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TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THEIR PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES: SELECTED RESULTS FROM THE ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION TEACHING IN EUROPE SURVEY

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The English Pronunciation Teaching in Europe Survey (EPTiES) is a collaborative effort by a group of European researchers interested in the state of English pronunciation teaching in Europe. Given the lack of research-based information on the topic (cf. e.g. Foote et al. 2011, Macdonald 2002), ten researchers designed an extensive online survey, which attracted participants from all over Europe. The participants are EFL/ESL teachers from various teaching contexts. This paper concentrates on two parts of the survey that deal with teacher training and pronunciation assessment. Responses from seven European countries are analysed (n=630). We present findings concerning the contents of teacher training received by the respondents and their overall evaluation of it. In addition, we look into the respondents' pronunciation assessment methods.

INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, a number of studies have focused on English pronunciation teaching and it is evident that there is a growing interest in this field of research. Various attempts have been made to deal with relevant issues related to teaching practices, materials, training and attitudes to native speaker models both from the teachers' and the learners' perspective. Most of these studies have been conducted in ESL settings and in English-speaking countries such as Canada (Breitkreutz et al., 2001, Foote et al., 2011), the USA (Murphy, 1997), Australia (Macdonald, 2002), and Great Britain (Bradford & Kenworthy, 1991, Burgess & Spencer, 2000). Pronunciation teaching in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) has been studied for example in Spain (Walker, 1999), Finland (Tergujeff, 2012), and in EFL environments of Ireland (Murphy, 2011). In addition, attitudes towards native speaker models and the degree of success in reaching the models in an EFL context have been investigated in Poland (Nowacka, 2010; Waniek-Klimczak, 2002; Waniek-Klimczak & Klimczak, 2005), Serbia (Paunović, 2009), and Bulgaria (Dimitrova & Chernogorova, 2012). It appears that recent

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research has given the appropriate attention to important aspects of pronunciation teaching; they are, however, looked into separately and tend to be rather country-specific with comparative studies, particularly between European countries, few and far between. Given this lack of research, the English Pronunciation Teaching in Europe Survey (EPTiES) seeks to provide a detailed insight into the current state of affairs. It addresses the issue of pronunciation teaching within an EFL setting in various European countries from a teachers' perspective.

Initial results rendered from a fraction of the EPTiES data came from the analysis carried out by Henderson and her team of researchers (Henderson et al., 2012). Findings revealed that the respondents feel that English is a very important language in relation to other languages, and consider pronunciation, in particular, to be one of the most important language skills. They further rate their own pronunciation skills as very good and claim to have a relatively high awareness of their learners' goals and skills in English pronunciation. According to the teachers, their learners strive for a native-like pronunciation to some extent, and generally prefer General American (GA) as a pronunciation model. On the other hand, the teachers themselves demonstrate a tendency to use British Received Pronunciation (RP) in their teaching.

In this paper, we further analyse two subsets of data from EPTiES addressing areas of pronunciation pedagogy related to professional teacher training and practical approaches to pronunciation assessment. The aim is primarily to tackle issues relatively underrepresented in the literature and to explore recurring trends in the European context.

The question of the lack of teacher training deserves attention and has been raised in several studies. Surveys conducted in Canada (Breitkreutz et al., 2001, Foote et al., 2011), Australia (Macdonald, 2002) and the USA (Murphy, 1997) suggest that many teachers teach pronunciation without substantial pedagogical training in this area, and that they often wish that they had received a more extensive training. Our study presents a closer look at what EFL teachers in Europe think about their teacher training relevant to pronunciation teaching with emphasis on the amount and contents of the training.

