

learners can sound like native speakers (Lenneberg, 1967) due to their L1, age, exposure, and innate phonetic ability (Kenworthy, 1987) it is not realistic to expect L2 learners, including non-NESTs, to speak with perfect American or British accents (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Levis (2005a) suggested that it is more realistic to apply the “intelligibility principle” instead of the “nativeness principle” to non-NESTs. If the goal is shifted to intelligibility from imitation of native English speakers, non-NESTs have advantages teaching pronunciation due to their English learning experience and because of sharing the same L1 with their learners (Snow et al., 2006). Walker (2001) concludes that non-NESTs might be ideal instructors for monolingual groups because they can use the learners’ L1 to help them achieve their goals.

Explicit Instruction

Due to lack of exposure to English, EFL learners tend to rely on their teachers to learn English mainly through explicit instruction in classrooms. Even in the area of pronunciation teaching, both Couper’s (2003) and Katayama’s (2007) surveys showed that L2 learners have positive attitudes toward explicit instruction.

Although the majority of learners can reproduce and copy sounds after listening to their teachers without explanation (Stevens, 1974), some learners forget the sounds after the session has ended (Locke, 1970). Learning phonology explicitly helps learners notice the features of the sounds in the target language (Derwing & Munro, 2005) and gives them a means of reviewing the the sounds in the long-run (George, 1972). Explicit instruction could prevent L1 interference (Spada & Lightbown, 2010) and raise learners’ awareness about their own pronunciation (Spada, 1997) by showing them the difference between their own pronunciation and that of native speakers’ or advanced learners’ (Derwing & Munro, 2005). Research also shows that explicit instruction has positive effects on learners’ aural perception abilities (Strange & Dittman, 1984). Couper’s (2006) study showed that short-term explicit pronunciation instruction could lead to a decrease in the total amount of pronunciation errors and improvement of the comprehensibility (Saito, 2011). These studies indicate that explicit instruction is effective in pronunciation teaching.

The Role of Suprasegmental Features in Intelligibility

Suprasegmental errors cause more hindrance in communication than segmental errors by interfering more with listeners’ understanding (Anderson-Hsieh et al., 1992). Therefore, researchers like McNerney and Mendelsohn (1992, p. 186) argue that “suprasegmentals have the greatest impact on the comprehensibility of learners’ English”. Broadly speaking, suprasegmental features have more influence on discourse than segmental features (Pennington & Richards, 1986). Some researchers indicate that focusing on suprasegmentals or prosody more than segmentals can improve intelligibility.

In the 1980s suprasegmental approaches dealing with stress, tone, intonation, and length played a main role in teaching pronunciation (Riney et al., 2000). Many recent researchers focus on learners’ acquisition of English intonation, rhythm, connected speech, and voice quality settings (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Sentence stress (Hahn, 2004), lexical stress (Field, 2005), and strong and weak syllables (Zielinski, 2008) play a crucial role in intelligibility (Saito & Saito, 2016).

A study by Nakamura (2010) showed that duration of unstressed syllables and weak vowels strongly affected evaluation scores of intelligibility as rated by native English

speakers. If non-native speakers use stress and rhythm patterns that are too different from those of native speakers, they might be misunderstood. For example, if they use improper intonation contours then they might be regarded as rude (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). In contrast, if L2 learners use suprasegmentals correctly, their segmental errors could be ignored, which might make their speech sound comprehensible (Gilbert, 2012). Therefore, Morley (1991) claims that suprasegmental features should be treated more seriously than segmental features in pronunciation teaching.

Reading Aloud

Reading aloud is a commonly used activity in L2 classrooms and is particularly popular in Asia (Gabrielatos, 2002; Gibson, 2008; Huang, 2010; Kailani, 1998; Kato, 2009). Takeuchi et al.'s (2012) research showed that reading aloud is favored by Asian EFL learners.

Some studies suggest that reading aloud is effective in the development of pronunciation, because it releases the cognitive burden by allowing learners to concentrate on pronunciation (Park, 2011). According to Gibson (2008), reading aloud has four advantages in teaching pronunciation. Firstly, reading aloud could improve spoken and reading fluency. Secondly, reading aloud can function as a way of monitoring pronunciation. Thirdly, reading aloud can reduce the learner's anxiety, because they do not have to create original speech and can focus on reading the text. Finally, reading aloud helps learners raise their awareness of intonation and sentence stress.

