

# Introduction



Veronica G. Sardegna and Anna Jarosz

## 1 Why a Focus on English Speech Accents

Derwing and Munro (2015) define accent as “a particular pattern of pronunciation that is perceived to distinguish members of different speech communities” (p. 5). In dictionaries, it is frequently defined as a pronunciation style or manner identifying the country of origin, the geographical region, and the social background of its user. Interestingly, it is not possible to speak without an accent, which is inseparably linked with the concept of national, regional, ethnic, or social identity. Native accent variants can be treated as speech varieties that differ from each other in certain pronunciation features and characteristics. A foreign accent, frequently also referred to as accentedness, is a gradable phenomenon, which denotes the degree to which non-native speech differs from the particular native variety (Derwing & Munro, 2005).

English (L2) speech issues have gained in relevance with the spread of global international communication and the growing number of non-native English speakers who use English to communicate with other non-native English users—that is, as a lingua franca. As it has been attested in numerous studies, English L2 speakers have different objectives and needs with regard to their English pronunciation, including being understood by other users and/or by English natives, approximating a particular native accent, or hiding their own accent in order to come across as native speakers (Jarosz, 2019; Waniek-Klimczak, 1997). In L2 learning/teaching, nativeness seems

---

V. G. Sardegna (✉)

Department of Instruction and Leadership in Education, Duquesne University,  
Pittsburgh, PA, USA  
e-mail: [sardegnav@duq.edu](mailto:sardegnav@duq.edu)

A. Jarosz

Institute of English Studies, University of Lodz, Łódź, Poland  
e-mail: [anna.jarosz@uni.lodz.pl](mailto:anna.jarosz@uni.lodz.pl)

to have become the secondary objective now that research points to intelligibility as a more feasible, attainable, and desired aim (Levis, 2018). Moreover, since intelligibility and accentedness are semi-independent constructs, considerably accented speech may still be understood by the interlocutor (Derwing & Munro, 1997). Thus, the degree of accentedness does not affect intelligibility or the delivery and reception of the intended message (Derwing & Munro, 1997).

However, the extent of foreign (L1) accentedness may impact the overall impression of listeners and bias their attitudes towards the speaker. It is worth bearing in mind that speech intelligibility and comprehensibility are not exclusively related to the speaker. The role of the listener or of the conversation topic (i.e., the degree of the listener's familiarity with it) cannot be underestimated (Rubin, 1992; Zielinski, 2008). The listener's attitude towards a particular accent (influenced by a particular L1 or representing a different region or background) affects the speech assessment and may evoke positive or negative prejudice in overall judgements (see Chaps. 2 and 3).

Therefore, English accents and accented speech, and the perception, production, and assessment of English speech varieties and pronunciation features are valuable areas to investigate further within the field devoted to L2 phonology acquisition. It is also important to examine the pedagogical effectiveness of various approaches to phonetic training and their effects on perceived L2 accent, comprehensibility, and intelligibility. Furthermore, there is also a growing demand for linguistically-grounded theories and models that would explain L2 and L3 acquisition, especially in the developing multilingual contexts. This volume was developed with these critical research needs in mind and with the goal of meeting the expectations of contemporary researchers and the requirements posed by modern linguistics.

## 2 Purpose, Aims, and Focus of the Book

The purpose of this edited collection is to present and discuss theoretical, practical, and research developments in English pronunciation in order to establish evidence-based directions and recommendations for best practices in English speech assessment, research, and training. The volume also provides a global perspective on English speech accents and their acquisition as well as pedagogical, assessment, and research implications for future research, including research directions for L2 and L3 acquisition.

Two main aims guided the selection of chapters: to disseminate knowledge about theoretical frameworks in relation to English speech assessment and training, and to share the results of the most recent investigations into L2 speech perception, production, assessment, and training. To achieve these aims, the volume features leading pronunciation experts and scholars who share valuable insights and cutting-edge research supported by contemporary methodologies and approaches.

The focus of this publication is on theoretical and practical frameworks for English speech assessment, perception, production, phonetic training, and acquisition. It

highlights the importance of the role of the listener in speech assessment, of individual differences in moderating accent training, and of the links between accentedness and comprehensibility. It also addresses the needs of the growing multilingual contexts, in which English constitutes only one of the few acquired foreign languages. Thus, the approaches, methodologies, models, and theories presented in this volume aim to answer the most recent and most urgent questions posed in the field of English speech assessment, research, and training.

### **3 Intended Readers**

This collection appeals to a large and mixed group of linguists, applied linguists, researchers, teachers, teacher educators, and students interested in English pronunciation learning, assessment, training, and research. Linguists, applied linguists, and researchers will find the book stimulating and thought-provoking because it not only confirms and disseminates the existing and available knowledge in the field of phonetics and phonology, but also sets new trends and directions for future research. The research and pedagogical methodologies and theories reported in the chapters will also undoubtedly motivate and encourage fruitful and intriguing academic discussions and exchanges among researchers in training and scholars.

Teachers and teacher educators may also appreciate the contributions of this volume as it offers them valuable insights into the mechanisms and factors that affect L2 speech acquisition, production, perception, and assessment. The chapters also share empirically-based theoretical frameworks and perspectives that can effectively inform and guide their teaching practices.

Undergraduate and postgraduate students could use this collection as a handbook for their courses in linguistics, second language acquisition, phonetics, and phonology. The book covers a carefully and methodically selected range of topics, research paradigms, and empirical and cutting-edge findings, which they may find useful, motivating, and relevant for their applied linguistics studies.

All in all, this volume is positioned to confirm, question, and suggest both theoretical and practical trends in English speech assessment, research, and training. Its international scope in terms of contributing authors and educational and research settings helps address the needs of a wide spectrum of readers, and makes it an enlightening and inspiring read for students and scholars at different levels of pedagogical and research expertise.

