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Isaacs, T. (2016). Review of [Pronunciation fundamentals: Evidence-based perspectives for L2 teaching and research] by T. M. Derwing & M. J. Munro. Speak Out!, 54, 52-56.
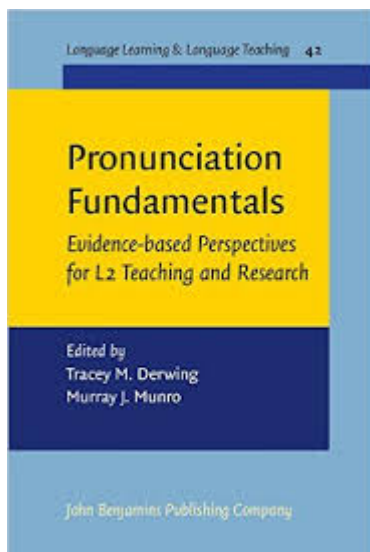
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Review of [Pronunciation Fundamentals: Evidence-based perspectives for L2 teaching and research]

John Benjamins, 208pp. ISBN 9789027213273 Paperback. $49.95, €33.00

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Having reinvented itself since its audiolingual heyday and subsequent period of neglect at the height of the Communicative era, the field of second language (L2) pronunciation has unmistakably rebounded, although there is still much work to be done (Isaacs, 2014). There are numerous signs of increasing momentum, including a growing presence of pronunciation-relevant content in scholarly venues (e.g., applied linguistics conferences, periodicals, encyclopaedias), discussion fora (e.g., SUPRAS mailing list), and, most recently, the birth of the pronunciation-dedicated journal, *The Journal of Second Language Pronunciation*, which represents a milestone in the professionalisation of our field.

This renewal, increased rigour, and uptick in the number of early-career researchers currently active in this area (Derwing, 2010) is due, in no small part, to the ground-breaking and prolific work of Canadian researchers Tracey Derwing and Murray Munro. For over two decades, these international leaders have conducted pioneering and rigorous research on different facets of L2 pronunciation, much of which is practically-grounded in understanding the pronunciation development and needs of L2 learners, how best to foster their communicative success, and the many complex variables that interact to lead to differential outcomes in both instructed and real-world settings.

In *Pronunciation Fundamentals*, the authors bring together the wealth of their knowledge and expertise in a one-stop go-to resource that covers the state-of-the-art, often shaped by their own research, interspersed with relatable anecdotes and doused with guidance on

becoming an astute and critical consumer of pedagogical services, materials, and research. This accessible resource has something to offer *all* readers with an interest in an evidence-based approach to teaching and learning L2 pronunciation. It warrants a cover-to-cover read for both pronunciation experts, and those with little grounding in the area, who are likely to find the book a useful companion.

Structure of the book

The book consists of ten chapters and a glossary of 103 keywords cited in the main text. Each chapter is a stand-alone unit that does need not be read in sequence, albeit with the authors' recommendation that the first chapter be read before any other. Chapter 1 covers key terminology and foundational concepts, including the nativeness versus intelligibility principles (Levis, 2005) and the interrelated but conceptually distinct constructs of intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness, which the authors have carefully defined and extensively researched (Derwing & Munro, 2009), with helpful summary tables showing the result of having high or low attributes of each. The authors also debunk a few common misconceptions about L2 pronunciation, including mischaracterisations of their own work, and set out the roadmap for the rest of the book.

Chapter 2 takes the reader on a historical journey of developments in pronunciation teaching from ancient to modern times. The inclusion of difficult-to-locate historical references gives the reader a more complete picture of how the treatment of pronunciation has evolved over time, including in teaching materials, with a section on the change brought about by technological advancements (e.g., tape recorder). Chapter 3 overviews major insights from speech sciences research on L2 phonetic acquisition, making findings often published in technical journals accessible to a broad readership and drawing out the pedagogical implications of findings. Content coverage includes the link between L2 speech perception and production and variables that could account for individual differences in L2 learner attainment, particularly with respect to accentedness, including operational measures of L2 experience and age effects. Continuing in a more technical vein relative to the other chapters, Chapter 4 focuses on learner error treatment, rendering major concepts accessible. The chapter clearly defines central pronunciation features, such as segments, prosody, and voice quality, and compares and evaluates theoretical models that make predictions about the likelihood of accurately perceiving and producing L2 sounds (e.g., Contrastive Analysis versus process-oriented models). I initially wondered if it would have been useful to refer, even briefly, to Levelt's (1989) speech production model or L2 adaptations of it in this chapter, although this would perhaps have steered the content too far away from its main focus. Finally, premised on the notion that some errors are more consequential for intelligibility and successful communication than others, the authors address the crucial question of which pronunciation features should be prioritised in instruction based on the available empirical evidence.