Adrián's (2014) research demonstrated that reading aloud activities help students to become aware of their pronunciation problems. Anderson-Hsieh and Venkatagiri's (1994) study found that intermediate speakers produced long and frequent pauses at places where they were not expected, but they improved their intonation after reading aloud. These studies indicate that reading aloud is not only favored by EFL learners but also effective in pronunciation teaching.

Research Questions

Research questions for this case study were:

1. Is explicit instruction for suprasegmentals effective in improving pronunciation?
2. Is reading aloud an effective activity for improving pronunciation?
3. What is a learner's attitude toward explicit teaching and the reading aloud activity?

Method

The Participant

The participant was a female Chinese adult about thirty years old using the pseudonym Lily Wang. She did not have experience in living or traveling in English speaking countries. She had learned English in classroom settings in China for more than ten years since she was 12. She passed an English proficiency test Grade 4 in China, which is equivalent to IELTS Band 6 score. She was a part-time Chinese teacher visiting the instructor's (the author) high school once a week. She was highly motivated.

Instruments

The material used for the diagnostic test (see Appendix A) was from the book *American Accent Training* written by Cook (1991). The text used for the pre- and post- test was from a first-year high school textbook (see Appendix B), which had 101 words and 56

word types. The text contained a token ratio of 0.64 and a lexical density of 0.43 based on Tom Cobb's vocab profiler. The passage (see Appendix C) chosen for reading aloud has 127.81 different words, with a 0.64 type-token ratio and 0.44 lexical density.

Meeting One

A diagnostic test (see Appendix A) was conducted. The participant had her reading recorded and rated by the instructor and a native American graduate student. Influenced by her native Chinese language, the participant read every word very clearly and accurately but without intonation or word-linking, which made her speech difficult to understand for the native rater. She also put too much stress on word-final consonants such as *t*, *d*, and *k*, which made her speech choppy and sound mechanical.

In Mandarin Chinese, except for *n* and *ng*, there is no final consonant sound, which causes Mandarin Chinese speakers speak with neither word connections nor consonant endings (Cook, 1991). In order to acquire English tones, Mandarin Chinese speakers must adapt to an intonation system with more variations (Park, 2011). Therefore, the decision to teach intonation and liaison was made in order to help the participant sound nearer to a native speaker as she wished by overcoming her negative L1 transfer.

Meeting Two

After explaining the result of the diagnostic test to the participant, she agreed to focus on intonation and liaisons. She read a short paragraph as a pre-test (see Appendix B).

Meeting Three and Treatment 1 (see Appendix C)

In order to make the participant feel comfortable about learning English intonation, the instructor told her that different intonation could produce different meaning in English even though it is not as a tonal language like Chinese. She practiced reading *Sound/Meaning Shifts* and *Two-Word Stress* (See Appendix C). Her reading was recorded at the beginning, in the middle of, and at the end of the reading activity, and the recording was analyzed by both herself and the instructor afterwards. After reading and correcting errors fifteen times, both agreed that her last recording became easier to understand than the previous recordings, which the participant reported made her feel confident.

Meeting Four and Treatment 2 (see Appendix D)

After focusing on intonation and word stress on the word-level in Treatment 1, Treatment 2 focused on intonation on the sentence level. The participant was told that putting stress on different words in the same sentence (e.g., *I did not say he stole the money; I **did not** say he stole the money; I did not say he **stole** the money*) could produce different meanings. The participant was asked to read the above sentence with three different intonations on different words in her native language so that she could realize the importance of the intonation in languages. After reading in her L1, she read the sentence with different intonations in English. Thereafter, she practiced reading a text (see Appendix D) fifteen times through reading aloud activities. Her reading was recorded and then analyzed by both the participant, herself, and the instructor.

Meeting Five and Treatment 3 (see Appendix E)

Treatment 3 focused on connected speech and reduced forms, such as *hol don* (*hold on*), *tur nover* (*turn over*), and *teller miser* (*tell her I miss her*). After explicit instruction about

word connection, the participant was given the liaisons in written form so that she could read them easily. As in the Treatment 1 and 2, the participant read the reading passage (See Appendix C reading passage) by looking at liaisons in written form such as, *They tell me the dai measier to understand. (They tell me that I'm easier to understand).*

One problem in Treatment 3 was that the participant could not focus on both intonation and word linking. When she paid attention to intonation, she forgot about word linking. On the other hand, when she focused on word linking, she forgot about intonation. A solution for the problem was practicing two words rather than a sentence until the participant got used to both intonation and word linking.

