

Levis, J. & LeVelle, K. (2012). Social factors in pronunciation acquisition. In J. Levis & K. LeVelle (Eds.). *Proceedings of the 3rd Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching Conference*, Sept. 2011. (pp. 1-10). Ames, IA: Iowa State University.

SOCIAL FACTORS IN PRONUNCIATION ACQUISITION

2011 Proceedings Introduction

[John Levis](#) & [Kimberly LeVelle](#), Iowa State University

The 3rd Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching Conference was held on September 16-17, 2011 at Iowa State University. The conference was held in conjunction with the [Technology in Second Language Learning and Teaching](#) and [Midwest Association of Language Testers](#) Conferences, with pronunciation oriented sessions found at all three conferences. Nearly 100 participants from 12 US states and from 6 foreign countries attended PSLLT, and the conference employed concurrent sessions for the first time with 32 presentations as well as poster sessions.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL FACTORS IN PRONUNCIATION ACQUISITION

Adults' acquisition of foreign language pronunciation is marked by a rarity of native-like control. The most common explanation for this is age and the influence of a critical period for language learning in general and for pronunciation in particular (Lenneberg, 1967; Scovel, 2000). While there is little argument about the correlation between age and the ultimate level of pronunciation mastery, there is more dispute about whether age is the cause of incomplete acquisition, with some researchers saying a critical period for phonological acquisition may not exist (Flege, 1995). Indeed, the amount of variation in pronunciation attainment among adult learners, from largely unintelligible to native-like, suggests that age cannot be the only influence on attainment. Instead, other causes such as exposure to the target language and social influences may be central to ultimate attainment. The wide variation in attainment means that we urgently need to better understand the causes of varied pronunciation attainment.

Sociolinguistic research in SLA has documented that social, cultural and psychological factors affect language acquisition. Indeed, there is a growing chorus of scholars interested in how social factors influence the learner's approach to pronunciation, and ultimately, their likelihood of fossilizing (Moyer, 2004; Piller, 2002). Pronunciation attainment as seen in the sociolinguistic paradigm has shown that greater attention needs to be paid to individual differences in phonological attainment, especially in relation to factors such as identity and sense of self in the new language. Some questions that have been explored in relation to social issues include the relationship of learners' own views of their accents and their success in pronunciation attainment, the practical implications of accent and the social impact of accentedness, and how listener perceptions and attitudes toward pronunciation affect learners' social interactions.

Research on social factors' influence on second language pronunciation has appeared under topics such as acculturation (Schumann, 1986), identity (Zuengler, 1988), discrimination (Lippi-Green, 1997; Munro, 2003), ethnic group identification (Gatbonton, Trofimovich & Magid 2005), as well as social variables thought to influence pronunciation acquisition (Miller, 2003), affect beliefs about L2 speakers' intelligibility or speakers' ability to speak the language (e.g.,

Lindemann, 2002; Rubin, 1992), or influence teachers' identities when learning to teach (Golombek & Rehn, 2005). Few of these treatments can be found in books, but rather they appear in a wide variety of journals. A forthcoming book addressing the varied threads is that of Levis and Moyer.

SCHEDULE FOR THE CONFERENCE

The conference provided a forum for exploring pronunciation from a sociolinguistic point of view as well as to examine other areas of applied research into pronunciation.

