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Why has phonodidactics become “the neglected orphan” of ESL/EFL pedagogy? Explaining methodology- and ELF-related motives behind a reluctance towards pronunciation teaching

Abstract. The post-method reality of ESL/EFL education, in which LT is no longer perceived as a large-scale enterprise based on one universal method, has encouraged theoreticians and practitioners to search for more personalised ways of L2/FL teaching. This specifically applies to pronunciation instruction, whose models, priorities and teaching procedures ought to be considered in light of the tenets of the Post-Method Era. Even though there is no disputing the fact that the influences of methodology- and globalisation-driven transformations have been generally positive in the sense that they have individualised approaches to LT and facilitated international communication respectively, they have also lowered the status of phonodidactics, which, in effect, is disparagingly referred to as “the neglected orphan” of ESL/EFL pedagogy.

Keywords: ENL, ESL, EFL, ELF, phonodidactics, methodology, globalisation.

1 Rationale

Traditionally, pronunciation has been viewed as a subskill of the productive oral skill, speaking (e.g. Chastain 1971; Kreidler 1989; Morley 1991; Dalton & Seidlhofer 1994; Celce-Murcia (1996); Brown 2001; Thornbury 2005, 2006; Bygate 2009; Boonkit 2010; Nation 2011; Waniek-Klimczak 2011; Brown & Bown 2014). Nonetheless, despite a specific

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linguistic norm, or standard, established and accepted by the community (or nationality) to which the end product of oral language production, that is speech, conforms, pronunciation is a highly individual phenomenon affected by distinctive non-language-related factors, including, *inter alia*, speakers' place of residence, age, education and personal voice characteristics (Nurani & Rosyada 2015: 109). It is to be noted here that the aforementioned presentation of a pronunciation learning process concerns first language (L1) contexts in which phonology acquisition is determined mainly by speakers' unique features and their immediate socio-cultural environments.

If one considers second and foreign language (L2/FL) instructed settings, the issue of pronunciation learning becomes even more complicated not only under the influence of linguistic and non-linguistic **learner-related determinants**² (e.g. level of language proficiency, amount and type of L2/FL and pronunciation instruction, language experience, language aptitude, age of onset, personality, identity, willingness to communicate, communicative apprehension, self-constructs, degree of motivation, expectations and future plans, learning style, aesthetic sensitivity), but also because of **teacher-** (e.g. level of competence, ability to approximate sound system, qualifications and teaching expertise, teaching and learning materials, beliefs and attitudes towards oral language teaching, choice of actual pronunciation-oriented in-class practices, personality traits) and **context-related factors** (e.g. similarities and differences between L1 and L2/FL, role of the target language in the community, ethnolinguistic vitality, similarities and differences between L1 and L2/FL culture, national language policy, national core curriculum, language examinations and their influence on teaching, situational context of a speech act). Given a multidimensional character of L2/FL pronunciation learning, as reflected in its linguistic, socio-cultural and emotional underpinnings, instructors' attempts to involve learners in formal pronunciation instruction to improve the latter's oral language competence have proven to be frequently unsuccessful.

Thus, motivated by a high variability of an ESL/EFL pronunciation learning process, the field of phonodidactics has become strongly associated with nothing else than the extreme unpredictability of L2/FL pronunciation teaching classroom procedures. This, in turn, questioned its usefulness, leading to lively discussions held by theoreticians and practitioners on to what extent the pronunciation component, taking into consideration its frequent inefficiency in instilling appropriate oral language habits, ought to be included in ESL/EFL courses. This has certainly not failed to influence the attitudes

2 Pronunciation-influencing factors which have often been discussed by SLA specialists in the context of L2/FL phonology acquisition include learners' biological (age of onset), linguistic (significance of their native language, level of language proficiency, FL experience, language aptitude) and psychological/ emotional (WTC, anxiety, self-constructs, motivation) determinants (see e.g. Carroll 1971, 1990; Patkowski 1990, 1994; Flege & Fletcher 1992; Flege et al. 1995; Flege et al. 1997; Kruger & Dunning 1999; Scovel 2000; Munro & Mann 2005; Bundgaard-Nielsen et al. 2011).

towards L2/FL pronunciation practice, which have become increasingly hostile, not only effectively diminishing the role of pronunciation, but also putting it into the background of L2/FL instructed settings.

