

## English language teachers' beliefs and concerns about pronunciation teaching in Uruguay

### What this research was about and why it is important

The researcher interviewed 28 Uruguayan English language teachers to explore their views on teaching pronunciation. The themes pulled out from the collective interviews included teacher anxiety about pronunciation teaching, external factors affecting pronunciation teaching, approaches, error correction, activities and techniques. The findings are of interest to language teachers, researchers, teacher educators, curriculum designers and textbook writers.

### What the researcher did

- **Participants.** 28 experienced and well-qualified English teachers self-selected to participate in the study.
- **Procedures.** The participants had an individual semi-structured interview with the researcher, and the interviews were transcribed. The researcher read the transcriptions a number of times to obtain the main themes which had emerged from the interviews. He highlighted participants' comments and stories representing the themes, and made notes to condense the meaning of comments. The main themes were also distilled to a one-page summary for each participant.
- **Themes.** The main themes included: 1) teacher anxiety about pronunciation and pronunciation teaching; 2) external factors impinging on pronunciation teaching; 3) approaches to pronunciation teaching; 4) error correction; 5) activities and techniques; 6) concerns and contentious issues.

### What the researcher found

- **Teacher anxiety.** The majority of participants felt pronunciation is important but was being neglected. Those not confident about their own pronunciation tended to avoid teaching features, such as stress and intonation; those confident about their pronunciation were uncertain about how to teach it. Teachers would like to know more about how to teach pronunciation, more about intonation and differences between English and Spanish phonology.
- **External factors.** Pronunciation teaching was being limited by a lack of time in a tightly packed curriculum and was a low priority in the curricula and textbooks. Some participants refrained from teaching teenagers or adults pronunciation, as they could feel ashamed or threatened when corrected.
- **Approaches and error correction.** Although many participants understood the need to contextualise and integrate pronunciation into the lesson, some did not know how to do it. Teaching was not systematic, but was done spontaneously and in response to errors. Participants all responded to errors, either immediately (using recast, repeat, and explanation) or afterwards (taking notes or using board), or in the form of encouraging peer or self-correction. Some were not sure if correction works.
- **Activities and techniques.** Many were not sure about how to help learners' pronunciation, but they used awareness-raising activities, e.g. listening activities, minimal pairs, getting students to record themselves, and drawing on first language and wider linguistic knowledge. Listening activities were generally believed to be conducive to increase awareness. Some found it difficult to raise awareness, e.g. English past tense and the final 's' in 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular or plurals. Participants did not adopt diagnostic tests to help learners become aware of their weaknesses.
- **Concerns.** There were disagreements over whether or not to teach the relationship between sounds and spelling, whether or not to use listen-and-repeat techniques, the aims of pronunciation teaching (fluency and being able to be understood vs accuracy and accent), and the language model adopted (exposing learners to many different varieties of English vs giving learners a native-speaker model). Although many tended to focus on phonemes (i.e., the smallest units of the sound, such as the phoneme /k/ in kite, cat) and regarded phoneme symbols as a useful tool for learners, particularly for more advanced levels, some did not feel comfortable or confident enough to use them.

### Things to consider

- This study suggested the need to promote non-native speaker teachers' confidence through focusing more on how to teach pronunciation in pre- and in-service education, to make room for pronunciation in the textbook and curriculum, and to make research accessible and meaningful to teachers. It also highlighted the value of reflective practice and teacher peer discussions as well as the need to train teachers in the use of diagnostics as an awareness-raising goal-setting tool.
- This study provided a picture of 'what they say they do rather than what they actually do'. A study observing teachers in action could help understand what teachers actually do in practice.

**How to cite this summary:** Chen, H-Y & Couper, G. (2019). English language teachers' beliefs and concerns about pronunciation teaching in Uruguay. *OASIS Summary of Couper (2016) in Journal of Second Language Pronunciation*. <https://oasis-database.org>

This summary has a [CC BY-NC-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license