

Acrolectal English for Tertiary Students: Individualised Metaphonological Awareness Instruction

BROMELEY PHILIP

*Academy of Language Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA Sarawak
bromeley@sarawak.uitm.edu.my*

JOHN FRANCIS NOYAN

*Academy of Language Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA Sarawak*

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the process of implementing the Individualised Metaphonological Awareness Instruction (I-MAI) for the teaching and learning of acrolectal English in terms of the phonological aspect: selected suprasegmental features of English sound, namely, the schwa and catenation or linking features. For instance, not producing the neutral schwa vowel sound is in part what gives those whose second language is English an accent or pronunciation that is different from those whose first language is English. Producing or not producing schwa vowel sounds affects the quality of one's pronunciation and how natural one sounds when speaking English. If the sophisticated learners aspire to approximate the RP model in their enunciation, schwa and catenation are deemed very important. The study assesses the instruction model in terms of its facilitative effects in assisting the teacher as well as in assisting the student to learn selected aspects of suprasegmental features of English sounds via scaffolding process. It is a qualitative case study which involves five (5) participant undergraduates at a public university in Sarawak. Only qualitative data involving one participant were reported and discussed in this paper. It was found that firstly the I-MAI model did assist both the teacher and the student in coaching and learning pronunciation respectively. The process of micro-scaffolding yielded varied scaffolding features/characteristics that explain the interactive dynamics occurring within the individualised instructional process itself. The I-MAI was also found to be positive and facilitative in enhancing the student's metaphonological awareness of the suprasegmental features of English sounds.

Keywords: metaphonological; awareness; acrolectal; catenation; suprasegmental

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, due to its long history of British colonisation, the British model of English seems to have become an acceptable standard particularly in the educational sector even though it is not spelt out clearly for example, in the Malaysian school English language curriculum. Although many would agree that pronunciation is an aspect of language that is difficult to acquire, the reality is that generally in many English lessons in Malaysian schools, teaching pronunciation is granted the least attention (Nair, Krishnasamy & De Mello 2006, Jayapalan & Pillai 2011, Pillai 2017). Yet, it can be argued that pronunciation skill is one of the most important language skills that contributes towards the overall success of a competent language user. This is because despite having a good grasp of the lexical and syntactical rules of English, an English user may find himself/herself unintelligible in his/her speech if he/she had poor pronunciation. Pronunciation skill is undeniably a crucial issue in the practice of teaching English and it needs to be addressed possibly urgently especially in regards to the selection or creation/construction of effective methods, approaches or instructional models for teaching it.

The spread of English worldwide is explained in Kachru's (1985) Concentric circles paradigm that demarcates the types of patterns of English into three circles: the Inner Circle, comprising the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, Canada and New

Zealand; the Outer Circle consisting of former colonies; and the Expanding Circle which is the rest of the world. Kachru's (1985) Three-circle concept has placed multilingual Malaysia, being a former British colony, in the Outer Circle where English, labelled as English as a second language (ESL/L2) has undergone dynamic changes due to the influence of local cultures and languages through the process of nativisation or indigenisation and institutionalisation, resulting in the emergence of a non-native variety conspicuously different from the traditional Inner Circle native varieties (L1), and in Malaysia, local scholars-researchers (Nair-Venugopal2003, Gill 2002,Rajadurai 2006, Koo 2009) have identified it as Malaysian English (ME).

Koo (2009) describes Malaysian English as "...a localized diachronic and synchronic variety of English which has evolved from the country's (Malaysia's) colonial and postcolonial experience. It is a nativised fusion of the formal, functional and discoursal features of English in interaction with the local Malay, Chinese and Indian languages used within a language context described as polyglossic and where the speech repertoire of its people is multilingual." (p.90). The indigenisation of English in Malaysia has resulted in the emergence of ME and its sub-varieties which have been described in terms of an acrolect-mesolect-basilect cline (Baskaran 1994, Gill 2002). Koo (2009) further explains that each sub-variety is generally distinguished according to its intelligibility in national and international settings, its context for formal and informal use, and its degree of variation from a Standard Native English in its linguistic and functional forms in terms of phonology, syntax, lexis and rhetoric.

The ME is viewed along the acrolect-mesolect-basilect continuum, with the acrolect being at the highest level in the continuum. Baskaran (1987, cited in Gill 2002) regards the acrolect as characteristic of standard ME that is grammatically similar to standard British English. However, it is neither spoken with the same native speaker's accented pronunciation nor with the prosodic features of the native speaker's standard variety of English. It is considered the prestigious form of English, either spoken or written, which is appropriate for formal context and is internationally intelligible (Baskaran 1987). The mesolect, which is in the middle of the continuum, allows more variation in the areas of phonology and lexis. The quintessence of indigenisation lies at this mesolectal level (Basakaran 1994). Baskaran further explains that due to simplification and generalisation, this substandard variety of ME lacks well-formedness. This variety is used in informal situations and is considered a local dialect. Finally, at the lowest end of the continuum is the basilect. Baskaran (1987) states that this lectal range is only found in the spoken form and is regarded as "broken Malaysian English." According to Baskaran (1987), due to the deviation in phonology, syntax, and lexis, the basilect is only intelligible among speakers who can communicate at this level. Therefore, it is possible to describe ME as a type of non-native variety because it clearly differs from the traditional native speaker's varieties particularly in the aspect of phonology whereby distinctive characteristics are discernible even in the educated sub-variety of ME, the acrolect. In sum, Baskaran (1994) describes the acrolect as 'official Malaysian English', the mesolect as the 'unofficial Malaysian English' used by a great majority in informal contexts and finally the basilect, as mainly of a colloquial variety. This paper promotes the teaching of the acrolectal English or 'official Malaysian English' to tertiary students. It explores the process of implementing the Individualised Metaphonological Awareness Instruction (I-MAI) for the teaching and learning of acrolectal English in terms of the phonological aspect: selected suprasegmental features of English sound, namely, the schwa and catenation or linking features.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ISSUES ON PRONUNCIATION INSTRUCTION

Pronunciation instruction was absent (at most incidental) from the second/foreign language (L2) classroom for a long time due to the conventional beliefs that pronunciation is not important, cannot be taught, and can be “picked up” by learners. These beliefs have been questioned and pronunciation teaching has undergone a shift, so that nowadays, its frameworks may encompass not only linguistic competence, but also discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence (Morley 1994) (cited in Silveira 2002). The teaching of pronunciation remains largely neglected in the field of English Language teaching.

It is undeniable that limited pronunciation skills can undermine a learner’s self-confidence, restrict social interaction, and negatively influence estimations of a speaker’s credibility and abilities (Morley 1991). Without adequate pronunciation skills, a person’s communicative skills may be severely hampered, and this in turn may give rise to speech that lacks intelligibility, leading to glitches in conversation and to strain on the part of the listener. English pronunciation is one of the most difficult skills to acquire and it is necessary for learners to invest ample time to practice their pronunciation (Pourhossein 2016). Studies have also indicated that poor pronunciation or heavily-accented English tends to be stigmatised at the workplace, and speakers often report being discriminated against and disadvantaged when it comes to employment or promotion (Lippi-Green 1997, Mashor 2000, Derwing 2003).