### **4 Structure of the Book**

The collection consists of six main parts. Part I introduces the aims, the focus, and the structure of the book. It also comments on its intended readers.

Part II reviews, provides empirical evidence, and offers critical analyses guiding different aspects of English speech assessment, including the malleability of listener judgments, linguistic variables affecting listeners' reactions to accented speech, and the effects of prestige familiarity on students' perceptions and attitudes towards English speech. Kym Taylor Reid, Pavel Trofimovich and Mary Grantham O'Brien review the impact of negative and positive social bias on naïve listeners' and language teachers' L2 speech assessments. Then they suggest different ways of mitigating social bias effects on listeners' judgments and offer several implications for teaching, research, and assessment of L2 speech. Ron Thomson and Talia Isaacs focus on listeners' judgments of different L2 English speakers' fluency, comprehensibility, relaxedness, friendliness, and intelligence. They conclude with useful guidelines for L2 instruction and listener sensitivity training. Pedro Luchini and Cosme Paz analyze the usefulness of measurements of nuclear stress placement and comprehensibility in assessing L2 pronunciation. Gemma Archer investigates whether prestige accent varieties are still perceived prestigious in a blind test by international students. The final chapter by Takehiko Makino offers a critical analysis of several diagnostic passages commonly used for data collection and provides recommendations for read-aloud assessments.

Part III examines L2 listeners' perceptions of (a) accented/comprehensible non-native English speech, (b) two different strategies for syllable structure simplification, (c) voicing of English plosives in the coda position, and (d) stress of polysyllabic words. Joan Mora examines the relationship between accentedness and comprehensibility in L2 English speech as a function of non-native listeners' L1 and their L2 proficiency level. He also provides implications for L2 speech perception and assessment. Ali Alelaiwi and Steven Weinberger explore L2 perceptions of syllable structure simplifications consisting in consonant deletion and vowel epenthesis. Lina Bikeliënė approaches the role of voicing of English plosive codas by Lithuanian learners of English from two perspectives: recognition and perception. Finally, Veronica Sardegna and Anna Jarosz report on a case study investigating the role of autonomous learning supported by *YouGlish* in predicting and perceiving English word stress in polysyllabic words.

Part IV reports empirical findings and research perspectives on the production of English vowels, coda obstruents, and rhoticity. Jan Volín, Tanja Kocjančič Antolík, Radek Skarnitzl and Pavel Šturm explore the factors that contribute to vowel accentedness in L2 learners. Steven Weinberger presents empirical evidence to support the claim that that /h/, aspiration, and vowel epenthesis are equivalent entities, which linguistically and theoretically equal the process of epenthesis in Mandarin Chinese production of coda obstruents. Ondřej Fischer and Pavel Šturm conclude this part with an investigation of the consistency of the treatment of rhoticity by Czech learners of English.

Part V shares current practices in phonetic training and their effect on learners and listeners. Ingrid Mora-Plaza, Mireia Ortega, and Joan Mora investigate the interplay between individual differences in auditory selective attention and attention switching skills, and the effectiveness of high-variability phonetic training under different stimuli and conditions in enhancing the perception and production of an

L2 vowel contrast. Finally, Ewelina Wojtkowiak shares the results of a longitudinal acoustic study exploring the effects of phonetic training on the acquisition of English stops by Polish learners.

Part VI presents theoretical perspectives on the acquisition of phonology in multilinguals. Katarzyna Dziubalska-Kořaczyk and Magdalena Wrembel propose the Natural Growth Theory of Acquisition to account for L2 and L3 acquisition processes. Jolanta Sypiańska and Zuzanna Cal explore perceptual drift in L1 phonetic categories caused by cross-linguistic influences from the L2 and L3.

## References

- Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J. (1997). Accent, intelligibility, and comprehensibility: Evidence from four L1s. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 19(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263197001010S>
- Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J. (2005). Second language accent and pronunciation teaching: A research-based approach. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39(3), 379–397. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3588486>
- Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J. (2015). *Pronunciation fundamentals: Evidence-based perspectives for L2 teaching and research*. John Benjamins. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1075/llt.42>
- Jarosz, A. (2019). *English pronunciation in L2 instruction: The case of secondary school learners*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13892-9>
- Levis, J. M. (2018). *Intelligibility, oral communication, and the teaching of pronunciation*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108241564>
- Rubin, D. (1992). Nonlanguage factors affecting undergraduates' judgements of nonnative English-speaking teaching assistants. *Research in Higher Education*, 33(4), 511–531. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40196047>
- Waniek-Klimczak, E. (1997). Context for teaching English phonetics and phonology at Polish universities and colleges: A survey. In E. Waniek-Klimczak & J. P. Melia (Eds.), *Accents and speech in teaching English phonetics and phonology: EFL perspective* (pp. 5–17). Peter Lang.
- Zielinski, B. (2008). The listener: No longer the silent partner in reduced intelligibility. *System*, 36(1), 69–84. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2007.11.004>

**Veronica G. Sardegna**, Ph.D. is Adjunct Faculty at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, USA. She has taught ESL and teacher education courses at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Pittsburgh, and Duquesne University, USA, for two decades. She conducts research on English pronunciation teaching, intercultural learning, and instructional technology. She has received the 2021 D. Scott Enright Interest Section Service Award for her outstanding service to TESOL.

**Anna Jarosz** is Assistant Professor in the Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics at the University of Lodz in Poland. Her professional interests include pronunciation teaching and learning with a focus on individual learner differences, motivation, and strategy use. She is author of *English Pronunciation in L2 Instruction. The Case of Secondary School Learners* (Springer, 2019) and, since 2019, she organizes the International Conference on Native and Non-Native Accents (Accents).