EXPERIENCES IN AN L2 PRONUNCIATION TUTORING PROJECT USING NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Tim Kochem, Iowa State University
Agata Guskaroska, Iowa State University
Tom Elliott, Iowa State University

Through the years, we have seen the focus on second language (L2) pronunciation swinging back-and-forth much like a pendulum in the US, from extremely important to being nearly unteachable (Morley, 1991). More recently, we see the pendulum swinging towards a renewed focus on L2 pronunciation in language classrooms with an increasing number of instructors claiming to have received explicit training in the area (Foote et al., 2011). However, a dearth of information exists concerning how teacher trainees interact with this information as they are gaining it through professional development. The current study adds to this literature by tracking the experiences of two teacher trainees as they completed a tutoring project as part of a L2 pronunciation pedagogy course by using narrative inquiry. Results of the study include the role past language learning experiences play, the convergence and divergence of new and existing knowledge and experiences, and how time is perhaps the greatest factor when providing effective L2 pronunciation instruction. These results suggest that future L2 pronunciation pedagogy courses should, when possible, include a hands-on fieldwork assignment, provide plenty of materials and resources for the teacher trainees to use or adapt for use, and stress the role of assessment in L2 pronunciation.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, researchers (e.g., Baker, 2014; Nair et al., 2017; Shah et al., 2017) have called for the incorporation of more coursework and focus in second language (L2) pronunciation pedagogy for language teachers, making it an increasingly key area. The problem seems to be that teachers are reluctant, unsure, or uncomfortable teaching pronunciation due to a lack of training. Pronunciation is typically taught as indicated within the course's textbook with little supplementary instruction, if at all. In fact, Baker (2014) demonstrated how language teachers will be less likely to provide pronunciation instruction to students if they have not received training as part of their coursework. It is here that a question arises, though: what does an effective course in pronunciation pedagogy entail? Very little research explores how the new information from a course in pronunciation pedagogy converges and diverges with previous knowledge and experiences of the language teachers. Understanding how teacher trainees integrate the new with the old will help instructors to create courses in pronunciation pedagogy that will be both effective and meaningful for developing language teachers. It will also help to understand what it is about a course in pronunciation pedagogy that makes teacher trainees more sure or comfortable in teaching L2 pronunciation explicitly. As such, this study examined the experiences of participants during a four-week tutoring project in an L2 teacher training graduate course in pronunciation.

L2 Teacher Cognition and Pronunciation Pedagogy

Through a review of the literature on L2 teacher cognition (attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and knowledge of L2 teaching), research has mostly been geared towards grammar, writing, reading, and vocabulary, with some looking at "language-teaching experiences, language-learning experiences, and how teachers work with instructional materials" (Baker & Murphy, 2011, p. 42). Moreover, studies that have explored teacher cognition and L2 oral communication gave pronunciation minimal attention (Cathcart & Olsen, 1976; Cohen & Fass, 2001). The need for such research is quite apparent, as teacher education programs could create and facilitate courses in pronunciation pedagogy that accurately reflect the "reasonings, knowledge, and beliefs" of language teachers regarding the subject (Baker & Murphy, 2011, p. 44). While some may argue that this is unrealistic due to resource constraints, studies continually show that L2 teachers are often uncertain or lack confidence in teaching pronunciation to students, even though a majority of those teachers reported that their students needed instruction in pronunciation (e.g., Burgess & Spencer, 2000; MacDonald, 2002).

Perhaps most noteworthy are the findings in the research that describe the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions that many English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers hold regarding L2 pronunciation. Fraser (2002) identified five major reasons why ESL teachers may ignore pronunciation instruction:

(1)   pronunciation is a talent and therefore cannot be taught;
(2)   students don't like to speak in class;
(3)   feedback and correction are invasive;
(4)   there is not enough time; and,
(5)   teachers have a lack of sufficient training.

Of these five, Fraser (2002) admits that the fifth reason—lack of sufficient training—is the most likely culprit, as all the participants in his focus group sessions agreed to this point unanimously.

This disconnect between the emphasis on pronunciation and the lack of teacher training certainly affects the handling of pronunciation instruction in the language classroom. Baker (2014) commenced a study of five experienced ESL teachers to explore their L2 teacher cognition regarding the explicit instruction of pronunciation. She found that participants who did not receive training in pronunciation pedagogy either followed the textbook's instructions or omitted instruction all together. Therefore, she recommended that MA TESOL candidates should have explicit training in pronunciation instruction.

Research Aim

Building off the need for more explicit L2 pronunciation pedagogy, this study sought to explore how teacher trainees who went through a course on L2 pronunciation pedagogy integrated the new knowledge with their prior knowledge. This paper has one research aim:
  (1) What does narrative analysis reveal about the experiences of incorporating
     pronunciation pedagogy coursework into language teacher development?

