

USING WEEKLY GROUP POLITICAL PRESENTATIONS TO ENHANCE THE PHONOLOGICAL LEARNING OF SECOND-YEAR ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS AT A UNIVERSITY IN VIETNAM

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Abstract

Studies about the learning value of group presentations in ESL and EFL have become increasingly common, particularly in relation to spoken fluency. However, few studies have explored their impact on students' intelligible pronunciation. In a Vietnamese context, recent changes in teaching and learning strategies set by the government have shifted attention to students' ability to communicate effectively in today's increasingly globalized environment. This inevitably turns the spotlight on pronunciation, an aspect of EFL long ignored in Vietnam. Qualitatively describing a case where group presentations were a key mode of teaching, learning and assessment for 17 second-year students majoring in English for Political Discipline at the Institute of International Studies in Hanoi over the course of one semester, this study suggests that monitored and transcribed group presentations may be one rational answer. The study investigates the impacts on participants' pronunciation of sounds and word stress and considers their attitude towards this method. The results reveal that students acknowledged the benefits of group presentations and experienced improvements in pronunciation, confidence and range of political vocabulary. These changes were diverse depending on each participant's attitude. The article concludes with reflective evaluations of the lessons and explores the pedagogical implications for future projects on implementing research into presentations among Vietnamese students of foreign languages.

Keywords: language learning, presentations, phonology, speaking, Vietnam

INTRODUCTION

Acquiring spoken communicative competency in English in Vietnam is an important aspect of the nation's social and economic development (London, 2011). Foreseeing the need for bilingual personnel, Government Decision 1400 (2008) stated that 'by 2020 most Vietnamese students...will be able to use a foreign language confidently in their daily communication, their study and work in an integrated, multi-cultural and multi-lingual environment'. The 'foreign language' in this legislation is, of course, understood to be English.

However, the progress made in English training and learning in Vietnam is behind the shift in ideology. Obstacles such as overcrowded classes and the ongoing

overuse of traditional grammar-translation methods prohibit the country's language education from nearing its goal. Such researchers within the ASEAN perimeter as London (2011) have suggested that Vietnamese language education, with traditionally fewer opportunities for students to participate in productive skills with fluent speakers of English, is still marked by a need for more emphasis on the *comprehensible* spoken word.

In this research context, one of the first author's students' greatest weaknesses is intelligible speaking. They are government officials working in international relations fields where they need to express themselves clearly and accurately. Our interest in conducting this research is to examine whether the continuing use of presentations

can improve their pronunciation skills, especially articulating sounds and stress.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Benefits of Student Presentations

Student presentations have been valued as a powerful language teaching tool by researchers all over the world. For example, presentations can enhance students' communication skills (Girard, Pinar & Trapp, 2011), narrow the gap between classroom and real-life language, encourage students' team-work spirit and assertiveness (King, 2002), increase students' autonomy and equip them with new vocabulary and knowledge (Lee & Park, 2008). Additionally, presentations in classroom context are also associated with the improvement of level of attention (Baranowski & Weir, 2011), self-efficacy and anxiety (Brown & Morrissey, 2004) and speaking rates and information content (Hincks, 2010). Nevertheless, the undoubted benefits of presentations in literature still leave the question of whether they can help improve students' pronunciation. This, again, points to a gap in the teaching and learning of pronunciation in professional contexts in Vietnam.

The Importance of Intelligible Pronunciation

Cakir and Baytar (2014) claimed that 'pronunciation is one of the most important aspects of a language', therefore 'foreign language learners should be exposed to the target language not only in written but also orally in order to acquire to sound systems correctly' (p. 106). There are few recent studies of Vietnamese pronunciation of English, so we rely here on two older studies. When examining Vietnamese pronunciation of English, the Center for Applied Linguistic Study (1977) stated:

a sentence can be pretty badly mangled grammatically and still be understandable if it is pronounced well enough, and, conversely, the most flawlessly constructed sentence won't do its speaker a bit of good if his

pronunciation can't be understood.

However, Vietnamese students are likely to struggle with English pronunciation. This is because the two sound systems share little similarity. Although, few contrastive analysis studies between English and Vietnamese exist, the two most serious areas of errors of Vietnamese pronunciation are *sounds* and *stress*.

