

DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT AS AN APPROACH TO FRENCH PRONUNCIATION INSTRUCTION

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This thesis is focused on dynamic assessment (DA), an instructional approach based on Vygotskian sociocultural theory, applied to French pronunciation instruction, which can be neglected or inconsistent in the foreign language curriculum. DA aims to combine instruction and assessment into a cooperative, mediated approach in which the mediator works with the learner to identify and develop emergent abilities. These emergent abilities can appear in what is often referred to as the zone of proximal development (ZPD), or the difference between what a learner can do independently and what he/she can do with mediation, which in the present study was the difference between what the participant could pronounce correctly with or without mediation. In carrying out an individual DA session with a learner, the author aimed to find suggestions of potential benefits by applying DA to French pronunciation instruction and gain a more detailed understanding of the learner's performance than is generally possible from a traditional assessment, which is totally devoid of mediation for the sake of validity and reliability. The study includes a discussion of some potential benefits and limitations related to the use of DA for teaching French pronunciation to intermediate L2 learners based on what was observed in the DA session, for example suggestions of increased awareness of pronunciation, suggestions of increased independent performance, and suggestions of decreased errors in specific problem areas.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
LIST OF EXCERPTS.....	vii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Why Pronunciation?	1
1.2 Why DA?.....	2
1.3 Why Not CBI or IC?.....	5
1.4 Research Questions	7
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW	8
2.1 Pronunciation Overview	8
2.2 Current Pedagogical Approaches.....	13
2.3 DA.....	16
CHAPTER 3. METHOD.....	25
3.1 Participant.....	25
3.2 Procedures	25
3.3 Instruments.....	26
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS.....	29
4.1 DA Sessions	29
4.2 Postsession Questionnaire.....	33
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION.....	34
5.1 Summarization of DA Session Results.....	34
5.2 Attitudes and Advantages.....	35
CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION.....	38
6.1 Summary	38
6.2 Limitations.....	38

6.3	Directions for Future Research	39
	APPENDIX A. SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND INTERVIEW INSTRUMENTS.....	41
	APPENDIX B. ONLINE SURVEY.....	45
	REFERENCES.....	48

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
TABLE 1. French Diacritics.....	10
TABLE 2. Previous Research in Favor of Explicit Pronunciation Instruction.....	14

LIST OF EXCERPTS

	Page
EXCERPT 1: Student 1.....	29
EXCERPT 2: Student 1.....	30
EXCERPT 3: Student 1.....	32

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Why Pronunciation?

This work serves as an exploratory study of the use of dynamic assessment (DA) as an approach to pronunciation instruction in the language learning classroom. It has been noted that several aspects of French pronunciation pose particular difficulties to Anglophones. Furthermore, these difficulties (pronunciation errors or misunderstanding) often persist beyond the novice level. Apart from several rules of thumb (which have exceptions of course) and inconsistently dispersed and isolated pronunciation notes or charts, in general French textbooks do not often explicitly contain pronunciation concepts to support steady pronunciation development in L2 learners. For example, in *Horizons* by Manley (2015), a French textbook for Anglophones consisting of beginner-low through intermediate-high level content, provides several pronunciation charts explaining the basic idea of individual concepts like liaison, elision, final consonant pronunciation, and generic vowel and consonant pronunciation, but fail to provide much context or systematic connections between ideas to promote linear development. In addition, this has the potential to cause difficulties for the instructor in accurately assessing development of learners' pronunciation. Further on in the textbook these charts address only small sets of words, or specialized examples based on the contents and concepts of the chapter, in this case demonstrating decreasing consistency of pronunciation information integrated into the more advanced curriculum. In addition, pronunciation instruction often is limited to a reflection of the style used in the book, and much of the time pronunciation is meant to be acquired implicitly by the learner through working on other

aspects of the language instead of giving it direct attention. Due to a lack of time or knowledge of alternative methods, this approach is often deemed sufficient in foreign language curriculum.

Taking all of this into consideration highlights the fact that pronunciation instruction can be easily and frequently neglected in the language learning classroom. The issue presented in this study is that French phonology is often not taught nor assessed on a holistic and systematic level, which in turn can cause incomplete understanding of pronunciation rules and performance on the part of the students and inaccurate pronunciation assessment on the part of the instructor.¹ Furthermore, the persistent mistakes that become ingrained in L2 learners of French can be quite difficult to eradicate at intermediate or higher levels. In order to address or avoid these undesirable tendencies in learning or teaching French pronunciation in a more active way than the aforementioned traditional methods, the researchers selected DA as an experimental approach to teaching French pronunciation. DA is an approach that allows direct intervention in the learning, teaching, and assessment processes. Hopefully, when applied to French pronunciation instruction, DA will reduce persistent mistakes or confusion regarding pronunciation, while thoroughly informing the instructor of problems and progress.

1.2 Why DA?

DA is an approach that originated from Vygotskian sociocultural theory (SCT) (1978), which places great importance on the aspect of mediation in development of abilities and knowledge, regardless of subject or objectives. In SCT, learners develop control of abilities

¹ See 2.2.

through activities like engaging in collaboration, utilizing resources, or other forms of external mediation. Similarly, DA is a simultaneous approach to instruction and assessment where the mediator and instructor and the learner work together on a specific task in order to allow the mediator to very closely track learner mental processes and breakdowns, to encourage learner independence in target concepts, and even to predict imminent future development. It has been used in various domains of instruction (including language learning), therefore in practice it can take many forms and depends heavily on the mediator and their teaching style and experience. There are two general methods of application detailed by Lantolf and Poehner (2004): interventionism and interactionism. While both have the underlying basis of being forms of graduated prompting from a mediator elicited by learner error, interventionism is generally more scripted and has specific levels of prompting to be used for the level of difficulty a learner shows in resolving an error. Interactionism is more flexible, and unscripted mediation is offered based on learner errors and questions. Interactionism by its nature could not be scripted as the direction of mediation depends on the learner and their development; the mediator is simply there to offer minimal guidance to support their independent performance. For this reason, it is often more comfortable or manageable for instructors that are new to DA to employ an interventionist approach as we chose to do in the present study. There are other advantages and limitations to both methods that will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

DA differs from traditional assessments, also to be defined and discussed further in Chapter 2. This differentiation is summed up nicely in Vygotsky's argument, "we must not measure the child, we must interpret the child" (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 204), including their emergent abilities, which can potentially help mediators or instructors to more accurately

predict and encourage future development as well. To further this idea, Vygotsky also said that "determining the actual level of development not only does not cover the whole picture of development, but very frequently encompasses only an insignificant part of it" (p. 200). For example, testing a learner of French on their pronunciation using a traditional assessment (that is devoid of pedagogical intervention or chance for learner modifications) can produce false positives where a learner does not have control or understanding over a phoneme or phonological feature but produces the correct sound during performance by chance.

At the other extreme, traditional or Static Assessment (SA) can also show false negatives, or errors occurring in phonemes or phonological features of which the learners might have relative and/or partial mastery but were unable to demonstrate said mastery within the narrow and inflexible scope of the assessment.² Simply put, assessments focused on observation and completely lacking intervention are bound to be somewhat incomplete. A more informative, contextualized, and modifiable performance certainly seems desirable in the effort to learn and instruct and assess L2 pronunciation. DA can potentially help instructors to avoid misconceptions and deepen understanding of their learners needs by interpreting the student's progress through cooperation to the point of success instead of measuring the reflection of a student's learning to the point of failure (in the form of a test score or the like).