Pronunciation assessment is yet another challenge that teachers are faced with in their professional lives. Despite the fact that pronunciation is a vital component of proficiency in spoken English, little published work seems to exist which addresses the issue of pronunciation testing and evaluation. This absence can be accounted for partly by the fact that "precise identification of pronunciation problems can be difficult even for experienced listeners" (Yates, Zielinski, & Pryor, 2011, p.4) and also by the fact that "the large body of literature on language assessment applies to pronunciation just as it does to any skill - reading, listening, speaking" (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996, p.341). Studies that have investigated issues related to pronunciation assessment mainly focus on the reliability of the descriptors for the speaking part in standardised tests such as Cambridge ESOL exams and IELTS (Brown & Taylor, 2006; DeVelle, 2008; Hubbard, Gilbert & Pidcock, 2006; Szpyra-Kozłowska et al., 2005; Yates, Zielinski & Pryor, 2011). Researchers have also been interested in what aspects of pronunciation assessment examiners should refer to while assessing individual speakers' speech and/or spoken interaction. With this in mind, research has addressed issues such as the relevance of diagnostic assessment versus holistic/impressionistic/global assessment (Levis, 2006; Szpyra-Kozłowska et al., 2005), the importance of intelligibility and comprehensibility (Gass & Varonis, 1984; Jenkins, 2000; Munro & Derwing, 1999), as well as the intricacies involved in assessing accuracy and fluency (Kormos & Dénes, 2004; Levis, 2006). This study attempts to broaden the research scope by providing insights into the use of established reference scales such as the Common European

Framework of Reference (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001), which has been promoted in the evaluation of language skills throughout Europe. The present article also explores what types of popular classroom activities are used as pronunciation assessment instruments.

THE SURVEY: METHOD AND PARTICIPANTS

EPTiES is an ongoing collaborative research project with partners from various European universities, the aim of which is to compare and contrast the English pronunciation teaching practices and attitudes of English language teachers working in EFL contexts across Europe. The data come from an online survey of 843 teachers from 31 European countries carried out between February 2010 and September 2011. Most of the respondents were female (76%) with an average age of 43 years. The majority were non-native speakers (89%), predominantly working in the public sector (85%) with 15 years teaching experience on average.

The survey consisted of 57 questions grouped into nine sections[2]: participant information, outside classroom, pronunciation teaching methods, teaching materials, evaluation of pronunciation, teacher training, views/attitudes, and model/norm. Some of the questions were formulated to reflect specific national contexts. Both closed-ended and open-ended questions were incorporated in the survey. The following types of closed-ended questions were used: Likert-scales, yes-no items, and multiple-choice items. The Likert-scales were of the five-point format with descriptive terms as response options adapted to the relevance of the question, for instance, in teachers' evaluations of their own pronunciation skills (with 1 as "extremely poor" and 5 as "excellent"). Where more straightforward answers were required, yes-no items were used with an additional option for a clarification comment. In all sections of the questionnaire, multiple-choice questions with the option of choosing more than one answer were used (for example in the section on model/norm for mapping the responses on productive and receptive work). In the analysis, frequencies were calculated for the quantitative data, whereas the open-ended questions were analysed qualitatively by coding the answers for recurrent themes (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009).

In the present paper, a more limited data sample (n=630) is used consisting of the respondents from seven countries where a minimum of ten people responded. In alphabetical order the countries are: Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Macedonia, Poland and Spain, and the number of respondents per country is presented in Table 1. Respondents from these countries form the majority of the responses in total. Not all of the respondents completed the survey, but all responses are considered for those parts of the questionnaire that were filled in.

[2] Results from teacher training, views/attitudes and model/norm sections were presented in Henderson et al. (2011) and reported in Henderson et al. (2012). Results related to pronunciation teaching methods, teaching materials and outside classroom were presented in Henderson et al. (2013a) and reported in Henderson et al. (2013b).