The question can be asked now whether an overwhelming number of pronunciation-influencing factors has been the only culprit responsible for provoking widespread reluctance towards phonodidactics. The answer is, as argued below, negative.

Once we have briefly considered some of the possible causes underlying the notoriety of phonodidactics on the ESL/EFL educational stage, we would like to continue the discussion by shifting its focus to less obvious, however equally, if not more significant reasons for the controversial and, hence, problematic nature of instructed pronunciation practice. Once we have carefully tracked the history of L2/FL methodology and the *lingua franca* role of English (ELF), it is possible to identify certain tendencies which, despite their vital importance in, *exempli gratia*, establishing the field of second language acquisition (SLA) and facilitating international communication in the sphere of commerce, politics, business and education, have more or less directly tended to weaken the position of phonodidactics.

In view of the above, the aim of the present paper is to investigate methodology- and ELF-related causes undermining the position of pronunciation teaching (see the term “the neglected orphan”³ coined by Deng et al. 2009 qtd. in Ketabi & Saeb 2015). Following scholars from the relevant fields (e.g. Brown & Yule 1983; Kachru 1986; Morley 1991; Jenkins 2000; Field 2005; Kumaradivelu 2006; Cruttenden 2008; Szpyra-Kozłowska 2015, 2018), we would like to:

1. present selected methodology- and ELF-related problems underlying the continuing neglect of instructed pronunciation practice;
2. consider the potential impact of L2/FL methodology and a growing importance of English on the teaching of ESL/EFL pronunciation today.

The objectives of the article are twofold: (1) to broaden the view on ESL/EFL pronunciation teaching by offering methodological and historical insights from the fields of phonodidactics and L2/FL education and (2) to demonstrate the increased sensitivity of ESL/EFL pronunciation teaching to a constantly evolving position of English on the international stage.

3 Other revealing terms such as “the Cinderella area” and “the lost ring of the chain” coined by Kelly (1969) and Moghaddam et al. (2012) respectively were introduced to underline the inferiority of phonodidactics in L2/FL instructed settings.

2 Reasons behind the inferiority of ESL/EFL phonodidactics

The following sections present selected methodology- and ELF-related problems which, in our opinion, have put ESL/EFL phonodidactics in a vulnerable position.

2.1 Methodological marginalisation of ESL/EFL pronunciation teaching

A subordinate role of instructed pronunciation practice can be explained on the grounds that the study of written language used to foreshadow the analysis of speech production processes. Traditionally, in the **Pre-Method Era** a continuing preoccupation with written models resulted in an exhaustive investigation of the written language (Brown & Yule 1983). Triggering from the fact, until the nineteenth century instructed pronunciation practice had mostly been a forgotten activity. According to Kelly (1969), little is known about pronunciation instruction characteristic of the West up to Reform Movement⁴ in view of the fact that the mechanisms underlying speech production remained a mystery to contemporary language instructors. Even though phonetic descriptions appeared before this time, they contained, as Kelly (1969) claims, mistakes whereas pronunciation teaching was limited to imitation and “approximation drawn from spelling” (Kelly 1969: 60). As far as the approach to the teaching of classical languages in the light of pronunciation practice is concerned, the instruction allowed only for the consideration of stress placement rules, which were judged significant for the process of verse composition whereas target language (TL) phonemes were replaced with the ones from learners’ native language (L1). Even though some attempts to popularise a more welcoming attitude towards pronunciation instruction were made – for instance, different kinds of phonemic transcription and some rules based on spelling and etymology were put forward – they were so informal that, in fact, no teaching took place.

Such liberal attitudes continued in the consecutive period of language teaching (LT), the **Method Era**, in which phonodidactics generally evoked mixed feelings among language instructors (see Rodgers 2001). Amid the initial prominence of grammar and vocabulary in Classical and Grammar-Translation Methods, there appeared to be a manifest lack of attention paid to oral language production in language classrooms. The teaching of pronunciation gained prominence in the wake of World War II, leading to the introduction of production-oriented instruction which focused on individual segments, stress patterns and intonation (Brown & Yule 1983: 2). To be precise, interest

⁴ The history of pronunciation as a scientifically relevant field of study can be dated back to 1886 when the International Phonetic Association was established. The origins of the nineteenth century movement can, however, be traced back to India where one thousand years B.C. Sanskrit grammarians devised a phonological system which provided the basis for the European school of phonetics as late as in the nineteenth century (Kelly 1969).

