

Challenges and Solutions to Incorporating Pronunciation Instruction in Second Language Classrooms

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Overview

- Why should we care about pronunciation?
- What is pronunciation (instruction)?
- What do teachers think? And what are they doing in their classes?
- What can I do in my classroom?
 - Selecting targets and a framework for teaching
 - Resources for continued engagement

**Why should we care
about pronunciation?**

Why is L2 pronunciation important?

- Pronunciation is a core component of speech – “spoken language is sound ... [and] phonology cannot be dissociated from the rest of language”
- Pronunciation is related to all four skills
 - Speaking: intelligibility/comprehensibility
 - Listening: understanding connected speech
 - Reading: processes of word recognition
 - Writing: spelling and function word usage

(Darcy, 2018)

What is pronunciation (instruction)?

Please take a moment to think about what the phrase 'pronunciation instruction' means to you in the context of second language teaching. Try to define it and think of a few examples that come to mind.

How do instructors define pronunciation (instruction)?

- Three main themes: what is being taught, how it's taught, and what the goals of the teaching are
 - What: Teaching/learning of sounds/consonants/vowels (~64%)
 - How: listen/repeat (~33%); corrective feedback (~20%)
 - Why/goal: 'correct'/native-like (~20%); comprehensible (~10%)

Huensch (2018)

Global speech dimensions

- **Intelligibility** – actual understanding of an utterance (transcription)
- **Comprehensibility** – effort required (ease/difficulty) to understand an utterance (scalar rating)
- **Accentedness** – the extent to which pronunciation deviates from an expected pattern (e.g., native/local form) (scalar rating)

Global speech dimensions



Understanding of an utterance

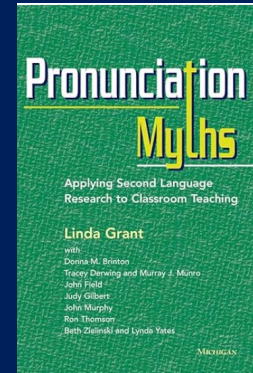
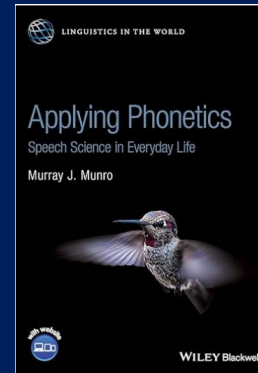
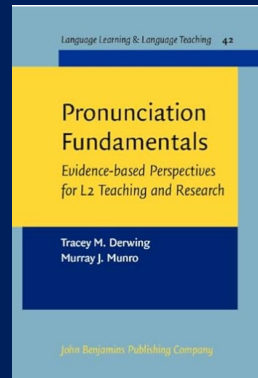
- **Accentedness** – the extent deviates from an expected form)



A side note/caveat...

- Pronunciation involves a listener (but today I'm focused on the learner and the teacher)

Accent ‘myths’



- “I don’t have an accent” – *everyone* speaks with an accent
- “some speech is ‘accent-free’” – nope!
- “we should teach to ‘eliminate’ foreign accent” – not necessary, not possible (for a lot of reasons)
- “reducing accentedness = being more understandable” ...

Comprehensible ≠ No Accent

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LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Studies in
Second
Language
Acquis

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

The relationships among L2 fluency, intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness

Vol. 47 No. 3 December 2022

Studies in
Second
Language
Acquisition

Revisiting the moderating effect of speaker proficiency on the relationships among intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness in L2 Spanish

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even 'heavily'
comprehensible



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L2 Spanish Listener Ratings Database (L2SLRD)

**L2 pronunciation
improvement ≠ accent
reduction**

What does it all mean?

- We should focus on improving those pronunciation features that impact comprehensibility/meaning
- Focusing on 'accent elimination' isn't possible (we all have an accent)
- What does research tell us about which pronunciation features are most important for communication?

