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Teaching Pragmatic Suprasegmentals in the Adult ESL Classroom

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TEACHING PRAGMATIC SUPRASEGMENTALS IN THE ADULT ESL

CLASSROOM

by

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DEDICATION

To my loving parents who are the reason I am where I am today, and to my amazing husband who supports and encourages me every single day.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

One of my first experiences with teaching English to speakers of other languages was at a community center in the Middle East. While there, I also studied Arabic, which helped me to understand how my students' first language (L1) might have been shaping their understanding of content in their second language (L2) in our English class. One particularly interesting discovery was that the way the English and Arabic languages denoted emphatic stress is entirely different. Discovering this encouraged me to search through our curriculum for a lesson to help my students with this. Finding nothing, I took what I knew and created a simple lesson, writing a sentence on the board and explaining how the meaning of the sentence altered depending on the word that we chose to verbally "highlight." For example, "**SARAH** was talking to Ahmed" carries a very different connotation than "Sarah **WAS** talking to Ahmed" which is different than "Sarah was **TALKING** to Ahmed" and so forth. While very intuitive to native English speakers, this was a whole new world for my students and they were puzzled at first.

The students and I talked through the different stress patterns in each utterance and about the information the speaker was trying to convey. We talked about various hypothetical scenarios and came up with the following: in the first sentence, the speaker is trying to get the listener to understand that it was Sarah, not somebody else, who was talking to Ahmed. In the second sentence the meaning shifts entirely, and is explaining that in the past Sarah was talking to Ahmed but now she has moved on to someone else. Finally, the third sentence may show that Ahmed got the entirely wrong impression. He thought Sarah was interested in him, but all she was doing was having a polite

conversation! With a more nuanced understanding of the way "talking" is used in American slang, the students may have even drawn the exact opposite meaning from the utterance, that Sarah was in fact very interested in Ahmed. Our classroom conversation carried on in this way, and the students were amazed with how many different meanings we could come up with for this simple, five-word sentence. Finally, one male student exclaimed, "It can mean all of these things? Teacher, English is hard!"

This lesson proved to be a very meaningful and fun experience for me and my students, one that I never would have experienced if I had been confined only to the available curriculum. Reflecting upon this lesson got me thinking about how pronunciation works in our English classes, which gave little if any attention to the teaching of suprasegmentals, a term that I will define in the following section. A review of the literature on the topic confirmed that mine was not a unique case. Suprasegmentals, also known as prosodic features, can play a large role in the English language learner's (ELL's) verbal communication with others, but seem to get very little attention in the scope and sequence of most English as a second language (ESL) textbooks. To address this gap, I explored the following question: *How does one best create effective and engaging material in order to teach pragmatic suprasegmental features in the adult English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom?*

What are Suprasegmentals?

To begin, I will define some key terms. There are two primary categories to think about when considering pronunciation: segmentals and suprasegmentals. Segmentals are the smallest units, or "segments" of speech, and consist of vowels and consonants. Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) uses the illustration of viewing segmentals as the individual

notes that compose the music. To continue this metaphor, suprasegmentals are all the other aspects of the music outside of the individual notes. This would include the melody, the pitch, the tempo, etc.

"Supra" means above and denotes that these are language features that sit "on top of" the segmentals, spanning individual segments, and are used to imbue the utterance with new meaning (Hussain & Sajid, 2015). They can span syllables, words, and phrases. Some suprasegmental features are rule-governed; for example, individual word stress. I will never forget my high school Spanish teacher lecturing about how the correct way to pronounce the word "easy" in Spanish is "FA-cil." She was very emphatic. "Yes," she said, "they may understand you if you say 'fa-CIL' but it's just annoying! How annoying would it be to hear someone speaking English always saying 'ea-SY! ea-Sy! ea-SY!'" In this instance, the stress for the word is rule-bound. There is a correct and incorrect way to say it. Breaking the rule may or may not result in a breakdown in communication. "ea-SY," for example, may be understood while the word "record" means two different things depending on where the stress is placed.

There is another category to consider aside from rule-based suprasegmentals. This has to do with meaning, and would include the earlier example that looked at the sentence "Sarah was talking to Ahmed." As the students were dissecting different meanings hidden in this very simple sentence, they were trying to discover the speaker's intent. Another example of a meaning-based, or pragmatic, suprasegmental feature is intonation. Intonation can be easily understood by native English speakers by thinking about the difference between asking a question and giving a command. For example, in the question "Sit?" the pitch rises at the end of the word, versus the command "Sit" where

the pitch falls at the end of the word. The combination of different pitch levels from low to high and high to low is called intonation(Celce-Murcia, 2010). While both rule-based and meaning-based suprasegmentals are important to ELLs, it is the latter that I believe is more elusive as well as less developed in classroom materials and activities, and it is this that I will explore further throughout the course of this project.

Why are Suprasegmentals Important?

Having established a basic understanding of what suprasegmentals are, the next logical question to address is why they are such an important component for students to engage with in the ELL classroom. I will put forward three primary reasons: accent, intelligibility, and comprehension.

Accent

Students are often particularly interested in obtaining a native-sounding accent. Suprasegmentals are an important area of intentional study for ELLs because they can help to aid students on their journey toward more native-like pronunciation. Different languages have different suprasegmental patterns, such as the way they put stress on certain syllables of the word, or the rhythm they use when speaking (Hussain & Sajid, 2015). Using a pattern of speech that is found in the student's L1 often will not translate well in the L2, and will likely mark the student as less familiar with the English language (Hussain & Sajid, 2015; Kjellin, 1999). To that effect, one study found that "suprasegmental features accounted for about 50% of the variance in mainly naïve raters' assessments of oral proficiency" (Kang et al., 2010, p.563). This means that incorrect suprasegmental usage will cause untrained listeners to assume the speaker to have a lower proficiency with the L2 than they, in fact, possess. This perceived lack of

communicative ability can have very real-world consequences, such as lower class placement or lost job opportunities. While I would argue that the goal of language learning is not to sound like a native, and that there can be great beauty and diversity in maintaining an accent that is different from what is accepted as standard, I acknowledge that it is the right of the language learner to decide this for themselves. A primary motivation for them may well be that accents which employ suprasegmental features that are significantly different than those found in the L2 can strain intelligibility.

Intelligibility

Native speakers (NSs) use suprasegmental features in every utterance, generally without any thought given to the matter. According to Mampe et al. (2009), babies in utero begin to learn certain suprasegmental features in the language that surrounds the mother by the third trimester of pregnancy. What's more, after birth the baby's cries mimic the intonation of that language. This phenomenon can also be observed when young children who cannot yet form words often have "conversations" in gibberish that mimic the intonation and stress patterns of the language they hear around them (Kuhl & Meltzoff, 1996). It seems then, that humans are born with a propensity to attach importance to suprasegmental features.