In terms of sounds, Vietnamese students have problems with the pronunciation of 'final /p/, /b/, /g/ sounds'. Noticeably, some are unable to combine certain muscles and mouth-parts 'to articulate some sounds like /θ/ as in *think* and /ð/ as in *that*' (Center for Applied Linguistics, 1977, p. 2). Santry (1992) also added consonant clusters to the elements that hinder English pronunciation. Vietnamese speakers tend to omit or alter some consonants in difficult clusters. Take consonants with /p/ as an example; as with /ps/ as in *capsicum*, where /p/ is omitted before /s/; as for /pl/ like in *please* and *applaud*, /p/ is replaced with /f/; /l/ is omitted in medial position (p. 137). The same problems of omitting, replacing and even reversing sounds happen with /b/ clusters (/bd/, /βδz/, /bz/, /bl/ and /br/) (p. 141), /t/ clusters (/ts/, /tʃt/, /tl/, /tr/ and /tw/) (p. 146), /k/ clusters (/kt/, /ks/, /kl/, /kr/ and /kw/) (p. 152), /g/ clusters like /gl/ or /gr/ (p.154). The most serious error was /dʒd/ as in *dodged* or *trudged* (p. 156).

In terms of stress and rhythm, while 'Vietnamese...is a tone language: every word has associated with it a particular tone of voice' (Center for Applied Linguistics, 1977, p. 3), English's tones are associated with whole sentences. Hence, it is difficult for Vietnamese students to produce English accurately. Moreover, Vietnamese generally is a monosyllabic language (Thompson, 1965 cited in Hwa-Froelich, 2002) while English can be either monosyllabic or polysyllabic. Therefore, multisyllabic words pose challenges to Vietnamese speakers. Firstly, they struggle to learn the complex system of stress. Secondly, articulating a combination of multiple, long sounds and phonemes is

unfamiliar in light what they already know from their mother tongue.

Using Presentations to Enhance Pronunciation

As noted earlier, the advantages of using presentations in language classrooms are exemplified in extant literature but there remains a lack of research linking the effects of presentations to pronunciation (Schenettle, 2013).

The most relevant work was 'Integrating pronunciation for fluency in presentation skills' (Hall, 1997). Hall illustrated the use of presentations as meaningful context to practice pronunciation with an analogy: the process of hearing and imitating sounds is like 'learning to ride a bicycle on a road with no traffic' (1997, p. 4). Hence, there is a need for contexts to which learners can transfer pronunciation skills. Hill stated: 'for many ESL and EFL learners, skillful pronunciation is linked with effective presentation in an international context of developing globalization' (p. 2). Even twenty years after Hill, it remains clear that focusing feedback on pronunciation in the context of presentations is an innovative way to offer feedback on phonetic features.

Further, Morley's work (1991) shed light on the researcher-teacher's belief that group presentations are pedagogically appropriate. Using presentations to enhance phonological learning satisfies Morley's principles. To name several principles, the use of presentations does not isolate pronunciation practice but sticks with the communicative approach. Second, it also emphasizes speech awareness and self-monitoring, and, thirdly, it develops communication styles in real-life situations.

The research reported here considers sounds (including vowel, consonant sounds and consonant clusters) and word stress. These were fundamental elements in the aforementioned studies. Supra-segmental aspects such as intonation and pausing and the sociocultural feature of accent should be covered in future research. The present research focuses broadly on the possible

effectiveness of group presentations in the context of politics, a topic relevant to the curriculum of the target group. However, there is no research on the use of presentations as pedagogy for pronunciation in a Southeast Asian context. Hence, in addition to our broader evaluative enquiry, we ask the question, '*In what ways do weekly group presentations on political topics impact on second-year students' pronunciation of vowel and consonant sounds and word stress?*'

METHODOLOGY

Research in similar fields uses approaches utilizing the spectrum of qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. However, the present research applies qualitative methods following Andrew (2006) and Lee and Park (2008). The qualitative findings are accompanied by descriptive statistics.

Participants and Procedures

The 17 participants, one intact class, comprised 16 males and one female, aged from 25 to 35. They were divided into three mixed proficiency groups: high, medium and low, each of which has a nominated leader. The project was implemented over a course of one semester with eight presentation sessions. The participants were encouraged to present on political topics of personal interest.

