Teacher cognition on pronunciation teaching and testing in the Tunisian EFL context

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Abstract

The present paper reports research results on teachers' cognition of pronunciation teaching and testing in the Tunisian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context. Insight into teachers' knowledge, beliefs and practice of pronunciation teaching and assessment were obtained through semi-structured interview questions, classroom observation, and document analysis. While teachers possessed a sound knowledge of the content of their courses, their practice of pronunciation teaching reflects a traditional view of this skill rather than the research-based communicative view. This traditional view is manifested in the use of Audiolingual drills, in setting native-like pronunciation as objective of instruction, and in giving precedence to segments over prosody. Classroom observation sessions demonstrated that teachers' knowledge and beliefs about pronunciation instruction are clearly reflected in their teaching practice. Analysis of previous tests used by the participant teachers to assess the pronunciation gains of their students reveals an alarming confusion in their testing practice. Many of the tests in the analyzed sample appeared to lack validity and balance. These insights into the issue require effective intervention from teacher trainers and stakeholders to provide assistance and training for these teachers in order to improve teaching and assessment of pronunciation and to highlight its salience for successful communication.

Key words: *Teacher cognition, pronunciation teaching, assessment, Tunisian context*

1.   Introduction

Pronunciation is considered a key element of phonological competence. It involves the acquisition and mastery of various components of the sound system of the target language. It is an important skill that leads to fluency and to successful communication in the target language. Lack of mastery over basic segments (consonants and vowels) and suprasegmental features (stress, intonation, and rhythm) in L2 English (English as a second language) can affect a learner's intelligibility which is a main goal of communicative language teaching. Intelligibility and comprehensibility are today key concepts in L2 pronunciation research. Intelligibility is defined by Derwing and Munro (2005, p.385) as "the extent to which a listener actually understands an utterance" while comprehensibility is "a listener's perception of how difficult it is to understand an utterance", respectively. They represent reasonable goals in teaching pronunciation to L2 learners because they evade the frustration of trying to sound native-like imposed by traditional teaching methods such as the Audiolingual Method. Although research in L2 pronunciation has reached advanced levels and has clearly proved the efficiency of pronunciation instruction, especially when

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pronunciation is considered as a cognitive skill and is taught in the context of meaningful interaction rather than as an isolated skill (Couper, 2003, 2009, 2011; Fraser, 2000, 2006a, 2006b), its outcomes have not been implemented in most classrooms by pronunciation teachers who do not seem to benefit from results of research in this field. Many language teachers tend to avoid teaching pronunciation due to various factors, mainly lack of training, lack of exposure to research in this filed, or lack of confidence in their abilities to teach this skill. Therefore researching teacher cognition of pronunciation teaching is necessary.

1.1. Teacher cognition

Studying or researching teacher cognition is one of the most complex studies that can be undertaken because it requires inspection of various cognitive dimensions such as cognition of language knowledge, teachers' experiences, their beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes, most of which are elusive concepts that are generally difficult to measure or assess. Most of these dimensions have been explored by different researchers under the term teacher cognition and have been related to practice of teachers in their classrooms. According to Borg (2009, p.164), "teacher cognition research is concerned with understanding what teachers think, know and believe." In an earlier study, Borg (2006, p.35) presents second language teacher cognition as "an often tacit, personally-held practical system of mental constructs held by teachers and which are dynamic-i.e. defined and redefined on the basis of educational and professional experiences throughout teachers' lives". Research into teacher cognition should therefore address what teachers have cognitions about, i.e. their knowledge and beliefs, the way these cognitions develop, the way they interact with teacher learning, as well as the way they interact with classroom practice (Borg 2003, p. 81). Most of these aspects of teacher cognition are investigated in teacher education research as teacher cognition is considered crucial to better grasp and understand the link between teachers' mental lives and their practices (Barnard & Burns, 2012; Borg, 2006). Backer (2011) is one of the most comprehensive studies on teacher cognition of L2 pronunciation instruction as it addressed most of the aspects of this construct and showed that postgraduate education positively affected experienced L2 teachers' cognition in her study and influenced their classroom practice. She therefore calls for including L2 pronunciation pedagogy in teacher education programs. Teacher cognition is in most of the cases measured through semi-structured interviews, classroom observation, as well as questionnaires and recall interviews. Teacher cognition, however, should not only cover their knowledge and beliefs or attitudes on how to teach the language but also it should encompass knowledge on how to appropriately test language skills and how to measure the progress of their learners. Unfortunately, most of the studies that tackle the issue of second language teacher cognition discard teachers' knowledge of how to effectively assess the performance of their students in pronunciation learning and measure their progress in appropriate ways. Actually, in most L2 pronunciation research, pronunciation testing is the area on which literature is scarce and research is considered in its infancy stage.

According to Celci-murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (2010, p.308), testing and evaluation are "undeniably interwoven and essential to the entire process and cycle of curriculum development and teaching". Although a large body of literature has discussed evaluation and testing of speaking skills in general (Luoma, 2004), there is less literature that tackles the issue of what to test when we assess pronunciation development and how this should be done. Teachers of pronunciation are left to their own intuition in trying to assess and measure the progress and achievement of their learners in terms of pronunciation learning. Apart from Celci-murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (2010), a few textbooks and resource manuals provide useful criteria on how to measure pronunciation achievement. In addition, in most studies which suggest innovative ways of pronunciation instruction, rarely is the issue of how to measure pronunciation progress and teachers' awareness of it are discussed. The present study, therefore, aims to explore some aspects of Tunisian teachers' cognition about English pronunciation teaching, as well as their knowledge and practices in testing pronunciation. Before stating the research questions and presenting the methodology of data collection for this study, it is worthwhile providing an overview about the Tunisian EFL context.