Functional load in English

- Segmentals (sounds) have different levels of communicative value/weight in a language
- Sound pairings can be ranked as having **lower** or **higher** functional load (high = more important)

Vowels		Consonants	
10	/e, æ/ /æ, ʌ/ /æ, ɒ/ /ʌ, ɒ/ /ɔɪ, əʊ/	10	/p, b/ /p, f/ /m, n/ /n, l/ /l, r/

1	/f, θ/ /dʒ, j/
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Features predicting comprehensibility in L2 Spanish

- Eleven features coded (e.g., VOT of /p t k/, production of orthographic <h>, lenition of /b d g/; /r r/ accuracy)
- VOT – voice onset time; *park* [p^h] vs. *parque* [p]
- Although multiple features were associated with accentedness, only VOT also showed impact on comprehensibility



What's happening in world languages classrooms?



Stop and Think

- Have you heard any of the following about pronunciation instruction?
 - It isn't for beginners -- they need to focus on grammar/vocab
 - It isn't compatible with Communicative Language Teaching
 - Pronunciation instruction is boring
 - Only native speakers can teach pronunciation
 - I can't incorporate it because I don't control my course content
 - I don't have time to teach pronunciation
 - Learners will just 'pick it up' (or another variation – they'll get it abroad)

(why) is pronunciation deprioritized?

- History/Context

- “paradigm shift in language teaching...language skills that were form-based no longer seemed compatible with then-contemporary values and beliefs about language teaching”

(Levis & Sonsaat, 2017, p. 280).

- Time (priorities, assessment)
- Method (how to teach, effectiveness, input)
- Focus (what to teach, tailoring to context/needs)

Darcy (2018)

Findings from ESL/EFL contexts

- Instructors

- often lack specific training in pronunciation teaching but desire it
- Think pronunciation instruction is important

- Pronunciation instruction constitutes a minor focus in many classrooms

(e.g., Baker, 2014; Burgess & Spencer, 2000; Buss, 2016; Foote et al., 2011 Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010)

- More experienced pre-service teachers are more skeptical about L2 pronunciation teachability (and rate accentedness harsher)

(Tsunemoto et al., 2023)

Survey Participants

1168

Instructors contacted

28

Public universities in the US

Survey available on IRIS



296

Survey response collected

French ($n=89$) Spanish ($n=127$)

German ($n=80$)



Huensch (2019a, 2019b)

Interview/classroom observation participants

- Seven instructors of French ($n=3$) & Spanish ($n=4$)
 - Recruited from two institutions (from the survey)
 - 2-4 semesters prior teaching experience
- All TAs/graduate students (largest survey population)
- \$10 Amazon gift card for each phase (\$40)
- Pseudonyms used (chosen by participants)

Findings from CTL classrooms

- Instructors have less training/experience compared to ESL/EFL teachers (many participants were MA/PhD students)
- Similar to ESL/EFL contexts, instructors spend limited time, if any, on pronunciation teaching (< 15 mins/wk)

Findings from CTL classrooms

- Limited pronunciation moments (2%-6% of talk)
- Reactive in the form of corrective feedback
 - Only one instance of pre-planned pronunciation in 22 hours
- Tension between focus on accent reduction vs. intelligible speech; conflating pronunciation instruction with 'accent reduction'

Is pronunciation part of your course?

- No

- “It’s Spanish 1, we’re not really focused on pronunciation, we want them to start to understand grammar.” (Adam)
- “Pronunciation isn’t carved out as a distinct part of our curriculum. There are pages in the textbook (this vowel combo and examples and differing words). The problem is you’d have to take extra time to do that. If I have extra time, then I’ll read that page with them.” (Megan)

Are particular aspects more important to correct?