In order to help students devote their attention to pronunciation, they were allowed to use web-based information as long as it was referenced. The participants worked together to decide presentation topics and script, then uploaded their scripts onto a forum on www.edmodo.com. After that, the teacher-researcher proof-read each group's scripts and left comments about the accuracy of word choice or grammar. Since the students were multi-level, they made mistakes with grammar and lexis, so this step assisted them in concentrating on pronunciation.

Data Collection Methods

In order to keep records of students' performances, presentations were audio-recorded and transcribed. Recorded pronunciation mistakes were scrutinized and then categorized into sounds (vowel or ending sounds, consonant clusters) and word stress. In the last session, the participants were asked to re-present their first presentation so that a clear comparison could be made. By way of feedback, profiles of the strengths and weaknesses of participants were created to demonstrate their improvement.

Interviews were employed to investigate students' attitudes towards the effects of group presentation on their pronunciation and some student comments are included in this paper. After presentation sessions, one to three participants volunteered for one-to-one interviews. To avoid any conflict of interest possibly inherent in the teacher-researcher relationship and to encourage more idea-sharing, one of the first author's colleagues who had previous experience in conducting educational research and had no teaching and assessment interest in the participants was chosen to be the interviewer. The interview focused on the participants' feelings towards speaking aloud ideas and changes in the way they present in English as well as their pronunciation or any possible constraints.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Here we discuss existing problems and noticeable impacts of group presentations, drawing on comments from interviews to support our observations. Most interview data focused on the general value of presentations as a tool for practicing spoken English, as in Nam's reflection:

Presenting in English creates a suitable environment to train our speaking skills. Some of us found it hard to explain our points. Presenting is a way we can organize our ideas in advance. With careful preparation, we feel more confident speaking English.

The findings below focus on specific aspects of vowel and consonant pronunciation, the articulation of consonant clusters, particularly word endings, and word stress.

The Pronunciation of Vowel Sounds

The audio records of the presentations revealed a variety of vowel difficulties. Some were consistent and related to other mistakes; others had strong links to word stress.

The most common mistake the students made was inability to pronounce the unstressed sound (schwa). This might be the result of lack of awareness of word stress. The majority of students pronounced words like *control* /kɔ̃vɔ̃tɾɔ̃yλ/ and *protect* /πɾɔ̃vɔ̃tɛkɾ/ as /kontrô/ and /πrỗtɛkɾ/; the English sound /o/ or /ɔ̃/ were replaced by the Vietnamese sound 'ô' /ow/. The sound 'ô' /ow/ has several allophones which do not resemble any English sound (Nguyen, 1970; Le, 1973, cited in Santry, 1992, p. 92). When this mistake was pointed out, some still faced difficulty with self-correction. This type of chronic mistake lies in the boundary of vowel sounds and word stress and this makes it more difficult to correct. Other examples were *foreign* /vɔ̃fɔ̃r.ɔ̃v/, *perspective* /πɔ̃vɔ̃pɛk.tɪv/, *ultimately* /vɔ̃zλ.tɪ.mɔ̃t.lɪ/ and *consensus* /kɔ̃vɔ̃sɛv.t.sɔ̃v/ which turned to /fɔ̃r.ɛɪv/, /πz:ɔ̃pɛk.tɪv/ ανδ /kɔ̃v.sɛv.t.sɔ̃v/ respectively. As the semester progressed, there was a decrease in this problem. Students paused before they pronounced problematic words. Students were able to 'notice a gap between what they want to say and what they can say' (Swain, 1995 cited in Izumi & Bigelow, 2000, p. 244). They applied their meta-linguistic knowledge to articulate the sound.