	Session 1	Session 2
8:45 a.m.	Introduction	
9:00 a.m.	<i>Investigating the Role of Discourse Intonation in Miscommunication in Outsourced Call Center Interactions</i> Lucy Pickering (Texas A & M, Commerce), Audrey Roberson (Georgia State University), Eric Frigal (Georgia State University)	EMPTY SLOT
9:40 a.m.	<i>Discrimination of L2 Spanish contrasts: The role of immersion and instruction</i> Marda Rose (Indiana University)	<i>Perceptions of friendliness and intelligence in L2 accented speech: The contribution of race independent variables</i> Ron Thomson (Brock University), Talia Isaacs (University of Bristol)
10:10 a.m.	<i>The Understandability of Chinese with the Removal of Tones</i> Quan Zhang (Nanjing University of Science and Technology)	<i>Using Learner Recordings in Pronunciation Teaching</i> Jennifer Foote (University of Alberta)
10:40 a.m.	BREAK	
11:00 a.m.	<i>Instruction in L2 French: A Global Analysis of Improvement</i> Jessica Sturm (Purdue University)	<i>Perceptual Judgments of Accent by Native Speakers and Non-native Speakers of English</i> Okim Kang (Northern Arizona University)
11:30 a.m.	<i>Spanish native-speaker perception of learner phonology: (Mis)conceptions of accent and intelligibility</i> Kara Moranski (Temple University)	<i>Teaching segmentals step-by-step: Introducing a pedagogical regimen for /n/ and /l/</i> Monica Richards (Iowa State University)

12:00 p.m.	<i>English-Spanish bilinguals' attitudes toward L2 pronunciation: Do they identify with native Spanish speakers?</i> Tyler Anderson (Mesa State University), Benjamin Souza (Appalachian State University)	<i>Teaching pronunciation without using imitation</i> Piers Messum, Roslyn Young (United Kingdom)
12:30 p.m.	<i>The Effect of Metacognitive Feedback on Second Language Morphophonology</i> Marnie Reed (Boston University)	<i>Artificial pronunciation models: Reality or the realm of imagination?</i> Biljana Cubrovic (University of Belgrade)
1:00 p.m.	LUNCH (provided) – in Campanile Room	
1:30-2:45 p.m.	Posters (see titles below)	
3:00 p.m.	<i>Learner Differences in Strategy Use, Self-Efficacy Beliefs, and Pronunciation Improvement</i> Veronica Sardegna (The University of Texas at Austin)	<i>Segmental errors in conversational and read speech: A comparison of ESL learners from four language backgrounds</i> Taylor Anne Barriuso, John Levis (Iowa State University)
3:30 p.m.	<i>The Selling of Accent in Recent U.S. Television Commercials</i> Patricia Watts, Amanda Huensch (University of Illinois)	<i>Somali Accented Pronunciation of English Lax Vowels</i> Ettien Koffi (St. Cloud State University)
4:00 p.m.	BREAK	
4:15 p.m.	<i>The social impact of pronunciation difficulties: Confidence and willingness to speak</i> Beth Zielinski (Macquarie University)	<i>A comparative study of the perception of ITAs by native and nonnative undergraduate students</i> Edna Lima (Iowa State University)
6:30-9:00 p.m.	DINNER (catered)	

Saturday, September 17

	Session 1	Session 2
8:45 a.m.	Introduction	
9:00 a.m.	<i>Evaluating Individual Variability in Foreign Accent Comprehension</i> Murray Munro (Simon Fraser University), Tracey Derwing & Amy Holtby (University of Alberta),	EMPTY SLOT
9:30 a.m.	<i>Analyzing Mutual Comprehensibility Among Non-native Speakers of English: The Effect of Listener First Language Background</i> Audrey Roberson (Georgia State University)	<i>Bringing pronunciation instruction back into the classroom: An ESL Teachers' pronunciation "toolbox"</i> Isabelle Darcy, Doreen Ewert, Xi Chen, Luni Wang, Ryan Lidster (Indiana University)
10:00 a.m.	BREAK	
10:15 a.m.	<i>Extra-Linguistic Factors in the Teaching and Learning of Pronunciation in an ESL Class</i> Joshua Gordon (Indiana University)	<i>Teaching Pronunciation with Phonetics in a Beginner French Course: Impact on Production and Perception</i> Jessica Miller (University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire)
10:45 a.m.	<i>Perception and Awareness of Linking for Non-Native Speakers of English: The Role of Speech Visualization Technology</i> Ghinwa Alameen, Iowa State University	<i>Native-Speaker Perceptions of L2 Spanish Pronunciation: Implications for Pronunciation Instruction in the L2 Spanish Classroom</i> Christina Agostinelli, SUNY Buffalo
11:30 a.m.	Plenary Address <i>The Power of Prejudice in Accent Perception: Reverse Linguistic Stereotyping and its Impact on Listener Judgments and Decisions</i> Donald Rubin (University of Georgia)	

