

Pronunciation in EFL Instruction

SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Series Editor: Professor David Singleton, *University of Pannonia, Hungary* and Fellow Emeritus, *Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland*

This series brings together titles dealing with a variety of aspects of language acquisition and processing in situations where a language or languages other than the native language is involved. Second language is thus interpreted in its broadest possible sense. The volumes included in the series all offer in their different ways, on the one hand, exposition and discussion of empirical findings and, on the other, some degree of theoretical reflection. In this latter connection, no particular theoretical stance is privileged in the series; nor is any relevant perspective – sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, neurolinguistic, etc. – deemed out of place. The intended readership of the series includes final-year undergraduates working on second language acquisition projects, postgraduate students involved in second language acquisition research, and researchers and teachers in general whose interests include a second language acquisition component.

Full details of all the books in this series and of all our other publications can be found on <http://www.multilingual-matters.com>, or by writing to Multilingual Matters, St Nicholas House, 31–34 High Street, Bristol BS1 2AW, UK.

SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: 82

Pronunciation in EFL Instruction

A Research-Based Approach

Jolanta Szpyra-Kozłowska

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

Bristol • Buffalo • Toronto

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Szpyra, Jolanta.

Pronunciation in EFL Instruction: A Research-Based Approach/Jolanta Szpyra-Kozłowska.

Second Language Acquisition: 82

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. English language—Pronunciation of foreign speakers. 2. English language—Phonology—Study and teaching. 3. English language—Study and teaching—Foreign speakers. I. Title.

PE1137.S96 2014

428.3'4071—dc23 2014021877

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue entry for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN-13: 978-1-78309-261-1 (hbk)

ISBN-13: 978-1-78309-260-4 (pbk)

Multilingual Matters

UK: St Nicholas House, 31–34 High Street, Bristol BS1 2AW, UK.

USA: UTP, 2250 Military Road, Tonawanda, NY 14150, USA.

Canada: UTP, 5201 Dufferin Street, North York, Ontario M3H 5T8, Canada.

Website: www.multilingual-matters.com

Twitter: [Multi_Ling_Mat](https://twitter.com/Multi_Ling_Mat)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/multilingualmatters>

Blog: www.channelviewpublications.wordpress.com

Copyright © 2015 Jolanta Szpyra-Kozłowska.

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the publisher.

The policy of Multilingual Matters/Channel View Publications is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products, made from wood grown in sustainable forests. In the manufacturing process of our books, and to further support our policy, preference is given to printers that have FSC and PEFC Chain of Custody certification. The FSC and/or PEFC logos will appear on those books where full certification has been granted to the printer concerned.

Typeset by Techset Composition India(P) Ltd., Bangalore and Chennai, India.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by the Lavenham Press Ltd.

Contents

Preface	vii
1 English Pronunciation Teaching: Global Versus Local Contexts	1
Part A	2
A.1.1 Why Should Pronunciation Be Taught?	2
A.1.2 Why is Pronunciation Teaching Often Neglected?	4
A.1.3 Goals of Pronunciation Teaching/Learning	6
A.1.4 EFL Versus ELF: English Pronunciation Models Debate	8
A.1.5 EFL, ELF or NELF?	23
A.1.6 Which Native Pronunciation Model?	29
A.1.7 EFL Versus ESL	33
A.1.8 Diagnosing the Local Teaching Context. Learner-related and Teacher-related Determinants of Pronunciation Instruction	39
Part B	45
B.1.1 Attitudes to Accented Speech and its Users	45
B.1.2 Native Accent Models or ELF? A Questionnaire Study	49
B.1.3 Diagnosing the Pronunciation Teaching Context in Poland	55
2 Global and Local Pronunciation Priorities	67
Part A	68
A.2.1 How to Establish Pronunciation Priorities	68
A.2.2 Selected Proposals for English Pronunciation Priorities	76
A.2.3 Focus on the Pronunciation of Phonetically Difficult Words	90
A.2.4 Pronunciation and Spelling	104
A.2.5 Segmentals Versus Suprasegmentals	110