Meeting Six

The participant read the same paragraph as a post-test (see Appendix B) and completed questionnaire (see Appendix F).

Results, Discussions, and Pedagogical Implications

Results

Quantitative data was collected from recordings while qualitative data was collected from a questionnaire. Both the instructor and the native American English speaker rater agreed that recordings at the end of the treatment were easier to understand than before. Therefore, the answer to the research question one is positive: Teaching suprasegmentals is effective in improving speech comprehensibility.

The text (see Appendix E) used for reading aloud has 23 sentence stresses, 46 reduced forms, and 55 liaisons. At the end of Treatment 3, the participant could read 23 sentence stresses, 16 reduced forms, and 10 liaisons. She made an improvement of 100% on sentence stress, 35% on reduced forms, and 18% on liaison.

The text (see Appendix B) used for pre- and post-test has 20 sentence stresses, 12 word linking occurrences, and eight reduced forms according to the CD attached to the high school textbook. In pre-test recordings, there was neither intonation nor word linking. In post-test recordings, the participant made 12 sentence stresses, three word links, and three reduced forms. She made a 60% improvement on sentence stress, a 37.5% improvement on reduced forms, and a 25% improvement on liaisons. Therefore, the answer to research question two is also positive: Reading aloud is responsible for the improvement of the speech intelligibility.

Table 1
Results from reading passage with practice and post-test without practice

	word stress	reduced form	liaisons
Results from readings practiced during Meeting 5	100%	50%	18%
Results from the post-test without practicing during Meeting 6	60%	37.5%	25%

As Table 1 indicates, the participant could read word stress, reduced forms, and liaisons in the post-test text which was not practiced during the case study.

The questionnaire answers also indicated that the participant was interested in learning English pronunciation. She agreed that explicit explanations of pronunciation was effective. She partly agreed that reading aloud was effective for learning and teaching pronunciation. She had no prior knowledge of intonation, rhythm, re-syllabification and reduced forms because teachers in her previous learning contexts focused on teaching English grammar rather than pronunciation. In other words, she had never learned suprasegmentals before during her ten-year formal English education in China. She was also satisfied with the results of the treatments even though she did not sound like a native speaker of American English, as she had wished to before the treatments.

Discussion

The results from the recordings were consistent with previous research, showing the effectiveness of explicit pronunciation and reading aloud on the development of pronunciation intelligibility. The participant's reading recordings at the end of the treatment were more comprehensible than before just by adding intonation and word linking. These results implied that suprasegmentals play an important role in comprehension. The results of the post-test and questionnaire showed positive effects of teaching suprasegmentals, which is consistent with Morley's (1991) view.

In terms of the results of the treatments and the participant's satisfaction, we can see that pronunciation instruction in EFL contexts needs more attention. Like many other English learners in an EFL environment, the participant in this case study did not receive much previous pronunciation training, but rather reading comprehension and grammar lessons. This might have been partly caused by nonnative English teachers' limited knowledge or lack of confidence (Celce-Murica et al., 1996).

It is important to provide training for EFL teachers and to adopt the "intelligibility principle" in pronunciation teaching (Levis, 2005a). We have to bear in mind that the ultimate goal of pronunciation teaching is to facilitate effective communication and not to imitate perfect American or British accents (Zhang, 2009).

Pedagogical Implications

Teachers in EFL environments serve as role models for their learners in teaching pronunciation (Zhang, 2009). Therefore, English teachers are expected to (a) have a high command of the English sound system, (b) analyze negative L1 transfer, and (c) be well

trained before teaching (Celce-Murica et al., 2010). Pronunciation plays an important role in the process of communication (Zhang, 2009). Although there are many unchangeable factors affecting acquisition of native-like accents (Kenworthy, 1987), there are potentials to teach intelligible pronunciation in the EFL environment in terms of effective communication. Eighty percent of all English teachers globally are non-NESTs (Cangrjaj, 1999). Therefore, we cannot expect that English pronunciation will be taught only by NESTs (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). If pronunciation needs to be taught, it should be taught by both qualified NESTs and non-NESTs (Levis et al., 2016).