When one considers the persistent pronunciation errors, common trends of lack of learner understanding of French phonology in general, and lack of popular and effective explicit pronunciation instruction, one can see how this approach which seeks to assess and instruct at

² See 2.3.

the same time could be highly efficient and fill gaps in knowledge on the part of the mediator (understanding learner needs) and the learner (understanding phonology and their own performance). By using DA and working collaboratively, it is the researchers' expectation that both learner and mediator will have a better understanding of the learners' grasp on phonology, and errors can be more swiftly and fully addressed than in traditional pronunciation assessment.

1.3 Why Not CBI or IC?

Two other approaches based on Vygotsky's SCT are concept-based instruction (CBI) and instructional conversation (IC). While both of these approaches can be of great value when used in L2 classrooms, DA seems to be more immediately applicable specifically with pronunciation than CBI and IC. According to Williams, Abraham, and Negueruela-Azarola (2013), "promoting conscious conceptual mediation is the central tenet of CBI . . . This conscious focus on semantics and pragmatics, which may be absent in many L2 classrooms, makes CBI a distinct approach to grammar teaching in conventional communicative classrooms" (p. 364). Unsurprisingly, an approach that loans itself well to semantics and pragmatics and more conceptual subjects would not likely be methodologically appropriate a phonology project such as this, seeing as pronunciation, especially at the target level of this study, is not very conceptual. While CBI may be highly useful in teaching a language learner the more complex process of choosing the appropriate auxiliary verb to form the French *passé composé* (present perfect) for example, there is no distinctive process one must master to understand

that in French, *é* is pronounced [e], *ç* is pronounced [s], *il* is pronounced [il], *tu* is pronounced [ty], etc.³

IC would be a more appropriate approach for pronunciation instruction, and in fact has been used in conjunction with DA (Davin, 2013).⁴ Both demonstrate use of mediation to encourage independent performance, and both can be used in group settings (although DA is typically carried out in a one-on-one setting), but they differ in that IC is always unscripted and driven by learners' evolving needs and interests. Due to these conditions the learning objectives tend to be less defined and it proves more difficult to track learner progress due to a lack of structure and standardization. It can however provide some very critical instructional opportunities when confronted with less routine and predictable errors by organically uncovering areas of uncertainty through learner-driven group conversation. DA gives the advantage of a more informative assessment than CBI and SA, and more focused learning objectives than IC. Furthermore, given that the concentration of the present study is specifically pronunciation, DA was determined to be a more appropriate approach than either CBI or IC.

According to Poehner,

DA stands apart from CBI and instructional conversations as neither of those is primarily concerned with diagnosis or assessment. Instructional conversation is highly dialogic but is really about guiding learners to construct their knowledge, etc. and so I think only loosely connected to SCT. CBI, while firmly rooted in SCT, aims to promote the development of new ways of understanding language and the use of that understanding to regulate performance. (personal communication, April 28, 2020)

³ A full explanation of all the sociolinguistic and pragmatic implications in relation to CBI applied to pronunciation instruction is beyond the scope of this study; it is understood that CBI has many pedagogical applications, however DA was more readily adaptable and applicable for the purposes of the present study.

⁴ See 2.3.

1.4 Research Questions

The following overarching question, which was principally focused on the value of DA as a pedagogical approach, guided the following study:

- What are some potential benefits and limitations related use of DA for teaching French pronunciation to intermediate L2 learners?

The following questions were created to provide more insight into the results of DA applied specifically to French pronunciation:

- What are the most frequent pronunciation errors performed by learners of French?
- To what extent do students appreciate dynamic assessment versus traditional methods?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Pronunciation Overview

For the purpose of having a basic understanding French phonology with particular emphasis on difficulties Anglophone learners typically face therein, summarizations are provided of a few French phonological aspects which, in general, seem unfamiliar to Anglophones or significantly differ from English phonology. Certain French sounds do not exist in English and vice versa. In addition, the sounds that do exist in both languages often have differing grapho-phonemic correspondences; that is to say, these sounds are often represented differently in writing and/or spelling in each respective language. Sounds that do not exist or have difference grapho-phonemic correspondence in a learner's first language tend to be especially problematic for learners as they can be difficult to both hear and imitate, and can often develop into persistent incorrect production of these sounds.

Furthermore, in the author's experiences, habits of incorrect production of some of these more problematic sounds can persist to high levels of language learning and become a true hindrance in L2 speech production. Lack in explicit pronunciation instruction only furthers these potential issues. Bernard Tranel (1987) states "the identification of pronunciation errors, the interpretation of their causes, and the application of appropriate corrective methods constitute important steps toward the mastery of an improved pronunciation" (p. xii), which highlights the need for consistent (self and/or other) regulation and correction for optimum pronunciation and theoretical knowledge with which to do so. The importance of developing a theoretical understanding of the French phonological system is also supported by Tranel, who

affirms that "a theoretical approach frees students from a number of negative psychological attitudes which are often obstacles to practical progress" (p. xii), negative psychological attitudes here referring to ingrained phonological misconceptions due to preconceived assumptions which are normally derived from the phonological system of the learner's first language. In an effort to research ways to fulfill this need to provide consistent pronunciation correction and guidance in the emerging development of theoretical knowledge, for the present study we used DA as an approach to pronunciation instruction and assessment to investigate potential benefits and improvements to learner pronunciation.

In consideration of these remarks and the content of the present study, as previously mentioned it is useful to understand a few phonological aspects of French. One of the first that surely comes to the minds of many French learners and instructors is the concept of liaison. Liaison is a type of linguistic phenomenon in which "the pronunciation of an otherwise absent consonant sound at the end of the first of two consecutive words the second of which begins with a vowel sound and follows without pause" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Therefore, "liaison may only occur with a following vowel-initial (or glide-initial) word; it does not take place before a consonant-initial word" (Tranel, 1987, p. 173). Among the consonants that can serve as linking consonants, "[z, t, n] are frequently used" (Tranel, p. 174). The following examples show these three linking sounds in context: *Les oiseaux* [lezwazo], *tout à fait* [tutafɛ], *bon appétit* [bɔnapeti]. Due to the fact that liaison isn't explicitly marked in orthography, learners must train their eye to catch instances of liaison while reading, and eventually be aware enough while speaking to insert proper instances of liaison at conversation speed. Additionally, liaison is not obligatory in all cases of a final consonant followed by a vowel-initial or glide-initial word,

which adds to the complexity of learning when to apply it in conversation.⁵ This distinction is beyond the capabilities of the students of the target level, therefore attention will be given to the more basic cases of liaison (usually obligatory) and explicit liaison errors committed by participants.

The French language also contains several diacritics (see Table 1) which correspond to several letters and produce specific sounds according to the particular letter and diacritic combination. Some diacritics do not actively affect the phonology but rather are markers of etymology. While this aspect is more obvious than liaison, it produces a new set of sounds to be learned all the same. Observations by the author outside the scope of the present study indicate that diacritics can sometimes cause a higher occurrence of errors in the learner's writing where they are visible than in their speech, however they do frequently influence pronunciation and can pose problems to learners, and are therefore worth mentioning.