Another common feature was the confusion when pronouncing the sound /ɪ/. Since /ɪ/ does not occur in Vietnamese, the presenters, without careful preparation for their speech easily switched it into /A/ or /ɛ/. They had problems pronouncing words like *sanction* /vɔ̃sɔ̃ŋk.sɔ̃v/, *demand*

/δΙ∇μ{̣:νδ/, and mainland (China) /∇μεΙν.λ{̣νδ/. Their words transformed into /∇σΑΝκ.Σ{̣ν/, /δΙ∇μ{̣ν/, /∇μεΙν.λ{̣ν/. That is, the participants did not pronounce the final consonants of the words. There are observable tendencies to pronounce /{̣/ either towards an /A/ or /e/ sound. However, the participants' articulation of this sound was inconsistent. That is why it was more a mistake than a conscious adaptation of a British or American accent. This particular problem seemed to be eradicated at the end. Nam, one of the group leaders, mentioned this:

... I could not pronounce sounds like /{̣/ in 'bank' or 'cat'... I knew that I had these weaknesses before. But when participating in this project, I have opportunity to practise speaking so that I can fix my mistakes. (Nam, interview)

Also, the participants, even the strong ones, confused the two sounds /e/ and /i/. For example, the words like 'response' /ρ{̣∇σπθντσ/ and 'evaluate' /{̣∇τ{̣λ.φυ.ε{̣τ/ would be pronounced as /ρ{̣∇σπθντσ/ and /ε{̣∇τ{̣λ.φυ.ε{̣τ/, and vice versa. Similarly, 'threat' /Τρ{̣ετ/ will be pronounced as /Τρ{̣ετ/. One of the students reported that:

Before I took part in the project, I usually pronounced 'interest' as /∇in{̣rest/, but it is /∇in{̣rɪst/, and 'respect' as /r{̣e'spekt/ instead of /r{̣ɪ'spekt/ (Hung, interview)

The frequency of this mistake dropped significantly throughout the project. Among the final sessions, only mix-ups were evident. Interestingly, Minh, the last presenter in the final presentation, changed 'EU' /t:∇φu:/ into /e.u:/. It is because 'e' sounds /i:/ in English, yet it sounds /e/ in Vietnamese. Similarly, while 'i' sounds /ai/ in English, it sound /i:/ in Vietnamese (Cheng, 1991; Thompson, 1965; Thuy, 1975 cited in Hwa-Froelich et al., 2002, p. 267).

Clearly, the pressure pushed him back to his 'language of thought' (Pavlenko 2011). He had spoken and heard /e.u:/ (wrong) much more frequently than the /t:∇φu:/ (correct). In addition to these noticeable mistakes, the students encountered other problems with vowel sounds. One of them was between long and short vowels, for example, 'seek' and 'cheap' with long /i:/ was pronounced as /σ{̣k/ or /τΣ{̣π/. The reason for this common error is that 'as opposed to English, Vietnamese language does not have the tense-lax contrasts of /i, I/ ανδ /υ, Y/' (Hwa-Froelich et al., 2002, p. 267). Further, there was confusion between /ie/ and /ε≡/: when a presenter was supposed to say 'railway' /∇ρ{̣ε{̣λ.ωε{̣/, he said /ρ{̣ε≡ρ.ωε{̣/ (/I/ in the middle was omitted and replaced by /r/).

The Pronunciation of Consonants and Consonant Clusters

Looking from a contrastive view, the differences in terms of consonants between English and Vietnamese are quite phenomenal. First of all, Hwa-Froelich (2002, p. 271) stated that 'most Vietnamese syllables do not end in consonants' and 'the Vietnamese language only allows voiceless stop consonants and nasals in the code...it is usually difficult for the Vietnamese speakers to pronounce English final consonant'. Besides, the distinction also lies in whether the consonant sound is aspirated and unaspirated. Hwa-Froelich (2002, p. 266) established that English speakers produce both aspirated and unaspirated stops, 'for example /p/ in 'pan' is aspirated, but /p/ in span is not' and that final consonants in Vietnamese, in contrast, are all unaspirated or implosive. Therefore, Vietnamese speakers tend not to pronounce the final consonants (Cheng, 1991; Center for Applied Linguistics, 1977; Flipsen, 1992 cited in Hwa-Froelich 2002, p. 266). The phonemes /t/ and /k/ in Vietnamese are also unaspirated in initial position while they are never so in English. That makes listeners trained in English phonology perceive them as /d/ or /f/. The last important factor differing Vietnamese from English is that 'the

Vietnamese language does not have consonant clusters or blends' (Cheng, 1991, Thompson, 1965, cited in Hwa-Froelich, 2002, p. 265). All of the information plays a crucial role as both foundation and explanation for the findings about consonants in this research.