Table 1
Number of respondents per country

Country	Number of respondents
Finland	103
France	65
Germany	363
Ireland	12
Macedonia	36
Poland	20
Spain	31
Total	630

The demographic data reveals that the present sample is well representative of the whole survey. The respondents were predominantly female (77%) with an average age of 43 years. The age range was from 21 to 69 years. Their teaching experience varied from 0 to 44 years with an average of 11 years. A vast majority reported working in the public sector (88%), and 92% of the respondents of the present sample were non-native speakers of English. This background information about the respondents is illustrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2
Background information about the respondents

gender (n=629)		**age (n=630)**		**native speaker status (n=629)**		**teaching experience (n=628)**		**teaching context (n=629)**	
female	**male**	**mean**	**range**	**NS**	**NNS**	**mean**	**range**	**public**	**private**
483 (77%)	146 (23%)	43.27 years	21–69 years	53 (8%)	576 (92%)	11 years	0–44 years	552 (88%)	77 (12%)

FINDINGS

Teacher training

The survey included a number of questions related to the teacher training the respondents had received. The respondents were initially asked to give an overall rating of their teacher training in relation to pronunciation on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 as "extremely poor" and 5 as "excellent". The results show that the whole scale was used, with the average rating of 2.91 (n=478).

The respondents were then required to explain how much training they had received *specific to teaching English pronunciation* (see Table 3). This question was open-ended, and the qualitative content analysis of the responses revealed the following as recurrent themes in all seven countries: (1) phonetics/pronunciation courses/modules; (2) pronunciation component as part of a more general TEFL course or MA programme (except Spain); and (3) no or hardly any training. Some respondents from Finland, France and Germany regarded practical sessions with

native speakers to be part of their training, in addition to a stay in an English-speaking country for the purpose of taking a language course. A number of items arose sporadically in the qualitative data, for example additional training via conferences, seminars, summer schools and workshops or different time periods devoted to training with no specific description about the type of training received. These items varied so much that no generalisations could be made.

Table 3
Summary of the qualitative content analysis regarding amount of training ("Please tell us how much training you received specific to teaching pronunciation.")

Items mentioned	Total number of mentions	Countries where mentioned
Phonetics course as part of their undergraduate studies	135	FIN, FRA, GER, IRE, MAC, POL, SPA
Several pronunciation or phonetics courses (not specific)	57	FIN, FRA, GER, POL, SPA
Intertwined with other topics e.g. As part of a general TEFL course	31	FIN, FRA, GER, IRE, MAC, POL
Native speaker contact or a stay in an English-speaking country	37	FIN, FRA, GER
Hardly any/very little	45	FIN, FRA, GER, IRE, MAC, POL, SPA
None	51	FIN, FRA, GER, SPA
Don't remember	35	FIN, FRA, GER

Teachers' comments reveal that the phonetics/pronunciation courses were in most cases undergraduate courses or modules which did not aim at preparing the future teachers to teach pronunciation, but to improve their own pronunciation, bearing in mind that the majority of the respondents were non-native speakers of English. The number of courses varied from one (frequently mentioned) to four (rarely mentioned). The following representative responses summarize the situation: "Three or four courses of pronunciation, but its intention was to improve our pronunciation not to teach us to teach it. I've had to figure out myself how to do it" (#846), and "We had an exam in Phonetics at the University, which was great; but very little training in teaching pronunciation" (#657). As illustrated, many of the respondents clearly regarded their undergraduate courses in pronunciation and phonetics as part of their training, and described how they themselves had practiced their own pronunciation. Although these general degree courses undoubtedly provide an important foundation, it was striking how few respondents mentioned having received subsequent courses dealing specifically with ways to *teach* pronunciation.

It was evident from the comments that training in pronunciation pedagogy does not generally include a separate pronunciation-oriented course, but rather is made up of smaller intervals of theoretical lectures and/or pronunciation activities as part of more general TEFL courses or as part of MA studies. Respondents frequently indicated that their "… teacher training was an all-

round course with different aspects of teaching combined into a programme which included teaching pronunciation" (#857) or even too general as in "I have not received any training specific to teaching pronunciation, my training was rather global and pronunciation incorporated into it" (#726).

Unfortunately, respondents frequently mentioned that they had received no specific training in this area, and many reported small amounts of training in phonetics. Where there was no or little training provided, the teachers compensated with "…self-teaching and a good deal of experience" (#741).

