

Second Language Learning and Teaching

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Ewa Waniek-Klimczak · Mirosław Pawlak
Editors

Teaching and Researching the Pronunciation of English

Studies in Honour of Włodzimierz
Sobkowiak

 Springer

Editors

Ewa Waniek-Klimczak
Institute of English Studies
University of Łódź
Łódź, Łódzkie
Poland

Mirosław Pawlak
Department of English Studies
Adam Mickiewicz University
Kalisz, Wielkopolskie
Poland

ISSN 2193-7648

ISBN 978-3-319-11091-2

DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-11092-9

ISSN 2193-7656 (electronic)

ISBN 978-3-319-11092-9 (eBook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014951540

Springer Cham Heidelberg New York Dordrecht London

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Printed on acid-free paper

Springer is part of Springer Science+Business Media (www.springer.com)

Preface

The pronunciation of English keeps attracting the attention of researchers, teachers and learners alike. Surprisingly perhaps, the somewhat radical proposal that a native-speaker model should be abandoned as the goal for learners of English seems to have provoked more studies of pronunciation learning and teaching than ever before, with the field of applied phonetics expanding and incorporating new approaches and research perspectives. The studies included in this volume bear witness to the growth of the field, reflecting its major dual interest in, on the one hand, researching and, on the other, teaching second and foreign pronunciation. In fact, this division is far from straightforward and neither are the two processes mutually exclusive, as it is much rather a matter of focus than methods or aims of the study that make a particular contribution more research- or teaching-oriented. This combination of theory and practice, with the requirement for a sound scientific background as a prerequisite for practical solutions, follows from the work of Professor Włodzimierz Sobkowiak, whose inspiration for the community of English pronunciation researchers and teachers in Poland and abroad is gratefully acknowledged by the editors and contributors to the volume, many of whom decided to pay tribute to Professor Sobkowiak by continuing (or challenging) his line of research. Although, over the years, Professor Sobkowiak's interests have shifted from general English phonetics to other areas, including phonetics in dictionaries and online communication (see <http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek> for publications and other important facts), the landmark publication *English Phonetics for Poles* (1996) remains one of the most influential texts that he has authored.

It is therefore only fitting that the present volume should be divided into two major parts, namely *Teaching the Pronunciation of English* and *Researching the Pronunciation of English*, which, however, should be seen as complementing and permeating each other. This is because, since most of the contributors are past or present teachers of practical English phonetics, not only the part of the book devoted to pronunciation instruction but also this dealing with researching different aspects of teaching and learning pronunciation contains references to the instructed learning context. As regards the part *Teaching the Pronunciation of English*, it brings together seven papers touching upon various facets of pronunciation

instruction, ranging from learners' beliefs, through factors affecting this process, to different types of educational resources. Setting the scene, the first two papers report the results of questionnaire studies carried out among English majors in Poland, with Pawlak, Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Bielak concentrating on students' beliefs about pronunciation instruction in relation to language attainment, and Waniek-Klimczak, Rojczyk and Porzuczek focusing on the effect of gender and level of study on the attitude towards pronunciation. The next two papers move closer towards the process of pronunciation teaching itself, describing and researching the results of using new technologies in teaching pronunciation, with Baran-Łuczarska, Czajka and Cardoso examining the effectiveness of and the attitudes towards teaching L2 English phonetics with 'clickers', and Cunningham reporting the process of online pronunciation teaching to teachers. While all of the above contributions concentrate on advanced learners, future or present teachers of English expressing beliefs and working on their own pronunciation, the remaining three papers in this section talk about resources available to learners (Nowacka) and teachers (Tergujeff and Furtak). However, the focus is different. In her account of textbooks, CDs and CD-ROMs, Nowacka overviews materials for learners at different levels of English proficiency and with different needs, whereas Tergujeff looks at the role of textbooks in a specific setting of Finnish lower secondary school. A situation-bound account is also offered by Furtak, who explores the potential use of a modified transcription system for Polish learners.