12:45 p.m.	LUNCH (on your own)	
2:30 p.m.	<i>Improving speaking fluency for international teaching assistants by increasing input: What role for prosodic contours?</i> Greta Gorsuch (Texas Tech University)	<i>Transfer of L1 Stress Pattern: Prosodic Acquisition of English by Chinese L2 Learners</i> Liyuan Wang (Purdue University)
3:00 p.m.	<i>Acquisition of the production of contrastive focus in advanced learners of English</i> Greta Muller Levis, John Levis (Iowa State University)	<i>Word Segmentation Skills in Adult L2 Spanish Learners</i> Danielle Reindl (Purdue University)
3:30 p.m.	<i>Analyzing rater bias to validate and revise an ITA performance test</i> Dale Griffie and Jeremy Gevara (Texas Tech University)	<i>Audio/Video Training: Students' Reactions and Improvement</i> Shannon McCrocklin (Iowa State University)
4:00 p.m.	BREAK	
4:15 p.m.	<i>Interactive Panel Discussion – The Ethics of Pronunciation Teaching</i>	
5:00 p.m.	Closing Address	
6:30-9:00 p.m.	DINNER RECEPTION	

POSTER TITLES

Lingua Franca Core: Material Availability and Teacher Training Issues in English Pronunciation Pedagogy, *Ahmet Dursun*

Does the pursuit of L2 accent equal the loss of L1 identity, *Hui-Hsien Feng*

Beaches and Peaches: Common Pronunciation Errors among L1 Spanish Speakers of English, *Jesse Gleason*

The Functional Load Hypothesis: Exploring the Responses of Listeners for high and low Functional Load Errors of Nonnative Speakers, *Kadir Karakaya*

Designing a website for the teaching of sentence stress, *Lindsey Kurtz*

Is a pause always a sign of disfluency? Refining the rating scales in oral proficiency tests,
Jooyoung Lee

Building Acceptance in the Institutional Culture: What an online IFLC can do to enhance
perceived language barriers, *Stephanie Link*

The Role of Word Stress in English as a Lingua Franca, *Shannon McCrocklin*

Machine generated feedback issues in ASR-based CAPT for L2 learning, *Moonyoung Park*

A Systemic Approach to Teach Word Stress to Francophone Adults Learning ESL, *Diane
Poisson*

The relationship between cultural identity and pronunciation of English in an EFL setting,
Elizabeth Pullen

Common Pronunciation Errors in English Vowels of Mandarin ESL Learners, *Manman Qian*

Instructional effects on the acquisition of Spanish vowels, *Anita Saalfeld*

English Pronunciation of Turkish Students: Attitudes and Awareness, *Aysel Saricaoglu*

Native and nonnative listener perception of degree of foreign accent in Spanish, *Elena
Schoonmaker-Gates*

Brazilians' Pronunciation of English, *Jayme Wilken*

The Lingua Franca Core as a Phonological Syllabus, *Teng Xuan*

THE 2011 PSLLT PROCEEDINGS – A SUMMARY

These proceedings include 23 papers in four groups: social influences on pronunciation (plenary plus 6 papers); examinations related to pronunciation instruction (9 papers); assessment (3 papers); and the evaluation of intelligibility, comprehensibility and accentedness (4 papers).

Group 1: Social influences on L2 pronunciation

The theme of the conference was the influence of social factors on pronunciation. In addition to Don Rubin's plenary address (summarized below), there were six papers related to the theme of the conference which were submitted for the proceedings.