1.2. The Tunisian EFL context and pronunciation teaching

The Tunisian sociolinguistic context is a case in point of a typical multilingual context for language acquisition. In this context, children speak Tunisian Arabic as their mother tongue and the language used for everyday social interaction. They start learning Modern Standard Arabic (the official language of the country) at school at the age of six, learn French later (at the age of eight) as a second language (L2), and then learn English as a foreign language (L3). Daoud (2011, pp.9-10) describes the sociolinguistic situation in Tunisia:

> For the last one hundred years or so, and particularly in the period following independence from France in 1956, the language situation had evolved into a diaglossic/multilingual one characterized nowadays by a mitigated maintenance of Arabic, the national/official language, an ongoing ideological, sociocultural rivalry between Arabic and French, an intensified pragmatic, functional competition between French and English, and an overall sense of deteriorating competence in all these languages among the younger generations, coupled with an unsettled cultural orientation.

In this complex language situation, Tunisian EFL learners generally profit from their knowledge of French at the lexico-semantic level. Knowledge of French as L2 would facilitate their comprehension and processing of cognate vocabulary such as the words, *hotel, passport,* or *information.* However, at the phonological level the previously learnt languages (Arabic and French) seem to make the process of acquiring English pronunciation much more

difficult as demonstrated by Ghazali and Bouchhioua (2003) and Bouchhioua (2016), where both Tunisian Arabic and French were found to affect the pronunciation of Tunisian EFL learners especially in word stress placement and in the production of nasalized vowels. Actually, in the Tunisian EFL context research in pronunciation instruction is scarce in comparison to other areas such as morpho-syntax, reading and writing skills, and vocabulary learning. In addition, teachers do not receive any training in how to teach pronunciation to EFL learners. At the middle and high school levels, students have three hours of English a week on average. An official book designed by the Ministry of Education is used. Pronunciation teaching is almost absent. At the end a few units of the textbook, activities such as *"Put S (similar) or D (different) for the underlined sounds: though-thief"*, or *"Circle the stressed syllable: photo-photography-photographic"* are presented to learners without any oral input, just from orthography. According to Elkassami's (2014) survey, EFL secondary school teachers of English, who are 100% non-native speakers, admit that they generally overlook pronunciation teaching. Some of them see it is not necessary to teach pronunciation and students will learn it by themselves. Others acknowledge its importance, but report that they always have no time for it and prefer to cover "much more important" skills in the syllabus such as grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing. The testing system itself contributes to reinforcing this negligence as in the distribution of marks in the English test, only few marks (2%) go to pronunciation, if it is tested at all. This neglect of pronunciation teaching and the underestimation of its importance for communication resulted in the failure of many learners to develop an intelligible pronunciation (Ghazali & Bouchhioua, 2003). Even students who choose to major in English report to feel embarrassed to present any assignments orally because they think their pronunciation is poor (Elkassmi, 2014).

At the tertiary level, that is in English departments where students major in English to become future teachers of English or use it as the main language in other jobs such as translation, interpretation, or whatever filed in which communication is achieved through English, the common practice in teaching English pronunciation is that either pronunciation is taught as articulatory phonetics (where students generally learn *about* the sounds and not how to pronounce the sounds themselves), or a pronunciation book is adapted and some production and/or perception activities are chosen and practiced in ad-hoc ways. Many Tunisian EFL learners as a result of this practice have not been effectively aided to develop accuracy in pronunciation, and were not able to achieve their goals of becoming successful communicators in the English language.

Because teachers are the real mediators of the learning process and play a significant role in its success or failure, their cognition about pronunciation teaching and testing needs to be investigated in order to gain more insight into the issue and to allow detecting the areas that require further

exploration and assistance. The present study, thus, aims to explore the following research questions:

1. What knowledge and beliefs do Tunisian teachers of English hold about pronunciation teaching and testing?

2. Are their knowledge and beliefs reflected in their teaching practices and in their pronunciation tests?

2. Methodology

The research design consisted of semi-structured interviews with four teachers of English pronunciation, classroom observation, and analysis of 15 sample tests used by teachers to measure the achievement of their students during the last three academic years (2015-2018).

2.1. Participants

The participants in this study were four female non-native speaker teachers of English aged between 38 and 45 years old. They were all Tunisians employed by the ministry of Higher Education in Tunisia to teach general English as a minor subject at different Tunisian universities (they are known with the French term 'Tronc commun' teachers, which means that they can serve both as teachers in secondary schools within the Ministry of Education, or teachers of English as minor subject in different higher education institutions). Many of those teachers, however, were sent to universities with languages departments such as the English department where English is a major subject and students receive intensive education to become English teachers, translators, or interpreters. Subjects taught to this type of students include the four language skills (reading-writing-speaking-listening), pronunciation, as well as literature (drama, poetry, fiction, literary theory), linguistics (phonetics, phonology syntax, morphology, semantics, etc.) and culture studies of English speaking countries (British and American culture and history, mainly).