Similar to the aforementioned descriptions, the participants in this project tend to either delete the endings sounds or devoice them. It was particularly noticed that the final consonants were likely to be omitted the most, including /s/, /t/, /d/, /l/, /v/, /b/, /g/, /θ/, /ð/ and affricates sounds like /tʃ/ or /dʒ/. For voiced sounds like /z/, /b/, /d/, the participants are inclined to either drop them or devoiced them to /s/, /p/ or /t/. This was explained by *Speak English like a Native* (2015) that 'In English, frequent shifts between voiced and voiceless consonants are required to distinguish between certain words. Such mechanism does not exist and is not required in Vietnamese, thus, constitutes a complex problem.' Last but not least, for *-ed* morphological endings, students either totally ignored the sounds or added the extra syllable /ɪδ/ no matter what sound was in front of the *-ed* ending. To illustrate, students would say sentences such as 'Hong Kong has strongly developed' as /δɪvɔpɛλ.≡πɪδ/ instead of /δɪvɔpɛλ.≡πτ/.

Now, we turn to analyzing the complexity of the /s/ sounds. Firstly, as to the morphological *-s-* endings, whether they comprise plural countable nouns, possessive or third person singular verbs, most students omitted them in their first presentations. For those who were aware of the existence of *-s-* endings, it was unlikely that they could master three ways of pronouncing *-s-* endings including /s/, /z/ and extra syllable for sibilant sounds. The root problems can be tracked back to the lack of understanding about voiced and voiceless sounds in English. Also, the participants failed in producing words with '-s', '-ce' or '-se' at the end; for example *always, peace, release, cause, grievance, the United States* or *human rights*. Additionally, the medial production of /s/ sound also challenged the participants. Those words included, to name a few, *risk, against, boost, most, transaction* or *satisfaction*. The above finding that Vietnamese does not have consonant clusters or blends explained to a great extent why these participants could not pronounce the words accurately. In terms of communicative freight, the most severe kind of mistake, however, was not the omission of the /s/ sounds but the careless addition of the sound. Three out of 17 participants frequently added the /s/ sounds irresponsibly at the end of all types of words. This particular problem hindered understanding to a great extent.

Below is a table that records the times students made mistakes with the /s/ sounds:

Table 1. Comparison of /s/ Sound Mistakes in 8 Sessions

Student	Session Number							
	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
Group 1								
Hung	3	4	6	6	2	1	0	3
Hieu	2	2	8	X	3	0	0	0
Lee	1	8	6	5	1	6	6	0
Phong	1	2	3	9	X	2	2	1
Group 2								
Nam	8	7	2	5	2	2	0	2
N.Hoang	4	6	2	7	X	5	2	0
Binh	4	1	2	4	1	0	0	1
A.Hoang	6	7	4	6	4	6	2	6
B.Minh	5	2	5	X	2	1	1	5

Dinh	5	10	5	4	X	4	13	0
Anh	1	6	9	5	1	10	5	0
D.Minh	3	5	6	7	2	0	0	2
Group 3								
Long	5	6	0	8	3	2	0	1
Phong	2	6	5	8	4	8	2	2
Cuong	2	3	3	0	5	5	0	0
Hai	7	2	8	8	4	X	1	1
C.Minh	6	7	9	X	3	8	4	6

There was a downward trend in the frequency of this particular mistake in the second-half of the project. Reliable comparison could be made between the first and the last presentations because they were linguistically identical. The majority of the participants reduced the number of times they repeated the mistakes. Among them, five students did not make any mistakes in their last presentation. This could reflect the positive impact of practicing presenting in English on pronouncing this consonant sound.

Single final consonants were difficult, not to mention consonants clusters. Clusters like ‘most’, ‘resurrect’, ‘dealt’, ‘human rights’ were hard. The participants found clusters like ‘world’, ‘protests’, ‘risks’, ‘boosts’, ‘unrests’, ‘context’ or ‘biggest’ impossible to produce. It was especially hard for the presenters when they faced clusters composed of all voiced sounds like ‘hailed’, ‘cancelled’, ‘perspectives’ or ‘dissolve’. In fact, ‘final cluster reduction also occurs widely in English native speaker casual speech...deleting the second consonant of a sequence of three’ (Selkirk, 1972; Temperley, 1983 cited in Osburne, 1996, p. 165). However, the participants in this project tend to omit two last consonants or all of three consonants. For clusters that appeared at the middle of the words, such as ‘milestone’, ‘engagement’, ‘worldwide’, the participants would turn them to something totally different with the origins.