Suprasegmentals help listeners make sense of the sounds they are hearing, and often impart key information. Therefore, it is not surprising that suprasegmentals affect how the words spoken by the ELL are received by the NS. Aside from just "proper-sounding speech," suprasegmentals convey a lot of nuances such as certainty or uncertainty, sarcasm or sincerity, surprise or indifference (Armstrong, 2020; Hussain & Sajid, 2015). They may draw attention to certain information given. NSs intuitively listen

for these cues, and when they are missing, the intended meaning may well be frustrated (Zielinski, 2008). In fact, Kang (2010) makes the case that "listeners can tolerate a great deal of inaccuracy in pronouncing consonants and vowels, so long as [certain suprasegmentals] are used appropriately" (p.555). This is because the brain is designed to "fill-in-the-blanks" and suprasegmentals allow for mental shortcuts, so to speak (Kjellin, O., 1999). If these cues are absent, or if they are given unintentionally or incorrectly, then proper understanding may prove elusive (Hussain & Sajid, 2015).

Comprehension

The proper suprasegmental cues are as important to receive well as they are to give well. As anyone who has ever learned a foreign language knows, mastering the sounds of the language alone does not equip one to understand the true meaning behind the utterances they hear. Without a working knowledge of the way suprasegmentals add layers of meaning to the utterance, ELLs may often feel uncomfortable or confused. Of course, as previously mentioned, some suprasegmental features are more crucial to comprehend than others. The rule-based suprasegmentals will likely cause less trouble than the meaning-based ones. This, again, is why I will focus on the meaning-based features.

To What Extent are Suprasegmentals Addressed in the Classroom?

Traditional methods have focused on segmentals in pronunciation work, and then have moved on to other topics they deem more important, such as vocabulary or grammar. While there is currently debate over which is more crucial, the field is increasingly acknowledging the importance of suprasegmentals for reasons mentioned above (Capliez, 2016; Hussain & Sajid, 2015; Yenkimaleki & van Heuven, 2020). After

the literacy level, most textbooks dedicate little time to pronunciation work at all, much less to the teaching of suprasegmental features. This apparent lack of coverage, as well as the high demands placed on time in the ESL classroom, likely contributes to the under-development of this skill (Hussain & Sajid, 2015). What may assist in addressing this problem, in addition to teacher buy-in, would be an easy-to-implement, time-conscious curriculum that could be used on an on-going basis and would ask for only a small portion of class time. To address this, I will research the following question: *How does one best create effective and engaging material in order to teach pragmatic suprasegmental features in the adult English as Second Language (ESL) classroom?*

Summary and Overview of Chapters

In Chapter One, I have discussed the usage and importance of suprasegmentals in language learning. Issues relating to the topic of accent, comprehensibility, and comprehension may arise when suprasegmentals are erroneously used in speech or misunderstood by the listener. In Chapter Two, I will review the literature that speaks to special considerations that must be made when working with adults, which suprasegmentals are pragmatic, and how these suprasegmental features have been taught in the classroom in the past. Chapter Three will be a discussion of my project, and in Chapter Four I will reflect upon my project.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The goal of this paper is to answer the question: *How does one best create effective and engaging material in order to teach pragmatic suprasegmental features in the adult English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom?* To answer this, this chapter is a literature review that breaks the question down into three main sections. The first section studies what experts have to say about effective teaching, and in particular the special considerations needed for teaching adults. Section two identifies which suprasegmental features are considered pragmatic, so that the curriculum can then be focused on only these features. Finally, the third section looks at methods of teaching suprasegmental features that have been used in the past. Identifying trends in these methods can help guide the creation of this curriculum. These three sections, taken together, will provide a direction for the project.

Teaching Adults

Learning is a difficult thing to ensure; it depends so much on the learners themselves. A teacher may be an expert in their field of study, but if they do not know how to reach their students, then the battle is likely lost before it even begins. No two learners are alike, and taking the time to explore how to reach learners in different ways is important. Additionally, adults approach learning differently than children do. Their reasons for learning are different and they bring different experiences and expectations to the classroom. In order to provide effective teaching material for adults, we will explore these two areas. The first part of this section will look at how to employ multiple senses

in the classroom in order to engage a diverse group of learners, and the second part of this section will look at what has been discovered about the way adults uniquely approach learning. It is important to start with a baseline understanding of how students best learn if any teaching is to be effective.

Ways of Learning

Learning is a very sensory experience, and students have preferred ways of learning based on their own experiences and history (Lipke, 2013; Russel, 2006; Zarabi, 2016). The three primary senses associated with learning are hearing, touch, and sight. Some people associate these preferred senses with "learning styles" but there is compelling evidence to show that it is more accurate to think of them as preferences. In this section, we will discuss why the "style/preference" distinction is important as well as what these learning preferences look like, why it is important to consider them in a classroom setting, and what incorporation of different preferences might look like.

Learning Style vs. Learning Preferences. The notion of learning styles has long since been widely circulated and generally accepted as fact. It is the idea that students learn best when instruction is matched with their own favored way of learning, either auditory, visual, or kinesthetic (Russel, 2006). One problem with this theory is that it does not take the content of the material to be learned into account. For example, if someone generally favors auditory learning, but was tasked with learning a dance, they would likely benefit more from kinesthetic learning (Reiner and Willingham, 2010). People cling to the idea of learning styles because it makes logical sense to them, and plenty of people can back up the claim with anecdotal evidence to prove their point. Reiner and Willingham (2010) say this is actually a large part of why the myth of learning styles is

perpetuated, because people depend on common sense and personal experience and remain unaware of the fact that the scientific evidence behind their claim is lacking. In fact, there is no empirical evidence that more learning takes place when instruction matches the student's "learning style" which in large part is due to a lack of systematic experimentation on the topic. Based on this lack of evidence, there are many researchers who are imploring educators to stop spreading the myth of "learning styles" (Dembo & Howard, 2007; Paschler et al., 2010; Reiner and Willingham, 2010).

These researchers do not claim that all students learn the same way and there are no individual differences among learners. They acknowledge that students do indeed have preferences in how they learn, and these preferences usually align with what they feel they succeed at. Students have different abilities, and thus will succeed and struggle in different areas but, they claim, abilities are not the same as learning styles. The reason this is an important distinction is that people may be led to believe they are only able to learn via a single learning style and therefore disengage with the material presented in other styles, thus missing out on what they could have gleaned (Dembo & Howard, 2007; Nancekivell, Shah, & Gelman, 2020; Riener & Willingham, 2010). In fact, sometimes students learn best via methods other than those they would prefer (Nancekivell, Shah, & Gelman, 2020). To summarize, Reiner and Willingham (2010) claim that "students differ in their abilities, interests, and background knowledge, but not in their learning styles" (p. 34).

However one looks at this issue, one aspect remains clear and undisputed by both sides: students are different from each other. Whether these differences are preferential, experiential, or biological, an understanding of them needs to be reflected in the

presentation of information in the classroom. Both sides agree that students benefit from education that activates multiple senses. Based on the reasons outlined above, this paper will heretofore refer to these differences as learning preferences, defined as "the way a person takes in, stores, and retrieves information" (Lipke, 2013, p.26).

Learning preferences are typically delineated into three sensory categories: Auditory, Visual, and Kinesthetic/Tactile. By better understanding these learning preferences, the argument is that instructors can modify their lesson plans to engage more senses and thus help students retain learning longer.