Teachers who teach English major students at the English department are supposed to hold a PhD degree in linguistics, literature, or culture studies or at least hold an MA degree and should be at an advanced stage in their PhD research process. Because of the great lack of English language teachers holding PhD degrees in the areas mentioned, head of departments and deans or directors resorted to the help of non-PhD holders and general English teachers ('Tronc commun') to teach what they consider 'minor' subjects that require less qualification such as language skills and pronunciation. The four participants in this study were of this category as they were directly involved to help with pronunciation teaching in the English department in a well-known Tunisian university, though none of them holds an MA degree in TESOL, Applied Linguistics, or any other field of English language studies . Table 1 below provides background information about these four female teachers.

Table1
Participants' background information

Teachers	University degree	Years of Teacher experience	Subjects taught	Mother Tongue
Aey	Maitrise (BA)	13	Pronunciation/Reading/writing	Tunisian Arabic
Bee	Maitrise (BA)	12	Pronunciation	Tunisian Arabic
Cee	Maitrise (BA)	10	Pronunciation	Tunisian Arabic
Dee	Maitrise (BA)	14	Pronunciation/grammar/ reading/writing	Tunisian Arabic

2.2. Classroom observation

The second instrument of data collection for this study consisted of sessions of non-participant classroom observation with the four teachers for each level they teach (Level 1 and Level 2). Level 1 corresponds to the second year of the 'License' (equivalent to BA) degree of these students, while Level 2 corresponds to the third year, which is the final year of the 'License' degree in English. The researcher observed each level three times during the course[2] with each teacher. One time at the beginning of the course, one time at the middle of the course and one time at the end of the course, which results in 3 sessions of observation with 4 teachers for Level 1 students and 3 sessions with 4 teachers for Level 2. The total number of classroom observation sessions was 24. During each session the researcher sat at the back of the language laboratory and collected information on target features using an observation sheet.

2.3. Document analysis

A sample of 15 previous tests used by the participant teachers to measure the achievements of their students at the end of each term during the academic years 2015-2018 were obtained in order to analyze what teachers do in order to measure pronunciation gains of their students and to check whether what they report in the semi-structured interview about their testing practices is reflected in their tests.

2.4. The semi- structured interview questions

The semi-structured interview consisted of yes/no and open-ended questions that were meant to elicit the information needed from the respondent teachers. The rationale behind opting for a semi-structured interview and not a return questionnaire is to enable the researcher to prompt and probe

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[2] The course is spread over 24 weeks in an academic year which comprises two terms of 12 weeks each.

the participants for further clarifications about certain questions and provide them with the opportunity to express themselves on any points they want to raise about their experiences with teaching pronunciation (see Appendix A).

2.5. Data analysis:
Data collected from the semi-structured interviews, the 24 sessions of classroom observation, as well as the previous tests obtained from teachers were analyzed qualitatively and/or quantitatively depending on the point investigated.

3. Findings
3.1. The Semi-structured interview results
As stated in the method section above, the background questions about the participant teachers revealed they are of almost of the same age and of almost the same years of teaching experience; 41.5 mean ages, and 12.25 mean of teaching experience years. Three teachers, Aey, Bee, and Cee, were students in the same department they are currently teaching in. They all hold the same university degree (Maitrise= four years BA) and none of them has an MA in TESOL, Applied Linguistics, or any other area of English language studies. Responding to interview question 2 *"Did you choose to teach pronunciation?"* the four teachers reported they did not choose to teach this subject. When the researcher asked, *"How did you land on pronunciation then?"* they all said that they were assigned the course by the head of department as soon as they joined the teaching team. One of them, Teacher Dee, said that she was assigned a grammar course first and then, the head of department told her that she will be given a pronunciation course as well. Teachers Bee and Cee say that when they joined the department, there were no native-speaker pronunciation teachers, and the only experienced native-speaker teacher who used to coordinate the pronunciation laboratory course was going to retire and they had to join and help with teaching the course. The answer to question 3 of the interview *"have you ever had any training on how to teach pronunciation?"* was "NO" for the four participants. None of the fourth teachers had any training in pronunciation teaching. Teachers Bee and Cee report that the experienced native speaker colleague showed them how to use the language lab, which is a traditional language laboratory that comprises a set of booths, each providing a cassette deck, and an accompanying microphone and headphones as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The language lab where the participants teach the pronunciation
         course

The native speaker teacher provided them with a course he had personally designed and told them to follow it exactly. The NO answer to this question by teachers Bee and Cee shows that they do not consider this as training on how to teach pronunciation. Surprisingly, when asked whether they enjoy teaching pronunciation (Question 4: *do you enjoy teaching pronunciation?*), they all answered "YES". Though, they did not choose to teach the subject and had no pedagogical training on how to teach this skill, the four teachers seemed to enjoy their experience of pronunciation teaching. The next question (Q5) was: *"If you were offered the opportunity of training in pronunciation teaching, would you consider it?"* The answer to this question was YES by the four teachers.