With a survey of this scale and having in mind that teacher training in general entails training in assessment, one would expect respondents to provide details of their experience of how well they were prepared to assess pronunciation. To our disappointment, only two respondents referred to pronunciation assessment separately. The first respondent mentioned: "personal training and assessment of pronunciation at university (gave an idea of what it should be like) (#60). The second respondent indicated lack of training in this area: "Usually it comes down to teaching pronunciation exercises and ideas. Never assessment of pronunciation or systematic work with it" (#678).

In another question in the survey, respondents were asked to describe the contents and/or style of the training they received (see Table 4). This question was also open-ended thus a qualitative thematic analysis was carried out to group the responses in most recurring themes. Participants from Finland, France, Germany and Poland gave descriptions of what appeared to be training to improve their own pronunciation through practical classes in language labs. As reported in the responses, these mostly covered listening, reading aloud words/sentences/texts and phonetic/phonemic transcripts, as well as "… work on minimal pairs/repetitions…" (#826), "stress and intonation exercises" (#485), and "…exposure to a variety of accents…" (#708). In all seven countries the respondents were taught how to implement IPA symbols and had practical sessions in phonetic/phonemic transcription of sounds, words, utterances and texts. In addition, data from all seven countries showed that the respondents' training had a theoretical orientation with lectures in phonetics and phonology, revealing a frequent overlapping use of the terms pronunciation, phonetics and phonology. For example, in response to this question about their training to teach pronunciation, one respondent wrote that the university module "…was theoretically based without any practical classroom application. This gave me a good overview of the IPA and the different terms related to the biology of the mouth along with the restrictions some speakers may have" (#470).

Table 4
Summary of the qualitative content analysis regarding content/style of training ("Please explain the content and/or style of the training you received.")

Items mentioned	Total number of mentions	Countries where mentioned
Language lab	81	FIN, FRA, GER, POL
Transcription, Phonetic training, Implementing IPA symbols	82	FIN, FRA, GER, IRE, MAC, POL, SPA
Lectures/theory	44	FIN, FRA, GER, IRE, MAC, POL, SPA
Weekend seminars, In-service training, Seminars, Classes abroad	24	GER
Specific activities:		
- **Repetition/drills**	21	FIN, FRA, GER, POL
- **Conversation**	17	FIN, FRA, GER, POL
- **Listening tasks**	14	FIN, FRA, GER, MAC, POL
- **Reading aloud**	13	FIN, FRA, GER, POL
University classes to improve one's own pronunciation	105	GER
Learning by doing, Individual self-improvement	15	GER
None	33	GER, SPA, POL
Don't remember	29	FIN, FRA, GER, MAC, SPA

When it comes to the practical aspects of their training, the following specific activities were noted (see Table 4 for specific countries where mentioned): repetition/drills, conversation, listening tasks and reading aloud. One positive experience comes from several German respondents who seem to have improved their practical skills through in-service training and weekend seminars. For instance, one of them gave a detailed description of the type of training received: "An experienced teacher showed us her methods. We examined materials, tried it out as if we were the children and learned about studies in connection with the way children learn how to speak and understand English" (#378). Another respondent mentioned training practice with a native speaker: "A training day with a native speaker; the content was to train pronunciation and classroom methods" (#450). In this section of the survey, many German respondents quite specifically mentioned university classes as a means to improve their own pronunciation. Also, they referred to "learning by doing". This was not mentioned in any of the data from other countries.

Finally, 21 activities in total were mentioned between 1 and 5 times either in one country only or in several countries separately. They can be grouped as follows: (1) *teacher training specific activities* (e.g. watching other teachers, training in evaluation of oral skills, training in different

accents, stress on the importance of pronunciation teaching); (2) *teacher-student activities* (e.g. listening and correction, teacher correcting/commenting on students' pronunciation, identifying students' problems, L1 influence on L2 sounds, evaluating oral exams, oral translations, diagnostic tests of students' recordings at the beginning and the end of the year); (3) *student-student interactive classroom activities* (rhymes, games, stories, singing, film analysis, role-plays, pair work and group work, reading plays); and (4) *outside classroom activities* (recording one's own speech, exposure to English TV programmes).