Despite student complaints about these clusters, the numbers of mistakes with consonants in general reduced greatly in the last three sessions. The students who

improved underwent two phases. Minh described the first phase as characterised by some students focusing too much on every word or sound so that listeners could not understand the whole sentence. According to Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen (2001) and Izumi and Bigelow (2000), the requirement of output activity triggers students’ attention to form incidentally. In this particular case, the form that the participants attended is the individual sound rather than other verbal or non-verbal expression factors such as fluency or confidence. Fortunately, there was also the second phase where the participants got used to harmonize individual sounds with features of a good speech. They noticed their own and others’ improvements. Hieu, after presentation session eight, shared:

When I first participated in this project, I feel very nervous speaking in front of people. But by practicing every week, even my classmates can see that after the fifth session, I have showed to be more confident. I think so too. I even use more body language and eye-contact.

The two phases experienced by the participants proved that the benefits of conducting group presentations covered both non-verbal and verbal aspects.

Word Stress

In the past, I didn’t focus on both word stress and intonation. After this project, I now pay more attention to word stress. (Hieu)

Findings about Vietnamese use of stress must consider the nature of the language. Hence, it is worthwhile mentioning its distinguishing characteristics. As discussed in the literature review, Vietnamese is a tone language which means every word has associated with it a particular tone of voice (Center for Applied Linguistics, 1977). In contrast, tone associates with English at the sentence level to ‘change the meaning from a directive, to a question, to a statement of fact, and intonation can be used to show surprise, anger, happiness, depression, or sadness.’ (Hwa-Froelich, 2002, p. 267). Furthermore, the monosyllabic character of the Vietnamese language challenges Vietnamese learners of English to pronounce multisyllabic words. According to Carr (2012), learners of English are very different from native speakers, who can judge what syllable in a word receives primary stress, secondary stress or otherwise. Thus, learners of English have no choice but to store vocabulary and their stress pattern rather than rote learning.

One of the unique features of this research is that the participants presented about political topics. Vocabulary in political themes normally contains a large amount of multisyllabic words and complex terminology such as *pragmatics*, *sovereignty*, *humanitarian* or proper nouns like *Angela Merkel*, *François Hollande*, *Counternarcotic Letter of Agreement*. To pronounce these words intelligibly and systematically given the Germanic and French origins of the first two, the students needed to understand the systems of words stress as well as get used to the ways these words are pronounced on the media and remember them. However, this was not the case:

Like many other friends of mine, when I faced difficult and unfamiliar words, I often spoke it unclearly or smaller so that nobody would notice. But in fact, no one understand us if we do like that. (D.Binh, interview)

As analyzed above, in the beginning stage, the participants did not recognize the

unstressed sounds and tended to pronounce vowels with their strong form. Pronouncing this way did not allow any word stress because stress only happens when one of the syllables in a word is pronounced longer, louder and higher in pitch (Beckman & Edwards, 1994). Besides, the participants did not shift stress when the word they spoke was reduced in form. Students’ lack of understanding about word stress derivation was evidenced when they said *strategy* and *strategic*. In the former word, the primary stress is on the first syllable / \forall στρ{τ.ε.δZι/, but it is on the second syllable in the later one /στρε \forall τι:.δZικ/. All of the participants encountered the word ‘strategic’ for the first time in this project and would pronounce it / \forall στρ{τι.δZικ/. They kept both the vowel sound and the placement of stress on the first syllable intact while still pronouncing the second syllable in its strong form.

Below is a table recording participants’ word stress mistakes in the first three sessions:

