

BOOK REVIEW

Pronunciation in EFL Instruction: A Research-Based Approach

Jolanta Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2014
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Jolanta Szpyra-Kozłowska's *Pronunciation in EFL Instruction: A Research-Based Approach* offers a persuasive argument that English native accents are pragmatically the best models for pronunciation teaching. In her conceptualisation of NELF (Native English as a Lingua Franca), Jolanta argues that the linguistic norms of the English native-speaker pronunciation provide a more suitable and accurate pedagogical alternative for intelligible communication between international speakers in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts than emerging approaches such as ELF (English as a Lingua Franca). Jolanta emphasises that such models "should be adopted not because of their alleged historical, cultural or social superiority but simply as valuable and effective tools of linguistic communication" (Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2014, p. 38). In her book, Jolanta focuses on fundamental theoretical issues and suggests practical tips for pronunciation instruction in the contemporary EFL settings.

Overall, the book is divided into four main chapters. The first two chapters focus on the discussion about pronunciation models (Chapter 1) and the debate surrounding pronunciation priorities (Chapter 2). In the third chapter, the author proposes a holistic multimodal approach for pronunciation instruction, in which physical and cognitive teaching techniques are combined. In Chapter 4, Jolanta reviews the main points she makes throughout the book and brings her key claims to the fore. With the exception of Chapter 4, the chapters in the book are organised into two parts. Part A provides the reader with a more global perspective of a given issue, whereas Part B provides a description of experimental studies conducted by the author in Poland to address the issues raised in Part A.

Despite having a wide audience of readers, I believe this book would be of interest to Academic and Language Learning (ALL) practitioners, people working in the area of EFL, and staff and students with an enthusiasm for English "phonodidactics", a term used by the author as a synonym to pronunciation instruction because of "its brevity, semantic transparency and combining the concepts of phonetics and phonology in one word" (Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2014, p. 14). The reason for this is that the book has been purposefully written to include a balance between theoretical discussions, examples of empirical studies and notes on pedagogical application.

One section of special relevance to me, for instance, was *Articulatory training* found in Part A in Chapter 3. Here, Jolanta discusses the issue surrounding the use of habit-formation phonemic drills and recommends that these are adapted to a more communicative format for the classroom. The discussion is well-supported by references from the literature and illustrated with examples of idiosyncratic phonetic features which distance Polish from English pronunciation. In Part B of the same chapter, a small-scale study conducted with Polish secondary schools is provided, in which the researchers (the author included) examined the effectiveness of two distinct pronunciation approaches, motor (e.g. "listen and repeat") and cognitive (e.g. explicit instruction). Interestingly, the conclusion of this research was that both methods seemed to be equally effective in developing certain aspects of pronunciation, which led Jolanta to suggest that "both deserve a place in the language classroom, but their use must depend on the type of phonetic problem" (Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2014, p. 218).

As previously mentioned, one of the main arguments put forward by Jolanta is the use of a standard native accent as the intelligibility model for international users of English. Nevertheless, the author suggests that the adoption of the native variety of English, either Received Pronunciation (RP) or General American (GA), must satisfy certain criteria, which also include determinants such as the teaching and learning setting (e.g. instructed or naturalistic), the type of learning (explicit or implicit), the quantity and quality of the auditory input (limited or unlimited), the educational context, as well as learner-related and teacher-related factors.

From my point of view, another attractive feature of this book is the thought-provoking argument that Jolanta makes regarding pronunciation priorities. In her opinion, a pronunciation approach which prioritises the mispronunciation of problematic lexical items is more advantageous to ELF learners than a focus on inaccurate pronunciation of individual sounds or prosodic features. As such, the author suggests that orthography input should not be pushed to the wayside, but rather heightened by the pronunciation teacher. By way of illustration, Jolanta suggests that teachers should pay more attention to the occurrence of errors caused by spelling interference and to instruction which raises learners' awareness of English spelling-to-sound correspondence, a strategy she sees as an effective means to reduce the impact of the English orthographic form on the learners' pronunciation.

Another controversial point made by Jolanta is her criticism of several other proposals for pronunciation instruction, including Jenkins' (2000) *Lingua Franca Core*, Cruttenden's (2008) *Amalga English and International English*, and Collins and Mees' (2003) *Pronunciation Error Ranking*. By suggesting that such approaches contain conflicting propositions and other major flaws due to limited empirical evidence, the author advocates that there is still much need for increased research in the area of first-language (L1) accented English and its role in communication. Jolanta also extends her viewpoint about pronunciation priorities to the typical "segmentals versus suprasegmentals" controversy. For the author, neither the former nor the latter perspective fully succeeds in satisfactorily meeting the phonetic needs of learners from different linguistic backgrounds. She argues that such needs can only be achieved if L1 specific features which distance the learners' pronunciation from the L2 is prioritised and accompanied by empirical research. For example, revealing data from an investigation conducted by the author with intermediate and advanced Polish learners of English provided a wealth of information about the role which problematic words played in the phonetic acquisition of English sounds. Although the findings were somewhat affected by learner subjectivity, the data provided valuable weight to the argument made by the author regarding the significance of the learners' L1 in phonetic development, as demonstrated by this quote from learners on phonetic cognates between Polish and English: "*They look like Polish words so when I see them, I pronounce them in the Polish way though I know it's wrong*" (Szypra-Kozłowska, 2014, p. 135, italics in the original).

Another positive feature of the book is Jolanta's proposal for a holistic multimodal approach to phonetic instruction in Chapter 3. By suggesting that teachers should endeavour to employ a mode of pronunciation instruction which takes advantage of both "sounds in the body" and "sounds in the mind" (Szypra-Kozłowska, 2014, p. 235), Jolanta innovates and caters for proponents of both motor-skills and cognitive approaches. By the same token, Jolanta includes in her list of pronunciation techniques an eclectic selection of instructional procedures which ranges from phonemic transcriptions to the use of technology.

The climax of the book, in my opinion, is Chapter 3, dealing with the issue of exposure to spoken English by learners in EFL contexts. For Jolanta, teachers ought to encourage pronunciation training beyond the walls of the classroom. To achieve this, the author recommends the use of dictionaries, learner recordings of their own utterances using a performance piece, listening to and reproducing a short passage from an audiobook, as well as other technology-based resources available for computer-assisted pronunciation training.

In conclusion, I found this book an essential resource for people with an enthusiasm for pronunciation instruction. Generally speaking, the book is reader-friendly and the summary provided

in the final chapter (Chapter 4) is particularly helpful for locating key information in the book, as this information is presented **in bold** on the page. Personally, I have little criticism to make about this book. If I were to point out the shortcomings of the book, however, I would emphasise that the technical jargon from the field of phonetics (e.g. geminates, fortis-lenis distinction, pre-fortis clipping) used in the book could be rather off-putting to a layperson audience. Furthermore, the book could be challenging for novice teachers with limited classroom experience. As the author points out, the book is not a pronunciation manual, and it thus assumes that the reader will have some teaching expertise which will allow them to better engage with the pragmatic advice included in it.

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