INTEGRATED SPEAKING, LISTENING AND PRONUNCIATION: ARE TEXTBOOKS LEADING THE WAY?

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After undergoing a period of de-emphasis in the early years of communicative language teaching, pronunciation instruction is experiencing a renaissance. While access to stand-alone pronunciation courses is still somewhat limited, a growing number of learners are able to receive pronunciation instruction through integrated skills courses, such as those blending pronunciation instruction with speaking and listening. The development of this trend has been marked by a concurrent rise in integrated skills textbooks focusing on speaking, pronunciation, and listening (SPL). We examined eleven sets of SPL textbooks to determine how this integration was being achieved and how textbooks were dealing with certain inherent challenges such as finding an appropriate balance among the skills, providing guidance for inexperienced pronunciation teachers, and addressing the diverse pronunciation needs of learners from different backgrounds and levels. To that end, we documented topics covered, their relation to findings on intelligibility and comprehensibility, and support provided for novice pronunciation teachers both in terms of presenting materials and assessing performance. While results indicated several salient concerns with these books in terms of support provided to instructors and the systematic presentation of topics, they also showed that textbook syllabi primarily reflect the literature on intelligibility and comprehensibility. Recommendations for future SPL textbooks and the SPL movement are provided.

INTRODUCTION

Integrated teaching of speaking, pronunciation, and listening (SPL) has remained a topic of interest for several decades. This movement began to take shape in the 1980s with language teaching practitioners and researchers advocating for the linking of pronunciation practice with listening instruction (Gilbert, 1987) and with broader and more communicative speaking activities (Acton, 1984; Celce-Murcia, 1987; Pica, 1984). Literature outlining ideas and frameworks for integrating these skills (Levis & Grant, 2003; Murphy, 1991; Morley, 1994) helped advance the trend by offering specific suggestions for implementation. In 2003, the Speaking and Pronunciation Interest Section (SPIS) of TESOL fostered oral-aural skills integration further by adding listening to its focus, officially changing its name to SPLIS (Speaking, Pronunciation and Listening) and adopting the following as one of its six explicitly stated goals: To "encourage and support the integrated teaching of pronunciation, speaking, listening, and nonverbal communication" (SPLIS web site). Part of the appeal of this movement is based on the premise that a natural interdependence of these skills exists both in daily life and in the development of oral proficiency (Murphy, 1991), a claim that has a sound theoretical foundation and makes sense intuitively. Another factor contributing to the growing SPL

movement is the fact that many language programs do not offer stand-alone pronunciation courses, leaving this important part of language instruction to be covered alongside related skills when it is covered at all (Foote, Holtby & Derwing, 2011). In spite of growing interest, a number of concerns surround the trend, such as achieving an appropriate balance among the skills (Foote, Trofimovich, Collins & Soler Urzúa, 2013; Levis & Grant, 2003), the need for teacher expertise in teaching pronunciation (Breitkreutz, Derwing & Rossiter, 2001; Foote et al., 2011), and uncertainty about how to address diverse pronunciation needs of learners from different language backgrounds and levels of intelligibility (Foote et al., 2013; Piske, MacKay & Flege, 2001). Factors such as these complicate the task of syllabus design and materials development as well as the actual teaching of pronunciation. Despite these challenges, a number of textbooks have begun to integrate pronunciation with other oral skills. To investigate these concerns and document the specifics of how integration is being achieved, we undertook a widespread review of SPL textbooks, focusing on the following questions:

- What pronunciation topics are included and how well do syllabus selections reflect findings from the literature on intelligibility and comprehensibility?

- How does treatment of the topics stack up in terms of efficiency and thoroughness?

- What support is available for teachers who may have little or no training in teaching pronunciation?

METHOD

To select books for inclusion in the study, we first decided to limit our focus strictly to SPL books and not to include four-skills texts. This decision was driven by our specific interest in the integration of content for the three related oral-aural skills. With this focus in mind, we solicited textbook recommendations from TESOL's SPL interest section online discussion board, from colleagues with related research and teaching interests, and from representatives at major publishing houses. Based on these recommendations, eleven sets of textbooks were reviewed (see Appendix A) along with corresponding teacher's manuals and other accompanying materials and resources, such as CD ROMs and websites. Thus, when we refer to a textbook, we are including multiple levels of textbooks (if applicable) as well as teacher's manuals and any other supporting materials.

