orchestrated. This same activity was conducted six times during the study to help hone the observation skills of the learners. It was also conducted in pairwork. The peer correction received some resistance; students were reticent to critique classmates. However, discussions of journal writings indicated that students were able to identify specific sounds of native speakers outside of the classroom.

#### Communicative practice.

The communicative practice component received much less time than the guided and controlled practice. Students participated in only two brief presentations. The presentation didn't focus on one particular segmental or suprasegmental feature. Rather it encompassed all that was taught during the pronunciation study. For the first presentation two students collaborated to write a short dialogue about one of the topics below. The other students were encouraged to ask questions and complete the pronunciation checklist. Students repeated the dialogue if asked to do so.

- A parent with a sick child at the doctor's office
- A supervisor talking to an employee who isn't wearing safety equipment
- A cashier with a customer complaining about the bill
- A teacher and parent at school conferences
- A policeman giving a ticket for speeding

The second presentation was a short story about a picture that the students chose.

Students presented individually. They showed their picture while telling the story. Most

students were asked to repeat their stories. Students had difficulty completing the pronunciation checklists and did not complete them thoroughly.

The presentations received good reviews from the students. They liked the writing practice, the chance to speak in front of the class, and answering questions the other students asked. Both presentations were an activity for the entire four-hour block of language class to avoid students being left without a partner the day of presentation because of absence. Even then adjustments had to be made because some came late and others left early. The pronunciation showed little change; however, when students indicated a lack of understanding and/or when non-verbal cues of not understanding came from the instructor, who was standing in back of the room, an adjustment in speech was almost always made.

During the 12-week study the learners participated in an intense pronunciation course set in a multi-skilled curriculum. First, information about the learners was elicited. Next, speech samples were analyzed and a diagnosis of problem areas was made. Then, realistic goals were set during an individual consultation. After that, instruction was implemented with sufficient listening discrimination and controlled, guided, and free practice.

### Evaluation

The final phase of the study was evaluation. The question to be answered was “Did the pronunciation of the students improve by teaching metacognitive strategies?” Once again students recorded speech samples, which included the same reading and picture-prompted free speaking activity. Students were given the reading to practice.

They were told that the first and last speech samples would be compared. They could make any corrections as they read or spoke.

The recordings were scheduled during the twelfth week of the study. By that time only eleven of the students attending had initial speech samples. Three evaluators critiqued the speech samples: one was the instructor; one was another English language instructor; another was someone who did not work with non-native speakers. All three evaluators used an evaluation sheet.

The evaluation conducted was relatively rudimentary; nonetheless it provided the instructor with some sense of whether or not the intelligibility of the learners had been affected by the pronunciation instruction that took place during the 12-week study. The first question received an eighty percent affirmative response. On the second question the evaluators indicated that eighty percent of the speakers read and spoke slower than in the first speech sample. Those responses were interpreted as an indication that the learners had an awareness of their speech and were more deliberate in their delivery. The third and fourth question primarily addressed the segmental component of the instruction. The evaluators' responses identified clearer and easier-to-understand words in the rehearsed reading but many fewer ones in the picture-prompted speaking activity. This was also the evaluators' response to question six which addressed rhythm. There was evidence of rhythm in the rehearsed reading but less in the picture-prompted activity. That was interpreted positively again as an indication that raising awareness produces some change in pronunciation. The lack of transfer of the pronunciation features to the free-speaking activity might be attributed to any number of factors: sporadic and inconsistent attendance, a diminishing commitment on the part of the learners, ineffective

instruction, lack of appropriate time to effect a change. More research is needed to determine the reasons for the lack of transfer.

In addition to responding to the rhythm of the learners' speech, the evaluators commented on the suprasegmental feature of number of syllables and appropriate stress on syllables. The responses showed an improvement in this area. This can be attributed to an on-going integration of this feature into every part of the daily lessons. It became a competition for the students as to who heard a word with the most syllables outside the classroom. Then discussing the pronunciation of it and where the word was used made a mini-lesson relevant and engaging and resulted in improvement in this area.

The final question gave the most encouraging information. All evaluators agreed that adjustments and corrections were made by all the speakers. The responses to this final question indicated that if learners are made aware of pronunciation problems and are given the tools to make corrections, they will attempt corrections and adjustments in a controlled situation. The learners also appeared to have gained confidence in their speech; however, this interpretation was too subjective to be valid.