To investigate this aim, we used six significant issues as themes to analyze the experiences of the participants, as outlined by Borg (2009, pp. 164-169):

(1) Experience as a Language Learner
(2) Interaction Between New and Existing Knowledge/Experience
(3) Significance of Context
(4) Tension during Development
(5) Changes in Teacher Beliefs
(6) The Role of Affect

These six issues have been identified by Borg (2009) as significant pathways for future teacher cognition research based on previous research and theories in both language learning and language teacher development.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Data was collected from two students—Jack and Jill (pseudonyms)—in a graduate-level pronunciation pedagogy course in a large-sized university in the Midwest U.S. Table 1 provides demographic information on each participant, including (1) years of teaching/tutoring experience; (2) nationality of each participant; (3) speaker status; and (4) L2s studied. Since this study was exploratory, it seemed advantageous to have participants with different backgrounds, as the purpose of this study was not to compare the participants' experiences.

Table 1
Demographic information of participants

	Jack	Jill
Years of Teaching/Tutoring Experience:	2 years	7 years
Nationality:	American	Macedonian
Speaker Status:	Native Speaker of English (NES)	Nonnative Speaker of English (NNES)[6]
L2s Studied:	French; Spanish	English; Italian; French; Spanish

Setting

Both participants were enrolled in the same graduate-level pronunciation pedagogy course. The purpose of the course was to prepare students to teach L2 pronunciation (specifically English) to non-native speakers. The instructor of the course used both landmark and current research, as well as instructional materials, to highlight teaching methods within L2 pronunciation. As the capstone project for the course, teacher trainees were assigned a four-week tutoring project in which they would tutor a single tutee in English pronunciation, translating the coursework into practical lesson plans and materials through field experience. The instructor found the tutees for the trainees, and also completed a diagnostic of the tutee's pronunciation; yet, the trainees were given the task of

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[6] Jill's first language (L1) is Macedonian.

evaluating their tutee's pronunciation using a diagnostic and an audio recording of the tutee's speech. From the trainee's evaluation of their tutee, they were to designate three pronunciation features to focus on in each of their four 50- to 60-minute tutoring sessions. For example, if a trainee designated intonation, word stress, and the minimal pair /m/ vs. /n/ as focal points, they would address all three of these points in each session.

Data Collection Instruments

Surveys and semi-structured interviews were used as data to gather information on teacher cognition and methodologies of L2 pronunciation planning, instruction, and assessment. These instruments were used to examine the translation of coursework into practical teaching application, in that they provided data that came from different angles to better inform the implications of this study. Figure 1 displays a flowchart of how the data was collected throughout the study.

Order of Data Collection
Pre-Tutoring Survey
Pre-Tutoring Interview
Tutoring Interview #1
Tutoring Interview #2
Paired Interview #1
Tutoring Interview #3
Tutoring Interview #4
Paired Interview #2
Post-Tutoring Survey

Figure 1. Flowchart of Data Collection

Pre- and post-surveys. The pre-tutoring survey was used to gather demographic information about each participant, as well as language learning and teaching experiences. Also, each participant was asked to provide some information about their teaching preferences and style through the use of 15 items on a seven-point Likert scale and five open-ended questions to expand on choices made on the Likert scale items. The post-tutoring survey consisted of open-ended questions to allow the student to touch upon any further elements that they felt were pertinent to share as part of their overall narrative of their experiences. The pre- and post-surveys were distributed a week before and after the tutoring project, respectively.

Semi-structured interviews (SSIs). The SSIs were used to gather descriptive data and narratives of each participant's experiences of developing and assessing their tutees L2 pronunciation in English. Of particular focus was how each participant translated the coursework into lesson plans,

and also adapted or created materials, to enhance their tutees' understanding of English pronunciation, as well as how the tutee responded to the instruction and materials. In this study, five SSIs—one with the pre-survey and the one within 48 hours of each tutoring session—were conducted with each participant individually, each lasting 15-25 minutes. Two additional SSIs—one after the second tutoring session and another after the fourth—were conducted with both participants together so that they could share their experiences with one another, each one lasting 30-45 minutes.