We created a template for textbook review (see Appendix B) to guide our examination based on our research questions. The template originally included the following six questions:

1. What pronunciation topics are covered?
2. What is the rationale for the selection of pronunciation content?
3. Does the pronunciation content correspond with findings from research on intelligibility?
4. How is a pronunciation focus integrated into listening and speaking assignments?
5. What guidelines or rubrics are given to assess pronunciation performance?
6. Are resources provided to aid inexperienced pronunciation teachers?

After deciding upon these six questions, the researchers randomly selected and analyzed one set of textbooks each (or approximately 10% of the data). This was done both to check the choice of template questions as well as to compare the analyses of the two researchers. The textbooks and teacher's manuals were reviewed page by page. In terms of listing the topics covered, all topics that appeared in the book were listed even if the treatment was cursory. For the questions related to the qualitative analysis, the researchers summarized their findings as well as listed example passages and activities from the textbooks as justification. After conducting separate analyses on these two sets of textbooks, the researchers compared their analyses to ensure agreement. At this stage the template of questions was also evaluated and both researchers agreed to the addition of the following three questions based on the notes from their analyses:

1. What is the overall gist/focus of the book?

2. How complete is the coverage of topics in terms of accuracy, efficiency, and thoroughness?

3. What stands out about this book (both positives and negatives)?

The remaining nine textbooks were then divided between the researchers for analysis. Once the textbook reviews were completed, the quantitative analysis was completed by tallying pronunciation topics. The qualitative analysis was conducted by combining the notes for each of the questions and comparing them for trends found across the textbooks. Each researcher completed the qualitative analysis separately after which the researchers met to compare their notes and summarize the findings.

RESULTS

What pronunciation topics are covered in the text and how well do they correspond with research findings on intelligibility and comprehensibility?

In this section, we present the results related to the pronunciation topics covered in each of the textbooks and how well they correspond with findings from the intelligibility and comprehensibility research. Topics were divided into three main sub-groups by the researchers: phrase level topics (e.g., focal stress, linking), word level topics (e.g., compound nouns, word stress) and sound level topics (e.g., /θ/ vs. /ð/, diphthongs). Table 1 below provides a summary of the topics found in each text/set of texts. An 'X' in a column indicates that the topic was presented. Note, however, that an indication that a topic was covered in no way relates to the thoroughness of coverage. A discussion of the efficiency and thoroughness of topic selections can be found in the next section.

Table 1: Pronunciation Topics Covered in the Textbooks

	All Clear: 1 & 2	Basic Tactics	Open Forum: 1 & 2	Person to Person 2	Q Skills 1, 2, 3 for Success	Real Talk	Speaking Solutions	Talk it Through 2	Tuning In	What I Believe	World English 2
Phrase											
Focal Stress		X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X
Contractions	X	X	X		X	X				X	X
Reductions	X				X	X			X	X	
Thought Groups	X				X	X		X	X	X	X
Linking	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Intonation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Rhythm	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
h-elision		X	X			X					
Blending		X				X					
can/can't[1]			X					X	X	X	
Word											
Multi-word Verbs	X					X					
Compound Nouns	X	X			X	X			X	X	
-s endings	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		
-ed endings	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Word stress		X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Number stress		X			X						
Sound Level											
C/V Chart	X										
/iy/ vs /i/			X								
Voiced vs. voiceless Cs			X								
Theta/Eth				X		X		X			
/r/ after vowels				X							
Consonant clusters				X				X			
/ai, iy, i/									X		
Diphthongs								X	X		
/r/ vs. /l/								X			

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[1] Even though *can* and *can't* are single words, they are treated as phrase-level pronunciation topics because in the stream of speech, the phonological distinction between their vowel quality is a result of differences manifested in rhythm in phrasal contexts. Unstressed *can* is subject to vowel reduction while this is not possible for *can't* because the word receives some degree of stress due to its contracted negative form.

Deciding which pronunciation topics to include is an important task for textbook authors, and the factors authors take into consideration during the decision making process warrants further exploration. The findings from intelligibility and comprehensibility research must be considered, especially because of the shift away from accent reduction in pronunciation teaching (Levis, 2005). At the phrase level, the importance of suprasegmentals in general (Derwing & Munro, 1997; Munro & Derwing, 1995; Suenobu, Kanzakei & Yamane, 1992; Zielinski, 2006) and primary stress in particular (Hahn, 2004) have been noted. These findings are reflected well in the syllabi of the books we critiqued. Notably, all of the books treat rhythmic alternations and intonation, ten books (91%) cover linking—a prevalent means of enhancing rhythm—and eight books (73%) include focal stress.