Auditory Learning. As the name indicates, adults who prefer this kind of learning do best when hearing instructions as opposed to reading instructions, because they are most easily able to process information that they have heard spoken aloud. It is often helpful for them to have someone to talk through their task or process with, and if no one is available, they may talk to themselves. Hearing information helps them to remember it, and they are able to reproduce the sounds, words, and grammatical structures they have heard (Lipke, 2013; Russel, 2006). The implication for educators, then, is that written instructions and explanations may not be enough for these learners. It would help them to hear the teacher or their fellow classmates verbalizing information. Videos, podcasts, music, and audio recordings may help support learning as well. The teacher might create space in class for students to summarize and discuss the information presented, or they may ask students to repeat instructions (Lipke, 2013).

Visual Learning. Some learners prefer to see the information. These students do well with pictures, graphs, and charts. As they read, they create a mental picture of the information that will stay with them longer than if they simply hear the words (Lipke,

2013; Russel, 2006). For educators, this means that helping students to create a mental image is important. Visual representations of the material covered may include pictures, flashcards, charts, and diagrams. Teachers may choose to provide written instructions to reinforce what is taught orally, highlighting key words (Lipke, 2013). They may help students visualize spelling and sight words. In a class about intonation, the teacher may choose to draw the path the word takes (i.e. from high to low) thus helping the student to visualize what is happening acoustically.

Kinesthetic/Tactile Learning. Learners who prefer kinesthetic/tactile learning enjoy being physically active. They prefer to learn by touch and hands-on experience. They may have difficulty focusing on lectures that do not require any bodily movement. Manipulatives are often useful in connecting what they are hearing or seeing with meaningful learning. People who prefer this style would rather learn by doing than by reading or talking about something (Lipke, 2013; Russel, 2006). Some researchers differentiate between kinesthetic and tactile learning, but historically these two categories are combined under one title (Russel, 2006; Zarrabi, 2016). Educators should try to include activities that allow students hands-on experience with the material, as well as activities that require bodily movement. People with this learning preference may enjoy board games or simulations in class. They also benefit from frequent breaks and activity changes (Lipke, 2013). Teachers may ask students to draw a picture to represent what was discussed in class, or when teaching intonation, as in the example above, the teacher may ask the student to draw the visual representation of what they are hearing (instead of the teacher providing it for them). They may even ask the student to show the movement

of pitch in the utterance with hand motions or their whole body, more specifically, learners stand on their toes when pitch is high and bend at the knees when it drops.

All Learners. As mentioned above, a preference for a particular way of learning does not nullify the usefulness of utilizing other styles in the learning process. Each learner is different; some may rely strongly on one sense, while others may rely on two or three senses. The task in question may also determine which pathway is the most useful. Though in fact, studies show that the more senses are engaging with the information in meaningful ways, the more likely the information is to be remembered (Lipke, 2013). This multisensory approach allows teachers to meet the needs of a diverse group of students more effectively, even without knowing each student's individual learning preferences. No matter their preferred style, adults do best when they actively participate in the learning process (Lipke, 2013; Russel, 2006). The key takeaway here is that intentionally designing class time to engage students in ways that align with a variety of learning preferences will lead to a more engaged classroom experience and hopefully long-lasting learning. This will be a key consideration when it comes to designing effective and engaging curriculum for ELLs.

Adults as Learners

Adults learn very differently than children, and these differences must be taken into account in meaningful adult teaching. The method and practice of teaching adult learners is often referred to as andragogy, a term that was first coined by Alexander Kapp in 1833 (Henschke, 2010). Andragogy was first separated from the term pedagogy to distinguish between the methodology of teaching adults versus teaching children. It was

some time before the term gained in popularity, which in large part happened thanks to the work of Malcom Knowles.

After much work in the field, Knowles (1975) shifted the meaning of the term to distinguish self-directed learning (andragogy) from teacher-directed learning (pedagogy). At a practical level, however, the terms "andragogy" and "adult education" are still used more or less interchangeably in the United States. Knowles is considered one of the leading experts on the topic and his six assumptions are often cited as a basis for much of the work done with adults today. The assumptions are as follows (Knowles, 1990):

1. Adult learning must be self-directed.

2. The greatest resource in adult learning is experience.

3. Motivation to learn arises from real life needs and interests.

4. Adults need to be able to use what they learn immediately.

5. Adults are more intrinsically motivated than extrinsically motivated.

6. Adults need to know why what they are learning matters.

To Knowles' sixth point, adult learners do best when they are convinced of the need to learn (Henschke, 2010; Russel, 2006). They can then use learning as a problem-solving tool to address needs in their life and bring about change (Richardson & Prickett,1994; Russel, 2006). What this means is that adult learning must be directly related to the obstacles adults face in their day-to-day lives, drawing on their own challenges and victories, with the learner and the teacher working together to meet educational goals. Knowles believed that these principles had wide applications beyond the classroom and into the workplace, and anywhere else where adults felt the curiosity or need to learn (Henschke, 2010).

Building on Knowles' ideas, researchers have continued to seek out the best ways to empower adult learning in the classroom. A common theme in the research is to ask more questions and talk less (Richardson & Prickett,1994; VanLehn et al., 2003). This encourages adults to share their experiences and use what they have already learned to come up with solutions to the challenges posed. In this way, it really does become a give and take.

Lipke (2013) builds on Knowles' assumptions with some additional general characteristics of adult learners and their implications for the instructor:

1. Adults want and deserve respect - This means it is important for the instructor to draw out the adult learner's strengths and provide frequent praise. The instructor should also believe in the adult's ability to learn.

2. Adults are used to making decisions - Instructors should offer decisions to the adult learner in class. These decisions may include choices of activities and materials. It also includes inviting the learner to set goals and objectives they want to achieve.

3. Adults are busy people - Instructors must be sensitive to this and be flexible, helping students prioritize their learning goals. Lessons must also be designed to use time efficiently and be related to the learners' immediate needs and/or long-term goals.

4. Adults sometimes feel insecure using new skills - Instructors should provide ample opportunity for learners to practice a new skill and then be quick to give feedback on the learner's progress.

Instructors should also remember that stress acts as an inhibitor to learning, so working to lower students' affective filter is always important (Henschke, 2010). All of this needs to be taken into account when designing curriculum for the adult classroom. For many adults, it has been a long time since they set foot in a classroom, and they may come with trepidation or embarrassment. In order for them to engage enthusiastically with the material we are hoping to teach them, we must find ways to put them at ease, build them up, and provide them with practical assistance so that they are able to take ownership of their own experience.

Thus far we have discussed different learning preferences and adults' unique motivations and approaches to learning. Now, with this base of understanding, we will move the conversation along to narrow in more specifically on what we would like to be able to teach adults: suprasegmental features.

Suprasegmental Features

Our brains are made in such a way that they are always looking for heuristics, or "short-cuts," and native speakers use certain suprasegmentals as cues to understand a speaker's intent (Wilson & Wharton, 2006). While it is true that the incorrect usage of these features can cause a breakdown in communication, not all suprasegmentals are created equally. Some carry implied intent, for example, while others serve primarily grammatical functions. The first part of this section will identify which suprasegmental features function grammatically and which are pragmatic. The second part of this section will take a closer look at the full scope of what the pragmatic suprasegmentals entail.