The second part of the semi-structured interview addressed teachers' cognition of pronunciation teaching approaches, methods, focus, and objectives. Question 6 was *"what approach do you follow in your pronunciation course?"* The four teachers used the words "listen and repeat". Teacher Cee, added, "I think it's called the Audiolingual Approach". Question 7 was *"what teaching method do you follow in teaching pronunciation?"* Teacher Aey used the terms "transcribing, listening, repeating", Bee answered "students listen to a tape, they identify and produce sounds, stress, and intonation". Teacher Cee used the terms, "Audiolingual method, or direct method...?" which revealed her uncertainty about the name of the method she is using. Teacher Dee resorted to the same description of "listening and repeating". It seems here that most of the participants are not familiar with the technical terms used in pronunciation pedagogy, which is not surprising since none of them had training in pronunciation teaching. When prompted further to see if any other ways of teaching are used in the lab course, Teacher Aey said that they also make students play conversations in pairs. The researcher asked "how does the way students are seated, that is in separate booths, allow playing conversations or dialogues?" Teacher Aey then answered: "we ask them to come in pairs to whiteboard, next to the teacher's desk, face their peers, and role play the conversations". When asked about which textbook(s) they use in teaching pronunciation

(Question 8), the four teachers mentioned that they use a variety of books and internet resources. When probed by the researcher to give at least the title of one of the books they use, none of the teachers could remember a single title. Teacher Aey said that she "can't remember any titles because it's a collection of photocopied units from different books", and added that she can check when she goes home and send the researcher the name of some of the textbooks she uses. Teacher Bee reports that in addition to the material from various text books, she also uses "a former course I had when I was a student". Teacher Cee also said that she uses in addition to teaching units from multiple books, the course designed by the experienced native speaker colleague who introduced her to the pronunciation course and who was her teacher when she was an English major student in the same English department. It is worth mentioning, however, that teachers Aey and Bee were also students of the same colleague teacher who introduced them to the course. Both of them are now using parts of his course to teach the subject.

The next part of the semi-structured interview attempted to investigate teachers' cognition of the content of the pronunciation syllabus. The answers of the four teachers show that both segments (vowels and consonants), as well as suprasegmental features such as stress and intonation are taught. Teachers added when they are asked whether their course covered any other aspects of English pronunciation that they also teach linking, syllable structure, and they do a lot of phonetic transcription of Standard British English as the norm accent chosen in their course. In response to question 10 (*What do you start with, segments or suprasegmental features?),* all teachers replied that they teach segments to Level1 students and suprasegmental features to level 2 students. When asked about the rationale behind this choice, none of the teachers provided a scientific or pedagogical reason. They say that they are following the tradition of the native speaker teacher who introduced them to the course. The semi-structured interview tried also to elicit information from the teachers about their objectives from teaching pronunciation (Q11). Teachers Aey and Cee report that they want to help their students to become fluent and native-like. Teachers Aey and Dee provided no answer to this question. The following question (Q12) was *"do you think that it's enough for your students to be intelligible and comprehensible even with a foreign accent or do you want them to sound native-like?".* Teachers Aey and Cee, who have just mentioned that their objective is to help their students become fluent and native-like, answered that they can tolerate that their students' speech is simply intelligible and comprehensible enough to native speakers, but they prefer that students opt for native-like British English pronunciation. Teachers Bee and Dee, however, insisted that their students sound native-like.

The last part of the semi-structured interview tackled the issue of testing pronunciation. Teachers were asked: *"How do you measure the progress of your students in terms of pronunciation learning?"* (Q13). Teachers Bee and Cee simply replied that they use "regular testing exercises". Teachers Aey and Dee were more precise as they added that they test their students' perception and production of English sounds. When they were further probed to specify what forms of tests they use to assess progress in

pronunciation acquisition (Q14).Teacher Cee said that she makes them identify sounds to test their perception and makes them produce utterances to test their production of "wh-questions, and yes/no questions". Teacher Aey reported that she tests "everything from the shortest sound to the intonation of sentences". She added that she asks them to identify sounds within speech and to produce these sounds "with the right stress and intonation, all of those through oral and written tests". Teacher Dee also mentioned that she uses both oral and written tests to measure her students' perception and production of English sounds and prosody. In order to further explore these teachers' testing practices a collection of pronunciation tests used by these teachers over the last three years was collected for analysis. Results of this analysis are reported after reporting classroom observation.

3.2. Classroom observation

The main objective of the observation sessions was to see whether teachers' knowledge and beliefs of pronunciation teaching (which they reported in the semi-structured interview) are reflected in their teaching practices inside the classroom. Throughout the 24 sessions, the focus of the researcher was the method used in the language laboratory, the teacher's focus (prosody, segments, syllables, or linking), the way the lesson proceeds, and teachers' feedback on students' pronunciations. Table 2 displays the distribution of the classroom observation session with the four participant teachers.

Table 2
Distribution of classroom observation sessions

	Teacher Aey		Teacher Bee		Teacher Cee		Teacher Dee	
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 1	Level 2	Level 1	Level 2	Level 1	Level 2
Observation	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Sessions	6		6		6		6	
Total	24 sessions							

For Level 1 students and just as the four teachers agreed in a common course outline, focus of teaching progressed from segments (vowels and consonants) at the beginning of the course to syllables and a few other issues such as how to say numbers in English in the middle of the course, to word stress practice at the end of the course with the aim of helping students become "more fluent and native-like", as specified in the course description. The accent used as norm accent was Standard British English. Each lesson starts by the teacher providing handouts for students to use and follow. Although participants reported using a collection of printed material from different textbooks, the only handouts used in most of the sessions observed with Level 1 students (10 out of 12 sessions) were those provided by their previous native speaker teacher. Teacher Dee, who was not a student of this teacher, was the only teacher who used different handouts in two out of three of the lessons observed. The general way each lesson proceeds was that teachers explained place and manner of articulation and

the voicing state of certain consonant, for instance, show students how to transcribe it phonemically, and then ask students to listen and repeat in an Audiolingual way after a tape in the booths using their headphones.