The second part of the book, *Researching the Pronunciation of English*, brings together contributions discussing different aspects of pronunciation, from priorities in phonetics instruction, through the study of errors, to the suggestions as to the sources of difficulty, and ideas as to the ways of tackling them. As already mentioned, the difference between the papers in this section and the previous one is a matter of focus rather than main interest, with all contributions referring to research with practical implications for pronunciation teaching. The first two papers offer a good example of this type of research, as they take up a crucial theme of the aims for pronunciation teaching, looking for ways to specify priorities for L2 phonetics, with Scheuer concentrating on the criteria of accentedness, intelligibility and teachability, and Zajac exploring frequency. The notion of an error, crucial in the above studies, is further developed by Porzuczek, who looks at local and global errors on the basis of the most-often cited fragment of Sobkowiak's *English Phonetics for Poles*—the list of words commonly mispronounced. It is a sub-section of these words that is further explored by Waniek-Klimczak, who discusses the perception of an error as a possible indicator of advancement. A contrastive approach to vowels, proposed by Schwartz, aims at specifying areas of difficulty for Polish learners; a broader perspective is taken by Shockey, who points to the importance of larynx in the study of a foreign accent. Continuing the topic of a foreign accent, Rojczyk reports the results of an imitation study which shows that a selected feature of L2 can be transferred into accented L1 in advanced learners; and, finally, Dziubalska-Kołaczyk, Balas, Schwartz, Rojczyk and Wrembel argue that pronunciation can be taught more effectively through enhanced suppression of native language processes in imitation. With the final paper aiming to provide a yet

different perspective on successful teaching of pronunciation, the links between theory and practice are stressed yet again.

The editors are convinced that the papers included in the present volume will serve as an inspiration for further research into pronunciation learning and teaching, particularly such that would provide concrete pedagogical implications. Although there are voices that pronunciation teaching should no longer be the priority of foreign language education, mainly because the main focus at present should be on teaching English for international communication, this is surely not the case for the majority of philology students and even when intelligibility is the main goal, good pronunciation instruction can ensure that learners do in fact speak in a way that is understandable to their interlocutors.

Ewa Waniek-Klimczak
Miroslaw Pawlak

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Notes on Contributors

Anna Balas, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of English at Adam Mickiewicz University. She publishes on phonetics and phonology in second-language acquisition. She received a DAAD scholarship in 2004–2005 (University of Bielefeld). She is a member of the editorial team of *Poznań Studies in Contemporary Linguistics*.

e-mail: abalas@wa.amu.edu.pl

Małgorzata Baran-Łucarz received her Ph.D. degree in Applied Linguistics in 2004 with a thesis entitled ‘Field independence as a predictor of success in foreign language pronunciation acquisition and learning’. She is an assistant professor at the University of Wrocław and in the years 1998–2013 has been a teacher at the Teacher Training College in Wrocław. Her main areas of interest are: methodology of FL teaching, SLA (particularly the matter of individual learner differences and FL pronunciation acquisition), psycholinguistics, phonetics and pronunciation pedagogy.

e-mail: mbaran-luczars@ifa.uni.wroc.pl

Jakub Bielak obtained his Ph.D. in Linguistics from the School of English of Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland. He teaches at the Department of English Studies of the Faculty of Pedagogy and Fine Arts (Kalisz, Poland) of the same university and at the Department of Modern Languages of Konin State School of Higher Professional Education, Poland. His interests include form-focused instruction, individual learner differences and applications of cognitive linguistics to language teaching. He has authored and co-authored one book and several articles in edited volumes and journals and co-edited two books.

e-mail: kubabogu@amu.edu.pl

Walcir Cardoso is an Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics at Concordia University (Montreal, Canada). He conducts research on the second language acquisition of phonology, morphosyntax and vocabulary, and the effects of computer technology (e.g., clickers, text-to-speech synthesizers, automatic speech recognition) on L2 learning.

e-mail: walcir@education.concordia.ca

Una Cunningham grew up in Northern Ireland, studied at the University of Nottingham and came to the University of Canterbury in New Zealand at the beginning of 2013 after some 30 years in Sweden. She has taught and carried out research in schools and universities in Sweden with a focus on learner pronunciation with English, Swedish and Spanish as target languages. Her recent work has been developing e-learning in teacher education and she is currently a member of the University of Canterbury E-learning Research Lab. She will coordinate a new international online taught Master of Computer-Assisted Language Learning programme at the University of Canterbury starting in 2015.
e-mail: una.cunningham@canterbury.ac.nz

Ewa Czajka is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Wrocław, Poland. She is an English teacher and teacher trainer. Her research interests include foreign language pedagogy, with special attention to foreign language pronunciation instruction. Currently, she is working on her doctoral dissertation on pronunciation perception and production training at upper secondary school level of education.
e-mail: czajka.ew@gmail.com