Part B	117
B.2.1 Intelligibility and Global Versus Local Errors	118
B.2.2 Other Phonetically Difficult Words	123
B.2.3 Pronunciation Priorities for Polish Learners	130
3 Pronunciation Inside and Outside the Classroom: A Holistic Multimodal Approach	140
Part A	141
A.3.1 Developing Concern for Good Pronunciation	141
A.3.2 A Holistic Multimodal Approach to Phonetic Training	144
A.3.3 Selected Pronunciation Teaching Techniques	170
A.3.4 Pronunciation Learning Outside the Classroom	191
A.3.5 Providing Feedback	194
A.3.6 Problems with Pronunciation Teaching Materials	198
Part B	209
B.3.1 Motor Training Versus Cognitive Training	210
B.3.2 Effectiveness Versus Attractiveness of Pronunciation Teaching Activities	212
B.3.3 Employing Elements of Drama	218
B.3.4 Phonetic Error Correction	220
4 Concluding Remarks	225
References	234
Author Index	243
Subject Index	246

Preface

Due to the considerable impact of the concept of English as an International Language (EIL) or English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and its pronunciation teaching agenda, known as the Lingua Franca Core (Jenkins, 2000), the last decade has witnessed a major change of paradigms in pronunciation teaching. As a result, as argued by Levis (2005), pronunciation theory, research and practice are in transition and many widely accepted assumptions such as the supremacy of inner-circle models, the primacy of suprasegmentals and the need for native instructors have been challenged.

While most specialists agree that, in view of these facts, some modifications in English pronunciation instruction are unavoidable, it is by no means clear what they should be like in specific cases. Thus, although much attention has been given to pronunciation teaching to ESL learners (English as a Second Language, when English is acquired in an English-speaking country, e.g. Celce-Murcia *et al.*, 1996), as well as to ELF students (e.g. Walker, 2011), an important and highly controversial issue concerns selecting appropriate phonetic model(s) and pronunciation priorities for the largest group of learners, from the Expanding Circle, for whom English is a foreign language (EFL) and whose number is often estimated to be around 1.5 billion. The debate over this problem has been very heated (e.g. Dziubalska-Kořaczyk & Przedlacka, 2005) and is far from being settled, with many opposing views being expressed and different arguments presented.

This book is meant as a contribution to this discussion. It addresses the major theoretical issues relevant to contemporary English phonodidactics¹ approached from an EFL perspective and offers a novel approach to several fundamental problems such as, for instance, the choice of a pronunciation model for foreign learners, establishing teaching priorities for them and the ‘segments versus suprasegmentals’ debate concerning the salience of these two aspects of pronunciation for effective communication.

Moreover, it deals with numerous practical aspects of phonetic instruction and attempts to provide answers to many questions facing EFL teachers. For example, having a limited time at their disposal, how much attention should teachers devote to pronunciation? What realistic goals should be aimed at? Which aspects of English phonetics should be taught to foreign

learners and which can be neglected with little loss to successful communication? How can pronunciation be taught in an interesting, effective and both teacher-friendly and learner-friendly way, in accordance with the latest scholarly and technological achievements? How should appropriate teaching materials be selected? These and many other practical issues are raised and addressed in this book with many new solutions offered within a holistic motor-cognitive multimodal approach to English phonodidactics, particularly suitable for EFL learners.

The present author is convinced that informed and non-arbitrary decisions concerning both theoretical issues as well as various details of pronunciation teaching can only be made on the basis of extensive empirical research which examines, on the one hand, the pronunciation problems of specific L1 learner groups and their acquisition of L2 phonetics, but also, on the other hand, the perception of foreign-accented English by native and non-native listeners. In other words, there is agreement with Derwing and Munro (2005: 379) that 'empirical studies are essential in improving our understanding of the relationship between foreign accent and pronunciation teaching'.