Grammatical Vs. Pragmatic

It is perhaps a bit misleading to suggest that suprasegmental features can be cleanly separated into the two categories of grammatical and pragmatic. Many have aspects of both, making a clear-cut distinction difficult. Chevallier et al. (2009) does an excellent job of summarizing how they are intertwined:

> "Prosody" relates to a variety of phenomena (including intonation, stress, rhythm, etc.) serving grammatical as well as pragmatic functions through variations in pitch, intensity and duration (Cruttenden, 1997; Wilson & Wharton, 2006). At the grammatical level, stress and rhythm help the hearer chunk the speech flow into words and clauses (e.g., "Dragonfly and carrot" has a different rhythm and stress pattern than "Dragon, fly, and carrot"), intonation patterns help to identify sentence type (e.g., a final rising contour signals a question and a falling contour signals a declarative), and word stress enables one to differentiate between nouns and verbs (e.g., PREsent vs. preSENT).... At the pragmatic level, many cues to the meaning intended by the speaker are conveyed through subtle prosodic changes (e.g., clues for turn-taking, speaker's attitude, speaker's emotional state, focus and contrast, etc. (p.503)

What she is saying, then, is that while all suprasegmental (or prosodic) features are meant to help with clear communication, some aspects are bound by grammatical rules (i.e. PREsent vs preSENT) and others are utilized at the discretion of the speaker to disperse certain unspoken information. While a misuse of the grammatical features may frustrate intelligibility, there is also a chance that it does not affect it whatsoever (Levis, 2005; Zielinski, 2008). The intent of this paper is to work with features that have the greatest

capacity to frustrate intelligibility, and so features that serve primarily grammatical functions, once identified, will not be included in the project even though they are still seen as very important.

Kang et at. (2010) makes the case that the suprasegmental features most commonly discussed when talking about intelligibility are speech rate, pausing, stress, and intonation. From this list, we will look at which factors are "sensitive to a speaker's intent" (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010, p.221). A slower than average speech rate often carries with it the assumption that English is not the speaker's first language, but is not often associated with a particular meaning or unspoken intent. Because of this, speech rate will not be considered in this paper. Pausing, word stress, and rhythm fall into the same category, as they are used primarily in a grammatical context rather than to convey the speaker's intent (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Chevallier et al., 2009; Kang et al., 2010). This leaves prominence and intonation as the features primarily employed to embed pragmatic information into speech (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). As mentioned earlier by Chevallier et al. (2009), there are aspects of both prominence and intonation that serve grammatical functions as well. However, this paper will explore the pragmatic aspects of these features.

Prominence and Intonation

Now that we have identified the suprasegmental features that are most likely to carry unspoken speaker intent, we will take a closer look at what each of them entails. They are highly related features, and separating them may seem a little forced, for, as Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) puts it, "Intonation is used to mark prominence, while at the same time it is necessary to know which words are prominent in order to know the

placement of tones and intonational contours" (p. 221). Though closely interrelated, they are separate features and we will here discuss how each function in speech can convey a variety of meanings.

  Prominence. Speech consists of multiple intonation units - units which are "semantically and grammatically coherent segments of discourse" and which each have their own pitch pattern (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010, p. 221). Within each intonation unit, there is an element that is highlighted, or drawn out from the rest of the information. It receives greater accentual strength via pitch, duration and intensity of voice than the words around it in the utterance (Krahmer & Swerts, 2007; Levis & Silpachai, 2018). This is called prominence, and Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) explains how it can be used in one of three distinct ways:

1. Informative - to highlight new information

2. Emphatic stress - to draw special attention, to emphasize a point

3. Contrastive stress - two elements in a single intonation unit receive prominence in order to point out the difference between one thing and another

While there may be multiple instances of stressed syllables in each intonation unit, there is only one instance of prominence (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014). When used correctly, it draws attention to the part of the utterance the speaker most wants the listener to hear, which is the part that explains the purpose for the communication. Using prominence incorrectly can draw attention to the wrong piece of information. Shifting the prominence in any utterance would change the perceived intent. This is why prominence can be challenging for those learning English. In fact, each language has a way of indicating what is most important in an utterance. However, because suprasegmental features vary

greatly within languages, methods of calling attention to information are not universal, and thus English prominence must be taught to ELLs (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Gilbert, 2019; Schaefer & Abe 2020). Prominence, however, is not the only way to highlight information in English. Another closely related feature is intonation.

Intonation. Any conversation on intonation must first discuss pitch. Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) defines pitch as "the relative highness or lowness of the speaker's voice" (p.230). Because pitch is relative, it will vary from speaker to speaker; what is high pitched for one speaker may be considered normal for another. Intonation, then, is the rising and falling of the voice as it combines different pitch levels throughout the course of an utterance. Intonation serves many functions. It can signal grammatical information, such as if the utterance is meant to be a question or a statement. It can signal emotional information such as enthusiasm or indifference. It can also signal certainty or uncertainty (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Though intonation varies slightly from speaker to speaker, there are general patterns that native speakers recognize easily and that language learners can be taught to recognize (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014).

Up to this point we have identified prominence and intonation as the two categories of suprasegmental features that deal the most with pragmatic meaning, and we have explored what each of these two terms are and how they are used to mark meaning. Now we will shift our attention to consider what has been done in the past to teach suprasegmental features to ELLs.

What Has Been Tried?

While it has not historically received as much attention as segmentals, the teaching of suprasegmentals is a growing field and much research has already been done

to seek out innovative and engaging ways to help students improve their skills in this area. The first part of this section will explore what methods have been used in the teaching of suprasegmental features, as well as why they are considered to be effective ways of teaching intonation and prominence in Standard American English. The second part of this section will discuss the limitations of the studies presented and implications for this project.

Methods

The research suggests eight primary methods of teaching intonation and/or prominence to ELLs. The following section will explore these eight methods and why they are thought to be effective. It will conclude with an observation of the trends that these methods reveal.

Gestures. The first method to be discussed can be used as a tool to help teach a variety of suprasegmental features, including intonation and prominence. It may be called conducting, beat training, gestures, or beat gestures (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014; Gluhareva & Prieto, 2016; Hussain & Sajid, 2015; Krahmer & Swerts, 2007; Yusupova et al., 2019). All these terms refer to the same general process of using bodily motion to signify the intonation or prominence that can be observed in an utterance. These gestures can be used to indicate the direction that intonation is taking, or where prominence can be found within a sentence. An advantage to using this method is that it combines auditory, visual, and kinesthetic techniques to promote learning, which can help students with any combination of learning preferences.