One striking remark is that in most of the sessions, where segments such as separate vowels were taught, teachers tended to provide extensive technical explanation about tongue position and height for the vowels [iː] versus [ɪ], for instance, but did not raise students' awareness of the importance of producing the right vowel in word pairs such as *live* and *leave* for meaning and successful communication. Pronunciation teaching in most of Level 1 lessons seems to be detached from meaning and communication, hence teachers' choice of the phrase "listen and repeat" to describe their teaching method. In most of the observation sessions teachers did not give feedback to students about their pronunciation of segments. However, with saying numbers and word stress patterns, teachers often interfered using their control desk to give feedback to their students. When asked about the content of the feedback they gave to their students, teachers Aey and Cee reported that they corrected students' pronunciation of numbers and their assignment of stress to the wrong syllable by providing the accurate pronunciation.

The course outline for Level 2 students specifies that the major focus of the course is to help students master the various intonation patterns of English (in statements, different types of questions, and connected speech). Mastery of these intonation patterns should be achieved through the use of English idioms in English conversations as specified in the course description (see Appendix B). The 12 sessions of classroom observation of Level 2 students with the four teachers reflected the clear focus on prosody through heavy drills (listen and repeat) of various English tones and intonation contours. Students were provided by handouts that present detailed information about the characteristics of each intonation pattern and when it is used, illustrated by hand drawn curves for pitch contours. Teachers used a small white board in the Lab to draw intonation contours and explain where rises and falls should take place. Students are then asked to listen and repeat after a tape for practice. The four teachers use the same handouts which were provided by the same native speaker retired teacher. No other materials from any other books were used for intonation Lab drills. While Teacher Aey and Dee intervened frequently through their control desk to talk to students while they were practicing, Teachers Bee and Cee rarely intervened. Focus on drills with Level 2 students took place at the beginning and the middle of the course. At the end of the term, the four teachers started to use the idioms part. According the course description, "Students are introduced to a number of idioms through listening to everyday life conversations of the Johnson's family. They learn their meaning and use. At the end of each course, a few students are asked to re-enact the conversation they did before and to pay special attention to pronunciation and intonation" (see Appendix B). However, what was noticed during the 4 sessions of classroom observation with the four teachers is that higher emphasis is placed on the meaning and use of these idioms than on the way intonation is used in conversations. It seemed that students' and teachers'

focus shifted to meaning rather than to the appropriate use of intonation patterns. In addition, only a limited number of students (about four out of 32 in each class observed, 12.5%) were asked to practice the conversations in pairs during the lab session. For the majority of students the idioms lessons were much more vocabulary lessons than pronunciation lessons. Furthermore, in none of the lessons observed where conversations were played by students did any teacher raise students' awareness of the importance of using the right intonation patterns for discourse and meaning. Teachers' comments were of the kind "you have to raise your pitch a little bit here", "your pitch is very high, lower it and repeat the utterance", "no, here it's rather a fall that should be used". The communicative function of intonation was, unfortunately, not imparted to students.

3.3. Document analysis

In order to determine whether teachers' knowledge and beliefs are reflected in their testing practice, a collection of printed pronunciation tests, which were used by these teachers to measure the progress of their students, were analyzed. No random sampling was possible as the researcher could not have access to all the tests teachers used during their teaching experience. The sample analyzed, therefore, contained only15 previous tests participants used to measure the achievements of students at the end of each term during the academic years 2015-2018.

Questions 13 and 14 of the semi-structured interview tackled the issue of pronunciation testing. Teachers were asked about the way they measure the progress of their students in terms of pronunciation learning. The four teachers reported that they used both oral and written forms of tests in which they use different types of items to assess the perception and production of their students. They also mentioned that they assess their students' pronunciation gains through phonemic transcription tasks. The scrutiny of the 15 sample tests containing a total of 47 test items shows that what teachers reported exists in these samples, as most tests included items that assess students' production and perception of English speech as well as phonemic transcription items. However, sample analysis reveals an uneven distribution of the items that test perception, production, and phonetic transcription. Table 3 below provides descriptive statistics that display discrepancy in item distribution.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics of test item distribution of 15 sample tests containing a total of 47 items

Perception test Items			Production test items			Phonemic transcription test items		
Mean	%	SD	Mean	%	SD	Mean	%	SD
4.5	6.3%	0.36	26.70	43.7%	18.9	36.2	49.8%	21.94