in pronunciation aspects was revived in the period between the 1940s and 1960s with the introduction of American Audiolingualism and British Oral Approach. They put the importance of pronunciation in the centre of classroom instruction, focusing specifically on learners' accurate production of individual sounds, segments (Atli & Bergil 2012). With the arrival of Cognitive Code Learning and Designer Methods, however, formal pronunciation instruction was abandoned again on the premises that students can learn it through intuitive practices by following the rules of L1 phonology acquisition. Such an approach to the study of language changed with the introduction of controversial Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which perceived language education as written and spoken communication. Even though the main goal of fluency-oriented communicative tasks was to develop speakers' ability to communicate in the TL, excessive focus on meaning most often prevented them from noticing the form of utterances (Seidlhofer 2004: 488). The CLT methodology was mocked by Sobkowiak (1996: 19) who points out that the method, having foreshadowed the role of accuracy, or formal correctness, changed the face of EFL competence, severely limiting it to the knowledge of some English tenses and strategies, including the use of gestures.

Table 1 below provides a brief summary of the key assumptions underlying pronunciation teaching in the selected methods from the Method Era.

Table 1. Presentation of selected methodological approaches to FLT in the context of the instructed pronunciation practice

Method / Approach	Period	Assumptions about pronunciation teaching
Classical Method/Grammar-Translation Method	up to 1800s	L1 used as a means of communication in the classroom no interest in oral language production in the TL FL linguistic competence limited to the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary written translations of texts from L1 to the TL (and vice versa)
Direct Method	1800s and early 1900s	an intuitive-imitative approach to pronunciation instruction naturalistic L2/FL pronunciation teaching: no explicit information given how to produce sounds an emphasis placed on the listening skill on the assumption that students exposed to oral input internalise the TL sound system on their own

Method / Approach	Period	Assumptions about pronunciation teaching
Reform Movement	early 1900s	<p>International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) used to provide an exact representation of speech sounds</p> <p>phonetic training introduced to ensure good pronunciation instruction</p>
Audiolingual Method/Oral Approach	1940s and 1950s	<p>a decided advantage of accuracy over fluency development in formal pronunciation instruction</p> <p>a variety of exercises based on drills, dialogues and repetition</p> <p>the practice of overlearning to eliminate L1 influences</p> <p>decontextualised and isolated pronunciation practice</p> <p>minimal pairs introduced to highlight individual sounds</p>
Cognitive Code Learning	1960s	<p>rejection of the assumptions underlying Audiolingualism</p> <p>promotion of grammar and vocabulary teaching</p> <p>inductive teaching of language subsystems believed to exercise FL students' inherent creativity</p> <p>no place for explicit pronunciation instruction</p> <p>intuitive pronunciation learning</p>
Designer Methods (e.g. Natural Approach, Total Physical Response, Suggestopedia)	1970s	<p>L2/FL teaching resembles L1 acquisition</p> <p>emphasis on listening comprehension</p> <p>no formal pronunciation teaching</p>
Communicative Language Teaching	1980s	<p>pronunciation instruction viewed as an obstacle to communicative practice by early CLT</p> <p>phonodidactics conceptualised as a problematic component of LT which can decrease speaker's level of confidence (Binte Habib 2013: 21)</p> <p>departure from accuracy- to fluency-oriented language tasks</p> <p>no drills</p> <p>growing importance of pronunciation in communicative competence in more recent version of CLT</p>

As evident above, “changing models of second language learning, changing foci in second language teaching, and changing models of linguistic description” (Morley 1991: 485) led to the fluctuating significance of phonodidactics in ESL/EFL instructed settings. The contradictory nature of pronunciation instruction, however, has not been the only problem.

2.2 Methodology-related challenges of ESL/EFL pronunciation teaching

The failure of traditional approaches (and their pronunciation-based activities) to develop learners’ expertise in TL sounds and prosody dampened teachers’ enthusiasm to practice the subskill. This in turn might have constituted a source of discord between the subordinate position of pronunciation in LT and its indispensability in learners’ oral communication (see Levelt 1999; Burns & Claire 2003; Seidlhofer 2004; Demirezen & Kulaksiz 2015).

Ineffectiveness of phonodidactic classroom procedures, combined with scholars’, as Brown (2002) puts it aptly, obsession with the concept of a method and their extensive, yet futile search for a set of universal assumptions which could work well with all groups of students from around the globe, encouraged researchers to stress the need for a novel kind of instruction and mark “the Death of Method”.