Nonsense Syllables. The second method is the use of nonsense syllables/sentences and deals primarily with intonation. As we have established,

intonation has the power to carry a great deal of meaning. This is true even when it is devoid of lexical content, as Goodwin et al. (2020) discusses when talking about the case of Chil, a man who suffered a stroke and was thereafter able to produce only three words, "yes," "no," and "and," in addition to nonsense syllables. Even with this highly restricted vocabulary, Chil is able to converse with others using the limited gestures he can make with one hand as well as the intonation of nonsense syllables. By modulating his voice and using the same pitch movements he would use if he were able to speak sensical words, his conversation partners can understand his meaning. Such is the power of intonation. Hussain and Sajid (2015) propose that nonsense syllables, which are stripped of lexical meaning, can be used to illustrate challenging intonational patterns. This helps the focus to shift from the lexical meaning of the words to the acoustic signals within the utterance, such as words that receive more prominence (Avery & Ehrlich 1992).

In this method, the teacher reads a nonsense phrase with intonation that corresponds to a logical sentence, and students mark intonation and prominent syllables. One example that Hussain and Sajid (2015) give is the sentence, "Boa my wee jah bloppy-go" based on the model "Six times seven is 42" (p.322). In this way, students learn to listen to what the acoustic cues are telling them about the important information in the sentence, rather than relying on knowledge about the topic or situation. A variation on this is the work Gilbert (1994) did when he had students hum dialog or speak into kazoos, which would make the speech inarticulate and really clarify the intonation of the utterance.

Back Chaining. This third method of teaching suprasegmentals also focuses on intonation. It is called back chaining and it is based on the idea that in the majority of

English sentences, the pitch movement that bears the most meaning is generally located near the end of the sentence (Yusupova et al., 2019). Students frequently have difficulty accurately repeating back long sentences after their teacher, and it is often necessary for teachers to break these sentences into smaller parts. If they start from the beginning of the sentence, they will likely produce unnatural intonation of the sentence chunks. Consider the abbreviated example below:

Sally

Sally gave

Sally gave it

Sally gave it to him.

The teacher will use a falling pitch on the final word in each utterance, even though the complete sentence has the falling pitch on the last word of the sentence. If the teacher instead were to start with the end of the sentence and build the sentence backwards, the correct intonation is preserved (Hussain & Sajid, 2015).

Dramatic Reading. The next method that has been used for teaching and practicing intonation and prominence is dramatic readings, which can come in the form of poetry or reader's theater. A major benefit to this method is that learners do not have to focus on creating content or language themselves. Using these methods to practice helps internalize intonation/prominence while taking away the pressure to create language. It also allows for this practice to take place in a low stress environment (Gasparro & Falletta, 1994). Additionally, drama allows for multiple repetitions without becoming boring or tedious and raises learners' awareness of suprasegmental features within language (Daly, 2009). While most of the research with this method has been done with

children, Idogho (2018) points out that "imitative play occurs at all stages of human development," up to old age (p.265). The key with adults, it would seem, is to make sure the content is relevant to their life, and to provide a chance for them to draw on their own life experiences throughout the exercise. Another benefit of this method is that it allows for hands-on practice and can help learners who prefer kinesthetic learning.

Imitation Drills. The fifth method of teaching intonation and prominence, as uncovered in research, is imitation drills. This may be in the form of shadowing, where learners speak the same words as their source slightly after the source does, or it may be mirroring, which is the same except that learners also imitate gestures and expressions (Celce-Murcia, 2014; Hussain & Sajid, 2015). Liu (2018) found this method to have only limited usefulness, however, because unless the students' spontaneously produced sentences were very similar to that which was imitated, they had difficulty generalizing the suprasegmental features into their own speech. Yusupova et al. (2019) believes, though, that imitation drills can be useful when the source is authentic material, arguing that because of the complexity of intonation, it is better to acquire it naturally than trying to learn it consciously. In that case, learners who are repeating what they hear in videos of native speakers may be able to develop similar intonation patterns. The benefit of this method is that it could be done outside the classroom, as learners are often able to access authentic material and generally enjoy engaging with it more than they enjoy doing traditional homework.

Meta-linguistic Awareness. Another method Liu (2018) tried out was meta-linguistic awareness, meaning that he raised student awareness of suprasegmentals and how they were used. Because noticing is such an important aspect of learning,

promoting metalinguistic awareness is a logical step, and students did report increased awareness and attempts to implement the features into their daily speech. Awareness, however, was not enough. This method only proved useful when the features were explained in the students' L1. I believe that explaining the features is a good step, but that it ought to be combined with another method that helps students practice identifying and implementing the target suprasegmentals into spontaneous speech.

Visualization. The method of visualization has already been referred to several times. It is the process of using a variety of symbols to represent suprasegmental features such as pitch (and thus intonation) and prominence. Arrows or ascending/descending letters or words can be used to show intonation. Italics, bold letters, or capital letters can be used to mark prominence within intonation units (Celce-Murcia, 2014; Yusupova et al. 2019). This method is especially helpful for students who prefer visual learning to see how the acoustics of an utterance are shifting. These cues help learners to create a mental picture of how the melody of the language moves, which will hopefully assist them with their own pronunciation.

Different technologies have also been shown to help visualize intonation, as well as other suprasegmental features (Celce-Murcia, 2014; Cranen & Others, 1984; James, 1979; Levis & Pickering, 2004). While these have proved to be valuable in helping students understand how the language moves, as well as how their own utterances compare to the language samples, I will not spend much time on this method because it requires access to specialized equipment and the goal of this project is to create material that is easily accessible to all teachers.

Authentic Material. Another method for teaching intonation and prominence is using authentic material as a source to analyze. This is not necessarily a separate method; it may stand on its own or be combined with several of the other methods already discussed. McGregor et al. (2016) uses TED Talks to teach intonation and stresses the importance of learning based on material in context. Levis and Silpachai (2018) echo the importance of learning in context when they look at ways to teach prominence to students. Their primary takeaway is that most practitioners would benefit from using longer, authentic material rather than the more prevalent short, contrived exercises. Another source of authentic material that has been tried is the use of pop songs to identify thought groups and pausing (Ditter, 2013). While this doesn't deal specifically with intonation or prominence, it is an example of how authentic material can be used to aid students in their understanding and usage of suprasegmental features.

Another benefit of using authentic material, particularly when working with adults, is that it allows the learners to see why what they are learning matters. This corresponds with one of Knowles' (1990) six assumptions of adult learning. Adults need to see the value of what they are learning, and what better way than to show them authentic source material and the way in which suprasegmental features are manipulated to draw attention to certain aspects and thus create unspoken meaning. Students are then free to try to utilize this new-found understanding in their own speech.

Observations. From this list of eight methods, three trends emerge: engaging multiple senses, the importance of repetition, and an understanding of meaning. We will briefly discuss each of these. First, engaging multiple senses. As discussed earlier, most people learn best when multiple senses are engaged. People also have learning

preferences, and thus using a variety of instruction types in the classroom is useful to reach all students where they are. Visualization and Gestures are two methods that obviously employ the visual and kinesthetic senses, and both of these methods are accompanied by verbal input. Perhaps the use of multiple senses is why these methods are successful in teaching these tricky suprasegmental topics.

The second trend is that of repetition. Imitation drills, dramatic reading, and back chaining all rely heavily on the use of repetition in the teaching of intonation and prominence. This implies that repeated practice is an important component in the internalization of these suprasegmental features. Another thing these three techniques all have in common is that the pressure of creating language is removed, so that students are able to put all their attention into accurately producing form (and to this list I would add nonsense syllables as well). By focusing more on form, I believe this helps to make the skills ultimately more transferable. Once students have developed some level of mastery over how to use intonation and prominence, they can begin to implement it in their own speech with their own unique words and ideas. This is a more complex level rather than a first step.