If length is an indicator, Chapter 5 on research on L2 pronunciation instruction, which is 10 pages longer than all other chapters, is the heart of the book and speaks to its strongly

pedagogical orientation. Instructional effectiveness, pedagogical resources, teacher training, and curriculum development are among the covered topics. In contrast, Chapter 6 on L2 pronunciation assessment, which is 20 pages shorter than Chapter 5, is clearly not a main focus, with major topics such as rating scales and automated assessment receiving scant treatment and with the authors citing other sources for a more in-depth coverage. In light of the literature on formative assessment, in which assessment is viewed as integral to teaching, learning, and curricular goals (Cumming, 2009), these two chapters are perhaps more strongly linked than the authors seem to acknowledge. Parallel sections on "Needs analysis" and "Needs assessment" in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively, could have been consolidated, for example. To mitigate some of the existing overlap, it is my view that the discussion on curriculum development would have been a better fit in a broader assessment-curriculum chapter, since these two areas work hand-in-hand in classroom contexts (e.g., diagnosing learner errors and then designing and implementing an instructional programme), although this is simply a minor point.

Chapter 7 centres on technological innovations in pronunciation instruction, overviewing free or inexpensive speech recognition, digital editing, and videoconferencing software in view of pedagogical applications, with an additional discussion of computer-mediated feedback (e.g., English Accent Coach targeting segmental perception; Thomson, 2007). However, the authors underscore the lack of quality control in internet resources, apps, and other on-line materials, which are of highly variable quality and require discernment from an informed consumer. Chapter 8 focuses on sociolinguistic aspects of pronunciation, including stakeholders' attitudes toward and (sometimes prejudicial) judgments of L2 speech, issues of identity, and the reality of English as a lingua franca in different global contexts. There is also a discussion of the Willingness to Communicate framework (MacIntyre, 2007), which the authors applied in their research as one of the variables that mediates learners' interactional engagement in the target language in relation to L2 pronunciation development. Chapter 9 exposes readers to the unsubstantiated and often preposterous claims made by the accent reduction industry while also critiquing the (at least implicit) treatment of L2 speech as an abnormality in a few isolated examples from the speech language pathology community, although it is unclear how pervasive those views or practices are. Readers come away with the understanding that, in terms of the accent reduction business, consumers are often the victims of bogus claims intended chiefly as money making ventures that should rightfully be accompanied by warning labels, sometimes doing more harm than good.

Finally, Chapter 10 tackles future directions, highlighting areas where further work is needed in the domains of pronunciation research (e.g., longitudinal studies), teaching (e.g., pre- and in-service teacher training), assessment (e.g., promoting rater consistency), technology (e.g., time-efficient handling of speech files), and society (e.g., awareness-raising for professionals working with an L2 learner demographic). The book ends by reminding the reader of the detrimental effects of struggling to make oneself understood in an L2 and the likely benefits of instruction and greater sustained interactional exchanges in the target language. Although the research guidance is far from comprehensive and there

are many gaps in our knowledge of instructional effectiveness and provision of adequate resources, good uptake of this book by a readership of teacher-educators is a solid next step in helping teachers help learners engage in more effective L2 aural-oral communication.

Concluding remarks

In the contested world of academic peer review, it a rare pleasure to be able to give an unreserved endorsement to a colleague's work. I confess that I had high expectations for this book before reading it, having been inspired by the breadth and quality of Derwing and Munro's innovative work throughout my academic career. This book has exceeded all expectations in terms of the substance, clarity of thought, comprehensiveness, and likely impact on research and pedagogical practice, with the pervasiveness of the authors' own work in practically every chapter reflecting the centrality of their scholarship to so many lines of inquiry in our field. In conformity with their suggestion about the suitability of their volume for a broad readership, I wholeheartedly recommend the purchase and consumption of this book "for anyone who is interested in second language pronunciation" (p. xi) and believe that it will be a cherished and widely cited resource for many years to come.

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