TABLE 1

French Diacritics

Diacritic	Letter-Diacritic Combinations	Examples
<i>cédille</i>	ç	<i>ça, français</i>
<i>accent aigu</i>	é	<i>café, désert</i>
<i>accent circonflexe</i>	â, ê, î, ô, û	<i>hôtel, sûreté</i>
<i>accent grave</i>	à, è, ù	<i>particulièrement, où</i>
<i>tréma</i>	ë, ï, ü	<i>Noël, mais</i>

There are few differences between English and French consonants (although as

⁵ There are 3 types of liaison: *interdite* (prohibited), *facultative* (optional), *obligatoire* (obligatory).

mentioned some of them have different grapho-phonemic correspondences). However, the consonant [ʁ] in French, the absence of the sound [h]⁶ in French, double consonants, and final consonants seem to be typical causes of consonant errors for learners. The [ʁ] is simply difficult for Anglophones to learn how to produce seeing as it does not exist in English. Regarding double consonants, according to Tranel (1987),

with a few exceptions, a double consonant simply has the phonetic value of a single consonant [but] the few cases which depart from it . . . can be divided into four groups: (i) *ll* = [lj], (ii) *ss* = [s], (iii) *cc* = [ks] and *gg* = [gʒ], and finally (iv) consonants written double which are actually pronounced double. (pp. 147-148)

This last category refers to special, non-systematic cases where a double consonant does not have the phonetic value of a single consonant. This is much more information to internalize and apply in communication. Final consonants can be even more troublesome for learners, and Tranel attests that "from the point of an English speaker learning French, the situation with final consonant is, from the beginning, almost a constant source of difficulties" (1987, p. 154). In many beginner level French classes, students are taught that the final consonants *c*, *r*, *f*, and *l* are usually pronounced in French (the "careful rule" p. 411), but Moody (1978) found that in 1,927 final consonant letter occurrences amongst some of the most commonly used words in French, this "careful rule" was barely 60% accurate (p. 411). Tranel (pp. 155-167) elected to provide a more detailed individual study of final consonants in which conditions for the pronunciation of each consonant in word final condition were explained, but this can be an overwhelming amount of information to internalize and apply; in any case, it seems as if an

⁶ The letter *h* itself is complex when it comes to aspiration and it takes a thorough etymological understanding to master *h* aspiration, but given that *h* aspiration is both beyond the scope of our study and the capabilities of the target level of participants, it is more relevant to note that the sound [h] simply does not exist in French.

efficient way to gain an understanding of stable final consonants is lacking.

Vowels are perhaps the area of greatest phonological difference between French and English, and consequently vowels often prove to be the most problematic for Anglophone learners of French. The slight differences between open and closed vowels can be easy to confuse, and as mentioned earlier in the section, diacritics can systematically affect vowel sounds and can be difficult for Anglophones to internalize and apply. However, it is arguably nasal vowels, which do not officially exist or play a functional role in English, which can be the most unmanageable for newer Anglophone learners to form or distinguish.⁷ Furthermore, at higher levels, "the difficulty for the English speaker lies not so much in producing the nasal vowels where they should occur, but rather in avoiding producing them where they should not occur" (Tranel, 1987, p. 72), that is to say that Anglophone learners sometimes erroneously insert nasal vowels merely because they see an *m* or *n*. Tranel outlines the conditions for nasal vowels, which are "spelled by means of specific letter combinations: a single vowel-letter followed by the consonant-letters *m* or *n*" (p. 66), but there are many special cases and certain linguistic phenomena such as liaison which can alter the pronunciation of these vowels in certain contexts.

Understanding common pitfalls of Anglophone learners of French allowed the researchers to develop instruments geared to uncovering and working through the trickier phonological aspects of the French language (from an Anglophone point of view). This way, we

⁷ The 3 most commonly used nasal vowels in French are [ɔ̃, ɑ̃, ɛ̃]. See Tranel (1987) pp. 66-85 for additional information for nasal vowels.

were likely to confront learner errors and have the opportunity to make improvements through DA.

2.2 Current Pedagogical Approaches

In a recent article, Sturm (2019) states that "since only a few minutes per week of instruction are devoted to pronunciation in most classrooms (Olson, 2014), a total lack of instruction, or at best incidental instruction in pronunciation, seems to be the norm" (p. 33). As explained in the introduction, this has also been a trend that the author has personally experienced. In light of this trend, Sturm continues her article by explaining some potential benefits of "systematic, explicit pronunciation instruction", and shows inconsistent learner pronunciation improvement and lack of basic pronunciation comprehension over time in French courses using a "nonsystematic, 'traditional' manner" (p. 33).

In order to preface her investigation of the inefficiency of a nonsystematic, traditional approach to pronunciation instruction, Sturm cited several previous studies that in some form had shown that explicit and consistent approach to pronunciation instruction proved to be more beneficial than the traditional approach, in a variety of languages. Table 2 summarizes these studies, which gives the reader a general idea of the positive results shown, but for full explanations and results readers should consult the articles mentioned. These articles demonstrated many different positive possibilities in a variety of languages, but although explicit pronunciation instruction has been empirically proven to be advantageous multiple times, there is a lack of longitudinal studies in this area.

TABLE 2

Previous Research in Favor of Explicit Pronunciation Instruction

Author(s)	Year	Language	Sturm's Notes on Results
Lord	2005	Spanish	Explicit pronunciation led to better instruction
Sturm	2013	French	Explicit pronunciation led to better instruction
Offerman and Olson	2016	n/a	Visual feedback (spectrograms) reduced error in voiceless stops
Gordon and Darcy	2016	English	explicit instruction led to increased comprehensibility
Saito	2011	n/a	explicit instruction led to increased comprehensibility
Couper	2006	English	Explicit instruction helped reduce epenthesis use and dropped consonants
Miller	2012	French	Students preferred IPA over reference words to learn the sounds of French
Lappin-Fortin and Rye	2014	French	student self-assessment (1) led to improved pronunciation of...and (2) was comparable to expert assessments

The existing longitudinal studies concerning explicit pronunciation instruction often focus on a higher level or study abroad or long term residency cases, for example "Munro, Derwing, and Saito (2013) traced adult L1 Slavic and L1 Mandarin learners' L2 English vowels over 7 years of residency in Canada by recording them at arrival, 1 year later, and 7 years after immigrating" (Sturm, 2019, p. 35). There is a need for more longitudinal studies on pronunciation within a typical foreign language curriculum or at beginner levels in order to provide more solid evidence in favor of specific approaches to pronunciation instruction.

Interestingly, in a few of the longitudinal studies concerning higher levels, for example in Munro and Derwing (2008), there has often been remarked a pronunciation acquisition plateau after a certain time. This plateau would be a compelling subject for a longitudinal research study starting from a beginner level until the point of the so-called plateau trend in order to better understand and avoid it in by way of future instruction adjustments.

For four participants in Sturm's (2019) study, pronunciation progress was tracked by a recorded reading of a selected text throughout several semesters of beginning-level French, which, as mentioned, employed a traditional, inconsistent approach to pronunciation instruction. Sturm cites three reasons for using a recorded reading exercise that also apply to the selection of instruments in the present study:

(1) this method has been used in [many] other studies . . . (2) reading a text ensures that all participants utter the same number of syllables and the same sounds, and (3) because French is an opaque language, predicting the sound from spelling is a significant part of learning L2 French pronunciation. (pp. 36-37)

As the reader will see in Chapter 3, we have adopted a similar read-through of a selected text as a starting point in DA session for similar reasons. Based on the results of the four participants, Sturm asserted that "in the absence of systematic instruction or environmental input, pronunciation is unlike to improve in significant ways over time" (p. 41). These participants continued to exhibit pronunciation errors throughout the study, particularly in four areas: "(1) words resembling English, (2) long and infrequent words, (3) articles, and (4) many of the French vowels that do not appear or are spelled differently in English" (p. 40) with no signs of linear improvement over time. Additionally, "because improvement was not linear, one can conclude that students' pronunciation was not based on a systematic understanding of French letter–sound correspondences" (p. 41). Again, inconsistent or passive pronunciation instruction

is very unlikely to produce consistent improvement or development of an understanding of French phonology, and on the other hand an explicit approach to pronunciation instruction (i.e. consistent practice, correction, and phonology instruction) is much more likely to produce linear improvement.