Despite much agreement on the significant value of pronunciation for effective communication, pronunciation instruction in the contexts of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has been neglected (Harmer 2007, Kelly 2000). Harmer identified three possible reasons as to the reason why teachers may lack interest and enthusiasm in teaching pronunciation: firstly, a lack of confidence in giving pronunciation instruction, secondly, limited class time for teaching all areas of English, and finally, being unsure of the effectiveness of pronunciation instruction. In a similar vein, Kelly (2000) pointed out that the teaching of pronunciation may be neglected not because of disinterest on the part of the teacher, but rather due to the teachers’ lack of knowledge and strategies for teaching pronunciation. But the crux of the matter according to Hwang (2008), drawing upon her Korean experience, simply is that many teachers may not be sure of how to teach pronunciation. It seems that the situation is amplified in countries where the use of English is not widespread and most school teachers are non-native speakers of English. Both teachers and students rarely observe any immediate effects of pronunciation instruction due to the rarity of opportunities to use English in this context (Hwang 2008).

One probable explanation as to why pronunciation has long been neglected according to Darcy, Ewert, and Lidster (2012), is simply that pronunciation is difficult to teach for several reasons. Teachers are often left without clear guidelines and are confronted with contradictory purposes and practices for pronunciation instruction. This is indeed the case as there is no well-established systematic way of deciding what to teach and when and how to do it (Derwing & Foote 2011). In fact, a common problem is in deciding whether to focus either on segmentals or on suprasegmentals, and to what extent for each component (Derwing, Munro & Wiebe 1998, Jenner 1989, Zielinski 2008). A related challenge is how to address production and perception of English sounds. While there is ample evidence in the literature that both are necessary in a balanced approach to pronunciation development (Bradlow et al. 1997), the guidelines for teacher training and classroom materials are not well-defined.

It seems clear that the absence of pronunciation teaching or peripheral focus on it in ESL/EFL contexts world-wide is ubiquitous and not only specific to Malaysia. However, commenting on her research investigation into pronunciation in Japan, Koike (2014) observes that for the past three decades, it appears that there has been a renewed interest in second-language (L2) pronunciation, and some researchers have argued for more attention to pronunciation in L2 classrooms (Couper 2003 & 2006, Gilbert 2010, Isaacs 2009, Pennington 1998). But still pronunciation remains peripheral in applied linguistics, and there have been few studies focusing on the effects of pronunciation teaching (Derwing & Munro 2005). As a consequence, rather little guidance concerning L2 pronunciation instruction is available, and many teachers have limited training in teaching pronunciation (Derwing & Munro 2005, Foote, Holtby & Derwing 2011, Gilbert 2010). It is reported that teachers seem to lack confidence or express discomfort about teaching pronunciation (Baker 2011, Burns 2006, Foote et al. 2011). The number of controlled experimental studies on pronunciation teaching or learning is still remarkably small (Derwing & Munro 2015).

The pronunciation component is often treated with the least attention in Malaysian ESL classes (Nair, Krishnasamy & De Mello 2006, Pillai 2017). One probable reason could be that teachers are faced with the tension that arises between whether to teach pronunciation towards preparing students to achieve international intelligibility in one's speeches which is very subjective as to the meaning of intelligibility itself or to train students towards achieving native-like pronunciation ability which is a difficult goal to achieve and also it might mean losing one's local identities (local accent). Nonetheless, as English continues to be a global language, there needs to be specific efforts on the part of Malaysian English language teachers/practitioners to teach pronunciation either explicitly or implicitly in view of such distinctive divergence in the phonology of ME due to the contact with local languages and cultures that exert influence via mother-tongue transfer which definitely impede intelligibility particularly in the global context (Rajadurai 2006). Malaysian English Language teachers need to address the intelligibility and nativeness principles and make decisions as to their goals for pronunciation instruction. In order to draw attention to the importance of pronunciation especially in the context of Malaysia, Priscilla Shak, Chang Siew Lee and Jeannet Stephen (2016) believe that it is important for English teachers to use the right methods and tools to help improve pronunciation. This is crucial in the context of tertiary institutions where clear pronunciation is necessary for students to do their oral presentations and reports.

ACROLECTAL ENGLISH

Tun Dr Mahathir stresses that it is imperative for top civil servants to have good command of the English language as they have meetings overseas with international figures (Star Online, June 2018). Echoing Tun Mahathir's statement, it is a fact that English is now widely accepted as a global or international language, and it means that there exists a need for people of different nationalities to understand and be understood using English as a common means of global language. But with the emergence of many Englishes worldwide, it seems that possession of pronunciation ability that ensures international intelligibility is necessary especially in the globalised context of international communications. The central issue of debate in the current literature as regards to pronunciation revolves around the principles of intelligibility or comprehensibility (i.e., how easy it is to understand what they say) and nativeness (i.e., phonological nativelikeness of utterances), as to whether learners should aim for intelligibility while still maintaining their accented pronunciation or nativeness as in near-native pronunciation. Most scholars (Kachru 1985, Rajadurai 2007) outside the inner circle are for intelligibility and perceive nativeness as unnecessary as it might displace one's ethnic

identity while yet there are also proponents of nativeness notably Gill (2002) who promotes acrolect, the highest lectal range in the Malaysian English variety which is close to the Standard RP in terms of lexis, syntax and phonology, thus ensuring international intelligibility. Intelligible pronunciation is an important part of communicative competence. If learners do not have reasonably accurate pronunciation skills they might not be able to communicate effectively (Pourhossein 2017)

In view of the current on-going debate between intelligibility versus nativeness principles, this paper seeks to address two main perspectives namely, firstly, what is the pedagogical model of English pronunciation deemed appropriate to be selected for use in the teaching and learning of pronunciation?; and secondly, upon selecting the appropriate model, what is an instructional model that is suitable for the teaching and learning of the selected pedagogical model? Is there any existing instructional model that is suitable? If there is none then there is a need to conceptualise and build one that reasonably serves the pronunciation instruction well.

The first perspective as mentioned earlier is on the selection of an appropriate pedagogical model of pronunciation as guideline or point of reference for teaching and learning. According to Gill (2002), “The ME acrolect may be prescribed pedagogical norm necessary for international communication. The mesolect is the variety used for intranational communication, between Malaysians of different ethnicity. The basilect, due to its extreme differences from the standard, is regarded as almost unintelligible outside of the speech communities in which it developed” (p. 52). Baskaran (1987, cited in Gill, 2002) sees the acrolect as a characteristic of standard Malaysian English used in formal contexts and as enjoying international intelligibility. Baskaran (1987) further describes the acrolect as 'official Malaysian English', the mesolect as the 'unofficial Malaysian English' used by the person-in-the street and the basilect as 'broken Malaysian English'. Since there are sub-varieties (acrolect, mesolect and basilect) within the ME variety, choosing a pedagogical model to be taught in Malaysian ESL classrooms was not easy. It is also not possible to choose the 'educated variety of English' as spoken by the educated group because according to Gill (2002), graduates and undergraduates who have been educated in the Bahasa Malaysia medium of education, speak the mesolectal variety. Therefore, in the Malaysian context, it is not totally accurate to describe the recommended pedagogical model as the educational variety of English. As mentioned in the previous section, Gill (2002) suggests that the pedagogical model of Standard Malaysian English may be understood as 'the target model' that most educated Malaysian speakers would aspire to. What is the 'target model'?