Conclusion

Two conclusions were drawn from this case study. First, explicit instruction and reading aloud are effective methods of pronunciation teaching. Second, teaching suprasegmentals is effective for improving speech intelligibility during limited periods. The participant in this case study showed great interest and confidence in learning pronunciation after receiving the treatments. She was suggested to repeat after listening to CDs and to record her own pronunciation for comparison if she wanted to continue studying pronunciation in the future.

The major limitation of this case study was that there was only one participant with three treatments during a very short time, so the first conclusion cannot be generalized. A delayed post-test might have told whether explicit teaching along with reading aloud is effective in the long run. Unfortunately, the case study was finished at the end of the school year and the participant stopped coming to the high school where the instructor worked. However, the participant at least had raised awareness about intonation, liaison, and sentence stress through this case study, which laid a foundation for her further learning.

Due to lack of exposure to authentic input in the EFL environment, EFL learners rely on their teachers to learn pronunciation (Zhang, 2009), but learners' unrealistic goals and teachers' insufficient training in pronunciation (Derwing & Munro, 2005) can cause non-NESTs to lose confidence in teaching (Baker, 2011; Burns, 2006). Therefore, it is important for non-NESTs to help their learners set appropriate goals for pronunciation (Zhang, 2009), and for teachers to use appropriate activities.

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Appendix A

Diagnostic Test

A	B	C	D	E	F
Pit	bit	staple	stable	cap	cab
Fear	veer	refers	reverse	half	have
Sue	zoo	faces	phases	race	raise
Sheer	din	cashew	casual	rush	rouge
Tin	gin	metal	medal	hat	had
Chin	then	catcher	cadger	rich	ridge
Cut	race	bicker	bigger	tack	tag

1. Go up
2. Stairs.
3. I am going to other room.
4. My name is Ann.
5. It is the end of the bad years.
6. Give it to his owner.

From *American Accent Training* (Cook, 1991)

Appendix B

Pre-Test and Post-Test

Look at the pictures above. The left one is the picture of the sea around a small island in Southern Italy. Is it in the mid of air? No it is on the sea. The water there is so clear that makes you think it is in the mid of air. The right one is the picture of a hotel in northern Finland. There are full of stars in the sky and it is beautiful. You can watch all of them from your bed in the hotel room. Many people want to see. Don't you want to visit these places with wonderful views?

From *Vista English Communication I*

Appendix C

Treatment 1

I. Sound/Meaning Shifts

my tie	mai -tai	Might I ?
my keys	Mikey 's	My keys ?
inn key	in key	inky
my tea	mighty	My D
I have two .	I have, too .	I have to.

II. Two-Word Stress

Descriptive Phrase	Set Phrase
a light bulb	a lightbulb
a cold fish	a goldfish
a gray ground	a greyhound
a white house	The White House
a nice watch	a wristwatch
a clean cup	a coffee cup
a sharp knife	a steak knife

III. Reading Passage

Hello, my name is (___). I'm taking American **Accent** Training. There's a **lot** to learn, but I **hope** to make it as **enjoyable** as possible. I should pick **up** on the American **intonation** pattern pretty **easily**, although the **only** way to get it is to **practice** all of the time. I use the **up** and down, or **peaks** and valleys **intonation** more than I **used** to. I've been paying attention to **pitch**, too. It's like **walking** down a **staircase**. I've been **talking** to a lot of **Americans** lately, and they tell me that I'm **easier** to understand. Anyway, I could go on and on, but the **important** thing is to **listen** well and sound **good**. Well, what do you **think**? **Do** I?

From *American Accent Training* (Cook, 1991)

Appendix D

Treatment 2

Pitch and meaning change

I didn't say he stole the money.	Someone else said it.
I didn't say he stole the money.	That's not true at all.
I didn't say he stole the money.	I only suggested the possibility.
I didn't say he he stole the money.	I think someone else took it.
I didn't say he stole the money.	Maybe he just borrowed it.
I didn't say he stole the money.	But rather some other money.
I didn't say he stole the money .	He may have taken some jewelry.