For these reasons, and for the purpose of this study, research was used to identify possible pedagogical approaches that could be applied to pronunciation instruction in a more explicit and consistent manner. DA was quickly determined to have potential for such a goal considering the emphasis on cooperation, simultaneous instruction and assessment, and positioning learners to maximally contribute. DA isn't a consistent approach in practice per se, rather it has consistent goals (for example, a certain level of pronunciation from language learners) and uses different and appropriate (usually graduating) approaches with each learner to reach the goal based on their own progress, strengths, and weaknesses. In this way, it was predicted that through DA, learner pronunciation misunderstandings and errors would more frequently reveal themselves. Likewise, the learners' theoretical knowledge (or lack thereof) would become more visible and remediable during mediation, instead of traditional approaches in which these issues seem more likely to become habitual and problematic.

2.3 DA

DA is an interactive approach to instruction and/or mediation based on SCT and has been applied in a wide variety of fields prior to this study, including language learning. According to Poehner and van Compernelle "DA derives from Vygotsky's (1998) argument that observation of learner independent performance limits the scope of assessment to determining what learners are able to do autonomously and where performance begins to break down."

(2013, p. 354). This argument suggests that a more detailed understanding of learner development could be achieved by surpassing these limits and examining cooperative abilities, and working towards a point of success instead of a point of performance break-down. The distinction between these autonomous and mastered, and cooperative and mediated abilities led to the origination of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which is "the difference between an individual's independent functioning and the level of performance s/he can reach through cooperation with others (e.g., Vygotsky 1978)" (Poehner and van Compernelle, p. 354). Accordingly, "DA, as an assessment that aims to encompass the ZPD, requires the assessor to jointly work through tasks with learners, offering mediation as problems arise" (Poehner & van Compernelle, p. 354). This differs entirely from a more traditional, standardized assessment, or Static Assessment (SA) which "does not bring about assessment and teaching within the same process [because] it is related to the dualistic view of teaching and assessment as separate instructional activities" (Mehri & Amerian, 2015, p. 1459), and therefore cannot possibly account for or mediate within the ZPD, which by definition consists of aided or mediated performance. Consequently, SA generally deprives the instructor of a more detailed and individualized assessment, and any understanding of the individual or group ZPD. However, SA still holds value in that it is quantifiable and so progress is more easily traceable and comparison of student progress is also more easily achievable (although arguably of less thorough quality).

Arguments for such individualized consistent feedback as problems arise to promote and track development were presented by Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994). They support an approach such as DA in stating that "corrective feedback, if it is to have any impact on learning,

has to in some way be attuned to the individual learner . . . [and adjustments to feedback] must be collaboratively negotiated on-line with the learner" (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, p. 466), seeing as no learner is at exactly the same level as any other, nor do any two learners internalize information in the same way. These differences are nuanced and aren't often explicitly demonstrated, especially in SA, and as discussed above, "In formulating the concept of the ZPD, Vygotsky was critical of psychological and educational practices which assess development and guide educational intervention solely on the basis of the level of individual, independent functioning" (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, p. 467). In essence, feedback must be somewhat individualized as some learners will need more than others in certain areas, and also take account of both independent and cooperative abilities, in order to render a detailed understanding of learner development through mediation while promoting independent performance. The mediation is highly important, but intervention should not be over-frequent, overly direct, or without reason for it to be maximally efficient, or as Aljaafreh and Lantolf describe, graduated and contingent.

First, intervention should be graduated . . . The purpose here is to estimate the minimum level of guidance required by the novice to successfully perform a given task. Help, therefore, normally starts at highly strategic, or implicit, level and progressively becomes more specific, more concrete, until the appropriate level is reached as determined by the novices' response patterns to the help. Second, help should be contingent, meaning that it should be offered only when it is needed, and withdrawn as soon as the novice shows signs of self-control and ability to function independently. (1994, p. 468)

Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) also presented a graduated prompting scale which was developed into the guided interview questions used specifically for this study.⁸ It is an

⁸ See Appendix A.

instrument that allows for the mediator to assist the learner no matter their level of proficiency, and also for the mediator to track the level of intervention needed throughout the session or on a long-term scale. Learners who needed less frequent and less explicit intervention can be considered to be at a more advanced level than those who need more.

Due to its origins in SCT and lack of practical parameters, DA is highly adaptable. It can be, and it has been, applied to a vast array of subjects and levels in many different styles. As discussed in the introduction, two main applications of DA were introduced by Lantolf and Poehner in 2004, interventionism and interactionism; "In the latter, assistance emerges from the interaction between the examiner and the learner, and is therefore highly sensitive to the learner's ZPD. In the former, forms of assistance are standardized, therefore emphasizing the psychometric properties of the assessment procedure." (p. 54). Standardization can take some of the burden off of the mediator and can be especially helpful for first-time mediators; the present study adopted a standardized or interventionist approach. It is important to consider all aspects of the pedagogical situation (number and level of students, mediator's comfortability and training with DA, subject in question) and goals of DA in order to select the optimum application of DA for each situation. As Poehner and van Compernelle state (2013), "all approaches to DA share a commitment to looking beyond learner independent performance to understand their development" (p. 355), that is to say their emergent abilities.

Due to the fact that DA is most commonly a one-on-one approach and is therefore quite time consuming compared to many other approaches, it has not been widely applied in education, nor language learning, and the available research specific to DA and language learning is somewhat limited. DA is also, as discussed, a flexible approach, so few solid

conclusions can be drawn amongst the existing research, but generally positive results and trends are common within the current existing body of research. In 2009, Antón did a study of five university level students in an optional entry exam to assess their level of Spanish upon entering the program. Two of the five aspects of the exam were considered DA as they incorporated simultaneous instruction and assessment components, and these two yielded a much more complete understanding than the other parts of the exam concerning participants' proficiency and in which direction it would be best to proceed concerning instruction. The value of interaction was highlighted as it helped the learner and mediator collaborate within the ZPD of each participant to initiate development. Similarly positive results in tutoring style sessions were presented by Lantolf (2009), Poehner and van Compernelle (2013), van Compernelle and Zhang (2014), and Ying-Ying and Hu (2019).