Data Analysis

The SSIs were audio-recorded and transcribed manually by the researchers. Transcripts were read through to discover general themes about how the coursework translated into the planning and teaching of L2 pronunciation. Transcripts were then coded at the sentence level using the six issues outlined by Borg (2009, pp. 164-169) as themes. Multiple issues could be coded in the same sentence, depending on the data. To ensure dependability of the coding process, the researcher's interpretations of the narratives were verified with the participants in either the same or a subsequent interview through a member check (Ely et al., 1991). Narrative analysis was conducted to explore how each participant shared their experiences as they related to the six major issues, as well as to explore any other pertinent topics that each participant shared that did not categorically fit into any major issue.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Issue #1: Experience as a Language Learner

Jack and Jill's experiences with learning English, one as an L1 and one as an L2, could be seen in their teaching styles. Their teaching styles seemed to complement their language learning experience, whether consciously aware of it or not. That is, their teaching styles reflect the strengths and weaknesses of their own language-learning experiences. Jill explains her greatest hurdle for teaching pronunciation, which is confidence:

> I know everything about the grammar and stuff—but when it comes to pronunciation, I'm a bit less confident because I'm not even sure if I'm pronouncing the words right, so it creates a bit of lack of confidence when it comes to teaching pronunciation. (Jill, Paired Interview #1)

This speaks both to Jill's prior experience in language pedagogy, as well as her status as a NNES. We also see how she falls right into a similar category as most teachers in previous research (Burgess & Spencer, 2000; MacDonald, 2002), as her own language learning experiences and language pedagogy courses did not have include pronunciation, leading to a lack of confidence in teaching pronunciation.

Jack refers to not being "consciously aware" of his ability with English pronunciation. This relates back to what Burgess and Spencer (2000), Burns (2006), and Darcy et al. (2012) found: teachers often wait to hear pronunciation mistakes and provide recasts because they lack the knowledge to

explain the error. However, Jack claims to have found the "vocabulary to explain" the pronunciation errors through his own coursework.

Issue #2: Interaction Between New and Existing Knowledge/Experience

There was a great deal of interaction between old and new knowledge. Both participants were given access to the same materials and activities, though throughout the course, their understanding of the effectiveness and usefulness of the materials grew. This was illustrated by Jack, who scoured the internet for exercises that he thought would be appropriate for his tutoring sessions. He commented directly on the material assessments, asserting that they had given him the ability to find good quality exercises:

> I just saw an ad today on Facebook or something, it was kind of a video chatting thing to improve pronunciation, now I can look at it and be like 'That's bullshit'. They are not backed by any real research or anything other than advertising. (Jack, SSI #5)

The translation from coursework to application seems to have taken hold in both participants, albeit to slightly different extremes. Jill found use of the materials that were provided exclusively through the course. While Jack also found use in the course materials, he also applied his material assessment knowledge to find outside materials.

In terms of L2 pronunciation assessment, little attention was given to the area throughout the course. This was best exemplified by Jill's response to the question, "How do you know if your student is picking up what you're putting down?"

> Well, I'm not making a list or something to follow her, which would be useful now that you mention it. Uh, I'm not writing anything down, I'm just paying attention to what she says. I mean mostly I base that on the controlled exercises when she repeats after me or when she produces something. And when she speaks, I make notes of the words she mispronounced. (Jill, SSI#4)

Jack's response to the question resembled something similar, in that he had no definitive method for assessing his tutee, but rather took an 'as it happens' approach to assessment, making corrections when and where they were needed.

Issue #3: Significance of Context

This area spelled a singular word for both participants: instructional time. There just never seemed to be enough instructional time to really dive into the materials, which was mentioned during the course as a potential pitfall and aligns with what Fraser (2002) found, in that insufficient time was a reason for why teachers ignored pronunciation instruction. This was very evident in the participants' first session, in which neither Jack nor Jill was able to complete everything they set out to do.

Both participants seemingly put the same rigor into lesson plans, though both admitted a lack of knowledge of how important listening discrimination was in conjunction to production activities. Another aspect which seemed to throw both participants off was the tutee asking for specific help with words and sounds that were not in the lesson plan, as Jack states:

> Well the kid brought up some specific words he was having trouble with, so I didn't, I hadn't prepared for those necessarily, but I did fit them into the categories…. I didn't expect to be doing that. And it wasn't as much of an issue as other things so I tried not to spend too much time on it, but I didn't want to ignore it completely because he asked…. (Jack, SSI #2)

Jill, on the other hand, had "super confidence" in her previous teaching experience and knowledge, insisting:

> I didn't feel stressed at all: I had the lesson plan, I had everything on my mind, I heard her speaking in the diagnostic. […] I thought I would fix the problems in the first session…. (Jill, SSI #2)

To no surprise, Jill did not "fix" her tutee's problems in the first session, claiming that her tutee did a "terrible job" with the first pronunciation feature, /θ/ vs. /s/.

Issue #4: Tension during Development

Both participants noted relatively little tension within the tutoring assignment. What little tension existed was addressed after the first week of the tutoring sessions by the instructor. It was limited almost solely to making sure that all pronunciation features were addressed at each session. As such, after the first lesson, both participants honed down their lesson plans, leaving less wiggle room for alterations. Jack and Jill both reported in latter tutoring sessions that providing less wiggle room for alterations allowed them to hit all three features more easily and complete more of the tasks they had planned.