As a major part of British legacy, the British model of English seems to have become an acceptable standard in Malaysia even though it is not spelt out clearly and explicitly as to the model being adopted and used in the Malaysian English language curriculum. The Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) (1990) did state that as far as spoken English is concerned, the instructional objectives are to teach students to speak using 'correct pronunciation, and with correct intonation, word stress and rhythm'. But there are no prescriptive guidelines as to just what is correct pronunciation and intonation (Gill 2002). What seems to be emerging as a pedagogical model in non-native English-speaking countries according to Kachru (1985) is the educated standard variety of English. 'Educated' here is defined as 'formal education, usually up to and including the tertiary level' (Smith 1983, p. 57). In Malaysia however, as mentioned earlier, it is not sufficient to classify the model as the 'educated' standard variety of English. This is because being educated does not necessarily mean that one is able to speak the RP. Nonetheless, it can still be stated that in Malaysia the acceptable standard is still the one that is closer to the norm (Standard English/RP model) as far as possible. In fact, recently, the Education Ministry (2015 & 2016) clearly prescribes (not explicit in 1990) that British English should be followed as a pedagogic model for spelling,

grammar and pronunciation. The trend in Malaysia seems to be to still use a native model, namely British English (Pillai 2017). This is clearly spelt out in the curriculum document as the following excerpts show:

“Teachers should use Standard British English as a reference and model for spelling, grammar and pronunciation.” (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia 2015, p. 8)

“Although there are varieties of English used, the Standard British English is considered as the official standard of reference for English where spelling, grammar and pronunciation are concerned” (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia 2016, p. 1)

Is the British English the ‘target model’ that Malaysians aspire to? Going by the Education Ministry’s prescription, it is the ‘target model’ that is recommended. Pillai (2017) however, is sceptical as it is not easily achievable in terms of language performance which according to her, is due to the differences between Bahasa Malaysia which is syllable-timed while English is a stressed-time language. There are problems faced by Malaysian learners in vowel reduction, lacking in contrast between typical vowel pairs and other prosodic features with English sounds (Pillai et al. 2010, Tan & Low 2010). Pillai (2017) views the fixation with using a native model of pronunciation as prescribed by the national curriculum as not taking into consideration local English pronunciation features, or what the current developments in English pronunciation in other English-speaking contexts are. This, according to her, generally leads to the teaching of English pronunciation being largely ignored in the classroom, as is the case in the Malaysian context (Jayapalan & Pillai 2011, Nair, Krishnasamy & de Mello 2006).

While it is expected that it is not easy for learners to achieve British English/RP there might be an alternative for RP, that is a model closer to it or an approximation of the model to be near-native or native-like model. This was once addressed by Gill (2002) in her research. Gill (2002) conducted a study involving 500 university students to determine the spoken model of English pronunciation aspired to by these students. Her study elicited responses and reactions from the student-respondents on the ethnic accent of various speakers in Malaysia; which accent would the respondents view as acceptable pedagogical model for spoken English. Overall, learners found the following speakers most suitable as teaching models for ELT: an educated British English speaker with an RP accent - 95.9 % (percent) of the learners were in favour; and an educated Malaysian who speaks English with an unmarked accent which is neither strongly Malaysian nor strongly British and one who makes almost no grammatical mistakes - 88.9 percent of learners were in favour. However, as much as there exists an issue of wanting to maintain one’s identity, an educated Malaysian who speaks English with either Chinese or Malay accent and makes almost no grammatical mistakes was regarded as unsuitable. Clearly, the overall responses to the speakers with the Malaysian ethnic accents were not favourable.

It is obvious from all the results of the survey above that possessing a marked Malaysian ethnic accent (whether Indian, Chinese or Malay) does not automatically enable one to be accepted by the majority of respondents as a pedagogical model for ELT teaching. This study by Gill (2002) clearly shows that the learners (respondents) have definite preference (88.9% and 79.2%) for a pedagogical model **‘...who possesses an unmarked accent which is neither typically ethnically Malay, Chinese, or Indian, nor RP, that is, belonging to the upper end of the range of accents of Malaysian speakers of English’** (p.65). Gill (2002) further explains that in Malaysia, the person who possesses this unmarked accent can be either Malay, a Chinese or an Indian, and who belongs to the most educated and articulated speakers of English in his own linguistic group. Bamgbose (1998) describes L2 (second language) attitudes to English accents as “a love–hate relationship” and goes on to claim that in the outer circle “one does not wish to sound like a native speaker, but still

finds the accent fascinating” (p. 7), but his claim would receive a very ambivalent response in the expanding circle. Research studies done by Smit and Dalton (2000), Timmis (2002) and others show that despite recent promotion of English as an International Language (EIL), developments emphasizing international intelligibility per se, many teachers and learners still prefer to aim for an approximation of a native-like rather than a local or *internationally* acceptable accent.

A very rare study like Gill's (2002) provides strong ground for ESL teachers in Malaysia to decide on the pedagogical model that is considered appropriate for pronunciation teaching. It may be reiterated that based on Gill's (2002) study, the preferred pedagogical model is the one that is '**...an unmarked accent which is neither typically ethnically Malay, Chinese, or Indian, nor RP, that is, belonging to the upper end of the range of accents of Malaysian speakers of English**' (p. 65). This pedagogical model is the one that Baskaran (1987), Gill (2002) and Koo (2009) describe as acrolect, an unmarked accent which is neither British nor American, neither Chinese nor Indian nor Malay, and yet the syntax, lexis, phonology and rhetoric are close to the standard norm RP. It is the acrolect model that is considered as the 'official Malaysian English' by Baskaran (1987 & 1994) as well as Gill (2002). If the acrolectal model is an official Malaysian English and also a preferred one by Malaysian learners, then it might as well be the most suitable for an educational/classroom model particularly for pronunciation teaching.

Having addressed the first perspective, the second perspective is to explore and construct the kind of instructional model deemed appropriate for the promotion of acrolectal model of pronunciation. The overall aim of this paper is to promote the use of acrolectal range of Malaysian English in terms of its phonological aspect which is very close to the RP model (Baskaran 1987, Gill 2002, Koo 2009). The choice of subscribing to the acrolectal range in this research is supported by the positive empirical data from Gill (2002)'s survey research, whereupon it was found that the preferred pedagogical model of university students is an acrolectal model (Gill 2002).