The third trend that can be found in these methods is the focus on meaning. This can be seen in the methods of meta-linguistic awareness and nonsense syllables. It may seem counterintuitive to include nonsense syllables in a list that focuses on meaning; however, the intent behind the use of nonsense syllables is to strip the text of all other clues and distractions so that the student can focus on what the intonation is telling them about the sentence. Students are then trained to understand what the changes in pitch say about the meaning of different parts of the sentence. Once this baseline understanding is

in place, words can be added back in and the same filter can be applied to lexical sentences. Meta-linguistic awareness, of course, explicitly explains how the different suprasegmentals alter meaning within a sentence.

These three trends—engaging multiple senses, using repetition, and teaching meaning—can be seen as guiding principles when teaching intonation and prosody to ELLs. One method that I did not include in these three categories above is using authentic material. I did not list it in a particular trend because I believe it applies to all of them. Even in repetition, it is important that the source material is authentic and relevant to the learners. This provides realistic context and content for learning and will help the learners stay engaged.

Limitations

The literature has provided ample methods that it suggests will help students understand and be able to use English intonation and prominence. There are a few drawbacks to the research, however, that we will briefly discuss here. In fact, each trend identified above has a drawback. The drawback with the trend of engaging multiple senses is that much of the experimentation on the topic has been done with children, and as we established at the start of the paper, adults learn differently than children. There is a lack of solid evidence that methods such as poetry and reader's theater, which work so well for children, would be an effective learning tool for adults. There is reason to believe that such techniques can still be effective if the material is authentic and related to the adult's life, and the adult sees the value of the learning. Still, this is conjecture and must be understood as such.

The second drawback is related to repetition. Liu (2018) found that repetition alone was not useful in spontaneous production. A teacher wanting to use this technique would need to find ways to transfer the imitated intonation into spontaneous speech. Nonsense syllables may help with that, but this method could suffer the same problem if special attention were not given to making the leap from imitation to autonomous production.

The final drawback has already been mentioned, and is related to the trend of engaging the senses. Visualization can be done via the use of specialized technology, and this has been shown to be helpful for adults. It also, however, requires the use of equipment that many teachers have no way of accessing. While it is important to be aware of these three potential drawbacks, they in no way invalidate the claim that these methods have been shown to help improve the understanding and use of intonation and/or prominence in speech.

Summary

The aim of this project is to answer the research question: *How does one best create effective and engaging material in order to teach pragmatic suprasegmental features in the adult English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom?* To answer this question, we first reviewed what the literature has to say about effective adult education, and two key takeaways surfaced. The first is that effective education engages multiple senses. Students bring a variety of experience and abilities to the classroom, and activities that draw on different strengths will most often lead to enduring understanding and learning. The second takeaway is that adults come to the classroom with more responsibilities, life experience, and often more barriers to learning than children. Thus,

they approach instruction differently. Any instruction must be highly related to adults'

experiences and invite them into the meaning-building process. This understanding

should inform the way the curriculum for this project is constructed.

The next step towards answering the research question was to identify which

suprasegmental features are considered pragmatic; that is, which features most contribute

to the conveyance of a speaker's intent beyond the literal meaning of the words. It was

determined that intonation and prominence contribute most to pragmatic meaning, and

thus are the two features we will focus on when creating the curriculum for this project.

Both intonation and prominence help to draw attention to unspoken meaning, and are

able to reveal a great deal of information to the listener. A variation to either of these

features will change a listener's understanding of what the speaker intends to convey in

the utterance.

With the features to focus on identified, the next step was investigating what work

has been done to teach these features to ELLs in the past. This research led to a

compilation of teaching methods and three primary conclusions. The first was very much

in line with what was discovered about effective education in general; namely, that it is

important to engage multiple senses in the learning process. The second conclusion was

centered on the importance of repetition. When working with intonation and prominence,

multiple methods implemented variations that included some form of repetition to help

internalize the "feel" of the language. The third and final conclusion was that it is

important to include an understanding of meaning in the teaching of these features. It is

not simply enough for students to parrot back what they hear; rather, they need to

understand what signals are embedded within the information in order to be able to apply

the learning in a meaningful way. It is important to note that not every method needs to meet all three of these points, but all three have a place in the teaching of these features.

Now that we have reviewed and determined what must be taken into consideration when teaching adults, the suprasegmental features we will teach, and the ways in which educators have taught these features in the past, we will now turn our attention to the methodology behind the creation of this curriculum. Chapter Three gives a detailed explanation of how the curriculum is structured.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

Chapters One and Two outlined the case for the importance of teaching suprasegmentals in the adult ESL classroom, investigated research about how to effectively teach adults, and identified which suprasegmental features are considered pragmatic and thus will be the focus of the project. Chapter Three will use this information to craft a curriculum that is focused on answering the question: *How does one best create effective and engaging material in order to teach pragmatic suprasegmental features in the adult English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom?* The following sections discuss how the project was designed, the intended setting and target audience for the project, how the research supports the design, and the standards that inform the project design.

Project Overview

Project description. This project shares a series of "mini-lessons" which can be incorporated into the busy adult ESL classroom and focus on teaching English prominence and intonation. Using a variety of methods including nonsense syllables, gestures, reader's theater, visualization, and the implementation of authentic material, students identify how the prominence/intonation they hear in various conversations affects the prosodic meaning of the words.

Auditory, visual, and kinesthetic components were intentionally included in my project design, which serves all learners. There are also times of discussion where students are able to share frustrations that have arisen in their lives because of lacking or

misused suprasegmentals. Additionally, there are chances to discuss what they struggle with regarding these features and what assistance they need.

These lessons span a twelve-week period and are broken into three units: one with a focus on prominence, a second with a focus on intonation, and a third with a focus on both prominence and intonation together. The first part of each lesson is designed to show how the misuse of the suprasegmental feature in question can undermine communication. I demonstrate why students should care about prominence and intonation, and then proceed to explain how it works and offer ample opportunity to practice. The bulk of each mini-lesson is practice.

I chose to design the curriculum as a series of mini-lessons because of the great amount of material teachers are expected to cover in the adult ESL classroom. If I created lessons that were designed to take up the whole class, most teachers would have to pass, even if they agreed with the importance of suprasegmentals. Many teachers would struggle to find time to dedicate one whole class to the topic, much less spend several weeks on it. By creating small lessons that can serve as building blocks, teachers can incorporate suprasegmental training into their schedules far more easily. Also, if it is a small part of every class, students will have continual exposure to the material, which will hopefully keep it fresh in their minds. This will also keep the content fresh in the minds of the teachers, and they could spontaneously weave suprasegmental practice into the rest of their planned curriculum as they saw fit, thus reinforcing the material.