- 83% YES
- When impedes communication
 - *“The errors that impede comprehension are above all the most important”*
 - *“the mistakes that influence the intelligibility shall be corrected”*
- When meaning changed
 - *“it is very important to correct errors in words such as ‘pero’ and ‘perro’ that have only one letter difference, but change the word entirely”*
 - *“Vowel sound errors that change the meaning of the word are the most important. For example, in French, ‘coeur’ means ‘heart’, but is often pronounced like the word ‘corps’, which means ‘body’”*

Misunderstanding is infrequent

- “There are times when I don’t understand, but because I have context—I know what I asked them, I went through a similar learning process—most of the time I know what they said.” (Megan)
- “As language teachers we have super powers in comprehending...It’s rare that I actually can’t understand them.” (Sven)

Tension between nativeness vs. intelligibility?

- Assessment
 - 30% of explanations for why pronunciation not part of assessment indicated the course focused on communicative abilities
 - “We don't include it as part of the syllabus and we don't focus on accuracy but on communicative skills rather”
- PI disconnect from communicative framework?

Pronunciation isn't compatible with CLT

“The current thing that we do is communicative language teaching and there it's pretty explicit that you're not as worried about the pronunciation. You want them to be speaking. You want to provide an environment where if they say something you're not gonna immediately correct it...make them comfortable speaking the language and then down the road they can start to hone in their skills.” (Adam)

What about LCTLs (Less Commonly Taught Languages)?

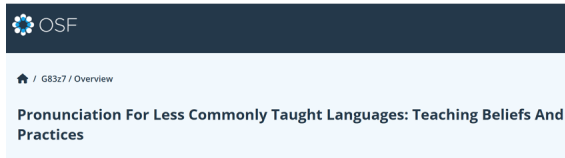
- Beliefs and practices related to pronunciation instruction of Arabic, Japanese, Korean, and Russian
- Better understand how LCTL contexts compare to ESL and commonly taught languages' contexts

Survey Participants

1268
LCTL Instructors contacted

100⁺
Public universities in the US

- Study materials, data, and analysis code are available at <https://osf.io/g83z7/overview>



262
Survey response collected



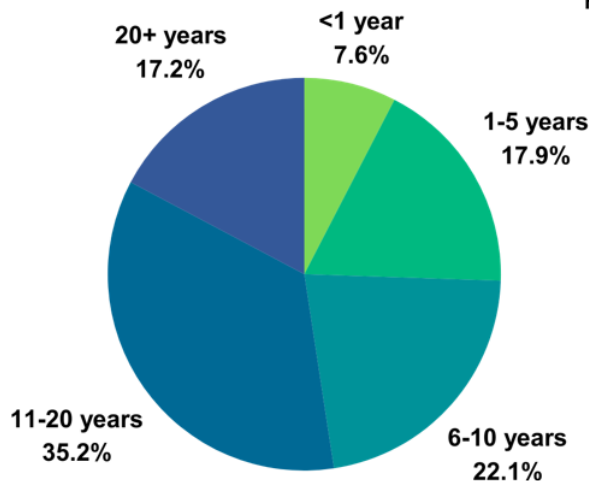
Participants

After data cleaning (repeat responses, survey completion, etc.); $n = 169$ participants

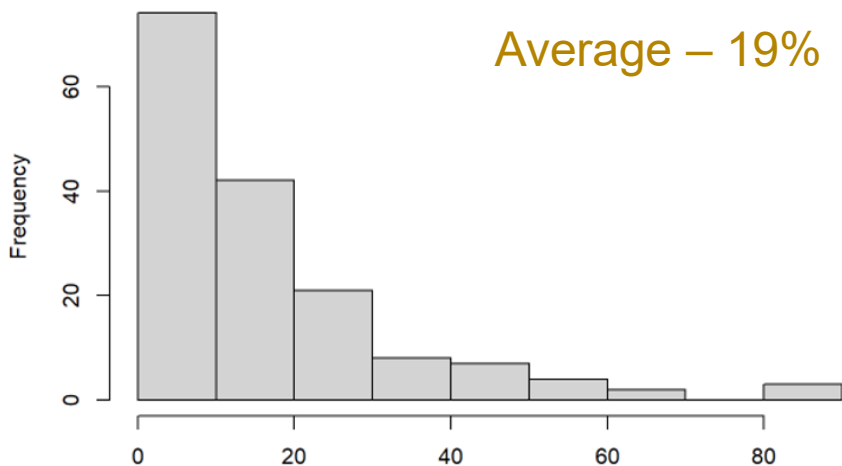
Language	<i>n</i>	Percentage (%)
Arabic	30	18
Japanese	54	32
Korean	38	22
Russian	47	28