This book, with its meaningful subtitle, 'A Research-Based Approach', attempts to bridge the gap between relevant phonetic research and pronunciation teaching by drawing on the results of the author's and other scholars' empirical studies on EFL learners' acquisition of English pronunciation, its perception and production, as well as the efficacy of various instructional procedures and the usefulness of teaching materials. Since such research can only be carried out with specific participants, the discussion is supported by extensive experimental evidence provided mostly by Polish learners of English.

It should be added that within the last decade in Poland much empirical research has been done on various aspects of English pronunciation pedagogy (for a summary, see Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2008). Moreover, Poles appear to represent typical EFL students acquiring this language in a characteristic EFL context, i.e. in an instructed setting, in which language classes are monolingual and consist of the same L1 speakers who have a limited exposure to spoken English outside the classes, but a considerable exposure to written English and who are usually taught by non-native teachers trained to teach various aspects of English, including pronunciation. As English is taught and learnt in similar conditions all over the world, not only in Poland, empirical studies carried out in an EFL context appear to have broader didactic implications.²

To make the book both general and specific, global and local, as well as interesting to various readers and certainly not only to Polish readers, each chapter consists of two parts (Part A and Part B), the first of which provides a general theoretical discussion of a given issue while Part B contains a presentation of several experimental studies carried out by the author and meant to examine the problems raised in Part A empirically and to verify various

theoretical claims. Thus, *Pronunciation in EFL Instruction* attempts to combine all the necessary ingredients for successful pronunciation instruction to EFL learners: phonetic theory, research and practice, all considered from both global as well as local perspectives.

The book does not provide a description of English phonetics; many other sources are available which supply the necessary information. Nor is it a pronunciation manual which contains sets of exercises to practise particular aspects of English phonetics although it does contain numerous practical hints and suggestions how to deal with specific problems.

The first two chapters are concerned with the issue of what should be taught to foreign learners pronunciation-wise: Chapter 1 deals with selecting an appropriate pronunciation model for instruction and Chapter 2 focuses on pronunciation priorities.

Chapter 1 starts with some necessary preliminaries, i.e. justifying the need to teach and learn the pronunciation of a foreign language, specifying the major reasons why L2 phonetic instruction often tends to be neglected and discussing various goals of pronunciation learning. The bulk of the chapter is devoted to the contentious and hotly debated issue of choosing an appropriate pronunciation model for foreign learners of English. Two approaches, traditional EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and a recent proposal known as ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) are examined and critically evaluated. Next put forward and developed is the concept of NELF (Native English as a Lingua Franca), meant to reconcile the previous two views by accepting the linguistic, but not the sociocultural aspects of native English and adopting native English pronunciation as a model, but not the goal of instruction, the latter being easy, intelligible communication with both native and non-native speakers. The major features of the three approaches to pronunciation teaching, i.e. EFL, ELF and NELF are juxtaposed and compared, with the superiority of NELF being argued in favour of. Subsequently, another important but frequently neglected distinction between EFL and ESL (English as a Second Language) is re-examined. It is claimed that regarding them as one phenomenon, as is currently the case, is detrimental to pronunciation instruction in EFL contexts and it is demonstrated that they differ too much to deserve a separate phonodidactic treatment. Finally, the major factors relevant to diagnosing the local educational context of EFL phonetic instruction are considered, as well as learner-dependent and teacher-dependent determinants of pronunciation teaching and learning.

Chapter 2 is devoted to the complex and controversial issue of establishing pronunciation priorities for EFL learners. First the major problems involved in this task are discussed with the focus on factors relevant for achieving comfortably intelligible pronunciation. Then we present and evaluate several recent proposals concerning pronunciation priorities, i.e. Jenkins' (2000) Lingua Franca Core, Cruttenden's (2008) Amalgam English and

International English, and Collins and Mees' (2003) pronunciation Error Ranking. An attempt is made to draw some generalizations from these concepts in order to formulate a set of general guidelines for foreign students of English. Next, a new suggestion, aimed specifically at EFL learners, is put forward, according to which phonetic instruction should focus on words prone to be notoriously mispronounced by foreign learners. It is argued and proved empirically that such lexical items hinder achieving comfortable intelligibility more than inaccurately produced sounds and prosodies, and should therefore be prioritized in EFL phonodidactics. The nature of phonetically problematic words and the major sources of their pronunciation difficulty are looked into. It is also demonstrated that, in view of the considerable impact of the written form of English on EFL learners' pronunciation, this issue ought to be placed among the top priorities in phonetic instruction.