It is clear from Table 3 that the most recurrent test items are phonemic transcription, followed by oral production items. Perception test items were, yet, the least present in the sample studied (6.3%). Analysis of the content of

most test items shows that what is being tested is students' knowledge of articulatory phonetics rather than their ability to produce and perceive English sounds and prosody. For instance, students are asked in some test items about the rules of the pronunciation of the "ed" morpheme in regular past tense English verbs. They are asked to answer in a written form by adding "d/id/t" (see Appendix D). Students might provide the correct answer to this task through theoretical knowledge of these rules, but this by no means shows they are able to produce these sounds when they use them while speaking English. Furthermore, most of the phonemic transcription test items in the sample test the ability of students to map sounds with spelling in English but do not reflect their ability to pronounce English words since students were not asked to produce these words. Instead, they were either asked to transcribe them phonemically or find the word from its phonemic transcription. Another problematic area is when test items, for instance, require students to "give the stress pattern of the following sentence: I know her but I don't know him" through a written form with no audio input (see Appendix C). There are different ways of placing stress depending on the speaker's focus or intention of what to highlight to convey the appropriate meaning in such an utterance. The question that arises here is what teachers would consider as an appropriate answer since no oral input was provided to students. It seems again that what is being tested is students' theoretical knowledge of stress rules rather than their ability to use sentence and word stress appropriately.

The course description and personal interaction with the participant teachers specifies that the major aim from teaching idioms is to enable students use appropriate intonation contours by playing conversations in which idioms are used. Strikingly, teachers used test items that ask the students through a written test to "fill in the blanks with the right idiom", which is a vocabulary knowledge testing item rather than a pronunciation testing one (See Appendix B). A basic knowledge about the validity of language tests is that a test is said to be valid only if it measures what it supposed to measure. Teachers in this study seem to have confused testing practices. The following section is devoted for the discussion of the results of the present study.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This study was designed to explore the knowledge, beliefs and practices of Tunisian teachers of English about pronunciation teaching and testing. It also attempted to determine whether this knowledge and beliefs are reflected in the assessment of their students' progress. A series of semi-structured interview questions were developed in order to get an insight into some aspects of teachers' cognition of pronunciation teaching and testing. Four Tunisian experienced teachers, who teach English pronunciation in an English department in one of the Tunisian universities, participated in this study. Their answers to the interview questions were qualitatively analyzed. The results show a great similarity about the teachers' experience and cognition of pronunciation instruction. Although none of them has chosen to teach pronunciation or had training in pronunciation instruction

pedagogy, they all reported that they enjoy teaching the skill. The situation of pronunciation teachers in the Tunisian EFL context is not much different from the situation of their colleagues in the international context since many studies report that EFL/ESL teachers receive no training in pronunciation instruction and have no confidence in teaching it (Backer, 2011, 2014; Setter & Jenkins, 2005, for instance). In addition, the four teachers expressed their willingness to be trained if offered the opportunity. Despite the long years of teaching experience, the attitude of the participant teachers in this study reflects their awareness of the importance of training in pronunciation pedagogy that is not always offered in programs that prepare students to be language teachers.

When asked about the approach and method they use in pronunciation teaching, most teachers were unable to provide the specific technical terms to describe their teaching approach and method. The use of the phrase "listen and repeat" to describe their method reveals lack of knowledge about the theories of language teaching. Theoretical knowledge about language teaching methods is generally taught at the MA level in Applied Linguistics or in TESOL. But since none of these teachers has an MA degree or had training in language teaching by professionals in ELT, they were not able to use the appropriate technical terms of the drills they use, the teaching approach or method. Hence derives the importance of continuous teacher training programs. Teachers' cognition of the focus of pronunciation instruction was revealed through their answers to questions 9 and 10. They reported teaching both segments and suprasegmental features. Precedence is given to segments because they start teaching them to Level 1 students and postpone the teaching of prosodic features such as stress and intonation to Level 2 students. This tendency reflects a traditional view of pronunciation teaching. Modern research-based approaches invite pronunciation instructors to give precedence to suprasegmentals because research has proved that they have a more important role in the development of fluency and are a key factor for successful communication (Derwing, Munro & Wiebe, 1998; Gordon *et al.*, 2013; McNerney & Mendelsohn, 1992). The participants' classical view of pronunciation instruction is also depicted from their answers to the goal of pronunciation teaching. All of them prefer their students to sound native-like, but tolerate intelligible and comprehensible speech. Though this might be a legitimate target for English major students, research results on goals, norms, and models of pronunciation teaching call for setting intelligibility and comprehensibility as goals of instruction rather than the frustrating goal of native-like pronunciation, which is often difficult to reach especially in EFL contexts (Jenkins, 2000, Dalton & Seidlhoffer, 1994). Teachers' traditional views of the focus and goals of pronunciation instruction derive from the wide gap between research in second language acquisition and classroom practice. Little of research results reach teachers who often remain skeptical and hesitant about implementing these results in their classrooms.

The results of classroom observation with the four teachers corroborate their knowledge and beliefs about pronunciation teaching. Actually, the use of Audiolingual drills, extensive theoretical explanation, and the absence of link