Given the fact that one method cannot provide effective teaching in all educational contexts, Nunan (1991), Brown (1994, 2002) and Kumaravadivelu (2006) recommend language instructors to adjust their teaching to unique L2/FL instructed settings by following three concepts characteristic of the **Post-Method Era** (Kumaravadivelu 2006). They include the following:

1. particularity, which considers local, socio-cultural and political features of the educational context;
2. possibility, which explores learners’ socio-cultural and socio-political backgrounds;
3. practicality, according to which FL instructors are expected to formulate their own theory of practice based on their students’ individual needs and characteristics.

Following the tenets of the Post-Method Era, ESL/EFL instructors are expected to adopt a two-stage approach to pronunciation teaching. This has generated lively discussions on *what* aspects of the TL sound system to teach and *how* to do in the classroom. Following that line of reasoning, the decision on the what ought to logically precede any considerations of the how. Otherwise, as Brown (1991: 1) explains, one may end up teaching the wrong thing, that is an unsuitable model and aspect of pronunciation, using a very good methodology.

In light of the above, some of the most intense debates in the field of phonodidactics have surrounded such notions as the choice of an appropriate pronunciation teaching model and the selection of instructional goals.

At this point, it is to be noted that ESL/EFL teachers have had two paths to follow. They could work on their students' native-like mastery of the TL sound system in accordance with the nativeness principle. Nevertheless, such factors as the formulation of the Critical Period Hypothesis and the prominence of communicative methodology gave way to the intelligibility principle, according to which L2/FL instructors may concentrate on developing their learners' ability to produce intelligible and comprehensible speech. In the context of the principle in question, the isolation of pronunciation aspects which determine the intelligibility of non-native speakers' utterances is a priority. The issue, however, is contentious because it is not always evident to whom the utterance should be comprehensible. Traditionally, it was native speakers who were the target interlocutors that L2/FL speakers were preparing for having conversations with. Nowadays, with an increasing significance of ELF, this trend started to halt, with conversations with non-native speakers of English outnumbering those held with native speakers.

Even though the above-mentioned developments to SLA and LT are more than welcome, they have not strengthened the position of phonodidactics. Given increased workload involved in the processes of planning and implementation of instructed pronunciation practice, teachers' ardour to include the pronunciation component in their courses might have thoroughly been cooled down.

2.3 ELF-related problems with ESL/EFL pronunciation teaching

The rise of ELF and, *ergo*, the development of World Englishes, further accentuated a highly unrealistic character of the objective pursued by the nativeness principle. The problem is well accounted for by Ketabi & Saeb (2015), who explain that "in an age when English had adopted the role of the basic channel of international communication, native-like pronunciation seemed to be an unnecessary extravagance not every learner could afford" (p. 185). Given the changing character of communication in English, the transition from the nativeness to the intelligibility principle has initiated extensive research into what features of speech ought to be central in pronunciation instruction.

In light of the fact that communication between non-native speakers of English had quickly become a reality, the English language ceased to be exclusively the domain of its native users (ENL). The search for a universally applicable set of pronunciation teaching priorities for ELF learners began. One of the important contributors to the field who made an attempt to satisfy the needs of such a group of learners is Jenkins (2000). The researcher proposed the so-called lingua franca core (LFC), in which she isolated a set of core (e.g. aspiration of /p, t, k/, approximation of consonants, emphasis on vowel quantity, nuclear stress) and non-core (e.g. dental fricatives, rhythm, intonation, weak

forms) features of English. Despite a growing need to acknowledge ELF users, Jenkins' (2000) LFC attracted justifiable criticism. An emphasis on developing learners' basic intelligibility was one of the arguments which effectively discredited her proposal. Its unsound empirical basis, as successfully revealed by Szpyra-Kozłowska (2015), was another reason behind a questionable implementation of the core features into pronunciation instruction.

Since English is spoken in different parts of the world, discussions have also centred on how the institutional context translates into pronunciation teaching. Szpyra-Kozłowska (2018) isolated four major types of pronunciation teaching models, including native, nativised, non-native and multiple models.

Their classification, as a historically motivated phenomenon, is often discussed in the context of Kachru's (1986 after Szpyra-Kozłowska 2018) model of concentric circle. Having taken the role of English as the main criterion, Kachru (1986) divides the countries into three circles:

1. the inner circle (e.g. the UK, the US, Canada), in which English functions as a native language (ENL);
2. the outer circle (former British colonies, such as India and the countries in Africa and Asia), where English is an official language used in politics, administration and education (ESL);
3. the expanding circle countries (e.g. Poland, Germany, Spain), in which the role of English is limited to the status of a foreign language (EFL).