Because of its flexibility, DA certainly isn't limited to these tutoring style sessions and research into small group and classroom DA has been provided by Lantolf and Poehner (2005 & 2010), and Poehner (2009). Poehner states that "the importance of both cooperative and collective activity for psychological development is that as individuals recognize the interdependence of their goals" (2009, p. 475), which, in language learning, manifests frequently as the need for communication, such as conversation with peers or instructors, to develop language skills (e.g., pronunciation). Language learners could potentially have more time and/or opportunities to actively communicate in a DA group setting (such as a classroom setting) as opposed to less frequent individual, tutoring style DA sessions with an instructor or mediator. Group DA (G-DA) is not a widely adopted or researched approach, but similarly to DA, it "provides mediation that is constantly adjusted and attuned to the learner's or group's

responsiveness to mediation. At the same time, it promotes the very development it seeks to assess in the first place" (Poehner & Lantolf, 2005, p. 252). These fundamental characteristics of DA can be interpreted in a myriad of styles, so it is important to remember that "DA is not a pre-specified technique or method of assessing that must be followed in a prescribed manner . . . and therefore its realization must take account of the immediate instructional context" (Lantolf & Poehner, 2010, p. 27). DA will always be unique as it takes into account the specific learner, specific mediator, and specific ZPD, but G-DA incorporates new interactants which guide it and increase the amount of influences on the direction of instruction. Poehner (2009) affirms that

Group-based and one-to-one DA . . . differ in that that G-DA must also take account of the group's ZPD . . . G-DA then must engage the group in an activity that no individual is able to complete independently but for which all members require mediation, albeit at different levels and different quantity. (p. 477)

These comparatively unconfined parameters hold immeasurable learning potential, but realizing this potential is not a simple task, especially for the mediator. Poehner and Lantolf (2005) contend that "once teachers and students engage in instructional activity, things can move in unanticipated directions and at unanticipated rates . . . the teacher needs to be prepared to provide appropriate types of mediation and to know when to withdraw this mediation as the learners begin to mediate themselves." (p. 242). They continue to discuss the responsibility of the mediator, stating that "in DA, mediation cannot be offered in a haphazard, hit-or-miss fashion but must be tuned to those abilities that are maturing, and as they mature further as a consequence of mediation, the mediation itself must be continually renegotiated" (p. 260). Mediation must be given when needed and withdrawn when unnecessary, or graduated and contingent (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994), and also adjusted based on the

developing ZPD, but as mentioned the true challenge that distinguishes G-DA from DA is the ability to remain aware of group ZPD and individual ZPDs simultaneously as a mediator. This is a very important skill for the mediator in order to keep the entire group engaged and no learner falls behind on the task at hand. As Poehner (2009) mentions, "Moving from a one-to-one model of teaching and assessment to a group-focused approach requires an understanding of the relation between development of individuals and development of the group" (p. 474).

While working with a group, it is possible for mediators to address the whole group to provide feedback, but the understanding of group and individual ZPD allows for necessary adjustments to feedback, for example in situations which require individual mediation. Poehner also addresses individual mediation within G-DA, asserting that:

In this regard, it is useful to distinguish primary from secondary interactants in G-DA. In the event that the teacher offers mediation in response to a given learner's difficulty, that learner and the teacher are the primary interactants as they negotiate the support that is needed. However, because the exchange occurs in the social space of the class and before the other group members, it has mediating potential for the rest of the group as well, who are secondary interactants but participants nonetheless. (Poehner, 2009, p. 477)

Many learners in the same class share similar problem areas and questions and therefore public feedback can be framed in a way that is useful for the learner that is intended to be the primary interactant, as well as all those who had not had the time or opportunity to ask the same question or perhaps make the same pronunciation error.

Regardless of the approach, and the context of the learner(s) and mediator, "The principle underlying DA is that a full picture of what an individual or group is capable of does not emerge unless and until the ability is not only observed in independent performance but is also pushed forward through specific forms of intervention and/or social interaction between

learners and assessors" (Poehner & Lantolf, 2005, p. 261). DA in a one-on-one or group setting provides detailed insight into developmental processes while simultaneously encouraging them, and is highly flexible and applicable. However, DA can also be highly time-consuming and has questionable reliability and validity due to its flexible nature. For these reasons, it is often most useful as a complementary approach to other pedagogical approaches, such as CBI, SA, or IC. For example, in Davin (2013), "Findings revealed that the DA and IC frameworks can be used in conjunction to construct individual and group ZPDs within the classroom that push the development of all students forward." (p. 319). Furthermore, she suggested "When organizing classroom instruction and assessment, a teacher might consider using the IC framework to introduce new concepts and the DA framework for material that has already been covered" (p. 318).

While relatively unexplored, there are several previous studies of the use of DA in the context of some form of language learning that form a decent body of research. Research on DA specifically used for second language pronunciation, however, was very scarce. In 2017, Yang did a study of the effect of DA on the English pronunciation of Chinese learners, and their corresponding interest, motivation, and anxiety. Yang concluded that "the intervention type of DA plays an active role in helping learners improve their pronunciation proficiency and promoting the positive effects of non-intellectual factors in the learning process" (p. 784). This was an encouraging result which provides some support for the present study. In sum, based on the potential benefits DA and the possibilities in the relatively unexplored and occasionally neglected area of pronunciation instruction, one-on-one interventionist DA as an approach to

pronunciation instruction was selected as the subject of the study in order to explore some possible implications of its implementation.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

3.1 Participant

The participant was third-semester learner of French attending a public American four-year university seeking to improve their pronunciation. The university is a typical public university located in a suburban area. The students in this course can typically be categorized as Intermediate-Low according to the 2012 Proficiency Guidelines of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), however they come from a variety of backgrounds in French experience (for example, some have completed the standard first two semesters of French at the same university, some have experience learning French in high school and have tested out of a year of French, some have experience learning French in different universities, and some even have experiences hearing French from family members). Regardless of background in French learning, all students enrolled in this third semester course follow the same curriculum and are responsible for learning the same content throughout the semester despite different instructors and class times. Little other demographic information was available nor applicable in for this study. The student participated voluntarily and was not offered compensation.

3.2 Procedures

The study proceeded through the following steps:

- Step 1: The researchers submitted and revised an IRB application (several times) in order to start the process of recruiting volunteers for individual DA sessions.⁹

⁹ IRB required us to present these sessions as "research interventions" instead of "tutoring sessions" or "DA

- Step 2: IRB approval was granted, and the participant recruitment process began.
- Step 3: The researchers contacted all third-semester French instructors and the Coordinator of Elementary and Intermediate French in order to request a class visit for the purpose of recruiting volunteers for the study.
- Step 4: The researchers visited the classes, and the potential participants were offered a free, 30-minute DA session in order to improve pronunciation.
- Step 5: Participants contacted the researchers by email to schedule a DA session.
- Step 6: The sessions took place in a conference room and were audio recorded.
- Step 7: During each session, the researchers began by giving a reading passage as well as a set of minimal pairs (see appendix A) to each participant to be read and recorded to serve as a baseline for the session. This helped the researchers quickly identify and categorize recognizable patterns of error within the first read-through.
- Step 8: Each participant then collaborated with the researcher to correct pronunciation errors as they occurred, using levels of graduated prompting by the researcher.¹⁰
- Step 9: The DA session recordings were transcribed by the researchers and a follow-up questionnaire was sent to the DA session participants for the purpose of collecting feedback about student attitudes and appreciation towards DA in relation to pronunciation instruction.
- Step 10: The questionnaires and transcriptions of the DA sessions were analyzed which expanded the researchers understanding of the value of DA used for language instruction and language learning, specifically within the field of pronunciation.

3.3 Instruments

Potential volunteers were asked to schedule a time to meet individually to complete a DA session using a francophone news article and a set of minimal pairs.¹¹ The purpose of this two-fold exercise was to examine performance in both longer contexts (full phrases with variety

sessions" for various reasons.

¹⁰ See 3.3.

¹¹ See Appendix A.

of phonological combinations) and then performance in isolated words (sets of minimal pairs focused on phonological aspects that usually pose challenges to Anglophone learners of French). Each part of the exercise required a different focus for the learner, which was predicted to bring different errors and in turn different types of potential progress. These 30-minute sessions were recorded, and certain parts were transcribed in order to highlight certain aspects of DA in relation to French pronunciation instruction. At the beginning of the session, students completed an initial read-through of materials as a personal and interactional frame of reference. In order to address each participant's pronunciation errors throughout the session, a figure from Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) was adapted by the researchers to guide pedagogical intervention on a graduating scale.¹² As explained in Chapter 2, the use of a consistent guide constitutes an interventionist approach to DA. The following questions were used as semiguided interview questions:¹³

- Are there specific sounds or words that are problematic for you?
- What about [sound/word/phenomenon X]?
- [If student does not understand technical terms: Do you know what that means?]
- Could you please re-read [Number/Line X]?
- Look at it carefully and try again. Which part of this is presenting the challenge right now?
- The error is in the [first/second/third/etc.] part of that [word/phrase]. Are you able to point it out specifically now?
- Pay attention to [sound/word/phenomenon X]. Keep in mind the use of [aspect X].

¹² See Appendix A.

¹³ See Appendix A.

- The [sound/meaning] of [X] is *this* not *that*. Could you try again?
- The [sound/meaning] of [X] is actually *this*.

Based on previous studies and author experience in language learning classrooms, several predictions of potential results were pondered, yet on the other hand they were all slightly undermined by the changing nature of DA and the lack of application to pronunciation in previous studies. Certain phonological aspects, for example sounds and phenomena that do not exist in English, were considered likely to be subject to error in these sessions, but with the understanding that each participant would be different. In addition, difficulty in this kind of mediation (especially with it being an approach the researchers had never personally practiced) was expected, particularly with the simultaneity of adapting to student questions and errors, focusing on minimal intervention, and multitasking assessing and instructing. Since a mediator or researcher can never know exactly how DA will unfold (again, DA is driven by learner and mediator cooperation and understanding), adaptability and flexibility are extremely important concepts and each session or each different learner and mediator combination will very likely yield different results even if a similar approach to DA is applied each time. Taking this likely difficulty under consideration, specific predictions were given little importance in this project, while process and progress were given priority, and more general goals were applied to the DA session in hopes of successful mediation within the participant's ZPD. Those goals were the general trends seen in previous studies: encouraging an increase in learner autonomy, development within the ZPD, and minimal pedagogical intervention guided by the learner.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1 DA Sessions

Due to constraints, we were only able to work with one participant, but the session proved to be highly informative and yielded generally positive results. The DA session took place with both the author and director in the role of mediator, and it was noted that nasal vowels, unpronounced letters, and vowel clusters seemed to be the most common points of difficulty for the participant. Liaison, the circumflex accent, the [j] sound of many French words with a double *l* in their spelling (e.g. Camille [kami]), and the sound [ɲ] in French words like *montagne* (mountain) were amongst the other pronunciation topics discussed prompted by performance questions and errors. Segments of the transcript of the session have been selected to highlight the trends of unpronounced letters, vowel clusters, and nasal vowels during the session as well as to discuss the participant's progress with these concepts throughout the session.

As seen in Excerpt 1, the participant prefaced the initial read-through of the instruments with a comment showing lack of confidence in pronunciation abilities, and made a couple of other comments to the same effect throughout the session.

EXCERPT 1: Student 1¹⁴

Line 1 A: very cool, so, to start today, what I'd like for you to do is just read for me to the best of your ability the highlighted portion within this article and then we will work on it together

Line 2 P: okay, just so you know I'm not very good

¹⁴ A = Author, P = Participant, D = Director.

As we moved through the instruments after the initial read-through, the participant systematically pointed out perceived errors and they were addressed cooperatively using the semiguided interview questions until we reached a point of performance success and/or understanding. It should be mentioned that not every perceived error pointed out by the participant was actually an error, indicating an incomplete awareness of her own correct performance. However, the participant did correctly point out many errors and needed various levels of prompting to resolve each issue. Excerpt 2 is a good example of a successful interaction, starting with the participant pointing out the word *Châteauguay* [ʃatoge] as a point of difficulty. She remarked that she remembered we had mentioned previously in the session that the circumflex accent rarely affects pronunciation, and so she accurately stated it was probably the same in the present word. Her first attempt at the word was [ʃaugwe], omitting the *t* and making a diphthong out of what should have been the sound [e]. When asked to slow down and segment it, the author noticed that the *t* was being omitted almost as if it was a final consonant and it was discovered that the participant saw the word *chat* [ʃa] for *cat*, so a discussion was started to try to guide the participant towards figuring out the answer with the knowledge she had by reframing the word.

EXCERPT 2: Student 1

- Line 1 A: so, think about where the *t* is in the word for cat, in the word *chat*
Line 2 P: it's at the end
Line 3 A: so why don't you pronounce the *t*?
Line 4 P: oh, because it's at the end, oh yeah
Line 5 A: but here...
Line 6 P: but here you would pronounce it 'cause it's not at the end, right?
Line 7 A: *exactement, exactement*, so will you do those first two parts for me again?

- Line 8 P: mhm, *château*?
- Line 9 A: mhm, yep, cause we just learned that *e-a-u* 'eau', *très bien*, so you have that *château* and then the last part, that *g-u-a-y*, what do you think?
- Line 10 P: I wanna just say [gwaj], but I dunno.
- Line 11 A : so we've kind of seen a couple times here that often in French, two vowels will come together to make one sound
- Line 12 P: mhm
- Line 13 A: this is kind of another such situation, so knowing that, what would you guess it might be?
- Line 14 P: maybe it would be the *u* and the *a* would make an [e] sound?
- Line 15 A: *oui!* so altogether?
- Line 16 P: *Châteauguay? Châteauguay?*
- Line 17 A: *oui, très bien, parfait, parfait*

She reviewed what she already knew about final consonants in French and was able to decide with help from some guiding questions that she did in fact need to pronounce the *t* since it is not a final consonant. She was also able to use the knowledge she had gained from a previous interaction concentrating on the vowel cluster word *réseau* (network) and apply it to a new problem in the word *Châteauguay*, which left the vowel cluster *-guay*, and she was able to guess correctly with her knowledge of vowel clusters producing one sound that the final part of the word was [ge]. She then put the word together to correctly pronounce it. Throughout this interaction, the participant was given no explicit answers and used the previously garnered information and mild guidance to solve her own confusion. This is a strong suggestion of potential benefit for pronunciation instruction, and further a positive suggestion for the use of DA and graduated prompting to help learners solve pronunciation errors. In Excerpt 3, the student was not able to come to a complete resolution on the issue of nasal vowels, but we were able to gain insight into her understanding of them and open a discussion on the

development of nasal vowel awareness and production.

EXCERPT 3: Student 1

- Line 1 D: *Pain*¹⁵
- Line 2 P: *Pain*, okay
- Line 3 A: and then it switches when you go to the next word that's spelled like *plan*, 'cause how does that sound?
- Line 4 P: *plan*
- Line 5 A: mhm, slightly different vowel there
- Line 6 P: mhm.
- Line 7 D: then you go back to *-i-n*, how would we do than one?
- Line 8 P: *Pain*
- Line 9 D: So, *p-l-e-i-n*?
- Line 10 P: oh, *p-l-e-i-n*?
- Line 11 D: yeah, sorry
- Line 12 P: um...*plan*?
- Line 13 D: so it's going back to the *-in*
- Line 14 P: *Plan*?
- Line 15 D: *plein*
- Line 16 P: *Plah*?
- Line 17 D: *-in*
- Line 18 P: pl...ah?
- Line 19 D: so, *pain*, *plan*...
- Line 20 P: ...*plan*
- Line 21 D: ...*plein*
- Line 22 P: ...[pla]
- Line 23 D: one exercise that some students do is they just look at the end of the word,
- Line 24 P: mhm
- Line 25 D: and they practice just doing the *-an*, *-in*, *-an*... (laughs)
- Line 26 A: just to really hear the difference

¹⁵ *Pain* is the French word for *bread*.