Table 2. Word Stress Mistakes in the First Three Sessions

Mistakes	Correct stress
CONTROL /κοντρô/ (/λ/ was omitted)	conTROL /κε \forall τρεYλ/
BOOMerang (effect) /βυ:.μê.ρ{N/	BOOmerang (effect) / \forall βυ:.με.ρ{N/
ASYMMetrically /εΙ.σΙ:μετ.ρΙ.κλΙ/	AsymMETrically /ε%εΙ.σΙ \forall μετ.ρΙ.κλΙ/
FOREIGN / \forall φΘρ.εΙν/	FOreign / \forall φΘρ.ε \forall ν/
CONSIderable /κον.σΙδ.ερ.ε.βλ/	considerable /κε \forall σΙδ.ερ.ε.βλ/
ORTHOdox /O:.To.δΘσ/ (/k/ was omitted)	ORThodox / \forall O:.Tε.δΘκσ/
MANIpulate /μανΙπ.φY.λεΙτ/	maNIpulate /με \forall νΙπ.φY
RepreSENTAtive /ε%ρεπ.ρΙ \forall ζεν.τεΙ.τΙ / (/ν/ was omitted)	RepreSENTative /ε%ρεπ.ρΙ \forall ζεν.τε \forall .τΙ ω/

TErriTORY /τερ.Ι.τορ.ι/ PERSPECTive /π3: σπεκ.τι/ (/v/ was omitted)	TErritory /∇τερ.Ι.τ≅ρ.ι/ perSPECTive /π≅∇σπεκ.τι∅/ SEPARatist /σεπ.ειρ.≅.τισ/ (/t/ was omitted)
ULtiMATEly /∇ζλ.τι.μειτ.λι/ FORWARD /∇φΟ:.ωΑ:κ/ (/d/ was omitted and changed to a sound like a /k/)	ULtimately /∇ζλ.τι.μ≅τ.λι/ FORward /∇φΟ:.ω≅δ/ EVALuate /ε∅{λ.φυ.ει/ (/t/ was omitted)
autoNOMous /Ο:τΘ.ν.ο.μ≅σ/ eCONOMIC /%ι:.κο∇νΘμ.ικ/ CONSENSus /κον∇σεν.σ≅σ/ (/t/ was omitted)	auTONomous /Ο:∇τΘν.≅.μ≅σ/ ecoNOMIC /%ι:.κ≅∇νΘμ.ικ/ conSENSus /κ≅ν∇σεντ.σ≅σ/ ReVOLUtionary /%ρε∇∅δ.λυ:.Σ≅ν.≅ ρ.ι/ (/o/ was changed to /δ/)
deveLOPment /δι∅ε∇λδπ.μ≅ντ/ (/≅/ was changed to /δ/)	deVEloPment /δι∇∅ελ.≅π.μ≅ντ/

These above examples indicated that the participants had serious problems with word stress. They did not remember the stress patterns and gave the wrong stress placement in an unpredictable way. However, there were still some common trends: firstly, students put equal strength, length and pitch on both syllables of bi-syllabic words; secondly, for words having more than three syllables, stress was likely to be placed at the third one; lastly, as analyzed above, they hardly pronounced the weak form of the syllable. Consequently, it was impossible to tell where the stress syllable was.

Positive changes were made during the process. In session six, there were a mixture of wrong and correct pronunciations and stress placements. To illustrate, Lee used correct stress in words like *terri ∇torial issues* or *diplo ∇matic policy* but still placed wrong stress on *deve ∇lopment* and *in ∇stability*. Phong also made the same mistake with *deve ∇lopment* but he pronounced *eco ∇nomic* and *po ∇litical coope ∇ration* with correct stress. For words that they had the habit of putting the stress in a wrong position, it was much harder to change than other words. It was also observed that the participants gradually gained their confidence in word stress after the first three sessions:

Word stress is relatively easier because we can check it on the dictionary. Recently, I also revise some rules in word stress and I can apply them. (Phong, interview)

Their confidence in word stress showed in the last presentation sessions. Almost all long complicated words were produced clearly: *infrastructure, peaceful negotiation, evacuation, humanitarian crisis, administration, multipolar world legitimate interest, asymmetrically, phytosanitary measures, referendum and annexation.*

CONCLUSIONS

Overall Evaluation of the Project

Participants took advantage of their group presentation project to practice and improve their pronunciation skills. Evaluation of the presentation as a pedagogical device was strong:

Vietnamese students often focus and spend most of their time on grammar or writing, but we do not spend enough time practicing speaking. So, when we talk to foreigners, we often feel nervous and inconvenient about ourselves. Presenting in English gives us opportunity to practice speaking. (D.Binh, interview)

Students' levels of improvement, however, were highly diverse. The first group of students, the high-competence group, found that their pronunciation underwent positive but not dramatic changes. They fixed minor sound mistakes and strengthened their correct placement of stress. The main beneficiaries were in the medium-competence group. They learned a great deal from exchanging ideas and peer editing with other members as well as observing stronger presenters. They noticed their improvement over time and consolidated their confidence by receiving positive feedback from their peers. The last group, the lower-competence group, did not make much progress in pronunciation. These students could not give clear answers about their strengths and weaknesses when interviewed. In general, participants developed a sense of responsibility to communicate effectively and genuinely wanted their audience to understand what they presented.