between pronunciation and communication observed in the lab course highlight the traditional views teachers hold about pronunciation instruction. These traditional views are further reflected in the choice of Standard British English as a norm accent rather than a model accent that students have to mimic accurately. Students are not exposed to any other accent or variety of English by native or non-native speakers. In addition, teachers' tendency to stick to the handouts provided by the experienced native speaker British teacher (who was their teacher and colleague) reveals a sense of security and confidence they have towards this teacher who not only represents authentic English pronunciation for them, but also an authority as previous mentor. Research in second language teacher cognition development has shown that teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practice is often influenced by their own teachers or colleagues (Sengupta & Xiao, 2002). The practice of the four Tunisian teachers in this study is also in conformity with Backer (2011) who states that "for teachers with limited or no teacher training in PrP (pronunciation pedagogy), the textbook and/or collaboration with a colleague appeared to have the greatest impact on their teaching of pronunciation" (p.89). Teachers' use of corrective feedback by intervening through their control desks to correct students' pronunciation is quite acceptable at this stage because students are still at the level of controlled practice where teachers' feedback is recommended (Celci-murci, Brinton, & Goodwin, 2010). At the communicative stage, where a few students were asked to play a conversation in which they use idioms paying attention to the production of the right intonation contours, teachers interfered frequently to comment on the students' use of pitch, which is undesirable because feedback should be delayed at this stage not to hamper communication. This tendency reflects lack of knowledge about the role and use of corrective feedback in pronunciation teaching. Actually, the use of the "idioms" part as practice for intonation patterns seems to have escaped the control of teachers. Instead of using conversations as a means to practice intonation contours and raise students' awareness of the importance of intonation in conveying the right meaning and attitude, teachers' focus shifted to explaining the meaning of idioms and transformed the lesson into a vocabulary lesson instead. This calls for a review of this part of the course as it does not have clear objectives and is misused by teachers. Conversations for intonation practice should not have much new vocabulary so that students' and teachers' focus remains on the suprasegmental aspects and their roles in overall communication rather than on lexical aspects and meaning disambiguation.

The last part of the semi-structured interview investigated teachers' cognition of pronunciation assessment since evaluation is definitely a crucial element and closely linked to curriculum development and teaching. Teachers' cognition of how to measure progress of their students differed from what the analysis of previous tests revealed. Teachers reported that they test both perception and production of their students through written and oral tests. The researcher understood from the use of the term "written tests" by teachers that dictation tasks are used, which is a common method to test students' perception of English sounds and the way they map sounds

to orthography. However, results of the 15 sample tests showed a great confusion in the teachers' practice of pronunciation assessment. Teachers use written tests to test students' knowledge of articulatory phonetics and not their pronunciation of English sounds and prosody, which are completely different. A student might know all the rules of stress placement in different types of English words, but this does not mean that s/he is able to produce lexical stress correctly. In addition, a student may theoretically know that yes/no questions in English end with a rising pitch. Yet, this does not mean that s/he can produce this rise appropriately. In addition, asking students to provide the right stress pattern for a sentence with no oral input is meaningless as the same sentence can be produced with stress being placed on various words depending on the intention of the speaker. Items of this kind show a serious confusion in the teachers' cognition and practice of pronunciation testing. Furthermore, the ability to transcribe sounds phonemically (often used as test items in the sample analyzed) reflects theoretical phonetic knowledge and not necessarily accurate production. Perception, which is an essential element that leads to correct and acceptable pronunciation, was the least element tested. The most oddly used test item was the "fill in the blanks with the right idiom" item which is supposed to measure progress in pronunciation acquisition. This item clearly tests vocabulary knowledge rather than pronunciation learning. The analysis of the 15 sample tests was not meant to determine the validity and reliability of the tests used through analyzing the discriminating power of the items, for instance. It was rather meant to see if teachers' cognition of pronunciation testing is reflected in their tests. The analysis, however, showed that the tests themselves lacked validity as many items used to test pronunciation in the sample do not really test it. These alarming results require serious interference from decision makers to help teachers who do not receive any training in pronunciation pedagogy, either in their education as students or as practitioners, revisit their pronunciation teaching practice and testing of this skill.

The importance of pronunciation for successful communication in English as a second/foreign language has become widely recognized through research results that have progressively created a significant shift from a traditional practice of pronunciation instruction to the research-based modern approach. This modern approach places emphasis on suprasegmentals and sets comprehensibility and intelligibility as goals of pronunciation achievement. The weakest link in the pronunciation instruction chain, however, is the teacher who often suffers from lack of guidance and training on how best to teach this skill. Teacher cognition research would hopefully raise the awareness of stakeholders and decision makers in ESL/EFL contexts of the need to empower teachers who strive with their own means and who are left to their own intuition in designing pronunciation courses and in creating their own tests. Continuous training sessions may be effective tools to bring research results to the classroom and help teachers benefit from innovation and various techniques used in the field. Teachers are the mediators of the learning process and require the right guidance and assistance, especially when they themselves express their need for training and desire for guidance. It is therefore essential that pronunciation pedagogy is imparted to

teachers through teacher education programs or through continuous training sessions, and that the right equipment and the required technology is provided to teachers to enhance their teaching and testing practice.

Acknowledgements

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Appendices

Appendix A

Semi-structured interview with teachers of English pronunciation

Background Information

Gender: F/M

Age: ....

University Degree: ....

1. How long have you been teaching pronunciation?

2. Did you choose to teach pronunciation? If the answer is NO, explain how you came to teach it?

3. Have you ever had any training on how to teach pronunciation?

>   NO/YES

>   If yes, where, by whom, and for how long?