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine whether raising the awareness of the most predominant pronunciation problems of NNS learners and teaching them the skills to self-monitor and adjust their pronunciation could help make the English language learners communicatively competent. And, given the variables that are present in typical adult English language programs was this possible in a multi-skilled curriculum? First, relevant data was elicited from the learners. Then, speech samples and teacher observation identified the most distracting problems to intelligibility. Next, goals were

set during individual consultation. After that, instruction was implemented. Finally, an evaluation was conducted. Based on the results of that rudimentary evaluation and the observations of the instructor during and after the study, learners, who were made aware of their pronunciation problems and were taught how to correct those problematic areas, made some strides toward communicative competence in the 12-week study. The most heartening observation was that the learners became much more aware of the language as it is spoken outside of the classroom. This factor alone will contribute to helping the learners continue to improve their intelligibility.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusions

#### Introduction

Research discloses that helping adult non-native English learners become communicatively competent is a realistic goal. In order to move learners toward that goal English language instructors need to have an understanding of the adult learner and be knowledgeable about the factors that influence the pronunciation process. They need to recognize that pronunciation instruction can help NNSs become viable members of the community. Lastly, instructors need to educate themselves in delivering effective instruction. The conducted study took these issues into consideration and investigated whether making learners aware of the most predominant pronunciation problems of the learners and teaching them the skills to self-monitor and adjust their pronunciation could make the learners communicatively competent.

#### Limitations

A review of the study brought several limitations of the study to the forefront. One was the duration of the study. The 12-week time frame included filling out the elicitation questionnaire, recording speech samples at the beginning and at the end of the study, and conferring individually with students. This expenditure of time cut into the actual instruction time of the segmental and suprasegmental features and the practice of self-monitoring and adjusting skills. A longer instruction time might have produced more significant improvement. A second limitation was also concerned with time. Recording speech samples and conducting individual consultations were too time-

consuming and cumbersome for an integrated life skills course. Also devoting three blocks of time during the week to pronunciation instruction seemed to segregate pronunciation from the rest of the skills taught. Pronunciation became a separate entity. The elicitation questionnaire was another limitation. The information gathered was meaningful, relevant, and drew a holistic picture of each student; however, it was not a very efficient and productive use of time considering that only sixty percent of those that began the study completed.

### Recommendations

After reflecting on the study and its limitations, some recommendations were entertained. The reality of the ABE English language classroom must be taken into consideration when planning pronunciation instruction. Open enrollment and inconsistent attendance caused by learners' family issues and changes in work schedules are part of that reality. In addition, learners want and need to have intelligible pronunciation. Therefore, direct instruction of pronunciation needs to be integrated into the life skills curriculum and recycled on an on-going basis rather than delivered in capsules of pronunciation instruction. To eliminate the time-consuming recordings and consultation the most obvious pronunciation problems could be quickly identified by teacher observation and related to the students in very brief individual consultations throughout the four-hour lessons. Thus, new students and students who might have been absent would be accommodated. Information about the students could, likewise, be collected in an on-going informal way. Conversations with students and speaking activities could be more focused on the information that the instructor wants to elicit. Charts and prompts that offer visual reminders and continual journal writing of

observations outside of the classroom would be a part of this integration making pronunciation a natural and integral part of the English language experience.

### Implications

The driving force behind this capstone project for the instructor was to help NNS learners become communicatively competent. That was also what most of the NNS adults attending English language classes wanted, making the project an excellent match for the learners and the instructor. Reviewing the research honed skills for instruction delivery and enhanced knowledge about adult learners, about the factors influencing the acquisition of pronunciation, about the importance of pronunciation instruction, and about effective instruction for the instructor. Incorporating the knowledge and skills into the 12-week study and facilitating the improvement of pronunciation for the learners was very exciting and satisfying.

The knowledge gleaned from the study and the field experience of the instructor revealed a number of implications for adult ELL programs and for English language instructors.

- Pronunciation features need to be taught; good pronunciation doesn't just happen.
- Pronunciation instruction needs to be on-going in an open enrollment program.
- The assessment and instruction components need to be integrated into the curriculum to be manageable.
- Instructors need to be particularly knowledgeable about the suprasegmental features of the English language and the effects of the learners' first language on their pronunciation.

- Instructors need to learn to work with the reality of inconsistent and sporadic attendance and open enrollment.
- Pronunciation instruction needs to concentrate only on the problematic areas of the students in the classroom in a life skills program.
- Listening is an important part of pronunciation and needs to be incorporated. This could be a topic of future action research.
- Intermediate/Advanced adults love to practice the suprasegmental features such as linking. Instructors need to capitalize on that love and teach these features to help improve pronunciation.
- Giving adults the tools to improve their intelligibility and providing the opportunity to discuss the language they encounter outside of the classroom empowers the learners.
- Instructors need to realize that intelligible pronunciation **alone** does not make a NNS communicatively competent.