Katarzyna Dziubalska-Kolaczyk is full Professor and dean of the Faculty of English at Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland. She is also head of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Speech and Language Processing at AMU. She has published extensively on phonology, phonetics and second language acquisition. In her works she has been pursuing and advocating the Natural Linguistic approach to language. Her books include *A Theory of Second Language Acquisition within the framework of Natural Phonology* and *Beats-and-Binding Phonology*. Her recent research focuses on phonotactics and morphonotactics. She is the editor of *Poznań Studies in Contemporary Linguistics* published by de Gruyter Mouton and organizer of *Poznań Linguistic Meetings* (PLM). She received a Senior Fulbright scholarship in 2001–2002 (University of Hawaii at Manoa) and was visiting scholar at the University of Vienna (1991–1994, 1998). She is a member of Academia Europaea and Agder Academy as well as the Linguistic Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences and nearly 20 professional organizations. She is a member of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Faculty of Philological and Cultural Studies at the University of Vienna, 2012–2016. 2011–2014 she was a member of Rada Narodowego Programu Rozwoju Humanistyki (NPRH, National Program for the Humanities). In 2013–2014 she is the President of Societas Linguistica Europaea.
e-mail: dkasia@wa.amu.edu.pl

Dr. Łukasz Furtak is currently employed at the State Higher Vocational School in Sandomierz, where he teaches phonetics, vocabulary and business translation, as well as at Bingo English School (Sandomierz), where he teaches English to students at all levels in all the age-groups and performs the duties of an academic coordinator. Prior to completing his Ph.D. at the Catholic University of Lublin, Dr. Furtak also worked at the Tarnobrzeg and Sandomierz Teacher Training

Colleges, the Catholic University of Lublin and supervised an EU-funded English language training. His research interests focus on experimental phonetics, contact linguistics phenomena in which Polish directly interacts with English, and the didactics of teaching practical phonetics to students at all levels of English. During his stay in the USA., Dr. Łukasz Furtak worked at the Law Offices of William Karnezis in Chicago as a bilingual paralegal assistant.

e-mail: furtakl@o2.pl

Anna Mystkowska-Wiertelak received her doctoral degree in Applied Linguistics from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland. She is a teacher and a teacher educator working at the English Department of the Faculty of Pedagogy and Fine Arts of Adam Mickiewicz University in Kalisz as well as the Department of Modern Languages of the State School of Higher Professional Education in Konin, Poland. Her main interests comprise, apart from teacher education, second-language acquisition theory and research, language learning strategies, learner autonomy, form-focused instruction and motivation.

e-mail: mystkows@amu.edu.pl

Marta Nowacka teaches Descriptive Grammar and English Phonetics at the University of Rzeszów. Her doctoral research has focused on phonetic attainment of Polish students of English. She is a co-author of two English pronunciation practice books. Her main interests in applied linguistics are in foreign-accented speech and teaching phonetics to foreigners.

e-mail: martha.nowacka@gmail.com

Mirosław Pawlak is Professor of English in the Department of English Studies at the Faculty of Pedagogy and Fine Arts of Adam Mickiewicz University in Kalisz, Poland and the Institute of Modern Languages of State School of Higher Professional Education, Konin, Poland. His main areas of interest are SLA theory and research, form-focused instruction, corrective feedback, classroom discourse, learner autonomy, communication and learning strategies, individual learner differences and pronunciation teaching. His recent publications include *The place of form-focused instruction in the foreign language classroom* (Adam Mickiewicz University Press, 2006), *Production-oriented and comprehension-based grammar teaching in the foreign language classroom* (with Anna Mystkowska-Wiertelak, Springer, 2012), *Error correction in the foreign language classroom: Reconsidering the issues* (Adam Mickiewicz University Press, 2012), *Applying Cognitive Grammar in the foreign language classroom: Teaching English tense and aspect* (with Jakub Bielak, Springer, 2013), as well as several edited collections on learner autonomy, form-focused instruction, speaking and individual learner differences. Mirosław Pawlak is the editor-in-chief of the journal *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching* (www.sllt.amu.edu.pl) and the book series *Second Language Learning and Teaching* (<http://www.springer.com/series/10129>). He has been a supervisor and reviewer of doctoral and postdoctoral dissertations. email: pawlakmi@amu.edu.pl

