

Foreword

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Pronunciation Fundamentals: Evidence-based perspectives for L2 teaching and research

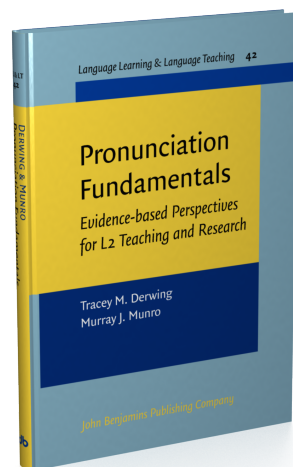
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Foreword

We wrote this book to serve as a resource for anyone who is interested in second language pronunciation. Teachers of pronunciation will find a practical presentation of theory and research to inform classroom choices. We have deliberately avoided including material that is readily available elsewhere (e.g. an introduction to basic phonetics; classroom exercises and activities) in favour of building a foundation for understanding how, why, and when to implement pronunciation instruction. Applied language researchers will also find a useful overview of research on pronunciation encompassing its historical roots, its main foci, and its methods. We have elaborated on the major themes and findings that characterize this field while looking critically at the strengths and limitations of specific studies. Although we have focused heavily on English as a second language (ESL), in part because much of the research involves second language (L2) speakers of English, many of the principles outlined here will apply in the instruction of pronunciation of other languages as well.

This book is the product of several years of collaborative research on issues of L2 pronunciation of English. When we first met, we were both teaching ESL to immigrants in the evenings, while attending graduate programs in Linguistics during the day. At that time, many of our students were Vietnamese refugees. Although some of them had a good command of English grammar and vocabulary, nearly all of them struggled to make themselves understood. Because of our Linguistics background, we were asked to teach stand-alone pronunciation classes for the students with the most serious problems. These experiences led us to a lifelong curiosity about the sources of communication difficulty that L2 learners face and the ways their problems can be addressed. When we started teaching ESL, pronunciation had already gone from a primary focus of L2 classrooms under the recently-abandoned audio-lingual method to a largely neglected concern under the communicative approach. In the second language acquisition (SLA) community there was considerable pessimism about the need for pronunciation teaching and its benefits, yet it was exceptionally clear to us that our students needed support. We had few up-to-date materials, and most of those were not helpful. As a result, we resorted to trial and error, developing new practices for our students. The results were mixed. In some instances, we saw clear improvement, both in perception and production; in others, we empathized with our students' frustration at how slowly change seemed to come, and how difficult their interactions were in their everyday lives. We would have loved to have a book like this one, which could have given us insights about the nature of our students' L2 pronunciation challenges, as well as pedagogical suggestions.

Our initial teaching experiences led us to the research that we have been conducting together over the last two decades. It has been most rewarding, and we hope that our work will help other language learners benefit from new knowledge about pronunciation learning and teaching.

How to use this book

The chapters in this book were written as stand-alone units so that they can be read in any order, with one exception. We recommend that readers start with Chapter 1, where the essential terminology used throughout this book is explained. It is possible to revisit the definitions of all expressions in SMALL CAPITAL LETTERS by referring to the Glossary at the end of the book. We have assumed a basic knowledge of linguistics, phonetics, and the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). If the book is serving as a text in a course on pronunciation teaching, readers without such basic knowledge will find it helpful to supplement it with other materials that offer ideas for activities and provide information on the IPA. Abundant useful volumes and other resources, both online and in print, are available and are referenced at various places throughout this book. Furthermore, instructors using this book as a course text are invited to access the discussion material and an expanded glossary on the John Benjamins website. Please see <http://dx.doi.org/10.1075/lllt.42.additional> for this supplementary content.