Findings from LCTL classrooms

Most Instructors Very Experienced



What percentage of your class time would you estimate you spend teaching pronunciation?



To learn more – visit us at AAAL! 😊



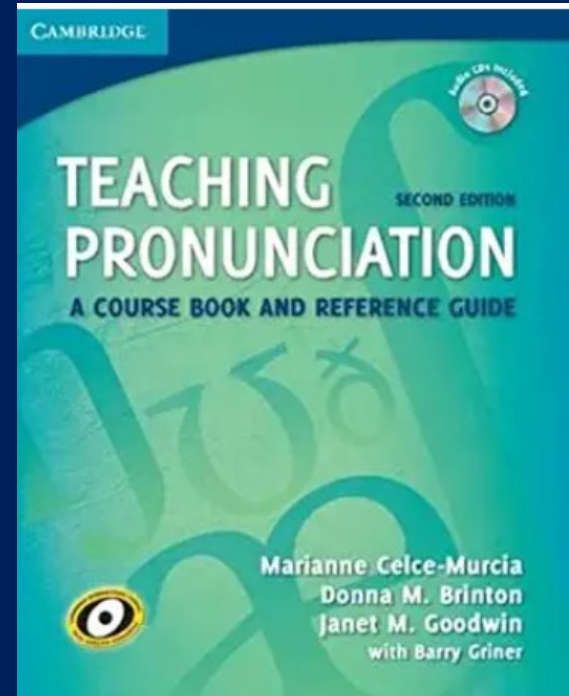
**What can I do in my
classroom?**

Selecting target features

- Above all, consider features which likely to impact comprehensibility (e.g., high functional load, saliency)
- Select features that are likely to benefit your group
- Help individual students target features that might be particularly relevant for them