Although the intended purpose of this project was to heighten the participants' pronunciation, the wider data set confirmed the other benefits of presentations mentioned in the literature including substantial gain in vocabulary, grammar structures and self-assurance. Some vocabulary, especially political terminology and multisyllabic words as well as complex grammar structures, were accumulated through the process of preparing for presentations. Self-confidence, on the other hand, was boosted through the procedure of frequently performing in public. The students also reported that they could build more background knowledge about international affairs and political disciplines.

Reflections and Pedagogical Implications

Within the researchers' observation, pronunciation errors had been made mainly because the participants had not been aware of the problems in their spoken language. Most of the participants in this project yielded positive results in pronunciation because they developed accurate awareness about both their strengths and weaknesses in

articulating sounds and stress. We believe that learners should be able to recognize their mistakes so that they are able to narrow the gap between their versions of English with the target ones. As our research results suggest, noticing why and how something is wrong benefited participants' phonological learning.

The act of addressing the participants' pronunciation errors explicitly was not the only cause for their improvements; it was also because of the constructive efforts of the instructor. This project was conducted in such a way that grammar and vocabulary mistakes had been limited or eliminated in advance so that the students could pay their full attention to pronunciation. Some of the significant ramifications were that the students actually '*learned a lot about grammar*' (D. Binh, interview) and they gained more insight into political terminology. Secondly, each presentation session was managed so that there was enough room for pedagogical instructions. Theory about sounds including minimal pair sounds, voiced and unvoiced, sounds that are not available in Vietnamese language and stress patterns were reintroduced. Again, the role of teachers or instructors in such a project like this is of paramount importance.

Taking these above issues into consideration, there are several suggestions for future group presentation projects to maximize benefits in language teaching in general and in teaching speaking in particular. Firstly, the students should be grouped into mixed-ability group and led by a strong and responsible leader. The idea was suggested in the research of Truong and Storch (2008) and is confirmed by our research. The leaders were the role models for their own group members although their working styles were very different. Secondly, teachers/ instructors should give detailed feedback on each presentation. In our experience, for a Vietnamese classroom, teachers' comments and feedback have been always valued; nevertheless, teachers should also be sensitive to individuals' traits. Thus, positive feedback should be raised in public

and negative feedback should be given in person. Finally, students should be evaluated by consistent benchmarks or criteria. These criteria should be introduced in advance so that students can use them as guidelines.

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- Question 2:** Do you think speaking ideas aloud is an effective way to practice pronunciation? Why or why not?
- Question 3:** What are your problems with group presentations?
- Question 4:** Think of the pronunciation issues you face when giving a group presentation. What aspects of pronunciation do you find easy?
- Question 5:** What aspects of pronunciation do you find difficult/ challenging?
- Question 6:** Has your pronunciation improved in the last 2/4/6/8 weeks?
- (If the answer is “yes”,) how do you think your pronunciation has improved?
 - (If the answer is “no”,) why do you think that is?
- Question 7:** In your own judgment, what were the strengths of your pronunciation before this program?
- Question 8:** What were the weaknesses of your pronunciation before this program?
- Question 9:** What are the strengths of your pronunciation now?
- Question 10:** What are the weaknesses of your pronunciation now?
- Other optional questions:**
1. What do you think about your vocabulary range after taking part in group presentations in the last 2/4/6/8 weeks?
 2. Are you more confident now than you were before taking part in this project? (If yes, in what ways?)
 3. How has taking part in this project influenced your attitude towards delivering group presentations?
 4. Is there any other way of practicing pronunciation you prefer?

APPENDIX A:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Question 1: Do you think presenting in English is a good way to practice speaking? Why or why not?

5. What sort of feedback would help you? given? (For example, individual feedback
What form of feedback would you like to be from teachers or peer feedback)