Donald Rubin (University of Georgia) gave the plenary address entitled *The Power of Prejudice in Accent Perception: Reverse Linguistic Stereotyping and its Impact on Listener Judgments and Decisions*. In it, he explored a disturbing finding about accented speech: speakers' comprehensibility, likeability, intelligence, and a host of other features are often downgraded by listeners because of the perception of accent based on expectations tied to stereotypes and physical characteristics. Rubin applies the findings from reverse linguistic stereotyping to several areas including education and health care. He also offers several ways forward from the findings of the research, calling upon teachers and researchers to address reverse linguistic stereotyping as a matter of social justice.

In "The social impact of pronunciation difficulties: Confidence and willingness to speak," Beth Zielinski of Macquarie University explored the social impact of pronunciation difficulties by

exploring English learners' perceptions of the impact of their pronunciation on their interactions in English. Using interviews with 26 migrants to Australia, she found that they were overwhelmingly negative about their pronunciation skills. These negative perceptions influenced the amount of English used by some participants, but the effect was not uniform.

Tyler Anderson (Mesa State University) and Benjamin Souza (Appalachian State University) explored how English-Spanish bilinguals identify with speakers of their L2 who show varying degrees of accentedness. Their results are interpreted with reference to issues of identity and degrees of language proficiency.

Veronica Sardegna (University of Texas) examined how improvement in pronunciation (stress and linking) is related to instruction in the use of learning strategies and how their improvement is connected to beliefs about the effectiveness of their own work on pronunciation. Her study suggests that individual learner characteristics can predict pronunciation progress

Edna Lima (Iowa State University) modified the methodology of the Reverse Linguistic Stereotyping paradigm in her examination of how native and nonnative English speakers react to a teaching assistant presented in two guises: an Arabic and a Brazilian speaker of English. Unlike other research in this tradition which used native and nonnative guises, this study found that raters only differed on their evaluation of teaching style, but that accent and comprehensibility ratings did not differ for native or nonnative speakers

Elizabeth Pullen (Bilkent University) looked at how cultural identity and degree of accentedness were connected to attitudes toward pronunciation in an EFL context. Advanced Turkish speakers of English answered questions about cultural identity and their attitudes toward pronunciation. She interprets her results in relation to how changes in pronunciation may be seen as interfering with the learners' identities.

Elena Schoonmaker-Gates (Indiana University), in "Foreign accent perception in L2 Spanish: The role of proficiency and L2 experience," looks at the effects of grammatical proficiency, study abroad experience, and pronunciation instruction experience on the perception of degree of foreign accent. She finds that nonnative listeners' ratings of foreign accent in Spanish varied as a result of all three factors, suggesting that nonnative speakers of a language are not consistent in their evaluation of foreign accent.

Group 2: Pronunciation instruction

Nine papers present studies analyzing methods of teaching pronunciation including best practices, feedback from students and teachers, and success from the use of particular methods.

Isabelle Darcy (Indiana University), Doreen Ewert (University of San Francisco), and Ryan Lidster (Indiana University) describe the development of a pronunciation curriculum in an intensive English program. IEPs seem to be a perfect laboratory for pronunciation, both by itself and integrated with other skills, but pronunciation is often treated in an ad hoc manner in IEPs. In their curriculum, pronunciation is fully integrated into the institutional learning outcomes across all levels of proficiency, with the intent of providing teachers with a pronunciation teaching toolbox they can confidently use.

Jessica Miller (University of Wisconsin Eau Claire) looked at how instruction on sound discrimination influences French learners' ability to discriminate between common French sound contrasts. She looks at the impact of two teaching methods, a phonetic approach and a key word approach. Learners were given both treatments in different orders. Both instructional orders led

to improvement, but only those learners who received instruction in the phonetic approach first improved significantly. The study also found that learners found explicit instruction valuable.

Greta Muller Levis and John Levis (Iowa State University) examined whether instruction in contrastive focus leads to improved production of contrastive focus for international teaching assistants. The TAs all showed improvement in a reading task, and overall the performance improvement from pretest to posttest was significant. Contrastive focus is presented as a learnable facet of pronunciation.