INDIVIDUALISED METAPHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS INSTRUCTION (I-MAI)

Individualised scaffolding instruction is based on equal partnership, as students and teachers collaborate more as equal social partners in a learning enterprise. Vygotsky (1978) advocates that a mutual social interaction between the knower and the lesser knower is the key to learning improvement. In the I-MAI, social interactions between the teacher and students revolve broadly around several types of scaffolding as instructional tools. Hogan and Pressley (1997, pp. 17-29) identify five main types of macro-scaffolding features which include namely, *offering explanations, modelling desired behaviours, inviting students' participation, verifying and clarifying students' understandings, and inviting students to provide clues*. The first type of macro-scaffolding constitutes **offering explanations**. Explanations are explicit statements adjusted to fit the students' emerging understandings about what is being learned (declarative knowledge), why and when it is used (conditional or situational knowledge), and how it is used (procedural knowledge) (Duffy et al. 1988, Paris et al. 1983). Throughout the remainder of the lesson, the teacher gradually removes the explanations about what students do, why they do it, and why that behaviour is important. The second type of macro-scaffolding is **modelling of desired behaviours**, that is defined as teaching behaviour that shows how one should feel, think, or act within a given situation (Duffy et al. 1988). This includes think-aloud modelling or demonstrating to students the thought processes underlying successive steps in a task; for example, enunciating words correctly. The third type of macro-scaffolding is **inviting student participation**. In this type of scaffolding, students are given opportunities to join in the process that is occurring. After the teacher provides illustrations of

some of the thinking, feelings, or actions that are needed to complete the task, the students have opportunities to fill in pieces they know and understand. The fourth type of macro-scaffolding is called **verifying and clarifying student understandings**. This involves teachers checking the students' emerging understandings. If the emerging understandings are not reasonable, the teacher offers clarification. In this scaffolding, students share their understandings while teachers verify those understandings. Effort is acknowledged, and the knowledge is signalled as important and useful. When confusion occurs, the teacher provides the necessary information. The fifth type of macro-scaffolding is known as **inviting students to contribute clues**. This involves the process whereby several students contribute clues for reasoning through the issue or problem. In this form of scaffolding, students are encouraged to offer clues about how to complete the task. Together, the teachers and students verbalise the process.

These five types of scaffolding features are reduced as the students move in their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): i.e., Yowell and Smylie (1999) (in McCaslin & Hickey 2001, p. 237) put it as, "*learner movement in the ZPD that represents an emergent and imaginative understanding of concepts learned in collaboration with the adult*", of pronunciation ability, gaining more responsibility for their learning. Eventually, the students are in control, indicating that they have internalised learning points or ways to contribute to the interactions (De Pol et al. 2010). Through the process of scaffolding, teachers and/or peers move the learner in their ZPD to the point where he or she can be fully involved in successful learning of pronunciation. In the area of pronunciation teaching, Derwing and Munro (2005) claimed that phonological forms should be explicitly taught to students, which helps them to notice the differences between native speakers' pronunciation and their own pronunciation. In fact, according to Preeti Singh (2016) teachers should make their students aware about IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) symbols to enable the students to recognise sounds in English. Research into the use of focus-on-form (FonF) for teaching pronunciation explicitly by Tabandeh, Moinzadeh and Barati (2018) found that it was mostly effective for segmental accuracy in a controlled reading aloud context.

The term *metapohonological* is derived from the combination of *metalinguistic* awareness and *phonological* awareness. Metalinguistic awareness is simply the ability to think about language and talk about it. When a teacher asks his/her learners to discuss the use of some words or to explain the pertinence of an argument, s/he is promoting the development of metalinguistic awareness. On a more academic level, metalinguistic awareness refers to having an explicit knowledge about the structural features of language (Gaux & Gombert 1999). More precisely, it is about allowing

“the individual to step back from the comprehension or production of an utterance in order to consider the linguistic form and structure underlying the meaning of the utterance. Thus a metalinguistic task is one which requires the individual to think about the *linguistic nature* of the message, to attend to and reflect on the structural features of language. To be metalinguistically aware, then, is to know how to approach and solve certain types of problems which themselves demand certain cognitive and linguistic skills.”
(Malakoff 1992, p. 518)

The instructions to be given are aimed at developing metalinguistic awareness in learners. This is because in the context of this paper, metalinguistic awareness enables the learner to understand how specific features of language are pronounced. Once the metalinguistic awareness is developed to a high level, it helps the learner use language with high confidence in a variety of contexts be it phonological, syntactical or lexical because s/he is in control (Euch & Huot 2015).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of the paper is to explore the process of teaching-learning selected aspects of suprasegmental features of English sounds namely, the schwa (weak vowel) and catenation or linking via the Individualised Metaphonological Awareness Instruction, involving interactive engagement in macro/micro-scaffolding episodes between the teacher and the participants in the context of the mentioned selected aspects of suprasegmental features of English sounds. Quite simply, the main purpose encapsulates the two perspectives mentioned earlier namely, to subscribe to the phonological aspect of acrolectal English for pronunciation instruction in tertiary settings, and to promote acrolectal English to tertiary students via individualised instruction.

INNOCENT VERSUS SOPHISTICATED LEARNERS

Teaching and learning of English pronunciation in general is an uphill task due to the wide scope of covering both segmental and suprasegmental aspects of English phonology. This research will focus specifically on the teaching and learning of selected suprasegmental features of English sounds only namely, the weak form schwa and linking features or catenation via Individualised Metaphonological Awareness Instruction. The premise of this research is based on the two opposing principles of learning pronunciation, that is, innocence versus sophistication (Stevens 1974 in Dalton & Seidlhofer 2004). These two principles are at opposing ends of a scale with *innocence* at one end catering for young or less sophisticated learners doing such activities as imitation and mimicking of certain discrete sounds whereas the *sophistication* at the other end deals with sophisticated older learners undergoing “...formal, specialised, intellectualised teaching methods; the more sophisticated the learner, the more sophisticated the instruction that can be used, and the higher the standard of achievement per hour of instruction he will typically reach.” (Stevens 1974, pp. 185-187 in Dalton & Seidlhofer 2004). It means that the main focus for sophisticated learners in the research was more of conscious sensitization of correct sounds than simply mere accurate production as expected of innocent learners. To be sensitized to the correct sounds is to be metaphonological aware of the subtleties of suprasegmental features of English sounds.

ACROLECTAL ENGLISH: SELECTED SUPRASEGMENTAL FEATURES

It must be emphasised here that the current research does not seek to explore the teaching and learning of English pronunciation in general. Rather, the participants selected for this research were from among the sophisticated learners who are proficient in English and aspire to be near-native in their enunciation but still lacking in understanding the subtleties of some aspects of suprasegmental features of English sounds like schwa and catenation that characterise accurate sounds of English. If the sophisticated learners aspire to approximate the RP model in their enunciation, schwa is seen very important. Bloomberg (2015) states that the neutral schwa vowel sound is the most frequently used vowel in English. Not producing the neutral schwa vowel sound is in part what gives those whose second language is English an accent or pronunciation that is different from those whose first language is English. Producing or not producing schwa vowel sounds affects the quality of one’s pronunciation and how natural one sounds when speaking English. Therefore, as Bloomberg (2015) stresses further, it is very important that ESL speakers who are concerned about their pronunciation and accent learn to use this sound. Catenation or linking is found to be not just a tendency in connected speeches but a rule based on the research done by Hieke (1984). In a two-dimensional, speech dynamic analysis of natural casual speech, Hieke (1984) identifies

linking as a prominent phenomenon at the phonetic syllabic level. Due to the importance of both schwa vowel sound and catenation/linking in reflecting a native-like enunciation, the proposed model has taken up the two aspects of suprasegmental features of English sounds as the phonological items to be taught to promote acrolectal model to the sophisticated learners in order to achieve their aspiration of becoming near-native in their enunciation.