Pronunciation assessment practices

Pronunciation assessment was approached in several questions in the survey. First, we inquired whether the teachers base their assessment on an established scale, either national or international. In our sample, to this question 497 respondents provided an answer, the vast majority of which (84.71%) replied that they did not, while the remainder (15.29%) answered affirmatively. Of those who indicated using an established scale (n=76), 85.53% referred to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001).

We were also interested to find out *when* teachers assess their students' pronunciation. Results show that initial diagnostic assessment at the beginning of the course is practised by 31.06% (n=498), while the other 68.94% do not make use of this assessment technique. In contrast, teachers seem to prefer during-the-course assessment (48.80%), they rarely opt for end-of-course assessment (5.62%), or sometimes combine these two types (32.93%).

The practical side of pronunciation assessment was explored by including a set of questions about assessment approaches and tasks. The respondents were asked to indicate which of the listed tasks they use in assessing their learners' pronunciation separately for diagnostic, formative and evaluative assessment. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Tasks used in the assessment of pronunciation skills. (n=504)

Type of task	Diagnostic	Formative	Evaluative
Written work, e.g. transcription	8.53%	19.64%	19.64%
Oral performances, e.g. presentations	27.58%	80.36%	72.42%
Individual oral exams	14.68%	39.48%	44.64%
Oral exams in pairs	15.48%	47.42%	55.16%
Listening and questions	22.62%	67.86%	60.71%
Reading aloud	27.38%	75.60%	58.93%
Other	4.76%	12.10%	8.13%
I don't know	0.60%	1.39%	1.59%
None of the above	9.92%	5.36%	6.35%

In relation to types of assessment used, it is apparent that formative assessment is the preferred approach; all of the tasks are predominantly used for this type of assessment except for

individual exams and oral exams in pairs, which more teachers say they use for evaluative assessment. This set of data also points out the lesser-used method of diagnostic assessment.

When looking at the types of tasks used to assess pronunciation, respondents chose written tasks (e.g. transcription) the least frequently for all types of assessment (in all three cases below 20%). In contrast, oral performances are most frequently chosen for all types of assessment with the highest value for formative assessment (80.36%), followed by reading aloud (75.60%), listening and questions (67.86%), and oral exams in pairs (47.42%). Although respondents indicated that diagnostic assessment is not a common practice, it is no surprise to find that reading aloud is most frequently chosen to diagnose learners' pronunciation with almost one-third of the respondents choosing this option (27.38%).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the findings from the *teacher training* subset of data presented in this paper, we can conclude that the teachers in our sample are in general critical of the training they received. In addition, some of them make a distinction between the training they received to improve their own pronunciation and the training they received for teaching pronunciation as professionals. While they rate their own pronunciation quite high (Henderson et al., 2012), they mention a lack of training in teaching pronunciation. Not receiving the professional development they need, teachers may feel reluctant to teach pronunciation, as pointed out by Foote et al. (2011, p. 16). This may in some cases have an adverse effect on the quality of pronunciation teaching; in the worst-case scenario teachers may neglect pronunciation teaching completely. Given that EFL teachers in various European countries and ESL teachers in the USA, Canada and Australia feel they lack training in how to teach pronunciation, this would seem to be a global problem, leading us to reflect on how to improve teacher training programmes.

The analysis of the *evaluation of pronunciation* subset of data reveals that the respondents' classroom practices may not reflect the sorts of pronunciation assessment proposed in the pronunciation teaching texts and professional literature, at least not in all aspects. Diagnostic assessment, for instance, is a common type of testing favoured by many pronunciation experts. Celce-Murcia et al. (1996, p. 341) recommend it as "the teacher's initial method of setting or adjusting curricular objectives". In his recent publication on teaching English as a lingua franca, Walker (2010, p. 148) advocates the use of diagnostic tests to help teachers "find out what problems the learner has with the language". Moreover, Levis (2006, p. 247) discusses in favour of diagnostic assessment, arguing that teachers "need to become aware of the relevant phonological categories and be able to name important errors … [because] being able to diagnose pronunciation in detail makes the teachers more fit to assess standardized tests, which is important since teachers are the primary source of raters". Our results, however, show that teachers do not seem to be using diagnostic assessment frequently, which may imply that: (1) teachers are not prepared to perform such detailed feedback analysis of learners' pronunciation; (2) it is not required in the course curriculum as a testing method; or (3) they simply lack the time and/or technical resources to do so.