Issue #5: Changes in Teacher Beliefs

Jack, having tutored in an ESL setting prior to the tutoring project, reflected a great deal on what he did previously in what he was tasked to do in the tutoring project. In his SSIs, there is almost always an undertone of his previous experience as a tutor, as well as his coursework completed in a linguistics undergraduate program.

In contrast, Jill's narrative followed more after her L2 learning. When asked about any changes Jill might make to her previous pronunciation instruction based on the coursework and after the first tutoring session, she says there is definitely more areas she would emphasize, elaborating as follows: "Expose students more to spoken language, and myself as well. […] I knew there was a difference [in minimal pairs] but I didn't think it mattered, but now I know it matters" (Jill, SSI #2). Jill's development as a language teacher through the pronunciation course is quite apparent through this statement. She reflects critically throughout the whole process, integrating old experiences with new knowledge to grow in her own teaching.

Issue #6: The Role of Affect

Affect played a role well before the tutoring sessions began. For Jack, it was closely tied with his experiences in language learning. He had mentioned his experiences with learning French, and then traveling to France for some time, where he was "very hung up on wanting to blend in and [he] really wanted people to mistake [him] for a native speaker" (Jack, SSI #1). Though he never reached that native speaker standard, he remembered how everyone told him how "adorable" his accent was, much to his chagrin. It was this memory that allowed Jack to understand where his tutee was coming from when they reported "wanting to sound like a native speaker", hence why the tutee signed up for pronunciation tutoring.

For Jill, affect came in two forms: both that of a language learner and as a language instructor. When she had first started teaching, she admits that "[she] didn't have a good background knowledge [at the time]" (Jill, SSI #1). Feeling "lost", as she put it, was not such a great feeling. She had previous language instructors who seemed "lost", and she did not want to fall into that category. She wanted to provide her students with a teacher that could not only adequately instruct them but was able to go above and beyond. In order to become the teacher she wanted to be, she always had her language learning experiences on her mind whenever she made lessons or materials, specifically experiences of when she traveled and used a second language.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

One limitation of the study is that the interviews were conducted using a "scout's honor" approach: Did the participants really do what they said they did? Classroom observations and stimulated recalls would greatly enhance the validity of the research design because it would provide yet another angle from which the data could be viewed.

Also, this study only followed the participants throughout the tutoring session, paying little attention to the course. For future research, perhaps by starting the study before the course begins, we can get a better snapshot of where the teacher trainees really are in terms of their knowledge of L2 pronunciation pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, this study sought to show the experiences of two teacher trainees in a four-week pronunciation tutoring project. We explored this with the use of narrative inquiry in order to gain a bird's eye perspective of how the teacher trainees transferred knowledge gained from the course into practical application. We charted how each participant developed as an instructor in L2 pronunciation. They had relatively similar gains from both the course and the tutoring projects, although they possess two different teaching styles. We suggest that future L2 pronunciation pedagogy courses be mindful of what topics are covered within such a course, as the teacher trainees are likely to transfer what was learned from the course.

From this study, it is reasonable to suggest that L2 pronunciation pedagogy courses, in tandem with hands-on experience, seem to have a positive impact on the development of language teacher trainees. Both participants showcased how, over time, they went from being trainees who were

"super confident" in their abilities and still falling short in instruction, to being trainees who felt prepared to provide the level of L2 pronunciation instruction that they felt their tutees, and future students, deserved.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Tim Kochem is a PhD student in Applied Linguistics and Technology at Iowa State University. He worked in the business realm for nearly ten years before making the switch to TESOL and applied linguistics. Currently he works as an English Speaking Consultation for the Center of Communication Excellence in the Graduate College. His research interests are L2 teacher development, English pronunciation, educational technology, and distance education. email: tkochem@iastate.edu

Agata Guskaroska is a PhD student in Applied Linguistics and Technology at Iowa State University. She's a Fulbright alumna who has taught EFL courses for 7 years and worked as a TA in American literature at FON University. She currently serves as a TA for English composition at Iowa State University. Her major interests include CALL, pronunciation, and sociolinguistics. email: agatag@iastate.edu

Thomas B. Elliott is a PhD student in Applied Linguistics and Technology at Iowa State University. Prior to completing his master's degree, he worked as an ESL tutor for the America China Exchange Society in Seattle, Washington. For the past three years he has served as a graduate assistant at Iowa State, teaching courses in composition and pronunciation. His research interests include corpus linguistics, noun phrase complexity, and student writing development. email: thomase@iastate.edu

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