METHODOLOGY

DESIGN

The research employed a **qualitative case study**. This is because the nature of the research which seeks to analyse how students improve and acquire accurate pronunciation of some aspects of suprasegmental features of English sounds, entails an in-depth and detailed description of the process as well as the cases (participants) involved within the process. According to Sturman (1997, p. 61), “...case study is a general term for the exploration of an individual, group or phenomenon”. Therefore, a case study is a comprehensive description of an individual case and its analysis; i.e., the characterization of the case and the events, as well as a description of the discovery process of these features that is the process of research itself (Mesec 1998, p. 45).

This was how the instructions were conducted to enable the researcher to identify scaffolding episodes between teacher-student interactions. Sagadin (1991) (in Sturman 2013) states that a “casestudy is used when we analyse and describe, for example each person individually (his or her activity, special needs, life situation, life history, etc.), a group of people (a school department, a group of students with special needs, teaching staff, etc.), individual institutions or a problem (or several problems), process, phenomenon or event in a particular institution, etc. in detail. Sturman (2013) stresses, that a case study is usually a study of a single case or a small number of cases. The idea of representative sampling and statistical generalizations to a wider population should be rejected, and analytical induction should be chosen instead.

PARTICIPANT

The participants in the research were selected on the basis of purposeful sampling. In purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn and understand the central phenomenon (Creswell 2015). The standard used in choosing participants and sites is whether they are “information rich” (Patton 1991, p. 169). In the context of this research, the five (5) participants were chosen on the basis of their high proficiency level or alternatively they were considered as sophisticated learners as they were able to interact with the teacher to understand how pronunciation of suprasegmental features of English sounds could be learnt via explicit teaching in an individualised manner. In view of the limit of this paper, only the outcomes on one participant were included in the results section.

PROCEDURE

Each participant attended the I-MAI class individually twice. Each session lasted for two hours. The class was conducted in a classroom and only the teacher and one participant were involved in each session. All the participants went through the same procedures but the I-MAI session was an individualised instruction. The first session was on the production tasks of suprasegmental features of schwa and linking. The participant was required to do the production task of the schwa sound involving the schwa occurrence in the initial word

syllable and this was followed by another production task of the schwa sound in either second or mid-word syllable. Production of catenation between adjacent words was also another task given.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The I-MAI sessions were audio-taped and the researcher who acted as a non-participant took down and recorded field-notes. The teacher-student interaction sessions were observed and documented. The qualitative data were recorded from the teacher-student interactions which were then transcribed for analysis. The relevant portions of the transcripts were analysed and interpreted for occurrences of micro-scaffolding features.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In view of the limit of this paper, only one participant’s qualitative data was reported and analysed below. The participant is identified with a pseudonym, Jack.

PRODUCTION OF SCHWA

TRANSCRIPT 1

TABLE 1. Participant’s I-MAI session – Schwa

Transcript	Observation notes
The symbol XX denotes truncated parts of the texts that were redundant and irrelevant.	
Excerpt 1	
(No.1) Teacher: Morning Jack, how are we today? What did you do last weekend?	Teacher began the session by creating a welcoming atmosphere via simple yet meaningful greeting and Jack felt relaxed.
Jack: Quite OK sir. Nothing much, just went for a movie with some friends.	To start their interaction Teacher asked Jack about his weekend (the current session was a Monday)
	Jack seemed relaxed and engaged in the interaction.
Analysis of Teacher-student scaffolding episode	
Excerpt 1 No. 1	
The teacher was creating a friendly atmosphere to reduce any feeling of anxiety or nervousness on the part of Jack, to enable Jack to feel at ease in the dialogic interaction and hence led to anxiety-free performance. This micro- scaffolding feature is where the teacher creates and maintains atmosphere that supports intellectual exchanges in classroom interaction. It can be described as Creating and Maintaining Relaxing Atmosphere .	

TRANSCRIPT 2

TABLE 2. Participant’s I-MAI session – Schwa

Transcript	Observation notes
The symbol XX denotes truncated parts of the texts that were redundant and irrelevant.	
Excerpt 2	
(No.1) Teacher: That sounds great. Ok let’s start with our mission today. Will discover some pronunciation. Have you heard of a word (teacher wrote it on board) called schwa... <i>(slowly pronouncing it)</i> ...shu..wa..it’s a term to describe a weak vowel, do you know what’s weak vowel?...XX...	Teacher introduced topic of lesson rather in an informal way and less rigid. Teacher tried to introduce a pronunciation term <i>schwa</i> , technical term rather, knowing that the student might feel curious as to the meaning of the term.
Jack: Shu..wa?...no never, what is it? Weak vowel? <i>(surprised expression)</i> . I don’t know sir, never heard before....XX	Jack was surprised to hear the term, showing that he had never heard of the term before and he showed a curious face.

(No.2)

Teacher:

Okay, no problem, I can understand...one needs to learn Phonetics to know it...k..will start...ahh...let me give you a list of words to pronounce, just don't worry you won't be penalized or something if you don't pronounce them correctly...(laugh)XX

Teacher tried to engage Jack into the interaction by creating interest on the topic and assured Jack not to be worried

Jack:(looked startled)...oh ok...phonetics? Is it pronunciation? I hope I can do it correctly...(laugh)

Jack responded but still unsure of what it was. But he seemed ready to explore what the term really meant.

Teacher:

(chuckled)...Yes pronunciation...here's the list...20 words...pronounce the first 10 first ok...you may start when you're ready...XX

Teacher confirmed that it was pronunciation and he tried to give Jack a bit of challenge with a list of 20 words.

Analysis of Teacher-student scaffolding episode

Excerpt 2 No.1

The teacher tried to recruit Jack's interest by introducing the term schwa and share it in their pursuit of pronunciation goal. This micro-scaffold can be described as **Recruiting Interest and Sharing Goal**.

Excerpt 2 No.2

The teacher introduced a term (schwa) that was unfamiliar to Jack so much that this led to some sense of curiosity for Jack as he wanted to know more about it. This micro-scaffolding feature can be described as **Raising the Student's Curiosity** which involves making the student feeling curious about a topic and wanting to know more. Even throughout the task, the element of curiosity existed as Jack wanted to know the accurate pronunciation of words introduced. The teacher did create moments that heightened the students' curiosity as to the accurate enunciation of words.