Andrzej Porzuczek is an Assistant Professor at University of Silesia, Institute of English. His Ph.D. dissertation, accomplished in 1998, dealt with Polish learners' perception of standard British English vowels. His research areas comprise foreign language acquisition, interlanguage phonology and practical phonetics pedagogy. His recent publications include an English pronunciation coursebook for Polish learners, a monograph on the temporal characteristics of Polish learner's read English speech and several articles devoted to prosodic timing in Polish-accented English pronunciation and teaching practical English phonetics to Polish learners. He has also presented papers at numerous international conferences on phonetics, phonology and foreign language acquisition.

e-mail: andrzej.porzuczek@us.edu.pl

Arkadiusz Rojczyk is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of English, University of Silesia in Poland. His research concentrates on production and perception in second-language speech, speech analysis and resynthesis. He is currently working on spectral and temporal parameters in the realisation of Sandhi processes in English and Polish.

e-mail: arkadiusz.rojczyk@us.edu.pl

Sylwia Scheuer is senior lecturer in phonetics and phonology at the Department of English, University of Paris 3-Sorbonne Nouvelle. She got her Ph.D.—under the supervision of Prof. Włodzimierz Sobkowiak—from the School of English, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, where she worked as Assistant Professor until 2005. She was also a visiting lecturer in the Department of Linguistics, University of Vienna, from 1998–2001. Her teaching experience and research has focused on second-language acquisition, phonetics and phonology, general linguistics, sociolinguistics, and English as an International Language.

e-mail: sylwia_scheuer@yahoo.fr

Geoffrey Schwartz is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of English at Adam Mickiewicz University (UAM) in Poznań. He received his Ph.D. in Slavic Linguistics from the University of Washington (Seattle) in 2000. He has been employed at UAM since 2002, where his teaching has concentrated on acoustic phonetics and L2 speech acquisition, and was awarded a post-doctoral degree (Polish *habilitacja*) in 2010. In recent years he has been working in phonological theory, developing the Onset Prominence representational framework, and continuing his work on L2 phonological acquisition. His articles have appeared in numerous journals, including *Journal of Linguistics*, and he is a regular participant at important phonology and L2 acquisition conferences.

e-mail: geoff@wa.amu.edu.pl

Linda Shockey has taught and researched in phonetics both in the USA and the UK for over 40 years, specialising in exploring the interaction of phonetics and phonology. She is the author of *Sound Patterns of Spoken English* (2003) and is currently at the University of Reading.

e-mail: L.Shockey@reading.ac.uk

Elina Tergujeff completed her Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics in the University of Jyväskylä in 2013. Her mixed-methods dissertation mapped English pronunciation teaching practices in Finland. Tergujeff represents Finland in the English Pronunciation Teaching in Europe Survey (EPTiES) research collaboration. She currently works as project coordinator of the University of Jyväskylä Language Campus, and is a popular invited speaker at in-service training events for teachers. e-mail: elina.tergujeff@jyu.fi

Ewa Waniek-Klimczak is Professor of English Linguistics and head of the Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics at the University of Łódź. Her main areas of interest are second language phonetics and phonology, sociolinguistics and pronunciation teaching and she has organised and co-organised (with Professor Włodzimierz Sobkowiak) numerous conferences on pronunciation teaching, with an annual conference on native and non-native Accents of English held every December in Łódź (filolog.uni.lodz.pl/accents). She has edited and co-edited collections of papers on applied phonetics, with the most recent publication co-edited with Linda Shockey on *Teaching and researching English accents in native and non-native speakers* (2013, Berlin Heidelberg: Springer Verlag). Her main previous publications include the book on *Temporal parameters in second language speech: An applied linguistic phonetics approach*. (2005, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego) and *Issues in Accents of English I and II* (2008 and 2010, Cambridge Scholar Publishing). She is an editor-in-chief of *Research in Language*, an international journal published by the University of Łódź. e-mail: ewaklim@uni.lodz.pl

Magdalena Wrembel, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of English UAM. She specialises in second-language acquisition of speech, acquisition of third language phonology, language awareness and innovative approaches to pronunciation teaching and learning. She has published in edited collections and international journals. e-mail: magdala@wa.amu.edu.pl

Magdalena Zajac is a doctoral student at the Institute of English Studies, University of Lodz, Poland, where she teaches phonetics and phonology courses at the undergraduate level. Her research interest include English phonetics and phonology, second language acquisition, L2 pronunciation and sociolinguistics. Her most current research focuses on phonetic imitation and speech accommodation in the pronunciation of Polish learners of English. e-mail: zajac1234@gmail.com