### Summary

Participation in this capstone project was a positive professional growing experience. It required an incredible amount of dedication that proved to be beneficial for both the learners and the instructor. The success that Eliza Doolittle attained in the fantasy world of *Pygmalion* and *My Fair Lady* was not realized; however, in the real world of the adult English language classroom, the learners were nudged closer to communicative competence.

APPENDIX ONE

**Personal Education Plan**

## APPENDIX TWO

## Elicitation Questionnaire

Please answer the questions as carefully and completely as possible.

1. What is your first language?
2. How long have you lived in the United States?
3. How many years did you go to school in your country and this country together?
4. How long have you been studying English?
5. How often do you attend ESL class?
6. What kind of ESL classes have you attended? Check all that you attended.  
 one-on-one tutor  
 adult ESL classes  
 multilevel classes  
 technical college classes  
 other (specify)
7. Was there pronunciation instruction in your ESL class?
8. Describe a specific situation when a native English speaker couldn't understand what you said because of your pronunciation.
9. Why do you want to improve your pronunciation?
10. How will good pronunciation help you?

11. What pronunciation problems do you think you have?

Check all that are problems.

\_\_\_\_\_ difficulty with consonant sounds. Give examples if possible.

\_\_\_\_\_ difficulty with vowels sounds. Give examples if possible.

\_\_\_\_\_ difficulty with putting stress on the correct syllable. Give examples of words if possible.

\_\_\_\_\_ difficulty with the rhythm of English when speaking. Explain if possible.

\_\_\_\_\_ other problems. Explain.

12. How do you think you can improve your pronunciation?

13. What pronunciation goal would you like to reach by the end of this school term?

Choose **only one**.

\_\_\_\_\_ spoken English that is easy to understand.

\_\_\_\_\_ spoken English that makes you self-confident and not embarrassed to speak to other people.

\_\_\_\_\_ spoken English that helps you communicate and strategies to help you correct your pronunciation inside and outside of the classroom.

14. How important is perfect and near-native pronunciation?

Circle one.

a. very important   b. important   c. a little important   d. not very important

15. Why do you think you have pronunciation problems? Check all that you think are problems.

\_\_\_\_\_ too old to learn

\_\_\_\_\_ no previous pronunciation instruction

\_\_\_\_\_ can't learn languages

\_\_\_\_\_ don't like the English language

\_\_\_\_\_ want to remember and use only my first language

\_\_\_\_\_ don't want to learn pronunciation

\_\_\_\_\_ don't need to learn pronunciation

\_\_\_\_\_ don't like the people and the culture in the United States

\_\_\_\_\_ English is too different from my language

16. Make a list of five English words that you like (Bolitho, 1998).

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

Why do you like them?

17. Make a list of five English words that you don't like (Bolitho, 1998).

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

Why don't you like them?

18. Who do you speak English with? Check all you speak English with.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> doctor              | <input type="checkbox"/> supervisor        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> friends             | <input type="checkbox"/> other students    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> bank teller         | <input type="checkbox"/> family            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> customers           | <input type="checkbox"/> line leader       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> children's teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> neighbors         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> co-workers          | <input type="checkbox"/> bus driver        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teachers            | <input type="checkbox"/> apartment manager |
| <input type="checkbox"/> caseworker          | <input type="checkbox"/> store clerks      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> others (specify)    |  |

## APPENDIX THREE

## Rehearsed Speech Sample

Timmy Brown and his brother and sister are very frustrated. Their television broke yesterday while they were watching their favorite TV program. Their parents called the TV repair person, but he couldn't come yesterday. He was fixing televisions on the other side of town. He can't come today either. His repair truck is broken. Unfortunately, he won't be able to come tomorrow because he'll be out of town. Timmy Brown and his brother and sister are afraid they won't be able to watch television for quite a while. That's why they're so frustrated.

Molinsky, S. J. & Bliss, B. 2001.  
*Side by Side*. p. 100. New York:  
Prentice Hall Regents Addison  
Wesley Longman, Inc.

## APPENDIX FOUR

## Picture-Prompted Free Speaking

Takahashe, N. & Frauman-Prickel, M.  
*Action English Pictures* 1999. p. 13.  
Burlingame, CA: Alta Book Center  
Publishers—San Francisco

## APPENDIX FIVE

## Pronunciation Plan

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Sounds to work on to improve my pronunciation

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

Another skill to work on to help improve pronunciation

\_\_\_\_\_

Ways to improve pronunciation

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

## APPENDIX SIX

## Pronunciation Checklist

Your name \_\_\_\_\_

Speaker's name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. What sounds did you clearly understand?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Give an example of two words that were easy to understand.

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Give an example of two words that had a clear ending sound.

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Give an example of two words that were linked together.

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Give two examples of words that have two or three syllables.

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Show the syllable where the speaker put the stress.

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