Reading Passage

Hello, my name is (___). I'm taking American **Accent** Training. There's a **lot** to learn, but I **hope** to make it as **enjoyable** as possible. I should pick **up** on the American **intonation** pattern pretty **easily**, although the **only** way to get it is to **practice** all of the time. I use the **up** and down, or **peaks** and valleys **intonation** more than I **used** to. I've been paying attention to **pitch**, too. It's like **walking** down a **staircase**. I've been **talking** to a lot of **Americans** lately, and they tell me that I'm **easier** to understand. Anyway, I could go on and on, but the **important** thing is to **listen** well and sound **good**. Well, what do you **think**? **Do** I?

From *American Accent Training* (Cook, 1991)

Appendix E

Treatment 3

Reading Passage

Hello, my name is (____). I'm taking American **Accent** Training. There's a **lot** to learn, but I **hope** to make it as **enjoyable** as possible. I should pick **up** on the American **intonation** pattern pretty **easily**, although the **only** way to get it is to **practice** all of the time. I use the **up** and down, or **peaks** and valleys **intonation** more than I **used** to. I've been paying attention to **pitch**, too. It's like **walking** down a **staircase**. I've been **talking** to a lot of **Americans** lately, and they tell me that I'm **easier** to understand. Anyway, I could go on and on, but the **important** thing is to **listen** well and sound **good**. Well, what do you **think**? **Do** I?

Reading Reduced Sounds

Hello, my name'z (____). I'm taking 'mer'k'n Acc'nt Train'ng. Therez' lott' learn, b't I hope t'make 't'z 'njoy'bl'z poss'bl. Ish'dek 'p on the 'mer'k'n 'nt nash' n patter pretty eas'ly, although the only way t' get 't 'z t' pract's all 'v th' time. I use the 'p'n down, or peaks 'n valleys, 'nt' nash'n more the'n I used to. Ive b'n pay'ng 'ttensh 'n t' p'ch, too. 'Ts like walk'ng down' staircase. Ive b'n talk'ng to' lot 'v' mer'k'ns lately, 'n they tell me th't Im easier to 'nderstand. Anyway, I k'd go on 'n on, b't the 'mport'nt th'ng 'z t' Is n wel'n sound g'd. W'll, wh' d'y' th'nk? Do I?

Practicing liaisons

Hello, my nay miz (____). I'm takingə mērica næccen(t)raining. There zə lättə learn, bə dəi hope t'ma ki desen joyablez passible. I shüd pi kəpän the^(y)əmerica nintənash'n pæddern prid^(y)ezily, älthough thee^(y) only waydə geddidiz t' prækti sälləv th' time. I^(y) use thee^(y)up' n down, or peak s'n valley zintənashən more thə näi used to. Ivbn paying tenshən t'pitch, too. Itsläl kwälking dow nə staircase. Ivbn talking to^(w)ə läddəvə mērican zla^(t)ely, 'n they tell me the däimeezier to^(w) understand. Anyway, I could go^(w)ä nə nän, bu^(t)thee^(y)important thingiz t' lisənwellən soun^(d) good. Well, whəddyü think? Do^(w) I?

From *American Accent Training* (Cook, 1991)

Appendix F
Questionnaire

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Partly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6

1. I am interested in learning English pronunciation.
 1 2 3 4 5 6
2. I believe I can improve my pronunciation with proper training and instruction.
 1 2 3 4 5 6
3. I have never received pronunciation instruction systematically.
 1 2 3 4 5 6

Before the Treatment

4. I had no knowledge about intonation, rhythm, and linking.
 1 2 3 4 5 6
5. I had no knowledge about re-syllabification and reduced form.
 1 2 3 4 5 6
6. No one has fixed my pronunciation problem.
 1 2 3 4 5 6
7. I did not know how to improve my pronunciation.
 1 2 3 4 5 6

After the Treatment

8. I thought pronunciation instruction could not be taught in a big classroom.
 1 2 3 4 5 6
9. I felt that pronunciation instruction can improve my listening abilities.
 1 2 3 4 5 6
10. I thought explicit explanation for pronunciation is useful.
 1 2 3 4 5 6
11. I thought reading aloud is an effective approach for learning and teaching pronunciation.
 1 2 3 4 5 6

Any comments about learning and teaching pronunciation: