Prosody Interventions 101: Three Levels of Practice

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Pronunciation & Prosody…

Previously, teaching of pronunciation has been referred to as the "Cinderella of language teaching… neglected and disconnected from other language learning activities" (Underhill, 2010 para. 1) and an "unattended bedfellow" of fluency in terms of its unresearched and untaught status (Dowhower, 1991, p. 173).

Agenda

1. What is prosody?
2. Why should we teach prosody?
3. Some barriers to teaching prosody
4. Steps to integrating prosody:

   a) definitions (for teachers/for students)

   b) framework for teaching –The Three Levels of Practice (Morley 1991; 2001)

5. Hands on time: Resources for teaching-specific classroom practices/activities
6. Discussion/Q & A

What is Prosody?

Suprasegmental phonology "refers to intonation patterns, stress placement and rhythm in spoken language; also called **prosody**" (Veenendaal, Groen, & Verhoeven, 2016, p. 56). –

It is **beyond the syllable level**.

We will not be focusing on segments (vowels and consonants or syllable stress/individual word stress)—important but often easier for teachers to focus on due to personal experience & dictionary rules

Purpose of interventions for students:

- To **raise awareness** of prosodic features (English language tendencies), metacognition of own speech tendencies, activate self-monitoring & independence

- To **improve comprehensibility**

- **Not to be "native-like"** but rather "English-speaker like" this means—someone who knows and can produce the tendencies of spoken English to be as intelligible as possible

Importance of Prosody for Communication

"Phonology is relevant in communication studies because **if the sounds of a language are not adequately learnt and/or articulated, communication will not be adequate or effective or may fail**"(Ape, 2014 p. 17) . Arguably this is the same for both segmental and supragegmental prosody but suprasegmental is truly essential.

"John," said the Boss, "is lazy." This is a quite different sentence than "John said, 'The Boss is lazy'." (Gilbert, 2008, p.7)

Obstacles to Direct Instruction of Prosody

- There can be an instructor mindset that pronunciation can only be or is best learned from "foreign" speakers of English (Dang, 2014 p.108).

- **Lack of experience**—just do not know how (not focused on in their own schooling or in Pre-Service English Teacher Programs) (MacDonald, 2002; Couper, 2006, 2017; Foote, Holtby, & Derwing, 2011; Henderson, et al., 2012; Grant, 2018)

- **Uncertainty & lack of confidence** in one's own prosodic skills— (MacDonald, 2002; British Council, 2008b; Couper, 2017; Darcy, 2018)

- **Higher stakes goals take priority**—students may resist if comprehensibility in speaking is not an academically valued aim (Gilbert, 2008; Henderson et al., 2012).

- Hold feelings that **direct instruction on prosody may** interfere with communicative activities in classes (Morley, 2000)

Need to counter these obstacles...

Without a sufficient, threshold-level mastery of the English prosodic system, learners' **intelligibility and listening comprehension will not advance**, no matter how much effort is made drilling individual sounds. That is why the highest priority must be given to rhythm and melody in whatever time is available for teaching pronunciation. (Gilbert, 2008, p. 8)

Key Definitions for Teaching Prosody

Not all definitions need to be taught to students.

Teachers should understand and feel comfortable with them in order to teach them.

However, student need not memorize the language that defines prosodic features.

Learners should internalize the basic concepts of:

timing, **stress & de-stress**, **thought groups**, **falling and rising pitch**, and **linking**.

The differences are illustrated in the following chart.

Key Definitions for teaching and understanding prosody

For Students

- timing, (rhythm)
- stress & de-stress, (rhythm)
- thought groups,
- falling and rising pitch,
- linking

For Teachers

- Prosody (Suprasegmental phonology)
- Prosodic features (intonation, stress & rhythm)
- Intonation (pitch, loudness, tempo, rhythm)

Key Definitions for Understanding Prosody

Prosody: the music of spoken English—the interconnected rhythm and melody.

Prosodic features: features that appear when we put sounds together in connected speech including **intonation, stress and rhythm** (British Council, 2008a.)

So, what is intonation?

Key Definitions for Understanding Prosody

Intonation: This is the collective term used to describe variations in **pitch, loudness, tempo and rhythm.**

"Intonation is about how we say things, rather than what we say" (Sabbadini, n.d). –The overarching definition…

Intonation is the way the pitch of a speaker's voice goes up or down as they speak, combined with tempo, and a **rhythm of emphasis and non-emphasis**. We use intonation to help get our message across (British Council, 2008a).

The previous example can highlight the necessity of teaching intonation:

"John," said the Boss, "is lazy." This is a quite different sentence than "John said, 'The Boss is lazy'." (Gilbert, 2008, p.7)

Markings that illustrate the differences in thought groups and falling/flat intonation.

- "John/\," said the Boss/\, "is lazy/\."

- "John/ said/--, 'The Boss is lazy/\'.

Key Definitions for Understanding Prosody

- **Final Intonation** -Falling (e.g. after a thought group) and rising intonation (e.g. for lists), and flat—(e.g. signaling there is more to come)

- **Prominence** or highlighting content/story words -

  "In English, prominence highlights important key words, new information, or contrasting information (e.g., I have GOOD news / and BAD news.)" (Grant, 2018).

Key Definitions for Teaching Prosody: Rhythm + Stress and De-stress

"English **rhythm** is the **alternation of strong and weak beats** in phrases and sentences.

Stress & De-stress: (**Content vs Structure**)

>>They go to the lake at the end of the summer.<<

Key Definitions: Rhythm & Suprasegmentals

"**Rhythm**: While [segmental] word stress is the alternation of strong and weak beats in words, **English rhythm is the alternation of strong and weak beats in phrases and sentences**.
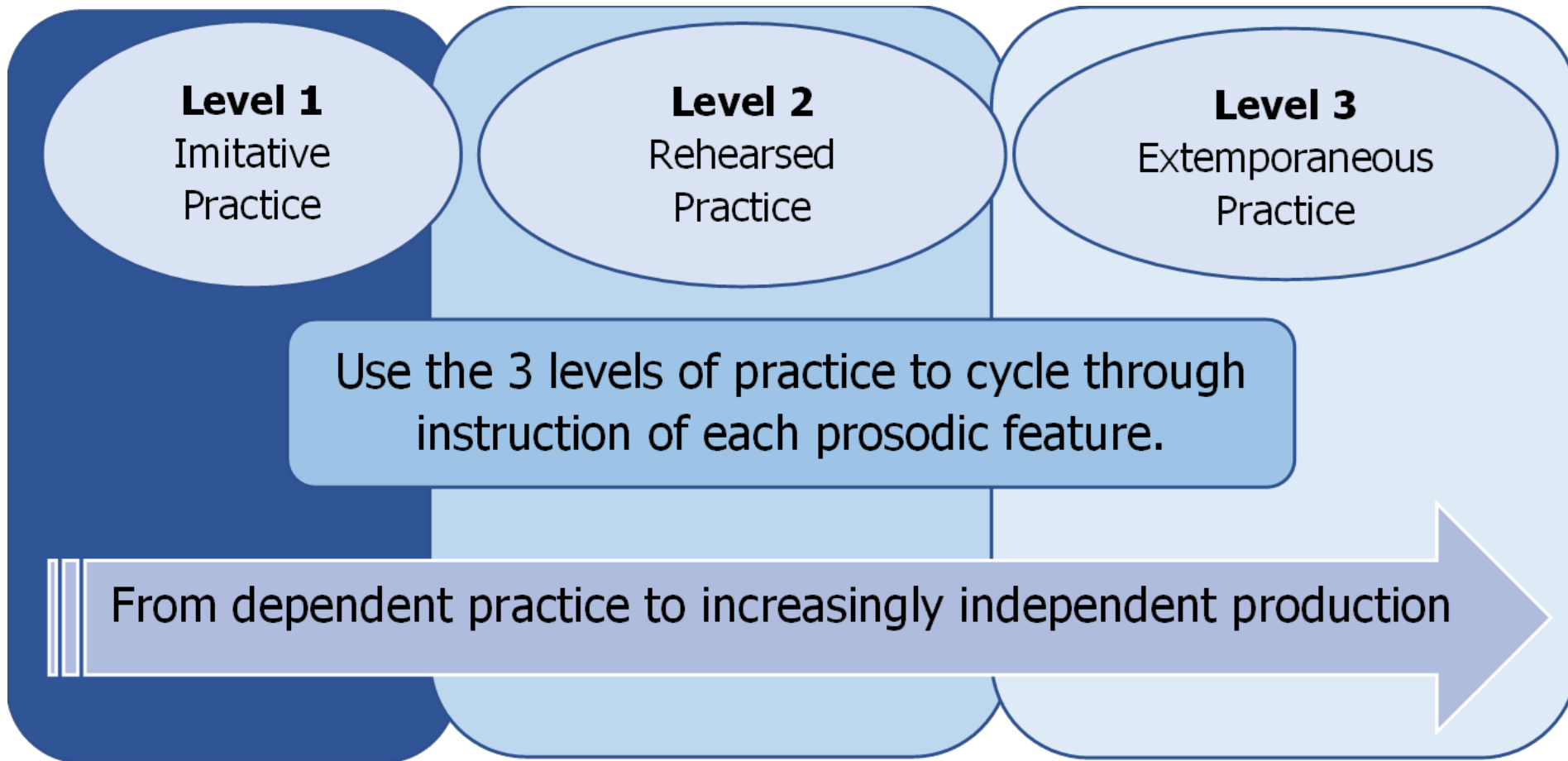
In English, words with relatively more meaning (i.e., nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, wh-words, and negatives) are stressed; words that serve a grammatical function but carry less meaning (i.e., articles, prepositions, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, etc.) tend to be weakened or reduced" (Grant, 2018).

Content VS Structure

Key Definitions: Thought Groups

- **Thought groups** a way of "grouping words so that they can be more easily processed" (2008, p.10).

- "A thought group is a group of words that belong together" (Baruch College, 2022).

- "Speakers break the stream of speech into chunks or meaningful groups of words called thought groups. A thought group might be a collocation (e.g., make progress), a discourse marker (e.g., however), a hesitation device (e.g., um; well) or a grammatical constituent (e.g., Thought groups / make spoken English / easier to process.). A brief pause often signals the end of a thought group or chunk" (Grant, 2018, p. 2).

Visualization of Morley's (1991; 2000) Three Levels of Practice

Level 1
Imitative
Practice

Level 2
Rehearsed
Practice

Level 3
Extemporaneous
Practice

Use the 3 levels of practice to cycle through instruction of each prosodic feature.

From dependent practice to increasingly independent production

Three Levels of Practice at a Glance —Based on Morley (1991; 2000)

Level	Type & Characteristics	Key Points & Sample Activities
1	**Imitative** Introduction of each feature Raising awareness of each feature	Begin with short, non-complex utterances/sentences • Choral repetition • Dictation • Individual repetition of a model • Fixed/repeated dialogues
2	**Rehearsed** Thoughtful & Rehearsed practice with each feature—working toward automatization and independent use.	Individual attempt at marking followed by comparing answers with partner • Dialogues • Short paragraphs • Scripted PPT Presentations
3	**Extemporaneous** Non-scripted activities supporting independent incorporation of taught prosodic features	Individuals incorporate features into unrehearsed speech acts • Debates • Discussion • Non-scripted presentations

Prosody Intervention: Order of focus

Based on the three levels of practice recommended by Morley (1991; 2000) and ideas found in Levis & Grant (2006) and Grant (2018), <u>I typically use the following order when introducing</u> **each of these prosodic features**:

    1) rhythm with weak and strong beats

    2) stressed and unstressed words (structure VS content/story)

    3) pausing at thought groups,

    4) falling ("essential pitch drops" (Gilbert, 2008, p. 11) and rising pitch/intonation,

    5) linking

Specific Classroom Practices

Prosody Intervention: Tools

- Imitation/Repetition

- Dictation

- Short dialogues with teacher & peer feedback

- Short reading passages-for practice with peer feedback and recording for teacher feedback & self-reflection

- Listening passages (I use Elllo.org videos)

1, 2, 3, 4—introducing stress and de-stress, timing, weak and strong beats

1,2,3,4

a1,a2,a3,a4

anda1,anda2, anda3, anda4

Mice Eat Cheese & Take a break

Mice eat cheese.

The mice eat cheese.

The mice eat the cheese.

The mice are eating the cheese.

The mice have eaten the cheese.

Take a break.

I wanna take a break.

I'm taking a break.

She's taking a break.

They've taken a break.

Teaching point: You can have students use their phones to record themselves saying these phrases before you teach timing. Then have them record **again** **after the intervention**— for comparison.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ZOIiEAMz9s&t=1s&ab_channel=SanDiegoVoiceandAccent :50~1:29

Introduce stress and de-stress, of content (story) versus structure through Dictation

Less advanced

- There's a big tree in the park.

- My desk is by the window.

- His books are in his locker.

- I like green tea.

Ask your students what are the most important words—the words that hold the story.

More advanced:

- They go to the lake at the end of the summer.

- I like chocolate ice cream, but I don't like strawberry ice cream.

- You always fall asleep in class. You should try to go to bed earlier.

Level 1 activity

| Teach how to mark | • **Teach symbols.**
• **Use them consistently.** |

stress   **super stress**   thought group /   falling \   rising +   linking lives in

Thought groups: Begin with Dictation.
Then: Listen→Mark→Discuss→Check

Less advanced → **More advanced:**

- There's a big tree/ in the park/.

- My desk/ is by/ the window/.

- His books/ are in/ his locker/.

- I like tea/ better than/coffee/.

- She has/ blue eyes/.

- They go /to the lake/ at the end of the summer/.

- I like /chocolate ice cream/, but /I don't like /strawberry ice cream/.

- You should/ call your parents/ before /you go/ to the party/.

As your students what words go together.

Level 1 activity

Using dialogues to teach all features.

Imitate →Mark→Check→Say with partner

Less advanced

- A: Do you like/ sweets+?

- B: Yes/\, but not/ chocolate.

- A: What+? You **don't** like/ chocolate+? Really+?

- B: No/\. Really/\. I don't/ like it.

Student centered: Brief, task-based dialogues.

More advanced:

- A: I thought/ you said/ they go/ to the **lake**/ in the summer/\.

- B: No/\, I said/ they go/ to the **beach**/ in the summer/.

- A: They have/ a cottage there/, right+?

- B: It's more like/ a **house**/. A **really**/ big one/\.

A/B worksheets are great! Sample: https://www.englishcurrent.com/pronunciation/connected-speech-practice-esl/
https://www.eslfast.com/easydialogs/

Teaching Marking Symbols with dialogues Levels 1 & 2

Level 1/ Introduction & Imitative Practice

Link to dialogue:

https://bit.ly/3Eid64t

Level 2 Teaching Point:

You can have students work in pairs and record fixed dialogues.

Practice →Record→ Transcribe→Mark→

Students can submit these.

Students can also do dialogues and explain their phonology choices.