Nasal vowels are an area of particular difficulty for Anglophone learners as mentioned in Chapter 2. Due to this common difficulty, a list of minimal pairs with a heavy concentration on nasal vowels was developed as one of the instruments of the study.¹⁶ In reading this list, the participant showed proficiency in producing two of the three nasal vowels [ã, õ], but was not capable at the time of the session of forming independently nor imitating the third and final nasal vowel [ẽ]. Instead of focusing on a correct formation and giving the participant a task that we measure to the point of failure, a discussion was opened about her understanding and current performance. In addition, supplemental explanation of the three nasal vowels were provided as well as recommendations about exercises and activities for improvement, including practicing the nasal vowels in an isolated situation sequentially to adapt to these sounds. The practice with the new distinction and discussion to raise awareness is an example of initial progress, and efforts to expand that awareness (and in turn the ZPD) would be revisited in a later DA session given the opportunity.

4.2 Postsession Questionnaire

The participant did not complete the optional postsession questionnaire, and as such we were not able to gather evidence about the learner's attitudes or impressions of DA in comparison to their past experiences with this instrument. However, some comments made during the DA session suggested certain attitudes which are further explained in the next chapter. The questionnaire is provided as Appendix B.

¹⁶ See Appendix A.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.1 Summarization of DA Session Results

This study was an attempt to apply a new pedagogical approach, DA, to pronunciation in language learning, which typically lacks attention in the classroom and sufficient pedagogical approaches seem to be hard to find or integrate. While the present study did not have the scope to explore integration into a language classroom or language learning curriculum, it was an exploratory pilot in effort to reveal some implications when DA sessions are specifically applied to French pronunciation for Anglophone learners.

As mentioned, certain phonological errors that are common for Anglophone learners of French were anticipated and the instruments used were prepared accordingly to bring opportunities for growth in a variety of phonological categories. Many of these anticipated errors were seen, but as expected the session was driven by the changing needs and interests of the learner and not every error was addressed; the participant confronted the errors that she perceived, not what she was led to or shown, with the guidance of the mediators.

In Chapter 4, a few main trends within the participant's errors were identified: nasal vowels, unpronounced letters, and vowel clusters were noted to be particularly challenging for the participant. In fact, the level of vowel awareness in general was low; she displayed little to no understanding in the difference between an open vs. closed vowel, even when hearing them performed by the mediators. She also had trouble reproducing vowel sounds that we had previously discussed in the session, particularly vowel clusters and nasal vowels. Frequently throughout the DA session, the participant and the mediators segmented problematic words

into gradually smaller parts. This proved to be highly useful in shifting attention to necessary problem areas and allowing the participant to independently build up to the correct pronunciation piece by piece. However it became clear once certain words were parsed into phonemes exactly which phonemes were the most regularly is pronounced by the participant. In such cases, the mediators were obligated to proceed to Step 8, the last step, of the semiguided interview questions: "The [sound/meaning] of [X] is actually *this*".¹⁷ Therefore, the answer was directly given and explained to the participant, or the assessment aspect of DA showed that instruction was especially necessary. Often in these cases, French grapho-phonemic correspondence was unfamiliar to the participant, especially in vowel clusters. On occasion when she was unsure, the participant applied her awareness of English grapho-phonemic correspondence to the French words she was reading (a common trend amongst language learners facing pronunciation difficulties is a tendency to lean on their first language).¹⁸

The capacity to identify these trends was very useful and led to a practical conversation about some recommendations, for example specifically improving awareness of the nasal vowel that she had trouble with the most; this was an important testament to the simultaneity of instruction and assessment in DA which is finely attuned to the learner's needs.

5.2 Attitudes and Advantages

In undertaking the study, the author and her thesis director expected a level of

¹⁷ See 3.3 above.

¹⁸ See 2.1 above.

unexpectedness itself; DA is a cooperation driven by the learner and the mediator as they are confronted with problems or confusions. This adapt-on-the-go aspect of DA certainly plays a role in the challenges associated with being a mediator, which was also anticipated. In practice, this presented itself as difficulty with providing only graduated feedback, or positioning the learner to do the work. It was tempting to give direct correction and aid upon hearing participant errors or confusion, and it was also distinctly difficult to refrain from what is often referred to as *teacher talk*, or all of the small encouraging remarks and filler words one provides in a classroom setting to transition from one activity or item to the next, or to provide some feedback. In addition, due to this being the first session the mediators conducted, the familiarity with the guided interview questions was low and it took a great deal of effort to keep up with the pace of errors and participant correction in applying various levels of this scale. While emphatically concentrating on appropriate graduated feedback, it was also necessary to make an effort to keep track of time and other external elements like the participant's extra-linguistic messages (facial expressions of confusion, sighs, body language, etc.).¹⁹

On the other hand, the mediators were occasionally left at a loss (as discussed in the previous section) and had to resort to the last step of graduated prompting, in other words directly providing and explaining the answer, especially when lack of participant knowledge did not allow the mediators to frame the error as they wished for potential correction. Furthermore, not every error was addressed or resolved; the participant independently identified all areas of difficulty, and although not every error was addressed, the natural result

¹⁹ See Appendix A for Semi-Guided Interview Questions.

of the learner guiding the session was a focus on the things she understood least. This reflects how the participant and mediators cooperatively worked within the participant's ZPD and were able to apply DA in an effort to initiate development based on the participant's specific needs.

Although the participant did not complete the optional post-session questionnaire, the researchers were able to ascertain certain aspects of her attitude through comments, both directed at the mediators and self-talk. She prefaced many attempts at more difficult words with nervous or doubtful comments and expressed several times uncertainty as to whether she had made an error or not. However, on a positive note, she revealed grammar knowledge in some of her comments and questions, and talked herself through pronunciation issues using some of the pieces of information previously given to her by mediators in the session (for example, at one point she talked herself through how to handle a circumflex accent and came to the correct decision). The participant exhibited the ability to use previous progress for new problems, which is a fairly common general goal for learning, but by using DA the progress and the problems overlapped, and her specific progress was rendered visible (which would be highly useful in deciding upon future directions and goals of instruction). On a personal note, the participant was also cooperative, open-minded about the approach, and patient, which certainly could have contributed to her generally positive results.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary

This study was an effort to investigate a relatively new approach to language instruction applied specifically to pronunciation, due to generally inconsistent pronunciation instruction in the typical language classroom.²⁰ DA, which derives from Vygotskian SCT, is an approach to instruction and assessment that can look quite different in practice according to the subject, the goal, the mediator, and the learner, the level of difficulty, and other factors. There is emphasis both on the simultaneity of instruction and assessment as well as maximum learner contribution. In order to determine potential benefits of this approach applied to French pronunciation instruction, instruments were developed, and a participant was recruited for a DA session, during which the author was able to mediate the learner's development within the ZPD (in certain areas of pronunciation) as well as observe how the participant worked through pronunciation errors and made improvements throughout the session. The author also gained some insight into the attitude of the participant based on her comments throughout the DA session.

6.2 Limitations

Not everything about this approach can be explored in one isolated session, nor can conclusions be drawn about definitive improvement in self-regulation from what was observed from the participant; rather there were suggestions of potential benefit and positive results.

²⁰ The statement that pronunciation instruction is often inconsistent comes from the authors' observations, conversations with colleagues, and her own experiences, and suggestions by Sturm (2019).

Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 4.2, the participant did not complete the optional post-session questionnaire, and therefore we were left solely with her commentary during the session to find any indication of attitude.