Kachru's (1986) model of three concentric circles has affected the type of pronunciation instruction found preferable in given educational settings. Accordingly, the inner circle adopts the native models of pronunciation whereas the outer circle opts for nativised pronunciation teaching models, with, for example, Indian English being adopted in India.

The introduction of nativised models of pronunciation in the outer circle countries carries fundamental implications. On the one hand, New Englishes, or as Szpyra-Kozłowska (2018: 238) explains, indigenised varieties of English, seem to be more appealing to ESL teachers given a number of linguistically, psychologically and culturally-related reasons. Local varieties of English are said to be easier to teach since they are deeply rooted in a given socio-cultural context, and, thus, frequently used. On the other hand, however, in contrast to standard models of pronunciation, they are simply local or regional varieties of English and, thus, they are known to a limited number of English speakers. Hence, their use in communication with the speakers of English from the outside of a given outer circle country may have far-reaching consequences with regard to the success of a communication process. Further, given a matter of prestige,

nativised models may evoke negative feelings among their users since they come across as inferior when compared with native models.

In the case of the expanding circle, the issue under discussion is usually far from being straightforward. The choice of a pronunciation teaching model usually depends on the country's geographical proximity to the inner circle countries as well as their political and economic relationship. Decisions have been therefore usually made between two most influential pronunciation models associated with the UK and the US, that is Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA) respectively. Their introduction to FL instructed settings has not avoided criticism either. On the one hand, they have been most thoroughly described models, providing an extensively documented theoretical basis for the development of an array of teaching materials. On the other hand, they have been criticised for their unrealistic and unattainable character as well as a diminishing approach towards non-native speakers' identity (Szpyra-Kozłowska 2018).

A reasonable alternative to native models of pronunciation that has a potential in providing EFL learners with a comprehensible and intelligible yet non-native-accented English can be offered by non-native and multiple models.

As far as the former is concerned, or the non-native models, both non-native speakers of English who share their L1 with their learners as well as non-native speakers of English whose L1 differs from that of their students can be involved in pronunciation instruction. The situation in which the teacher as well as the learners have the same linguistic background is more favourable. As argued by Szpyra-Kozłowska (2018), "this variety of English is phonetically and culturally close to the learners who feel comfortable with it and allows them to express their L1 cultural, linguistic and national identity" (Szpyra-Kozłowska 2018: 239). Such an argument, however, can be easily refuted if one takes into account those students who intend to achieve near native-like oral proficiency and whose ESL/EFL instructor provides an L1-accented a pronunciation model. The process of pronunciation teaching can become even more problematic when EFL learners are exposed to a pronunciation model which is not only a non-native accented speech, but also contains traces of a language different from learners' L1. As presented by Szpyra-Kozłowska (2018), such language instructors are not only at risk of being looked down upon by learners owing to their accented speech, but are also not able to predict students' pronunciation difficulties given two distinct L1 sound systems.

The latter, or the multiple models, do not focus on one variety of English. Instead, they introduce, depending on the educational context as well as the instructor and learners, different native and non-native accents. While, on the one hand, such a practice is beneficial from the perspective of learners' oral language comprehension; on the other hand, it may be the source of their confusion and annoyance given the fact that "if learning one variety is an enormous challenge, then coping with several models might be too heavy a burden" (Szpyra-Kozłowska 2018: 240).

The information presented in Table 2 gives insights into three aforementioned types of pronunciation teaching models: native, non-native and multiple models.

Table 2. Overview of selected pronunciation teaching models (based on Cruttenden 2008; Kretzschmar 2008; Seidlhofer 2008; Collins & Mess 2013; Szpyra-Kozłowska 2015; Trudgill & Hannah 2013)

Pronunciation teaching model	Type	Approach to pronunciation
English as a Foreign Language (EFL)	native	emphasis on communication with native speakers adoption of a native model of pronunciation aiming at native- or near native-like proficiency exposure to and imitation of native pronunciation models references to TL society and culture
English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)	non-native	emphasis on communication with non-native speakers of English adoption of the Lingua Franca Core (LFC) aiming at basic intelligibility (preservation of L1 features under the condition that they do not impede on intelligibility) native linguistic rules and socio-cultural norms not important
Native English as a Lingua Franca (NELF)	multiple	emphasis on communication with native and non-native speakers adoption of a native model of pronunciation aiming at comfortable intelligibility references to both L1 and TL socio-cultural norms

3 Future directions

It is difficult not to agree that the stipulated “Death of the Method” have revolutionised theoretical approaches to pronunciation teaching. Socio-cultural, economic, political and technological globalisation-driven changes which contributed to the emergence of ELF have also significantly affected the position of the pronunciation component in English language teaching (ELT).