A framework for teaching pronunciation

Phases of Pronunciation Instruction

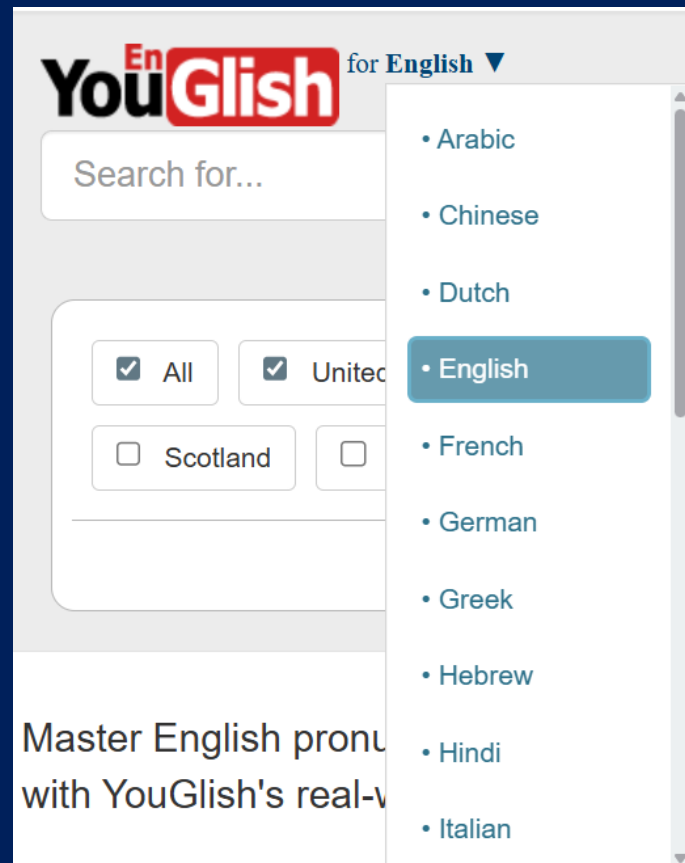


Listening an important first step

- When we're trying to learn the pronunciation of a new language, we often jump right to speaking
- Don't forget listening!
- Increase input variability/perception opportunities
 - Hearing many voices (including other learners' voices) can help listening and perception abilities
 - Being able to hear the target feature is likely a necessary first step

YouGlish for listening

- YouGlish
 - MANY languages (not just English!)
 - Contextualized learning
 - Variable input
 - Hear and see
 - Control speed



Overcoming obstacles (Darcy, 2018)

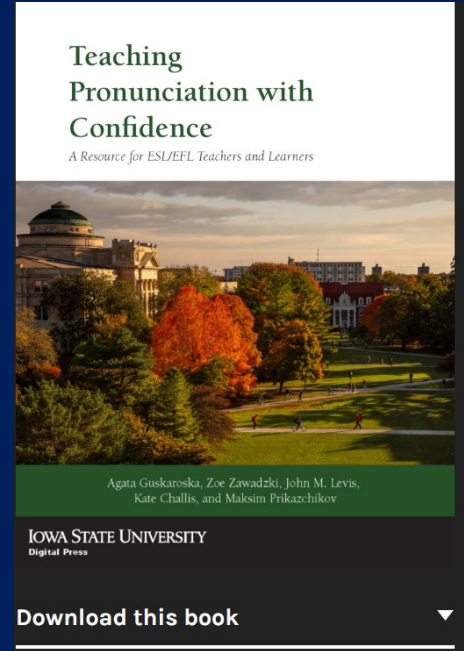
- Consider ways to integrate into existing content
 - Grammar unit on questions could include micro-lesson on intonation differences between yes/no and wh-questions
 - Grammar unit on separable/inseparable prefixes could include micro-lesson on word stress (Martin & Jackson, 2016)
- Then, reinforce with explicit reminders and corrective feedback, which is more effective when related to previous teaching (Saito & Lyster, 2012)

Additional resources



Ines Martin

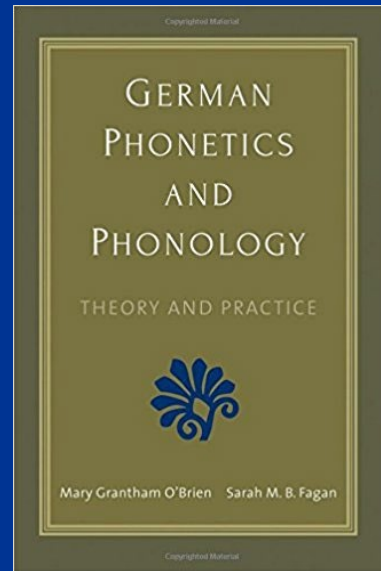
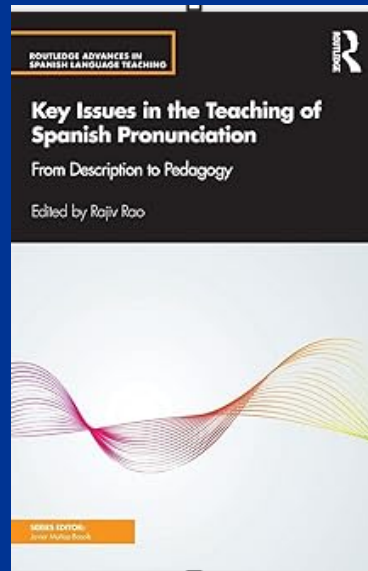
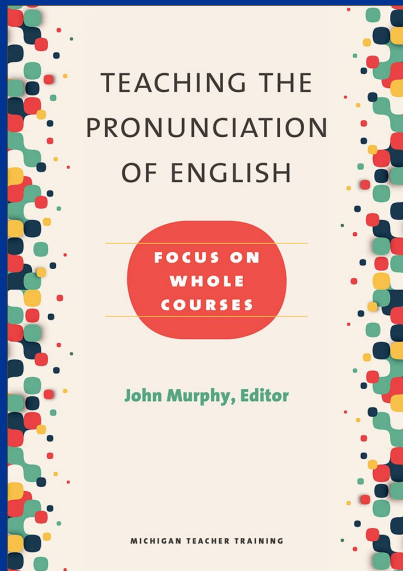
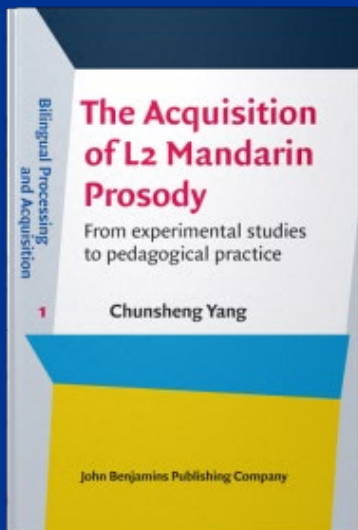
[German Pronunciation Materials](#)