TRANSCRIPT 3

TABLE 3. Participant's I-MAI session – Schwa

Transcript		Observation notes																																
The symbol XX denotes truncated parts of the texts that were redundant and irrelevant.																																		
Excerpt 3																																		
(No.1)		Jack was ready for the challenge.																																
Jack:		Teacher responded by saying yes and Jack started pronouncing each word. Teacher listened attentively.																																
OK. Can I start now?																																		
Teacher:																																		
Sure Jack.																																		
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: center;">First Syllable</th> <th style="text-align: center;">Tanscript</th> </tr> <tr> <th style="text-align: center;">Words</th> <th style="text-align: center;">Remark Jack's</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Agree</td> <td>X /eə'gri:/</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ahead</td> <td>√ /ə'hed/</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ago</td> <td>√ /ə'gəʊ/</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Alarm</td> <td>X /ɑ:'lɑ:m/</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Align</td> <td>X /eə'laim/</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Alike</td> <td>√ /ə'lai/</td> </tr> <tr> <td>About</td> <td>√ /ə'baʊt/</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Around</td> <td>√ /ə'raʊnd/</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Attend</td> <td>√ /ə'tend/</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Accomplish</td> <td>√ /ə'kʌmplɪʃ/</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		First Syllable	Tanscript	Words	Remark Jack's	Agree	X /eə'gri:/	Ahead	√ /ə'hed/	Ago	√ /ə'gəʊ/	Alarm	X /ɑ:'lɑ:m/	Align	X /eə'laim/	Alike	√ /ə'lai/	About	√ /ə'baʊt/	Around	√ /ə'raʊnd/	Attend	√ /ə'tend/	Accomplish	√ /ə'kʌmplɪʃ/	<p>Teacher noted down Jack's enunciation of the words to determine the correct schwa sound.</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: center;">Words</th> <th style="text-align: center;">Teacher's</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Agree</td> <td>/ə'gri:/</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Alarm</td> <td>/ə'lɑ:m/ or /ə'lɑ:rm/</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Align</td> <td>/ə'laim/</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>I (researcher) noted down Jack's enunciation of each word, the first syllable of each word is a schwa (short vowel). Jack mispronounced 3 words.</p>	Words	Teacher's	Agree	/ə'gri:/	Alarm	/ə'lɑ:m/ or /ə'lɑ:rm/	Align	/ə'laim/
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Teacher:		I noticed that Jack was a bit surprised and a bit embarrassed-looking.																																
Generally fine Jack, you didn't really get some words but Ok (mispronounced schwa or weak vowel in some words). Ok, I'll explain to you...XX		Realizing that Jack was surprised that he mispronounced certain words, the teacher offered to provide related information.																																
Jack:		Teacher was flexible in treating Jack's errors, giving him some confidence in doing the pronunciation task.																																
Oh, is it? (chuckled). I'm not good sir. My pronunciation is not good (chuckled).		Teacher went on to pronounce each word accordingly, giving particular emphasis on the initial syllable 'schwa'.																																
Teacher:																																		
Not so bad Jack. You sound fine...I just want to bring																																		

your attention to the schwa sound...listen to me carefully...(teacher modelling)...Now, your turn...

Jack listened attentively, and was seen moving his lips quietly uttering after the teacher.

Jack slowed down a bit (hesitant) on the word 'alarm', (probably I think he's been used to pronouncing it differently). Other words, Jack did them effortlessly. Jack sounded confident with his enunciation.

(No.2)

Teacher:

A single word in English is made up of syllables, could be two syllables, three etc. Of course you know syllables right? Those words you've just pronounced all first syllables are the short vowel schwa, remember I mentioned schwa earlier on...ok, listen to how I pronounce each word

Teacher provided information needed by Jack to assist his understanding of the pronunciation of the words.

Jack:

Ya, that sounds new to me (*chuckled*)... shu..wa..

Jack was still a bit surprised to have discovered the term schwa and what it meant in English pronunciation.

Analysis of Teacher-student scaffolding episode

Excerpt 3 No.1

The teacher provided positive feedback on Jack's performance and not being judgmental of his ability. This micro-scaffold can be described as **Providing Positive Feedback without Evaluating Student's Thinking or Ability**. This is to ensure that students will not be discouraged despite their poor performance.

The teacher was being flexible in responding to Jack's performance by offering his explanation. Such micro-scaffold can be viewed as **Responding flexibly to Student's Errors** so as not to discourage the student.

The teacher was very supportive of Jack's effort and he gave him confidence by assuring him that he (Jack) did quite fine. This micro-scaffold can be viewed as **Giving Confidence** which involves providing students with immediate sense of self-confidence and self-esteem.

Excerpt 3 No.2

The teacher provided Jack with the necessary explanation, making it clearer for him. Such micro-scaffold can be understood as **Providing Necessary Explanation**. It is crucial that students are given explanation on the teaching point at hand as and when necessary.

The teacher also provided Jack with the assistance that he needed by modelling the pronunciation of those words that Jack had lapses. This micro-scaffold can be regarded as **Providing Tailored Assistance** which involves adapting the teacher's level of assistance to the level required by the students.

The teacher also summed up by telling Jack that all words contained schwa in the first syllable. The micro-scaffold can be referred to **Summarising Information** for the students.

TRANSCRIPT 4

TABLE 4. Participant's I-MAI session – Schwa (Second/third/mid syllable)

Transcript	Observation notes
The symbol XX denotes truncated parts of the texts that were redundant and irrelevant.	
Excerpt 4	
(No.1)	
Teacher: Ok Jack, how's it now? Do you find it's clearer now? Are you aware of the sounds? I mean schwa sound or short vowel?	Teacher asked Jack to pronounce all the 10 words again. Jack seemed careful in his enunciation.
Jack: Ya, kinda open my eyes to something new because I only pronounce words and don't know whether... correct or not, just thinking it is correct. Don't know there's syllable or not....XX	Teacher was making sure that Jack's was in calm cognitive state, he showed to Jack that he cared for Jack's ability.
Teacher: Ya Jack I can understand. It isn't your training. You need to do phonetics to know those terms but how is it now, new thing for you?	Teacher consoled Jack that it was not Jack's area of specialisation and hence it was all right for him not to know anything about syllables.
Jack: Yes, interesting sir...I try to be careful (<i>laugh</i>)...XX	
(No.2)	
Teacher: Ok good Jack. There's no clear trick, you just have to	Teacher was giving Jack some advice and he was supportive in explaining to Jack that schwa entails

remember words that have schwa at the beginning of the syllable. You can do it.
Jack: (nodded)...it makes me realise it's not just say by remembering words containing it.
 ears... Jack was positive in his reaction.

Analysis of Teacher-student scaffolding episode

Excerpt 4 No.1

The teacher asked Jack questions to enable Jack to think, as to whether he felt that he became aware of schwa or not. This scaffold can be viewed as using *Socratic Style of Questioning* that involves asking questions to encourage the students to think.

The teacher also tried to console Jack so that Jack stayed in a calm cognitive state and able to focus on the task. The scaffold involves being *Aware of Students' Cognitive and Affective States*, that is, the teacher was being alert to the student's ability to enunciate accurately or otherwise, and getting ready to offer assistance or giving encouragement.

As previously, the teacher provided positive feedback on Jack's performance and not being judgmental of his ability. This micro-scaffold can be described as *Providing Positive Feedback without Evaluating Student's Thinking or Ability*. This is to ensure that students will not be discouraged despite their poor performance.

The teacher was also patient with Jack's lapses in pronunciation. The scaffold is referred to as *Being Patient* while collaborating with the students in completing a particular task.

Excerpt 4 No.2

The teacher was being supportive by giving Jack some understanding of the position of schwa in words. This micro-scaffold is viewed as showing high level of *Affective Support and Nurturance* which helps console students who might feel diffident of their own abilities.