Project materials. One vital piece of the project is an explanation to teachers of why it is important to teach prominence and intonation to students. Using the findings from my literature review, I created a cover letter of sorts to accompany my curriculum in order to

demonstrate the importance of these features for adult ELLs. Without teacher buy-in, the curriculum is all but useless. After addressing teachers' beliefs, it is time to turn attention to the lessons themselves.

Some materials vary from lesson to lesson. Below is a list of materials that will be included in most if not all mini-lessons:

1. A lesson plan outlining how to use the material for each session along with any materials that need to be prepared in advance. At the top of each lesson plan is a "Students will be able to…" or "SWBAT" statement indicating the learning objectives for the session.

2. Media of some sort, either a video clip, audio clip, or picture to demonstrate the importance of the suprasegmental feature that is to be studied.

3. Student handouts that correspond with the session's practice portion. Teachers will be expected to make the appropriate number of copies so that each student, or in some cases, each student pair, receives a handout.

Aside from these materials, there is also a pre- and post-session evaluation to be given to the students at the beginning and end of each four-week session. These brief evaluations test the students' competence with the suprasegmental feature in question. These evaluations will be used by the teacher to get an idea of how much familiarity the students have with the features and how well they are following the curriculum. This, combined with the formative assessments that the teacher will do during the practice portion of the lesson, will give a good idea of how well the students are understanding and implementing the material.

Research

  Much of this curriculum design is informed by what was discovered in the literature review. Hussain and Sajid (2015) spoke to the high demands which are placed on the ESL classroom. That and the debate over which is more important to teach, segmentals or suprasegmentals, is what led me to the creation of mini-lessons as well as the decision to begin by generating teacher buy-in (Capliez, 2016; Hussain & Sajid, 2015; Yenkimaleki & van Heuven, 2020). I then incorporated Knowles' (1990) research about how adults learn best; namely, that the information needs to be relevant and usable by starting many of the lessons with video clips where the feature being studied is used to convey implied information. Students are often asked where they have experienced this feature in their own interactions or in what circumstances they can see themselves needing to use it in their daily lives. Finally, I used the research from Lipke (2013) to inform the multi-sensory approach to learning that is used in each lesson, and several of the methods of teaching suprasegmentals that I discussed in the literature review appear throughout the mini-lessons (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014; Gasparro & Falletta, 1994; Gilbert, 1994; Hussain & Sajid, 2015; McGregor et al., 2016; Yusupova et al., 2019)

Framework

  The majority of the framework for this curriculum comes from Wiggins and McTighe's (2011) work called Understanding by Design (UbD). A part of their framework is using Backwards Design in curriculum creation and lesson planning. The goal as they explain it is not to merely start with what it is you want the student to know, but rather how it is the student will be expected to use what they know. This creates a

different way of thinking about teaching design, and this is the starting point I will use as I design my curriculum.

In addition to Backwards Design, UbD also lends support for the structure I have decided on for my curriculum; namely, smaller lessons over a longer span of time. As Wiggins and McTighe (2011) explain, "The best remembered information is learned through multiple and varied exposures followed by authentic use of the knowledge" (p.6). Also, by focusing and spending several weeks on just two suprasegmental features rather than trying to spend a little time on all of them, students are able to get a more in-depth understanding of how the features operate, helping to create connected knowledge.

Setting and Target Audience

The intended setting for this project is a community center in Kentucky that serves adults where classes meet twice a week for two hours per class. The curriculum is designed for an intermediate-level classroom because while I believe that it is valuable to learn these features early in a student's language learning journey, beginners will need a base in the language before they can participate in the kinds of conversations that are designed to accompany the material. The material, however, could be adjusted to accommodate a more beginner or advanced level by adjusting the time spent talking about the feature being studied. The activities themselves would remain largely the same. The curriculum is designed with the idea that one mini-lesson is taught in each class for a total of 20-30 minutes of specific suprasegmental work per week. The teacher may choose to do more than one mini-lesson per class, or continue practicing the prosodic features with other material throughout the class.

Sessions at this community center last four weeks, with a week in between each session. New students may join the class at the start of each session, so while the curriculum is designed to build on itself, there must be enough explanation so that a new student would be able to participate. Students who attend these classes are ages 16 and up. Students may take classes in the morning or in the evening.

Classes at the community center currently have no formal suprasegmental training requirements. Funding is given by the state and determined on the basis of CASAS scores. This particular program uses the reading and writing portions of the CASAS test only, so when trying to prepare students for the test, speaking is often neglected. Yet, as previous chapters have outlined, intonation and prominence are a large part of intelligibility and comprehension. In order to help students reach their goals — whether that is a promotion at work, graduating from college, or talking with their child's teacher, to name a few — it is vital that there be some measure of understanding and practice with these suprasegmental features.

Summary

Chapter Three explained how a twelve-week series of mini-lessons was designed to teach prominence and intonation to adult ELLs taking classes at a community center in Kentucky. By repeated exposure, students become more comfortable with understanding, identifying, and using these features. By using the mini-lesson format, teachers are able to include suprasegmental work into their busy lesson plans. The lessons are backwards designed by starting with the question of how students will be expected to use the material being taught in their daily lives. Each session begins by demonstrating the relevance of the topic to the students and is composed of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic

components. Research was shown to back up each design decision. With the project

outlined, we will move on to looking at outcomes. Chapter Four is a reflection on what I

discovered throughout the course of my project, discusses limitations, and offers

suggestions for further development.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflections

Introduction

The guiding question for my capstone was: *How does one best create effective and engaging material in order to teach pragmatic suprasegmental features in the adult English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom?* Reflecting on my own experience with suprasegmentals both as a student and as a teacher, I noticed a distinct lack of instruction in this area. Interest piqued, I was led to explore the differences between meaning-based, or pragmatic suprasegmentals and rule-based suprasegmentals. After looking at how much classroom time suprasegmental features are normally allotted, it was clear to me that there was an opportunity to create a curriculum which teachers could easily implement in their classrooms in order to intentionally expose students to these prosodic features.

Chapter Four is a reflection of my major learnings throughout the course of my curriculum development project. I revisit my literature review and make connections between the previous research and my project and discuss the implications and limitations of my project. Then comes a discussion about what opportunities there are for future research and projects, how I will communicate the results of my project to those who may benefit from it, and how my project benefits the profession.

Major Learnings

Throughout my process of research and project creation, I have learned quite a bit about suprasegmentals and the teaching methods that will best encourage a variety of students to interact with the material, including some very practical strategies for

engaging students with all different learning preferences — visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. One surprising discovery was how difficult it was to keep my lesson at 10-15 minutes per class, in large part because of my tendency towards trying to cover topics too thoroughly. Wanting to cover every nuance of a topic and make sure students had a strong grasp of the concept and were ready to put it into practice in their own speech, I had to remind myself that the aim of this curriculum is to expose students to these ideas so as to raise their awareness of suprasegmentals which affect meaning. This was never designed to be an intensive suprasegmental course for the simple reason that teachers do not often have the luxury of spending that much time on this topic, given the amount of other material they are expected to cover in their curricula. Perhaps once they really see the importance of the topic, they will be willing to dedicate more class time to it, but this project is meant only to serve as an introduction.