In the remaining parts of this chapter the question, undertaken in the 'segmentals versus suprasegmentals' debate, whether these are sounds or prosodies that should be viewed as pronunciation priorities in EFL settings is addressed. It is shown that the answer cannot be universal, but must be provided for each L1 learner group by considering the phonetic distance between the L1 and L2, and evaluating the impact of specific segmental and prosodic departures from the L2 on intelligibility, established in the course of empirical research. This proposal is elaborated and exemplified with a set of pronunciation priorities formulated for Polish learners.

After a discussion of the complex problem of English pronunciation models and phonetic priorities for EFL learners, in Chapter 3 the issue of effective phonetic instruction is dealt with and a holistic multimodal approach to it is proposed. It is holistic as it concerns both the learner's body and mind. It is dubbed multimodal since it involves developing in learners appropriate motor habits needed in sound perception and production, employing cognitive mechanisms responsible for the formation of the L2 sound system in the learner's mind and appealing to different kinds of multisensory reinforcement. It is argued that these four aspects should all be combined and integrated in successful pronunciation training and some effective techniques which can be employed in it are suggested. A large part of Chapter 3 is devoted to the presentation of selected types of phonetic activities that are particularly useful for EFL learners. The necessity of pronunciation learning outside the language classroom and developing students' autonomy is also pointed to. The final section of Part A in Chapter 3 addresses an important, but frequently neglected issue of the critical assessment and appropriate choice of pronunciation teaching materials for EFL learners.

Finally, Chapter 4 sums up the major points made in the preceding parts of the book and highlights its most important claims.

The book is addressed to current and prospective EFL teachers and teacher trainers wishing to improve their teaching skills and pronunciation instruction in particular, in accordance with up-to-date theory and practice,

as well as to pronunciation specialists, students of applied linguistics and anyone interested in English phonodidactics.

The author and publisher gratefully acknowledge permission from the following to quote from copyright materials:

Peter Lang Verlag for the extracts from “LFC, phonetic universals and the Polish context” by Jolanta Szpyra-Kozłowska, [In:] Dziubalska-Kołodziejczyk, K. and J. Przedlacka (eds) *English Pronunciation Models: A Changing Scene*. 2005, pp.151–176.

Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, for the extracts from “On the irrelevance of sounds and prosody in foreign-accented English” by Jolanta Szpyra-Kozłowska, [In:] Waniek-Klimczak, E. and L. Shockey (eds) *Teaching and Researching English Accents in Native and Non-native Speakers*. Second Language Learning and Teaching 2013, pp. 15–29. With kind permission of Springer Science+Business Media.

This study is an outcome of the author’s several years of research as well as teaching experience which involved many people to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude. In particular I would like to thank very warmly Agnieszka Bryła-Cruz, Darek Bukowski, Iwona Czyżak, Wiktor Gonet, Marta Nowacka, Sławek Stasiak, Marek Radomski and Radek Świąciński (listed here in alphabetical order) for being a great team of friends and colleagues whose contributions to this book are visible in many of its pages.

I dedicate this book to my daughter Iga.

Notes

- (1) The term *phonodidactics* is used in this book as synonymous with *pronunciation pedagogy* or *pronunciation teaching*. It is preferred by the author due to its brevity, semantic transparency and combining the concepts of phonetics and phonology in one word.
- (2) Furthermore, in recent years over 600,000 Poles have emigrated to the British Isles. This makes them a large and important group of learners and users of English.