On the other hand, the other two types of assessment, formative and evaluative, are almost equally represented in our sample. It's not surprising that formative assessment is used as it typically takes place during learning, focuses on helping students with the learning process, and aims at improving learning (Huhta, 2010). Brown (2003) argues that formative assessment

provides washback in the form of information to the learners on their progress, thus adding an important dimension to the effect of testing on learning in this case. In light of the survey results, we consider the practice of formative assessment by our respondents to reflect a positive trend in the European context. It also supports the tendency demonstrated by our respondents to assess their students during the course. As for their use of evaluative assessment, based on the types of tasks that are used i.e. individual exams and oral exams in pairs, we may infer that this type of assessment is practiced when a holistic judgement of learner's pronunciation performance is required.

It is generally accepted that pronunciation poses the greatest difficulty for assessment because it incorporates both knowledge and skills components, and, at the same time, it is viewed as both receptive and productive skill. It is, therefore, expected that a range of tasks be employed as assessment instruments. While oral performances and reading aloud evaluate the productive skills in learners, listening and transcription evaluate their receptive skills. Our results show that participants claim to use the first two most frequently, followed by listening and questions but not transcription. The participants seem to be covering both the receptive and productive aspects of pronunciation assessment, in one form or another and at one point or another in a course.

It was surprising to find out that few teachers base their assessment on an established scale. This result could be viewed in the following context: the respondents are experienced teachers from various countries mainly working with monolingual classes and probably experiencing frequent pronunciation errors typical of speakers of certain L1s. Perhaps, this language-specific aspect should be incorporated in a more context-based pronunciation assessment scale if we consider how criticized CEFR is for being too general and too broad for application (Fulcher, 2004; Milanović, 2002; Weir, 2005). This would not be the first attempt to improve a scale, as some have already been made for the English language within the English Profile Programme (www.englishprofile.org).

In terms of teachers' preparation to assess pronunciation, our data certainly did not yield any relevant comments to draw conclusions from. However, the following noticeable mismatch should be pointed out: the majority of the teachers were trained in phonemic/phonetic transcription but do not make use of it in evaluating learners' performance. Based on data from another section in the EPTiES survey (Henderson et al., 2012) this may have to do with the influence of the Communicative Approach as promoted via the CEFR and other European policies: teachers may prefer to assess their students' pronunciation in situations closer to real-life communication than by phonemic/phonetic transcriptions.

As a follow-up to the insights about teachers' pronunciation assessment practices presented in this paper, further research is needed to find out why particular approaches are preferred and whether they are based on overall evaluation of pronunciation or on discrete items of pronunciation such as individual sounds, stress patterns, rhythm and intonation. Further inquiry might provide useful information about specific assessment tasks, such as which aspects of oral presentations are assessed and what features are rewarded and/or penalized.

To summarize, the aim of the present paper was to explore two aspects of English pronunciation teaching, in particular teacher training in teaching pronunciation and pronunciation assessment practices, viewed from the perspective of teachers who work in an EFL setting in various countries in Europe. With respect to teacher training, the results reveal that on average the teachers are not satisfied with their training in this area, and many are totally lacking in training.

With respect to pronunciation evaluation, it is evident that they assess their students during the course adopting a formative approach, and, surprisingly, few base the assessment on an established scale, such as the CEFR. Pronunciation assessment tasks seem to reflect the types of assessment they may have received in their schooling and written work is seldom used. In line with previous research, these findings confirm the apparent need for more structured teacher training programmes that assign a fair share of time to pronunciation instruction and assessment.

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