The ease with selecting grammatical and lexical items according to their complexity and learners' age, interests and educational needs (Cruttenden 2008) has over the years remained a proverbial pipe dream in the field of phonodidactics. As already stated, contemporary phonodidactics involves a number of decision-making processes connected with the *whats* and the *hows* of pronunciation teaching. This, consequently, places more and more burden on teachers who need to select pronunciation teaching models and priorities by taking into consideration, *inter alia*, their students' L1, age, expectations, level of proficiency as well as cultural, historical and political ties with the TL community.

Even though the above-mentioned information has been found crucial to successful planning of pronunciation instruction, we would like to express our concerns as to what extent teachers of English across the globe are familiar with the latest guidelines on phonodidactics of the new millennium and to what degree they can adhere to them in language classrooms. Our worry has been prompted by the current situation in the Polish educational context in which EFL teachers' classroom work has been driven primarily by the prospect of high-stake examinations. As far as Polish instructed settings are concerned, there has been little room for pronunciation practice, and, all the more, the identification of pronunciation teaching priorities in view of the examination reforms initiated in the late 1990s. The speaking *Matura* exam, the only oral FL examination in Poland, administered at the ISCED⁵ level 3, not only assesses examinees' pronunciation very leniently, but it is also of little significance to Polish students in contrast to a written high-stake FL examination as demonstrated by Zawadowska-Kittel (2017) in her study conducted with secondary school students. Its impact on phonodidactics is more than obvious.

In the times of an increasing significance of English, the questions relating to what (and why) should be regarded as a pronunciation teaching priority have been giving researchers sleepless nights. There are, however, some other aspects which complicate the process of pronunciation teaching.

What is closely connected with the points made above is the concept of a standard which evolved differently in the context of a spoken and written language. It is to be noted that while the conventions concerning grammatical rules and vocabulary for the written language have generally been accepted by the majority of educated English speakers, the lively controversy has centred on the issue of spoken language. The latter has been diversified not only by different strata of the society, but also by various geographical regions (Cruttenden 2008).

Intelligibility, which describes the degree to which an utterance is understood by a TL user, is problematic since "just like with foreign accent, whether a given word/utterance

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is or is not recognizable will to a large extent depend on the listener, rather than on the objectively measurable features of the speaker's phonetic output" (Scheuer 2015: 140).

Even though it is possible for a foreign accented speech to be understood by other interlocutors, there is every likelihood that a poor quality of non-native speakers' pronunciation will have a negative effect on the latter's perception (Cunningham-Anderson 1993). Moreover, certain manners of pronunciation may be more irritating than others. As a result, "listeners sometimes exhibit prejudice against particular groups of L2 speakers or against non-native accents in general" (Munro & Derwing 1995: 290). The criterion of aesthetics and attitudes towards accented speech, since conditioned by listeners' likes and dislikes, is, thus, a personal issue.

Munro and Derwing (1995) point out that the sources of bias towards foreign accented speech can also be located within social, economic, historical and political features of a given nationality. Pennington and Rogerson-Revell (2019: 20) provide an example of Filipino English, which is disregarded by the citizens of Hong Kong due to the contrast between the Filipino, predominantly servants, and the English, a ruling class, communities.

What further complicates the issue is, as Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994) explain, the fact that some aspects of pronunciation teaching are easy to teach, whereas some "might better be left for learning (or not) without teacher intervention" (Dalton & Seidlhofer 1994: 72).

Apart from teachability- and learnability-centred considerations, the functional, or phonemic, load which stands for the contrasts between two, or more than two, sounds ought to be also taken into account. Accordingly, the higher the functional load a given sound carries, the more important it is in the context of oral communication and speech production (Cruttenden 2008: 315). In other words, the sounds which can be characterised by a high functional load constitute more minimal pairs and, therefore, their mispronunciation may result in frequent communication breakdowns, e.g. /i/ versus /i:/ as in *sit* and *seat*, *fit* and *feet*, *bid* and *bead*.

