

Teaching Pronunciation to the Brain not to the Ears: A Multisensory/Multicognitive Approach

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The traditional ‘approach’ to teaching pronunciation in Second Language (L2) and Foreign Language (FL) has been, and still is, predominantly, mono-dimensional in the form of Listen and Repeat (L/R). In other words, the instructor demonstrates the targeted pronunciation and the learners reproduce after him/her. L/R has two major drawbacks. *First*, if the instructor is not a native or near-native speaker of L2 he/she might unintentionally and subconsciously offer learners an inaccurate pronunciation to reproduce. This is a very common phenomenon throughout the world especially in FL teaching. *Second*, even if the instructor is a *native* or *near-native* speaker and presents an ideal pronunciation of a targeted sound, not all learners reproduce the sound correctly if it does not exist in their L1 **phonology** (i.e. their neuronal and cognitive storage). To demonstrate, the typical rendition of the Spanish plosives “p, t, c/q/k” is without a-puff-of-air (i.e. without aspiration) unlike their typical pronunciation in English with distinctly audible aspiration /pH, tH, kH/. Although English does have unaspirated versions of “p, t, k” especially in *s-cluster* formation as in ‘**spit**’, ‘**stir**’ and ‘**skin**’, these unaspirated allophonic contextual variants are not part of the neurological/cognitive storage (phonology) of the native English speakers. Stated differently, they fail to successfully articulate the unaspirated sounds independently. Consequently, native speakers of English learning Spanish fail initially to master the Spanish unaspirated /p, t, k/. To avoid such failures in teaching L2/FL pronunciation, the LR technique, which is a *monosensory* one, should be replaced with a 3D sensory (*multisensory*) approach, namely, *auditory*, *visual* and *tactile/kinesthetic* (T/K). Humans do not neuronize (store in long-term memory of brain) speech sounds solely via the auditory sense; rather, through a combination with *visual* and *T/K* senses. This is what is identified here as 3-D neuronization of L1 phonemes. In the world of a baby, speech sounds do not only have an auditory identity. Actually, many sounds have visual and T/K identities that a baby *sees* and *feels* jointly with their auditory identity. The visual features are depicted via lips, teeth, jaws, cheeks, eyes movements. Likewise, T/K sensations are proprioceptively picked up by the innervations in speech organs beginning with the larynx, pharynx, tongue, lips etc. There are several features of speech that are better *seen* and *sensed* than heard. Typical in this case for Hispanics is the distinction and correct rendition of [b] vs. [v] sounds. It is the joint contribution of those 3 senses that function as the windows to the brain through which it cognitively *hears*, *sees* and *feels* them and neuronizes them in the brain with perfection.