(No. 3)

Teacher:

So, Jack can you pronounce those words, from nos. 11 to 20.

Jack started pronouncing each word after word. The words are:

I noticed that in this exercise - second or mid-word syllable schwa sound, Jack pronounced only five words correctly (by RP standard).

<i>Second/third/mid syllable</i>		
<i>Words</i>	<i>Remark</i>	<i>Jack's</i>
civilize	X	/'sɪvɪlaɪz/
emanate	√	/'eməneɪt/
collect	√	/kə'lekt/
convey	√	/kən'veɪ/
innocent	√	/'ɪ nəsə'n't/
ignorant	X	/'ɪgnərənt/
decadence	X	/'dɪkeɪdə'n's/
informative	X	/ɪn'fɔ:mətɪv/
conservative	√	/kən'sɜ:ətɪv/
memorise	X	/'memɔraɪz/

<i>Words</i>	<i>Teacher's</i>
civilize	/'sɪvɪlaɪz/
ignorant	/'ɪgnərənt/
decadence	/'dekədə'n's/
informative	/ɪn'fɔ:mətɪv/
memorise	/'memɔraɪz/

When the teacher modelled the pronunciation, Jack listened attentively, while at the same time muttering to himself as he silently rehearsing pronouncing after the teacher.

Teacher was also trying to keep Jack's interest in the lesson by giving him confidence and assistance in discovering the right way to pronounce each word in the list.

Teacher:

The main idea of our lesson today is to make you aware of such delicate aspect of pronunciation. I'm sure you can do it. Let me pronounce them all for you. (proceeded to pronounce)

Analysis of Teacher-student scaffolding episode

Excerpt 4 No. 3

The teacher modelled the pronunciation for Jack to listen to. The micro-scaffold can be described as *Coaching and Assisting Students* who could not really complete the task fully. In the study, the teacher was assisting Jack to practise enunciation of words with schwa in mid-syllable position.

PRODUCTION OF CATENATION/LINKING

TRANSCRIPT 1

TABLE 5. Participant’s I-MAI session – Catenation/linking

Transcript	Observation notes																																														
<p>The symbol XX denotes truncated parts of the texts that were redundant and irrelevant.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Excerpt 1</p> <p>(No.1) Teacher: Next Jack, we’ll look at pronunciation involving link, linkages, there’s this element called linking of words when we pronounce those words next to one another. Jack: Ok, that sounds not familiar. Teacher: Am giving you a list, 20 in that list, ok...pronounce the first ten...(giving the list to Jack). You can start anytime. Jack: Ok. Now. (Jack proceeded to pronounce each phrase, from nos. 1 to 10).</p>	<p>Teacher listened attentively while noting down the ones correctly pronounced.</p> <p>Teacher provided Jack with another challenge. Jack was then asked by the teacher to enunciate all the ten phrases again.</p>																																														
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="3" style="text-align: center;"><i>Link Features</i></th> </tr> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>Features</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>Remark</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>Jack’s</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>Take it</td><td>√</td><td>/teɪ. k_ɪt/</td></tr> <tr><td>Do it</td><td>√</td><td>/duː. w_ɪt/</td></tr> <tr><td>Get it</td><td>√</td><td>/ge. t_ɪt/</td></tr> <tr><td>Let it</td><td>√</td><td>/le. t_ɪt/</td></tr> <tr><td>Let her</td><td>X</td><td>/let hə/</td></tr> <tr><td>Let him</td><td>X</td><td>/let hɪm/</td></tr> <tr><td>Get out</td><td>√</td><td>/ge. t_ɑʊt/</td></tr> <tr><td>Shut up</td><td>√</td><td>/ʃʌ. t_ʌp/</td></tr> <tr><td>Open up</td><td>X</td><td>/əʊpənʌp/</td></tr> <tr><td>Taken in</td><td>X</td><td>/teɪkənɪn/</td></tr> </tbody> </table> <p>√ - correct X – Incorrect [.] – syllable boundary ◡ - linking</p>	<i>Link Features</i>			<i>Features</i>	<i>Remark</i>	<i>Jack’s</i>	Take it	√	/teɪ. k_ɪt/	Do it	√	/duː. w_ɪt/	Get it	√	/ge. t_ɪt/	Let it	√	/le. t_ɪt/	Let her	X	/let hə/	Let him	X	/let hɪm/	Get out	√	/ge. t_ɑʊt/	Shut up	√	/ʃʌ. t_ʌp/	Open up	X	/əʊpənʌp/	Taken in	X	/teɪkənɪn/	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;">Phrase</th> <th style="text-align: left;">Teacher’s</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>Let her</td><td>/le. t_ə/</td></tr> <tr><td>Let him</td><td>/le. t_ɪm/</td></tr> <tr><td>Open up</td><td>/əʊpə. n_ʌp/</td></tr> <tr><td>Taken in</td><td>/teɪkə. n_ɪm/</td></tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Teacher provided some positive feedback on Jack’s enunciation but avoiding giving feedback that might discourage Jack.</p> <p>Teacher indirectly responded to Jack’s enunciation lapses by enunciating all the phrases that were pronounced rather ‘American’.</p> <p>Teacher was coaching and assisting Jack to the point that Jack would be capable of doing it on his own.</p> <p>Teacher entrusted Jack with the rest of the words.</p>	Phrase	Teacher’s	Let her	/le. t_ə/	Let him	/le. t_ɪm/	Open up	/əʊpə. n_ʌp/	Taken in	/teɪkə. n_ɪm/
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<p>Teacher: Ok Jack, I wont say yours are wrong, sounded American some of them.</p> <p>Jack: Oh, that’s how I pronounced them. So how not to sound American? (Jack proceeded to pronounce <i>Get it, Let it, Get out, Shut up, and Let her, Let him.</i>(Teacher responded by modelling it to Jack, <i>Let her and let him</i> (elision of ‘h’).</p> <p>(No.2) Teacher: Ok Jack, you try with the rest of it. Jack proceeded to pronounce each item. The outcome was noted by the teacher in the table below. Teacher: Ok fine Jack, but some ‘American’ I heard. (Teacher pointed out to <i>brought in, brought up, put in and put up.</i>) Jack: Oh I didn’t realise (laugh)XX...Ok I try the British way (laugh). (Jack pronounced those items correctly).</p>	<p>Again, the teacher commented on Jack’s American pronunciation style but not portraying that it was a poor enunciation.</p> <p>Teacher pointed it out to Jack as he was pronouncing so that he would not repeat it.</p>																																														

Analysis of Teacher-student scaffolding episode

Excerpt 1 No. 1

The teacher introduced the term linking/linkages to Jack as a continuation of the schwa pronunciation task. The teacher was ensuring that Jack remained focussed. This scaffold is referred to as **Maintaining the Pursuit of Goals** as used by teachers to maintain the students' attention in achieving learning goals; in the study, in achieving accurate enunciation of schwa and linkages.

As the teacher introduced linking features (catenations) to Jack, he was giving Jack a new challenge. It is important for the teacher to give students some challenge in their learning process. Such scaffold may be viewed as **Giving Challenge** which involves introducing new yet related to previous topic at hand.