Another possible limitation was the cognitive overload on the student; she mentioned not remembering the resolution to a previous error as we had addressed many other errors since, which possibly suggests that DA is susceptible, like most pedagogical approaches, to have an uptake limit, or will lose efficiency in too high a volume (i.e. too much new information, overly lengthy sessions).

As mentioned in some published research (Poehner, 2009; Lantolf & Poehner, 2010; Mehri & Amerian, 2015), the feasibility of this approach is not always optimum. It is often time consuming and tends to lend itself best to one-on-one, tutoring-type sessions. It can be a challenging approach to implement as an instructor especially without specific training, and it requires both mediator and learner to be highly engaged (for the purpose of yielding better results). It is also possible that it might not fit in well with a set curriculum or grading scale. For these reasons, it is often used in complementarity with another pedagogical approach.²¹

6.3 Directions for Future Research

In Chapter 2, the lack of research on DA applied to language instruction was discussed, specifically in the area of pronunciation. Within the existing research on DA for pronunciation instruction, beginner-level studies and longitudinal studies were even rarer; this would clearly be a good place to start. If given the chance to continue working with the participant and

²¹ See 2.3, Davin (2013).

perhaps some peers, longitudinal case studies of their progress and particular trends would be further investigated. A few general questions that emerged during the present study were (as discussed in the previous section and in 2.2) a possible uptake limit per DA session, a pronunciation plateau at intermediate or advanced levels, and the most efficient and productive way to use DA as a complement to other approaches to pronunciation.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND INTERVIEW INSTRUMENTS

1. Are there specific sounds or words that are problematic for you?
 2. What about [sound/word/phenomenon X]?
- [If student does not understand technical terms: Do you know what that means?]
3. Could you please re-read [Number/Line X]?
 4. Look at it carefully and try again. Which part of this is presenting the challenge right now?
 5. The error is in the [first/second/third/etc.] part of that [word/phrase]. Are you able to point it out specifically now?
 6. Pay attention to [sound/word/phenomenon X]. Keep in mind the use of [aspect X].
 7. The [sound/meaning] of [X] is "this" not "that." Could you try again?
 8. The [sound/meaning] of [X] is actually "this."

The 3 news articles provided below are the source for the interviews (research session in the format of tutoring).

The words provided below are additional items for participants to read, as needed, during interviews used for working on pronunciation.

dinosaure
 dessert
 désert
 poison
 poisson
 malsaine
 malsain
 pin
 plan
 plein
 temps
 ton

This type of tutoring/guidance follows recommendations made by Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994), who explained the overarching principle of this type of (dynamic) assessment in the following way: "The idea is to offer just enough assistance to encourage and guide the learner to participate in the activity and to assume increased responsibility for arriving at the appropriate performance" (p. 469).

Aljaafreh, A., & Lantolf, J. P. (1994). Negative feedback as regulation and second language learning in the Zone of Proximal Development. *Modern Language Journal*, 78, 465-483.

Regulatory Scale [left column from Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994] – Implicit to Explicit

This table shows that the tutoring session will progress from implicit to explicit assistance. It is not possible to provide—in advance—the exact words that will be used by the tutor, just possible examples.

0. Tutor asks the learner to read, find the errors, and correct them independently, prior to the tutorial.	Student re-reads the text as a frame of reference.
1. Construction of a "collaborative frame" prompted by the presence of the tutor as a potential dialogic partner.	Student is made aware that the tutor/researcher is present for collaboration up to pedagogical intervention when necessary.
2. Prompted or focused reading of the sentence that contains the error by the learner or the tutor.	Student is prompted to find their own errors (if any are present).
3. Tutor indicates that something may be wrong in a segment (e.g., sentence, clause, line): "Is there anything wrong in this sentence?"	Tutor/researcher directs student towards mispronounced item: "Could you please re-read number X/Y/Z?"
4. Tutor rejects unsuccessful attempts at recognizing the error.	"Look at it carefully and try again. Which part of the sentence is presenting the challenge right now?"
5. Tutor narrows down the location of the error (e.g., tutor repeats or points to the specific segment which contains the error).	"The error is in the second half of the sentence; are you able to point it out specifically now?"
6. Tutor indicates the nature of the error, but does not identify the error (e.g., "There is something wrong with the tense marking here").	"Pay attention to such-and-such vowel/consonant; keep in mind the use of liaison"
7. Tutor identifies the error ("You can't use an auxiliary here").	"The sound created by 'é' is [e], not [i]; knowing that, could you try it again?"
8. Tutor rejects learner's unsuccessful attempts at correcting the error.	Remind the students at each following occurrence of the same error of the explicit pronunciation rule they are not employing.
9. Tutor provides clues to help the learner arrive at the correct form (e.g., "It is not really past but something that is still going on").	The tutor/researcher will explain the mistake and use an example of another word with similar phonological, morphological, or orthographic characteristics to teach the pronunciation/reading concept in an attempt to facilitate understanding of the original mispronounced/misunderstood word.
10. Tutor provides the correct form.	Student repeats correct

	pronunciation/correct meaning after the researcher/tutor.
11. Tutor provides some explanation for use of the correct form.	Tutor explains the phonological/grammatical rule and therefore why the word was mispronounced/misunderstood.
12. Tutor provides examples of the correct pattern when other forms of help fail to produce an appropriate responsive action.	Tutor/researcher gives examples of several comparable words/phonological situations to solidify understanding.

INSTRUMENT A (primarily for pronunciation)

Le sud du Québec reçoit ses premiers flocons

<https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/201911/10/01-5249178-le-sud-du-quebec-recoit-ses-premiers-flocons.php>

INSTRUMENT B (primarily for reading comprehension)

La tour Eiffel à Montréal, le projet fou du maire Drapeau

<https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/201910/27/01-5247141-la-tour-eiffel-a-montreal-le-projet-fou-du-maire-drapeau.php>

INSTRUMENT C (primarily for reading comprehension)

Des Algériens dans la rue contre une loi sur les hydrocarbures

<https://www.nouvelobs.com/monde/20191014.AFP6541/des-algeriens-dans-la-rue-contre-une-loi-sur-les-hydrocarbures.html>

APPENDIX B
ONLINE SURVEY

PRONUNCIATION

1) How would you rate the quality of your French pronunciation? (choose one)

Very Bad Bad OK Good Very Good

2) Which specific [sounds/aspects of pronunciation/aspects of reading] are the most problematic in French? _____

(If you don't know the technical terms to explain this, just use some examples of words that have the difficult [sounds/forms] in them.)

3) Which online dictionary or resource do you use most often to look up the [pronunciation/meaning] of French words? _____

If you never use online dictionaries or resources to look up the [pronunciation/meaning] of French words, use **Not available** as your answer for this item.

RESEARCH TUTORING SESSION

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

4) I learned something new.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

5) My confidence level regarding [French pronunciation/reading texts in French] has increased as a result of my tutoring session.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

6) The tutoring was clear.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

7) The tutoring session was helpful.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

8) I can imagine signing up for that type of tutoring again if it is available.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

9) This type of tutoring was difficult.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

10) What was your overall impression of the tutoring session? _____

(Any comments/observations would be helpful.)

11) You might not have realized it, but this type of tutoring requires you to identify problems and try to fix them on your own before help is offered, and the help that is offered to you during this type of tutoring session moves from implicit to explicit. This just means that some hints are provided, but the hints only guide you indirectly (at first) toward noticing the general area where there might be a problem, and then the hints eventually become more

direct/explicit. In the text box provided below, please do your best to compare this type of tutoring with other tutoring you've had in the past.

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