4. Do you enjoy teaching pronunciation?

5. If you were offered the opportunity of training in pronunciation teaching, would you consider it?

6. What teaching approach do you adopt in teaching pronunciation?

7. Which teaching method do you follow in teaching pronunciation?

8. What textbook (s) do you use in teaching the subject?

9. What do you focus on when you teach pronunciation?

>   Segments (consonants and vowels)
>   Suprasegmental features (stress, intonation, rhythm, etc.)
>   Other (please specify)

10. What do you start with, segments or suprasegmental features?

11. What are your objectives from teaching pronunciation?
12. Do you think that it's enough for your student to be intelligible and comprehensible even with a foreign accent or do you want them to sound native-like?
13. How do you measure the progress of your students in terms of pronunciation acquisition?
14. What forms of pronunciation tests do you use with your students?

Appendix B

Third year course:

Idioms course:

Each week students are introduced to a number of idioms through listening to the everyday life conversations of the Johnson's family. They learn their meaning and use. At the end of each course, some students are asked to re-enact the conversation they did the week before, paying special attention to pronunciation and intonation.

Intonation course:

- Introducing the basic tones in the English language: high, medium and low –
  Identifying the rising and falling intonation (steps and glides)
- Short sentences with one stressed syllable (fall of intonation on the stressed syllable) / short sentences with two stressed syllables (high tone on the first stress and falling tone on the second stress)
- Normal pattern for the wh-questions (high tone which continues till the last stress where it falls sharply)
- Wh-questions expressing surprise and disbelief (start low and go on rising)
- Wh-questions expressing anger, exasperation or disappointment (continuous steep fall in intonation)
- Yes/no questions expressing sympathy, friendliness and interest (rising tune at the end)
- Stressing important words in questions in response to statements seeking additional information (the word adding the new information carries the fall in intonation)
- Stressing important words in sentences in response to questions (the fall in intonation depends on the position of the important word)
- Sentences with short pause in the middle when someone says something but has more in mind that qualifies and explains what the speaker said in the first part (rising tune in the first part and falling tune after the short pause)
- Questioning pattern of the question tags expressing uncertainty (rising intonation)
- Questioning pattern of the question tags expressing concern and worry (high tone on the modal or auxiliary and on the last important stress of the sentences, with a rising intonation on the question tag)
- Affirmative pattern of the question tag seeking agreement (falling pattern)
- Stress and implication: how stress affects the meaning
- Emphatic questions expressing polite incredulity or insistence on the truth (sharp fall on the first stress of the sentence and then a gradual low rise towards the end)

Appendix C

LABORATORY TEST 18   1ˢᵗ prep.   Second Semester

NAME : ....   GROUP : ....
ID CARD NUMBER : ....

WRITTEN TEST:

I_ Transcribe the following word, put the stress mark and then give the stress pattern:
Punctual

....

....

II_ Give the stress pattern for the following sentence:
I know her but I don't know him.

....

ORAL TEST:
I_
II_
Answer the following questions:
I_..
....
II_..
....

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LAB

WRITTEN TEST 2-1   3ʳᵈ year

NAME : ....   GROUP : ....
ID number : ....   MARK: ....

I–   **Fill in the blanks with the right idiom:**

-The job pays so badly that it's not ....even going for an interview.

-I don't need an exact price right now. ....is fine.

-I'll be sure to ....you when you visit me.

-You want to borrow my new car and drive it across the country? I'm sorry but that's ....

-"If you rake up all the leaves in front of the house, I'll do the dishes." "Okay, ...

II–   **Transcription:**

ðə ˈkʌntri z stɪl vjuːd æz trədɪʃnəli əgreərɪən ænd ˈrelətɪvli ˈbækwəd dɪspaɪt ðə nj
uː weɪv ɒv ɪndʌstrɪəl dɪveləpmənt ˈswiːpɪŋ ˈəʊvər ɪt
....
....

ɔːl ˈlɪŋgwɪsts əgriː ðæt spiːtʃ ɪz ə ˈspiːʃiːz spɪsɪfɪk ˈprɒpəti
....
....

ɪntəneɪʃən helps tuː ˈrekəgnaɪz ðə ˈlæŋgwɪdʒ ðæt juː hɪər ɪn ðə seɪm weɪ æz ðə ˈ
melədi ɒv ə sɒŋ helps tuː ˈrekəgnaɪz ðə sɒŋ ðæt juː hɪə
....
....

ðə seɪm mɪθs həv ˈɒfn led ænəlɪsts tuː ɑːgjuː ðæt sɪns ði end əv wɜːld wɔː ˈtuː
əmerɪkə həz lɒst ɪts ˈɪnəsns ænd həz biːn ˈeɪliəneɪtɪd frəm ɪts aɪdɪəlz baɪ wɜːld
ˈpaʊə
....
....

Appendix D

Laboratory Test : **1**   2nd Year

Name : .... Group :................................
ID number : .... Mark : ....

1- Write the corresponding words :
  a- /kɔŋkriːt   / :...
  b- /dʒɜːnɪ   / :...

2- Numbers:
  a- Change the following number into an ordinal one:

  Your exam will be 11 , December .

  ....

  b- Write the following fraction in letters :

  You 've got 4 $\frac{4}{9}$ in your maths test.

  ....

3-How is the (ed) pronounced in the following sentences ?
  a- Ted pigged (...........) out on hot dogs , then he got a stomach ache .
  b- Nicole wanted (..........) Ted to ask his friends to vote for her.

4- Change the voiceless plosives into voiceless fricatives:
  a- True :...
  b- Power :...
  c- Cold : ....
  d- tick : ....