



Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching

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Book Review

Pronunciation fundamentals: Evidence-based perspectives for L2 teaching and research

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After a period of relative neglect, pronunciation seems to have finally come back to the foreground of SLA theory and practice. A growing interest in the field is evidenced by a growing number of publications (e.g., Mompean & Fouz-González, 2015; Szyra-Kozłowska, 2015; Waniek-Klimczak & Pawlak, 2015), regular conferences (e.g., Accents, Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching or the bi-annual English Pronunciation: Theory and Practice) and the emergence of a new journal (*Journal of Second Language Pronunciation*). Within this richness, *Pronunciation Fundamentals: Evidence-based Perspectives for L2 Teaching and Research* stands out as a comprehensive and thought-provoking compendium of issues relevant for teaching and researching pronunciation in L2. In a way, this book rounds up all pronunciation-related events of 2015, reporting on major aspects of pronunciation research conducted so far and opening up new paths for the development of theory and practice. Coming from two leading researchers in the field, the book offers a personalized view

on what pronunciation research and teaching is all about, with evidence-based perspectives promised in the title fully explicated and illustrated in the text.

The book opens up with the chapter entitled “Key concepts,” which the authors recommend as a starting point for all readers, regardless of their specific interests in other chapters, which can be read independently. Introducing key concepts, the authors begin by stressing the importance of pronunciation, proclaiming that “oral communication is such a fundamental part of everyday life that if pronunciation patterns get in the way, action is essential” (p. 2). With this statement, pretty much a motto for the whole book, the authors move on to introduce essential terminology, with concepts such as accent, intelligibility, comprehensibility and fluency receiving most attention. Further on, nativeness versus intelligibility principles are introduced, followed by a short account of research agendas and research misinterpretations related to these and other concepts (e.g., the effectiveness of segmental vs. suprasegmental instruction). All in all, what the introductory chapter does goes beyond key concepts as such; in fact, it previews the approach used throughout the book with a critical overview of the research and its interpretation, which are crucial for the discussion of individual aspects of L2 pronunciation.

What needs to be mentioned at this point is a clear L2 focus of the book. As mentioned by the authors in the foreword, it is their experience with teaching and researching the pronunciation of English as the second language in North America that forms the basis for the book. While this can be seen as a limitation in the applicability of research insights discussed in the volume, this clearly stated perspective makes the discussion of such key concepts as intelligibility or accentedness precise due to a clear point of reference. Consequently, the book offers insights which are not only relevant but also crucial for instructed learning in the case of English as an additional or a foreign language.

This can be clearly seen in the following chapters, beginning with a historical overview of pronunciation (Chapter 2), through pedagogical perspectives on L2 phonetic acquisition (Chapter 3), to pronunciation errors and error gravity (Chapter 4), all of which rely on the native speaker as a potential interlocutor whose ease or difficulty in understanding and/or whose assessment is crucial for deciding about relative success in learner’s pronunciation. When talking about research into pronunciation instruction (Chapter 5), however, the authors do acknowledge the fact that it is not only native speakers of English who might be involved in the teaching process. Discussing pronunciation instruction research, the authors move to the classroom, and it is from this perspective that they discuss not only the availability of teaching materials but also teacher training in other than L2 contexts. One of the interesting issues that emerge is the question whether nonnative speakers should teach L2 pronunciation, a problem

well-known to many nonnative speaker teachers around the world and throughout Europe. Other problems discussed include the effectiveness of pronunciation instruction, curriculum issues, and decisions concerning when and who to teach. The following chapters continue with practical issues of interest to all teachers, such as the assessment of L2 pronunciation (Chapter 6) and technology in pronunciation instruction (Chapter 7).

Having discussed the instructional setting, the authors go back to real life, considering numerous issues related to the use of accented English, its social role, prejudice related to it, and, finally, the ethics of accent reduction. Chapter 8 and 9 begin with a more specific focus on the L2 setting for accents, and, using the Canadian perspective, illustrate problems related to accentedness versus intelligibility. Moving on to the attitudes towards accented speech or the stigma of a foreign accent, the authors discuss numerous studies concerning the call centre setting and other types of employment. Further issues, including the problem of accent and identity as well as the relevance of the context, bring the authors to world Englishes and English as a lingua franca (ELF), with the role of the interlocutor viewed as crucial for setting pronunciation priorities. Interestingly, while the authors do not make any strong claims as to the usefulness of ELF for pedagogy, they do stress the need for further studies into the needs of the students, including studies within the willingness to communicate paradigm. Finally, accent reduction—not infrequently treated as the ultimate aim of pronunciation instruction—is critically evaluated from the perspective of business as well as medical help providers. This is an extremely interesting and not at all obvious word of warning as to a wide range of meanings and services associated with pronunciation. From other than L2 perspectives, this angle may seem irrelevant; however, its reality needs to be noticed and acknowledged by educators not only in L2 but also in other contexts, such as English as a foreign, other or additional language. Chapter 10 closes the book with future directions being laid out and discussed for pronunciation research, teaching, assessment and technological innovations. Last but not least, intelligibility and comprehensibility are put into a broader perspective, with the role of interlocutors stressed in the process of reaching mutual understanding.

The book, written “to serve as a resource for anyone who is interested in second language pronunciation” (p. xi), stems from the long teaching and research experience of the authors, who provide a well-balanced account of research and pedagogical suggestions in connection with major challenges related to pronunciation. The structure of the book makes it possible for individual readers to choose aspects of interest rather than follow the order of issues raised by the authors; however, treated as a whole, the book makes a perfect text for the study of pronunciation in its full complexity. Raising important problems

and issues related to pronunciation as seen from a student and teacher perspective, discussing strengths and weaknesses of relevant research and providing a variety of insights into the development of research as well as pedagogy, the book manages to achieve what verges on the impossible: It is comprehensive and yet concise. Discussing sound research, it opens up new paths for further studies; referring to the authors' experience, it provides food for thought and stimulates new ideas. Most importantly, perhaps, the book bridges the gap between pronunciation research and teaching, showing how the former informs the latter. As it is only by better understanding of complex conditionings of pronunciation challenges faced by students that we can provide relevant instruction, the book offers an invaluable resource to all of us interested in pronunciation. And to make us enjoy researching and teaching pronunciation even more, the book reads so well, being both engaging and engaged in the pronunciation instruction cause.

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