1 English Pronunciation Teaching: Global Versus Local Contexts

This book starts with some necessary preliminaries. First a crucial question is posed concerning the need to teach and learn the pronunciation of a foreign language. It then proceeds to enquire why, in spite of the unquestionable importance of this aspect of language, it often tends to be neglected. Next the focus is on various goals of pronunciation teaching/learning and on a contentious and hotly debated issue of the choice of a model accent appropriate for foreign learners of English. The discussion centres around two approaches to ELT: the traditional idea of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and a recent proposal known either as EIL (English as an International Language) or ELF (English as a Lingua Franca). They are characterized in some detail, and a critical evaluation of each is carried out before putting forward the concept of NELF (Native English as a Lingua Franca) as an approach to pronunciation instruction for foreign learners of English, meant to reconcile the two opposing views. The major features of EFL, ELF and NELF are juxtaposed and compared, with arguments provided for the superiority of the latter. Subsequently, another important but frequently neglected distinction between EFL and ESL (English as a Second Language) is re-examined. It is argued that treating them jointly as cases of learning a second language (L2) in the process of second language acquisition (SLA) is detrimental to EFL pronunciation instruction and demonstrate that they differ substantially and therefore deserve a separate treatment. Finally, the major factors relevant for diagnosing the local educational context of EFL instruction as well as learner-dependent and teacher-dependent determinants of pronunciation teaching and learning are briefly examined.

In Part B three studies are presented which provide empirical support for some of the claims made in Part A. More specifically, in order to prove the importance of good pronunciation in another language, an experiment

devoted to foreign accent perception is related, demonstrating how accented speech affects listeners' judgements of personal characteristics ascribed to its users. Next, typical EFL learners' (i.e. Polish students') preferences concerning English pronunciation models are examined in a questionnaire study. Finally, an analysis of a cultural and educational context in which English is taught in Poland is presented, with the main focus on teachers' and students' attitudes to this language skill and the quality of phonetic instruction in schools.

Part A

A.1.1 Why Should Pronunciation Be Taught?

Suppose you are in a situation in which you have to speak a foreign language. It will take some time for the listeners to find out how well you know its grammar, how rich your vocabulary is. But it is enough if you utter just a few words for them to know how good (or bad) your pronunciation is. The first impression is formed and we all know how important first impressions are and how difficult it is to change those initial judgements.

But, of course, there is more to having good pronunciation than just creating a positive first impression. It is an important component of language without which no efficient oral communication is possible. Thus, phonetic errors may lead to misunderstandings and even communication breakdowns, as reported in many stories, like the one about a tourist asking in a London restaurant for *soup*, pronounced by him as *soap*, and being directed to the bathroom. Not long ago I had a conversation in English with a Polish student about her school experiences and she kept repeating how much she disliked *that [staf]*. I was quite confused as to whether she meant *the teaching staff* or *stuff*, i.e. school education in general, as in that particular context both items were just as likely to occur. Many similar stories, some jocular, some serious or even tragic, can be provided to prove the importance of clear and comprehensible pronunciation. Perhaps the most shocking of them concerns a collision of two aeroplanes with over 200 people dead in 1977 in Tenerife, attributed to a misunderstanding between the pilot and the air traffic controller due to the pilot's poor English pronunciation.¹

Luckily, the consequences of phonetic errors are rarely so dramatic. In most cases misunderstandings can easily be explained. In other situations the linguistic and/or extralinguistic context will allow the listener to guess the meaning of an utterance. For example, if on a walk with your pet somebody asked you in Polish English: *Is this your [dok]?*, you could guess without any major difficulty that the question concerns your dog rather than your physician. In another situation, if a person, using Polish-accented English,

states that she has just bought a new [bek], you will easily identify this word as the highly probable *bag* and not as the totally unlikely *back*.