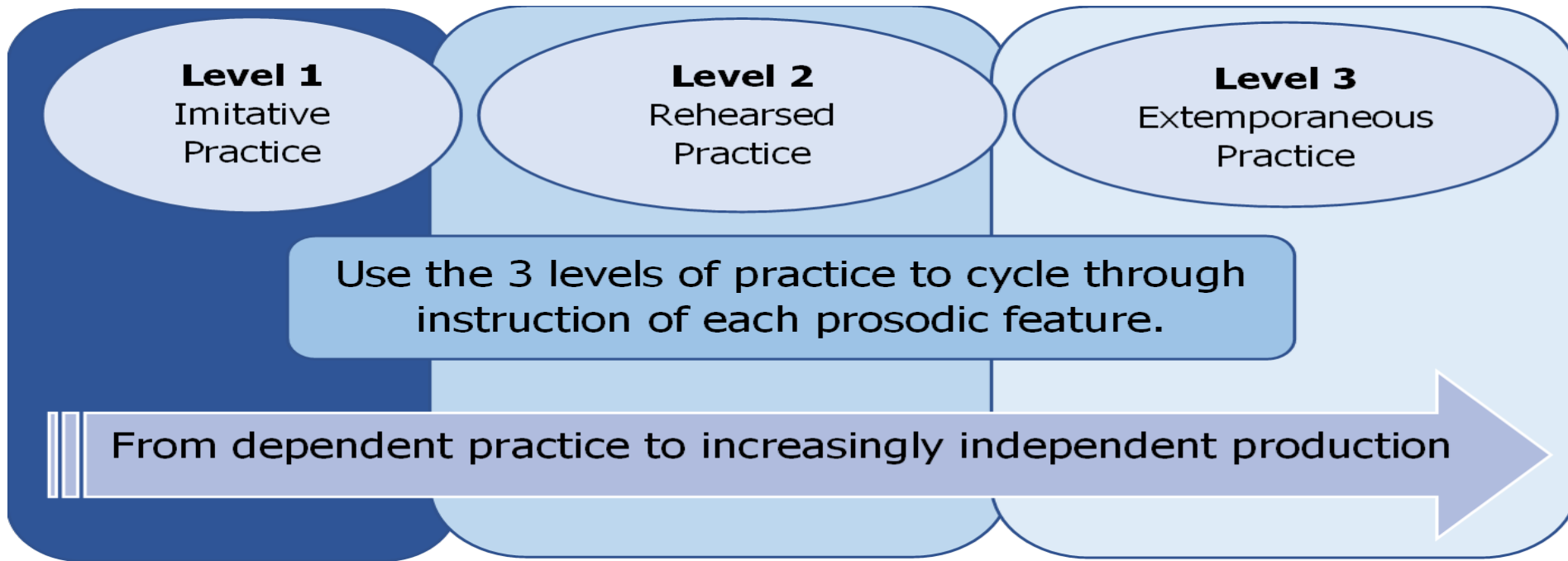**Level 2: Rehearsed Practice**

A/B dialogue links:

Group 1: https://bit.ly/3MC6MYt

Group 2: https://bit.ly/37Qq39R

Group 3: https://bit.ly/3KmtSkb

Group 4: https://bit.ly/3vPm8SH

Group 5: https://bit.ly/3rXDOui

Group 6: https://bit.ly/36Tm3ow

Link to Answers:
https://bit.ly/3KSe5uO

Visualization of Morley's (1991; 2000) Three Levels of Practice

Level 1 Imitative Practice

Level 2 Rehearsed Practice

Level 3 Extemporaneous Practice

Use the 3 levels of practice to cycle through instruction of each prosodic feature.

From dependent practice to increasingly independent production

Listen/imitate (choral) → Pair Practice with new sentences, dialogues, presentations → free discussion

Level 1   Level 2   Level 3

Paragraph Reading & Marking

Link to level 1 sample (on Google slides) https://bit.ly/3OF2Ac8

Activity order:

→Listen & repeat & mark.

➢**Teaching point**: I use the same paragraph at Level 1 with each feature.

Level 2 Activities:

Steps:

1. Read & Mark,
2. Compare with your group,
3. Discuss differences,
4. make changes,
5. look at answer key & make changes.
6. Take turns reading with good prosody.

Monologue Listening & Marking (Elllo.org)

Level 2 Activity:

Steps:

1. Listen for story words and take notes.

2. Answer questions about the content.

3. "Pre-mark" before listening again.

4. Listen and mark the transcript

5. Bring to class for discussion.

Sample assignment: https://bit.ly/3KnYORg

Level 2 activity

Portfolio assignment

- **Portfolio Assignment**

Flow

1) Students record a text "cold".

2) Students begin to learn about phonological features

3) Students record the same text again.

4) Students continue to learn about phonological features.

5) Student record the same text a final time at the end of the semester

6) Students compare the 1st and 3rd recordings and reflect on their personal progress.

- **Examples of assignments, Recording website, Google Forms**

"Snacks" recording on ZenZengo***:
https://a.ttd.ac/JNQMDG

→This recording is done 3 separate times at early/mid/late semester

- Link to "Snacks" portfolio Assignment:
https://bit.ly/3khBERK

- Link to Self-reflection on google forms

https://forms.gle/ugXRzGpabV4bWn6s5

Why teach prosody?

"Practicing pronunciation without prosody is like teaching ballroom dancing, only the students must stand still, practice without a partner, and without music." (Gilbert, 2008, p. 9)

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