[Teaching Pronunciation with Confidence](#)

Resources for continued engagement

Resources for pronunciation teaching



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Abstract

This overview of the key issues in French applied phonology and pronunciation begins with a description of the French phonology, phonetics, and pronunciation. It begins with a description of the French phonology, phonetics, and pronunciation.

German—Issues in Applied Phonology, Phonetics, and Pronunciation

[Ines A. Martin](#)

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Abstract

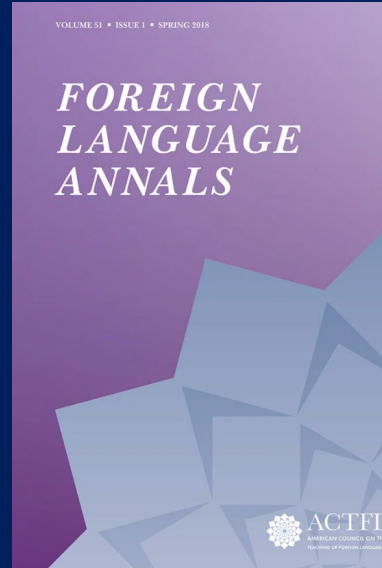
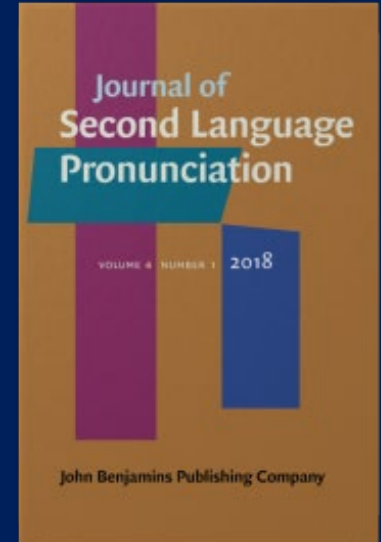
This encyclopedia entry provides an overview of the key issues in German applied phonology, phonetics, and pronunciation. It begins with a description of the German phonology, phonetics, and pronunciation.

Read and publish

[The Modern Language Journal](#)



[Journal of Second Language Pronunciation](#)



[Foreign Language Annals](#)

Get connected! - PSLLT

- Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching Conference (PSLLT)
 - Sept 10-12, 2026 at Iowa State
- Call for proposals (deadline April 17, 2026)
 - <https://bit.ly/psllt26abstract>



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Final thoughts

- Pronunciation is important; we should focus on comprehensibility
 - Focus on targets that have the most impact on meaning
 - We need much more research on what these targets are
- Pronunciation is a thriving field – exciting news for the future!

Acknowledgments

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Questions?

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