At the word level, several studies (Benrabah, 1997; Bond & Small, 1983; Zielinski, 2008) noted a correlation between word stress and intelligibility. Seven of the books reviewed (64%) included a focus on word stress, which indicates recognition of the importance of this topic. Another interesting finding is the widespread coverage of morphological endings (–ed 100%, –s, 73%). Although the contribution of morphological endings to intelligibility and comprehensibility has not been addressed, their inclusion may be warranted because they are frequent in speech, problematic among learners, and represent a potentially stigmatizing error.

Many of the studies cited previously (Derwing & Munro, 1997; Munro & Derwing, 1995; Suenobu et al., 1992; Zielinski, 2006) and Zielinski (2008) also discussed the impact of non-standard segmentals on comprehensibility and intelligibility. Overall, sound level topics received very little space on the syllabi. Six of the textbooks failed to include any coverage of segmentals, although one of these books did include a consonant and vowel chart with no explanation or corresponding activities. For the remaining five books, coverage varied from one to four lessons focusing on consonants and vowels.

Choosing which segmentals to focus on is another question textbook authors face. One means of making selections with some research basis is using functional load, which is determined by taking into account frequency of the sound or minimal pair, position of the sound in the word among other factors (King, 1967). Munro & Derwing (2006) found that non-standard segmentals with high functional load negatively impacted comprehensibility. To examine the consonants and vowels included, King's ten point scale of functional load was used as the basis for determining a load rating, with segments listed in the top five categories corresponding to high functional load and segments in the bottom five categories as low functional load. Five of the six books containing segmentals contained at least one vowel (/iy/, /ay/) or consonant (/r/, /l/) with high functional load. Yet, with the inclusion of so few segmentals, it was not really possible to make any conclusions with regard to functional load.
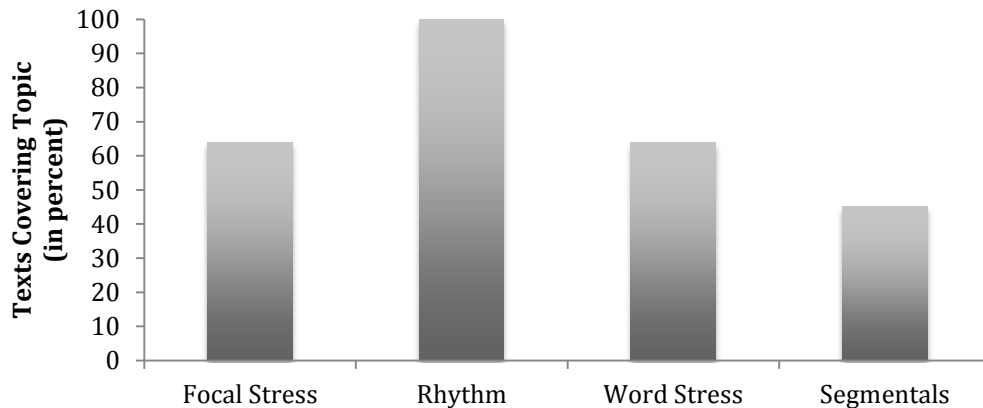
Figure 1: Syllabus Foci

Figure 1 displays information about the percent of textbooks covering topics related to intelligibility and comprehensibility. In sum, the pronunciation syllabi corresponded well with findings from the intelligibility and comprehensibility at the phrase level, somewhat at the word level, and not very well at the sound level due to the inclusion of so few segmentals.

How complete is the coverage of topics in terms of thoroughness and efficiency?

As we saw in the previous section, textbooks covered a wide variety of topics; however, the quality of coverage in terms of both thoroughness and efficiency was not considered in that discussion. During the preliminary analysis which included two sets of textbooks, it became clear that simply marking a topic as being covered or not did not provide a detailed enough picture for the differences among texts that were found in terms of coverage. Thus, a question was added to the template regarding the thoroughness and efficiency of topic coverage. When considering thoroughness, for example, we saw a tendency of a majority of texts to provide a 1-3 sentence explanation of a given topic followed by a handful of listen and repeat practice items as in the following explanation of focal stress from *Open Forum 3*:

> The focus word is the most important word in a statement. Speakers emphasize focus words by stressing them. This makes the important words easier to hear and understand. Focus words are usually content words (nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives) (p. 81).

Some textbooks stood out by having a more complete explanation of the feature as well as providing practice in prediction, perception and production. The presentation of focal stress in *Talk It Through*, for example, begins with full page explanation of focal stress, connecting to a discussion of rhythm from several chapters earlier. Next, the text goes on to provide predictive rules (e.g., emphasize new information in a sentence). The explanations and predictive rules are followed by exercises in which students predict and then practice perceiving focal stress, analyzing any mistakes they made. In the next exercise, students produce marked examples with a partner and, in a final exercise, they attempt communicative practice in a group work activity. As we can see, the presentation of focal stress in *Talk It Through* goes beyond a 1-3 sentence explanation.

