Chapter 10
Combining the Body and Mobile Technology to Teach English Pronunciation

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ABSTRACT
In Australia, postgraduate international student enrolments have risen 81 per cent since 2002. In 2008, 74 per cent of international enrolments were in Business/Management, Computer Science and Engineering-related courses (Davies, 2010). Most international students are from Asia, and the vast majority of those from mainland China. A survey of employers in 2006 found that employers rated interpersonal and communications skills (written, oral, listening) far above “qualifications” and “previous employment” as the most important selection criteria when hiring graduates (Davies, 2010). In fact, research on the IELTS levels of exiting Master’s degree students suggests that international students at Australian universities tended to graduate with worse spoken English skills than when they first entered.

The above research has identified a deficiency in the communication skills of international students, crucial in seeking employment. This chapter proposes various ways of helping committed international students on campus to improve their spoken English language by combining the use of the students’ bodies with mobile technology.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Davies (2010), in Australia, postgraduate international student enrolments have risen 81 per cent since 2002. In 2008, 74 per cent of international enrolments were in Business/Management, Computer Science and Engineering-related courses. Most international students are from Asia, and the vast majority of those from mainland China. International students from China have been increasing 8 per cent since 2007. A worrying development is the decline in the employment success of international students, attributed largely to the inadequate English language skills of graduating students. In fact, research on the IELTS levels of exiting Masters students suggests that international students at Australian universities tended to graduate with worse spoken English skills than when they first entered (Birrell, 2006).

As reported in Davis (2010), a survey of employers in 2006 found that employers rated interpersonal and communication skills (written, oral, listening) far above “qualifications” and “previous employment” as the most important selection criteria when hiring graduates (57.5 per cent, 35.4 per cent and 27.6 per cent respectively).

The above research has identified a deficiency in the communication skills of international students. One of the communication skills is obviously spoken English. However, in English language programs, spoken communication skills such as pronunciation has been marginalized for many years even in communicative language teaching (CLT) programs (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005). This is further compounded by many English language teachers’ lack of confidence in teaching the skill (Breitkreutz, Derwing, & Rossiter, 2001; Macdonald, 2002) despite the abundance of teaching materials available. Furthermore, the debate between what aspects of English pronunciation are more important to teach and what level of competency L2 learners should realistically aim for are still going on. For instance, research by Derwing and Munro (1997) and Derwing, Munro and Wiebe (1998) suggest that although second-language users are often able to modify their pronunciation to the extent that native listeners find their productions significantly easier to understand, total elimination of an accent is not a realistic goal. Otlowski (1998) and Fraser (1999) concur with much of the current research and suggested that the goals of pronunciation teaching should be “developing functional intelligibility, communicability, increased self-confidence, the development of speech monitoring abilities and speech modification strategies for use beyond the classroom” (p. 3).

While the goal of pronunciation teaching and learning has moved from that of native-like pronunciation (as in the audio-lingual approach), to intelligibility (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996; Kenworthy, 1987; Morley, 1994), the comments of teachers on the coal face in Macdonald’s study (2002) indicate that what intelligibility means and how it is measured are not clear. Intelligibility is therefore defined as the extent to which speech signal produced by the speaker can be identified by the listener as the words the speaker intended to produce. This definition is similar to that used by Field (2005, p. 401): “the extent to which the acoustic-phonetic content of the message is recognizable by a listener,” and to the term ‘phonological intelligibility’ used by Jenkins (2002, p. 86). Intelligibility is a complex construct that is also tangled up with different views, personalities and experiences. Nevertheless, it is a concept pivotal to examination of learner goals and assessment for pronunciation.

With regards to what aspect of English pronunciation to focus on (i.e. segmental or supra-segmentals) some studies of international teaching assistants’ (ITAs) speech found correlations between using suprasegmentals accurately and speaker intelligibility. Tyler, Jeffries, and Davies (1988) studied the discourse of ITAs whom undergraduates perceived as disorganized and unfocused. They found that these ITAs used too many pauses, too many primary stresses per mes-
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