But can we be satisfied with having pronunciation that is just comprehensible? To answer this question, let us consider some of the consequences of heavily foreign accented speech which can, however, with some effort on the part of the listener, be understood. As various researchers have observed, pronunciation which puts too much strain on the listeners is very likely to cause them irritation and annoyance and, in consequence, discourage them from further contact with the foreign speaker. The effort that is required might simply be too much for our interlocutors. I have personally found myself in a situation of this kind. Some years ago I spent several months in the USA where I rented a flat in a university building for foreign visitors. It turned out that my upstairs neighbour was a girl student from China. I tried to talk to her a few times, but found her English so difficult to understand that I finally gave up. In consequence we never made friends and just exchanged greetings and polite smiles when we accidentally met.

Speakers with pronunciation problems often make, quite unconsciously and unintentionally, an unfavourable impression of their personality on their listeners. Kelly (2000), for instance, in his discussion of the role of English prosody, claims that German learners who use their native intonation patterns in English sound abrupt or impolite, while the Spanish who employ Spanish prosody in English might sometimes appear rather bored and disinterested. Other studies have demonstrated that listeners often judge people they have never met on their personality, intelligence and social status just from listening to the way they pronounce a few words. Needless to say, the less intelligible the foreigner's speech, the more critical such judgements are. In Part B a brief report is presented on the experiment which has been carried out to examine how native speakers of Polish perceive foreign-accented Polish and how the degree of accentedness affects the listeners' evaluation of the speakers' personal characteristics. It is shown that the better foreigners' Polish pronunciation is, the higher scores they receive on their alleged intelligence, education, reliability, pleasantness and trustworthiness. Of course, the opposite is also true; more heavily accented and less intelligible speech causes more critical assessments.

Further empirical evidence is also available to show that there are serious drawbacks to having poor English pronunciation. In one experiment the same lecture was delivered to two groups of students. In the first case it was presented with near-native pronunciation, in the other, a foreign-accented version. The students' judgements were very different; the first lecture was regarded as more interesting, more logical and better organized than the second, even though the content of both was exactly the same! In another study carried out in Sweden (Abelin & Boyd, 2000), students evaluated foreign teachers who taught various subjects in Swedish. In all instances teachers

with good Swedish pronunciation were assessed as more competent and efficient than those with a strong foreign accent.

Negative perceptions of accented speech can have even more serious consequences and sometimes lead to foreigners' social stigmatization and discrimination (see Lippi-Green, 1997; Moyer, 2013). Munro (2003), for instance, discusses several cases of accent-based discrimination in Canada. One of them involved a Polish immigrant called Gajecki, who spoke fluent English but with a strong Polish accent. After a few years of a successful teaching career at school, Gajecki was denied employment because, according to the administrator, he 'did not speak English'. A court ruled that Gajecki was discriminated against on the basis of his accent and awarded him compensation.

Thus, no matter how good someone's general command of a foreign language is, if their pronunciation is poor, it might negatively influence the perception of such a person.² On the other hand, learners with good English pronunciation impress people favourably and often benefit from this asset. Some years ago a student of mine went to London for his summer holidays. He needed money to live on, but all he managed to find was a rather unattractive and poorly paid job of washing up in an expensive restaurant, which he did with two other foreigners. One day a waiter was taken ill and a replacement was needed. The manager decided to employ one of the three foreigners and chose the Polish student to be the new waiter (a considerably nicer and better paid job, with good tips from the customers) because of his good English pronunciation, much better than those of the other two candidates.

Finally, it should be pointed out that people with poor pronunciation often lack the confidence to speak up and try to say as little as possible. On the other hand, good pronunciation provides learners with the confidence to engage in conversations with other speakers of English, allows them to sound able and competent, and gives them a sense of achievement. It is an asset that cannot be underestimated.

I hope the above remarks make it clear why mastering the pronunciation of a foreign language is well worth both the teachers' and the learners' effort. As argued by Morley (1991), the question is not whether pronunciation should be taught, but rather what should be taught and how it should be done.

A.1.2 Why is Pronunciation Teaching Often Neglected?

In the preceding section we have pointed out the major advantages of having good English pronunciation as well as some negative consequences of poor pronunciation for language learners. A logical assumption based on the