In terms of efficiency, it became clear that some textbooks did not take advantage of opportunities to provide general patterns of features, but instead gave only a handful of specific examples. In this way, only part of a system was presented without mention of the larger whole. For example, the focus of the pronunciation topic in Unit 7 of *Expanding Tactics for Listening* is the reduction of *is* and *are*. Rather than focusing on the use of contractions in general, or even the reduction of all *to be* verbs, this text only gave two specific examples. Similarly, in a focus on word stress, *Open Forum 1* states: "Multi-syllable words have main stress on one syllable. This stress goes on the syllable before the suffix with these suffixes: *-ogy, -ogist, ion, ity*" (p. 40). In these cases, we consider the coverage of topics to be inefficient in that opportunities for presenting general patterns of rules were not taken.

More problematic, however, was an almost universal lack of systematic coverage of topics. Most textbooks did not make explicit the connection between related topics so that learners could see the interconnected system. For example, most textbooks presented the different features of rhythm (e.g., linking, blending, reductions), in isolated sections and no attempt was made to group related topics together as part of a systematic presentation of phrase rhythm. Thus, even though in this case a thorough coverage of topics was achieved, we believe that without explicit guidance, learners would not grasp how the combination of features work in consort to create the full system. One notable exception to this finding was the textbook *Talk It Through* which, as mentioned at the beginning of this section, tended to link new topics with those previously covered in the text.

Are resources or tips provided to aid inexperienced teachers?

In this section we present results related to whether textbooks provided additional resources or tips to aid inexperienced teachers. This question was included because, as noted in Foote et al. (2011), access to teacher training in pronunciation is more often received at conference presentations and workshops rather than as a credit course in a MATESL program and teachers comment on a feeling of a lack of preparation of teaching these topics. After our initial analysis, textbooks were placed into three categories: *No*, *Limited* and *Yes*. Figure 2 below provides a summary of the categorization of texts.
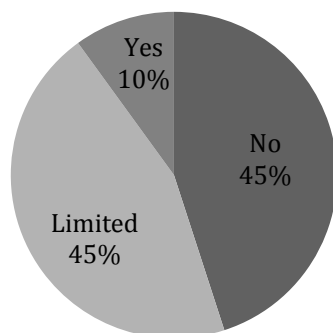

Figure 2: Tips and Resources Provided to Teachers in the Textbooks

Five of eleven or 45% of textbooks received a rating of *No* meaning they provided no other information to teachers beyond what was included in the student text. Five of eleven, or 45%, of textbooks received a rating of *Limited*. While textbooks in this category provided some additional information to teachers, it was often vague or incomplete. For example, when introducing rhythm the teacher's edition of *World English 2* provided this additional information:

> Introduce the idea of content words (meaning words) and function words (grammar words). If necessary, review the names of the part of speech and elicit more examples for each. Explain that content words have great stress (sound stronger) in a sentence (p. 78).

As we can see in this example, an attempt was made to clarify the labels 'content words', 'function words' and 'stress'; however, if an instructor did not know that 'sounding stronger' was the result of an increase in pitch, length and volume, then this limited information might not provide the intended help.

Only one textbook of eleven, *Real Talk*, received a rating of *Yes* in relation to this question. For comparison purposes, let us consider the help section related to rhythm from the teacher's manual.

> It may require a lot of ear training before students learn to hear the variations in pitch, volume, and intonation that characterize stressed words. This lesson is only an introduction. Point out to students that listening for stressed words is one of the most useful and more crucial strategies they must develop in order to understand spoken English. Refer back to this point frequently (p.17).

As we can see from this example, not only have the authors included the correlates of stress, but they have also indicated the importance of listening for stress to comprehension and reminded teachers to refer back to this point during future lessons.

Another consideration related to resources provided to teachers deals with support for the evaluation and assessment of pronunciation performance. As stated earlier, the lack of sufficient teacher training for pronunciation instruction also implies the necessity for guidance in evaluation as well. Of the eleven textbooks that we reviewed only five included any guidance on assessment in terms of either what to assess or how to assess it. Oftentimes, this information would be as simple as directing teachers to circulate around the classroom while students are working in groups and listen for accuracy on the pronunciation topic in focus. Therefore, we recommend that future textbooks consider including guidance for teachers in the area of assessment and evaluation.

DISCUSSION

Are textbooks leading the way?