As previously, the teacher provided positive feedback on Jack's performance and not being judgmental of his ability. This scaffold is described as **Providing Positive Feedback without Evaluating Student's Thinking or Ability**. This is to ensure that students will not be discouraged despite their poor performance.

As previously, the teacher modelled the pronunciation for Jack to listen to. The scaffold is described as **Coaching and Assisting Students** who could not really complete the task fully. In the study, the teacher was assisting Jack to practise enunciation of linking (catenations).

Excerpt 1 No.2

The teacher gave Jack control over his pronunciation. This scaffold may be referred to as making the students feel a **Sense of Control and Self-Efficacy**.

TRANSCRIPT 2

TABLE 6. Participant's I-MAI session – Catenation/linking

Transcript	Observation notes
The symbol XX denotes truncated parts of the texts that were redundant and irrelevant.	
Excerpt 2	
Teacher: Alright, how do you feel about those ways of pronouncing? Do you feel more ready to pronounce correctly? Confident?	Teacher was ensuring that Jack continued to pay his attention to the pronunciation lesson.
Jack: Yes, very interesting. Suddenly I become aware (laugh). I feel confident now I know something about linking.	Jack's interest was still intact and he grew in confidence.
Teacher: Yes in English there is a pronunciation feature called linking, you link words that are close to one another in a connected speech...just like the list I gave you. There's a rule of course, normally a word that ends with a letter we call consonant like 'r', 'l' 'n' and followed by a vowel like a,e,i,o,u, the first letter in a word after another word that ends with a consonant letter, example, put on...'t' is linked to 'o'.. Is this clear Jack?	Teacher was giving information on linkages. He was also making an elaborate explanation with examples to ensure that Jack could understand how linkages work.
Jack: Ya I know...I think I know (chuckled). I'm aware of it.	Teacher proceeded to explain other occurrences.

Analysis of Teacher-student scaffolding episode

Excerpt 2

The teacher provided relevant information to help explain the topic at hand. The scaffold may be viewed as **Pumping Information or Ideasto** help the students better understand the topic in question.

As previously, the teacher provided Jack with the necessary explanation, making it clearer for him. Such scaffold can be understood as **Providing Necessary Explanation**. It is crucial that students are given explanation on the teaching point at hand as and when necessary.

As previously, the teacher also provided Jack with the assistance that he needed to understand how linkages worked. This scaffold is regarded as **Providing Tailored Assistance** which involves adapting the teacher's level of assistance to the level required by the students.

TABLE 7. Summary of micro-scaffolding features

Micro-scaffolding features	Meanings
Creating and Maintaining Relaxed Atmosphere	To encourage students to take intellectual risk-taking.
Recruiting Interest and Sharing Goal	To ensure that students are ready for the task at hand.
Raising the Student's Curiosity	Making students feeling curious about the task at hand, accurate pronunciation of certain words that they wanted to try pronouncing them.

Providing Positive Feedback without Evaluating Student's Thinking or Ability	When the students are unsure of the task, e.g., right pronunciation whereby the teacher offered assistance without giving judgement to the students' inability.
Responding flexibly to Student's Errors	Giving additional examples to respond to student's errors.
Giving Confidence	Providing students with immediate sense of self-confidence and self-esteem.
Providing Necessary Explanation	When students need extra information for understanding.
Summarising Information	More like simplifying information for students.
Socratic Style of Questioning	It involves asking useful questions that encourage the students to think.
Aware of Students' Cognitive and Affective States	It refers to the way the teacher responds or reacts to the students' cognitive state.
Being Patient	Teacher demonstrates patience in assisting the students to finally get the correct ways, e.g., enunciating schwa sound.
Affective Support and Nurturance	To encourage students to keep trying.
Coaching and Assisting Students	Assisting students whenever needed in the class learning process.
Maintaining the Pursuit of Goals	Maintaining students' attentions on their goals.
Giving Challenge	Giving students challenging tasks.
Sense of Control and Self-Efficacy	Giving students control over their learning.
Pumping Information or Ideas	Providing additional relevant information.
Providing Tailored Assistance	Adapting the teacher's level of assistance to the level required by the students.

As Jack became aware of the need to take note of pronunciation rules while previously he claimed to have pronounced words without any knowledge of pronunciation properties (he has never heard of the terms schwa or linkages), he actually formed a sense of metalinguistic awareness of pronunciation. Metalinguistic awareness is defined as one's ability to consciously, think about language; awareness that language is rule-based and its structure can be manipulated (Roehr 2007). Metalinguistic is an awareness of the language, its structures and functions that let the speakers of that language think about and use the language consciously. It consists of the knowledge and awareness of phonemes, syllables, rhyme, and morphology (Andrew 2004). So what I-MAI did to Jack via its explicit pronunciation instruction and intense instructional scaffolding was to raise his metalinguistic awareness of selected aspects of suprasegmental features of English sounds, and such metalinguistic awareness however limited maybe, would open his minds to exploring and using second language consciously afterwards. The study also demonstrated an instructional model that has interactive dynamics between the teacher and students leading to attainment of metaphonological awareness. The interactive dynamics are represented by micro-scaffolding features such as *Providing Positive Feedback without Evaluating Student's Thinking or Ability* (from Table 7); this is to ensure that students will not be discouraged despite their poor performance. For example, the teacher provided positive feedback about Jack's performance and was not judgmental of any weaknesses in Jack's pronunciation ability. Another micro-scaffolding feature is *Coaching and Assisting Students* where the teacher assisted Jack when he could not really complete his pronunciation task correctly.

CONCLUSION

The paper provides a frame of reference for explicit pronunciation teaching especially as regards to specific suprasegmental features of the schwa sound and linking, in the context of Malaysian ESL involving undergraduates at a public university setting. Pronunciation teaching has long been neglected in the Malaysian ESL context (Nair, Krishnasamy & De Mello 2006, Pillai 2017), it would be useful to highlight the findings of the research to help inform the literature as to the potential of explicit pronunciation teaching with strong emphasis on the use of instructional scaffolding. With the success of I-MAI pronunciation research there is a possibility that it could be recommended on trial basis first perhaps, to be

implemented as a stand-alone pronunciation instruction for Malaysian undergraduates. The I-MAI model would be very useful for undergraduates who aspire to refine their pronunciation in order to attain a native-like accent which somewhat one that is neutral as it is neither British nor American, hence these speakers would not lose their ethnic identities while they speak acrolectal English (near-native model). Not only will these undergraduates possess the ability to speak acrolectal English but they would also be metaphonologically aware of the finer points of enunciation of English sounds. Acrolectal English is one that has international intelligibility as it has clarity in enunciation and is closer to the standard RP. It is highly recommended that the I-MAI model be developed further to include instruction in not only selected aspects of suprasegmental features of English sounds but also other aspects of suprasegmental features like rhythm, intonation and stress patterns. The main impact of this experiment is providing some basis as to how pronunciation in general can be taught effectively via explicit instruction on the technical aspect of English sounds such as the schwa and catenation. The results in this paper may pave the way for further research involving other features of phonology, and may eventually lead to its findings being implemented in English classrooms via I-MAI model.

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