Last but not least, given the fact that each group of learners has its own unique characteristics, it has recently been advocated that a list of pronunciation priorities which are most suitable for a specific group of speakers should be compiled (Szpyra-Kozłowska 2015). Accordingly, segmental and suprasegmental components of the TL sound system ought to be analysed with reference to the so-called priority evaluation. It encompasses the following criteria:

1. their influence on the intelligibility of learners' utterances and the functional load;
2. their degree of tolerance as perceived by native speakers of the TL;
3. teachability and learnability dimensions in FL classrooms;
4. decisions made with regard to the aims of pronunciation instruction relating to basic versus comfortable intelligibility.

In her publication, Szpyra-Kozłowska (2015) carries out an evaluation for the voiceless dental fricative /θ/. She argues that the sound ranks low with regard to the intelligibility, functional load, teachability and learnability, at the same time being characterised by a high degree of tolerance on the part of native speakers. If, however, the comfortable intelligibility is the goal, then the sound ought to be taught.

4 Concluding remarks

The most frequent explanation put forward to account for the underprivileged position of pronunciation teaching has lain in a plethora of linguistic and non-linguistic learner-, teacher- and context-related pronunciation-learning determinants. Unsurprisingly, the concept of a pronunciation error, or any deviation from the norm, has been mostly overlooked to the advantage of grammar and vocabulary practice based on the rule: the easier something is, the sooner it is taught. Nonetheless, inherent problems with pronunciation teaching might have been further aggravated by a range of economic, political and socio-cultural developments that have been taking place irrespectively of classroom settings.

The emergence of ELF has started a heated debate over who enjoys the sole right to judge what can be regarded as correct pronunciation. A growing number of non-native speakers of English have put into question the nativeness principle. Since more and more communication nowadays takes place between non-native speakers of English, native models of pronunciation have been replaced with their indigenised, non-native and multiple counterparts, following Kachru's (1986) model of concentric circle, on the significance of English in different parts of the world.

In addition, a methodological revolution marked by the demise of a method has had far-reaching implications in institutional contexts. Apart from the selection of a pronunciation teaching model, L2/FL teachers have been strongly encouraged to carefully analyse their instructed settings in light of the Post-Method Era. They have been expected to make decisions with regard to what aspects of TL pronunciation to teach and how to do it most effectively. In view of the above, onerous burden has been imposed on language instructors who are obliged to:

1. firstly, be well acquainted with theoretical and practical phonetics in order to identify similarities and differences between their learners' L1 and TL systems;
2. secondly, consider students' English-related plans with a view to isolating pronunciation teaching priorities which ensure speakers' basic or comfortable intelligibility in contacts with native and/or non-native users of English;
3. thirdly, select pronunciation-based classroom activities bearing in mind ESL/EFL students' linguistic and cognitive abilities.

This, despite a great prominence and obvious usefulness of ESL/EFL oracy, proves the problematic nature of phonodidactics and provides yet another reason behind an increased unwillingness of teachers to introduce and practice aspects of the English language pronunciation in their classes.

Theoretical discussions and empirical research have been and definitely will be an integral part of phonodidactics. We are afraid, however, that the increasing diversity of learners of English may further exacerbate the problem of neglected pronunciation instruction. Pragmatically speaking, a question needs to be asked, firstly, to what extent teachers can remain theoretically informed about the recent phonodidactic developments and, secondly, if it is really possible to determine nowadays pronunciation teaching priorities. Assuming that this difficult task has been achieved, we need to remember that this is only one side of the coin. There is still great abundance of linguistic and non-linguistic pronunciation-influencing factors which relentlessly put to the test the effectiveness of the teaching process.

Certainly, the aforementioned overview cannot and, therefore, does not offer a complete account of the problem under discussion. Nevertheless, bearing in mind an immense complexity of the phenomenon of pronunciation teaching, our determined attempt was to discuss selected methodology- and ELF-related developments with a view to illustrating a high vulnerability of a pronunciation component to ongoing changes taking place not only in ESL/EFL methodology, but also in different spheres of human lives. They all have, as, hopefully, successfully explained above, played an important part in reducing L2/FL instructors' willingness to teach pronunciation by complicating the selection of phonodidactic priorities, or maybe making the whole action completely impracticable.

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