While the number of SPL textbooks on the market is impressive in terms of diversity and uniqueness among the choices available, several salient concerns with the majority of these books prevent us from concluding that textbooks are leading the way. Chief among our concerns is a lack of systematic coverage of pronunciation topics, an issue that is even more important because of the possibility that some teachers may lack training in phonology and the teaching of pronunciation as has been noted in the literature (Burns, 2006; Foote et al., 2011). First and foremost, we recommend a more explicit connection

of topics throughout the text. For example, topics such as linking, trimming, blending, and reductions, should be identified as belonging to a category of features that aid in the creation of accurate phrase rhythm. This will allow students a better grasp of the entire system. Second, we feel that the potential of SPL can be realized only if the pronunciation content is truly integrated with the broader listening and speaking material rather than being presented and practiced in isolation. Such integration might include activities in which students listen and mark focal stress in a portion of a listening passage to which they have listened to previously for the thematic content or having students determine the appropriate intonation pattern of questions they will later use to interview a classmate. Three additional improvements would further strengthen syllabus design:

1) Consistently introduce basic predictive rules for all pronunciation topics so that students can use that information to guide their speaking;

2) Broaden the focus on segmentals using a principled means to select these sounds. Munro and Derwing (2006) and Levis and Cortez (2008) offer advice in that regard;

3) Create a wider range of pronunciation task types instead of relying on listen and repeat activities.

Finally, we recommend that books offer more support and tips for inexperienced teachers through teacher's manuals or websites. One way to improve this shortcoming would be to involve pronunciation experts as authors or consultants. Along with this suggestion, we concur with Derwing, Diepenbroeck, and Foote's (2012) recommendation that the language teaching profession needs to increase opportunities for teachers to develop their knowledge base and skill for teaching pronunciation.

In spite of these criticisms, we still believe that an integrated SPL curriculum can offer a meaningful way to contextualize pronunciation points in addition to providing opportunities for students to connect the various pronunciation topics covered. Two books that we reviewed bear special mention for their efforts in this regard. The first is *Real Talk*, which scored highly in all rated areas and offers authentic listening passages from a variety of sources (conversations, lectures, and interviews) to contextualize pronunciation points. We recommend the second book, *Talk it Through,* on the basis that it provides one of the most efficient and thorough treatments of pronunciation topics.

In closing, we posit that integrated SPL teaching and materials development is at a critical juncture. Along with the proposed changes to textbooks, we also recommend investigation of SPL classroom practices in the form of pedagogically oriented research to gain additional information about how best to integrate all oral-aural skills in a single course. These steps will help infuse the movement with vitality and lead to greater effectiveness.

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Zielinski, B. W. (2008). The listener: No longer the silent partner in reduced intelligibility. *System, 36,* 68-84.

Appendix A: Textbooks and Teacher's Manuals Surveyed

Baker, L. & Tanka, J. (2006). *Real talk 1: Authentic English in context.* New York: Pearson-Longman.

Baker, L. & Tanka, J. (2006). *Real talk 2: Authentic English in context.* New York: Pearson-Longman.

Baker, L. & Tanka, J. (2006). *Real talk 1: Authentic English in context, teacher's manual.* New York: Pearson-Longman.

Blackwell, A. & Naber, T. (2006). *Open forum 1: Academic listening and speaking.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Blackwell, A. & Naber, T. (2006). *Open forum 2: Academic listening and speaking.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Böttcher, E. (2008). *What I believe: Listening and speaking about what really matters.* NewYork: Pearson-Longman.

Brooks, M. (2011). *Q 2: Skills for success listening and speaking*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Craven, M. & Sherman, K. D. (2011). *Q 3: Skills for success listening and speaking*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Duncan, J. & Parker, A. (2007). *Open forum 3: Academic listening and speaking.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Fragiadakis, H. K. (2007). *All clear 2: Listening and speaking, 3rd edition.* Boston: Heinle.

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Scanlon, J. (2011). *Q 1: Skills for success listening and speaking*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Appendix B: Template for Textbook Review

Title:

Publisher:

Date of Publication:

Level:

1. What is the overall gist/focus of the book?

2. What is the rationale for the selection of pronunciation content?

3. What pronunciation topics are covered?

4. How is the coverage of topics in terms of accuracy, efficiency, and thoroughness?

5. Does the pronunciation content correspond with findings from research on intelligibility?

6. How is a pronunciation focus integrated into listening and speaking assignments?

7. Are guidelines and rubrics given to evaluate/assess pronunciation performance?

8. Are resources or tips provided to aid inexperienced pronunciation teachers?

9. What stands out about this book (both positives and negatives)?