Another insight from this project is that I often default to creating my own resources rather than using authentic materials. Part of this is that if I create something myself, it is exactly what I want it to be, whereas authentic materials do not allow for as much control. Real life examples aren't always as clear as could be desired. Speech is often too fast or too complicated for my target demographic. Another part of this is that the hunt for good, authentic material can be very time consuming. Still, knowing how important utilizing authentic material is, I really pushed myself to try to use it as much as possible and I discovered, much to my delight, that there are a lot of great resources out there. For example, others before me have combed through episodes from television shows looking for examples of suprasegmental features to illustrate their importance to

students. Combining the examples they'd identified with my own exercises, I was able to create a compelling lesson plan without trying to completely reinvent the wheel.

Revisiting the Literature

The resource that I relied on most heavily throughout the course of my project creation was *Teaching Pronunciation* (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). The chapter about how to teach intonation and prominence was very helpful in that it showed me how to clearly explain both concepts and gave me ideas on how to talk to teachers about their importance. It was also an invaluable resource for helping me narrow in on which aspects of these two suprasegmental features to teach.

Having identified which aspects to present on, I then went back to the research on effective teaching methods and looked for ways to integrate those into the lessons. Six of the eight methods researched lent themselves well to this curriculum: gestures (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014; Gluhareva & Prieto, 2016; Hussain & Sajid, 2015; Krahmer & Swerts, 2007; Yusupova et al., 2019), nonsense syllables (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992; Goodwin et al., 2020; Hussain and Sajid, 2015), dramatic reading (Daly, 2009; Gasparro & Falletta, 1994; Idogho, 2018), meta-linguistic awareness (Liu, 2018), visualization (Celce-Murcia, 2014; Cranen & Others, 1984; James, 1979; Levis & Pickering, 2004; Yusupova et al. 2019), and authentic material (Levis and Silpachai, 2018; McGregor et al., 2016).

Many of these methods naturally pulled in aspects that would speak to different learning preferences. For example, gestures incorporated kinesthetic learning, dramatic reading brought in auditory components, and visualization served those with visual preferences (Lipke, 2013; Russel, 2006; Zarabi, 2016). I was also intentional about

including visuals in the form of pictures and videos, auditory components via the use of kazoos (Gilbert, 1994), and hands-on kinesthetic activities in order to best reach all learners.

Upon reflection of the project, one thing that was hard to include in the curriculum design was student choice. Knowles (1990) and Lipke (2013) both speak to the importance of adults being a part of the learning process. They need to see why it matters and have a say in the direction of their learning. While the curriculum excels at the former, it lacks the latter. With such a limited amount of time in each lesson, offering students choices wasn't very feasible. Still, there were some small choices, such as to draw the intonation pattern or show it with a hand motion, that I believe will allow students to lean into their own learning preference and therefore feel empowered in their learning.

Implications and Limitations

The primary decision makers that my project has the ability to influence are the classroom teachers and program directors of English language programs. My hope is that these groups will be persuaded as to the importance of spending time in the classroom intentionally teaching these suprasegmental features to their students. Ultimately the goal would be for teachers to take this curriculum and make it completely their own, keeping the exercises and replacing all of the provided material with videos, dialogs, and examples from their own classroom units, thus seamlessly integrating this instruction with their normal teaching. In this way, suprasegmentals would become a part of the culture and language of the classroom rather than being something completely separate.

This potential "separateness" could be a limitation to my project, in that without integration into the class work as a whole, students may come to think of this work with suprasegmentals as something that does not integrate into their regular language learning. Another limitation is that some of the research relied on for my project was based on work with children rather than adults. This limitation is addressed in Chapter 2 in my literature review as well; I believe there is quite a bit of room for future research in this area. However, making the best use of the research available, I was able to successfully craft a three-month curriculum of mini-lessons around the concepts of prominence and intonation without any significant changes to my plan. The only thing that changed was my feeling about modifying this curriculum to make it accessible to beginner students. While these concepts are important for beginners to learn, it would take some really intentional work to make the explanations understandable, especially if the teacher were unable to explain in the student's L1. A bit more understanding of English on the part of the students may be required for the teacher to adequately communicate the ideas behind some of these concepts.

Future Research/Projects

My project provides three months of mini-lessons on prominence and intonation. Future projects can expand on this base by creating similar mini-lessons for other suprasegmental features. I limited my project to pragmatic, or meaning-based, prosodic features but there are other features that are important to pronunciation and intelligibility, such as rhythm and word stress. Another option would be to expand the work done with these two features, taking students even deeper into the world of prominence and intonation. My project was meant to cause students to notice these suprasegmental

features and to have some idea of the meaning they carry, but there is much more that could be explored.

An area researchers might examine in regards to my project is what format is more effective for learning: spending a few classes in their entirety on one topic, or spreading the learning out in smaller chunks of time over several weeks or months. The reason I chose the mini-lessons format is because it seemed easier to convince a teacher to devote ten minutes to this work at the beginning of class, rather than to spend the whole class working on it. However, more research would inform which method works best.

One other area of potential future research that I mentioned in the previous section is effective methods for teaching suprasegmental to adult ELLs. Much of the work that has been done in this area was with children. While many of the same educational principles may transfer from children to adult learners, there is certainly much more that can be investigated here. For example, researching which methods work best when teaching adults how to retain an understanding of suprasegmental features, identify them in speech, and ultimately, use them in their own utterances.

Communicating Results

While this curriculum was developed for use in a community center in Kentucky, it will be shared with the three English programs that I have connections to in Kentucky, Florida, and Northern Jordan. The programs in Kentucky and Northern Jordan are very similar except for the nationalities of students they serve. For these programs, the curriculum will be sent to the director as an offering to their teachers. The program in Florida is a bit different, as it primarily focuses on one-on-one tutoring. To make this

material accessible to these tutors, I will rework it to accommodate their unique format and then send out the exercises one by one via email in the program's weekly "Tuesday Tip." I will also present this material at one of the monthly in-services. While on the whole this is a relatively small reach, I am pleased that my work will be able to benefit teachers and students in such different locales and life circumstances.

Benefit to the Profession

This project is meant to be a feasible way for teachers to present suprasegmental features to their language learners, and the hope is that conversations around this topic will not be confined to the first ten minutes of class, but rather that it would spread to the other classroom activities as well. By putting these ideas before them in each class, students are constantly reminded that there is more to English than just the definitions of the words they hear. Additionally, the lessons are customizable enough to fit in with the subject matter of any class if the teacher is willing to re-work the worksheets and examples to fit with the class unit. By creating a lesson plan that could be altered to fit into any unit, my hope is that teachers will be more willing to give it a try.

Summary

This chapter was a reflection on my learnings throughout the course of this project, as well as on how my project will benefit others and where future research can further my project. I have learned an immense amount about suprasegmentals and teaching techniques, and have identified areas of growth for myself as a researcher and a teacher. My guiding question all along has been: *How does one best create effective and engaging material in order to teach pragmatic suprasegmental features in the adult English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom?* This process has helped me formulate a

strong answer to that question in the form of a three-month prominence and intonation curriculum, and I look forward to sharing my project with other teachers and students around the world.

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