Joshua Gordon (Indiana University) qualitatively examined the effectiveness of an ESL pronunciation class according to the teacher's and students' perspectives. He found that the teacher and students had different and sometimes contradictory expectations. He also discovered an undercurrent of socio-psychological aspects that affected the success of the teaching and learning.

Christina Agostinelli (State University of New York at Buffalo) reviewed research about what NSs and Spanish instructors pay attention to while listening to L2 Spanish, focusing on the findings that pronunciation has a greater potential for causing misunderstandings than more commonly taught areas such as grammar. She suggests applications to the teaching of Spanish.

Piers Messum (Pronunciation Science Ltd, London, UK) proposes an approach to teaching pronunciation without a central role for imitation, a strong departure from most approaches to pronunciation teaching. Messum argues that the weak results of teaching by imitation are based on wrong beliefs about how pronunciation learning actually occurs. He reviews findings questioning the assumptions behind imitation approaches and proposes an alternative approach based on the principles of Caleb Gattegno (creator of the Silent Way).

Monica Richards (Iowa State University) examines /l-/n/ confusion among a variety of Chinese. This contrast, while as troubling to intelligibility as the commonly researched confusion between /l/ and /r/, is far less well-known and is almost completely un-researched. Even though there is evidence that /l-/n/ leads to significant loss of intelligibility, the need for descriptive research is pressing. Richards sets forth ideas for such descriptive study into the /l-/n/ contrast.

Marnie Reed (Boston University) studied how teaching can help change explicit knowledge of pronunciation to implicit knowledge and how this ultimately affects intelligibility and the social evaluation of speech. She uses the findings to suggest instructional features that are needed to help bridge the gap between knowledge of the rules of pronunciation in controlled speech and making those rules automatic in spontaneous speech.

Shannon McCrocklin (Iowa State University) looked at the effect of audio and video input on the learning of a common vowel confusion in English learners, that of /i-/ɪ/. Starting from the hypothesis that video input should be more effective because it provides both visual and auditory modes of input, McCrocklin examines how well learners of English improve in their ability to hear the contrasting sounds. No difference was found for improvement in the two input conditions, but video input was evaluated more favorably.

Group 3: Assessment

The next section includes three papers related to diagnosing and assessing pronunciation. These two related but distinct issues ask very different types of questions. Diagnosing pronunciation usually is pedagogically oriented while assessment is testing-oriented. Diagnosis identifies key

features that need remediation, while assessment looks at pronunciation in relation to its effect on spoken proficiency.

John Levis and Taylor Anne Barriuso (Iowa State University) examined how segmental pronunciation errors differ in reading aloud and free speech for speakers from four language backgrounds: Chinese, Korean, Malay and Spanish. They found that consonant errors did not differ based on the speaking task, but that vowel errors in reading aloud were much more common than in free speech. They suggest that type of speaking task affects the errors made and that English spelling is a greater factor for the pronunciation of vowels than for consonants.

Dale Griffie and Jeremy Gevara (Texas Tech University) analyzed the item bias of a spoken proficiency test for international teaching assistants. The scores for ten test criteria from passing and failing groups were examined. Their results showed that two criteria did not distinguish between high achieving and low achieving test-takers. They suggest reasons for the ineffectiveness of the two criteria.

Jesse Gleason (Iowa State University) used a descriptive study to see if errors commonly attributed to Spanish speakers of English actually occur when students read aloud and speak in English. She looks at /p/ versus /b/ in a word-initial position, /i/ and /ɪ/, /ɔ/ versus /ow/, and the final voicing distinction between /t/ and /d/. Her results showed that only the /i/ versus /ɪ/ and the final voicing distinction between /t/ and /d/ were difficult for her speakers.

Group 4: Evaluating intelligibility, comprehensibility and accentedness

The last section includes four papers that address questions related to the key pronunciation constructs of intelligibility, comprehensibility and accentedness.

Ettien Koffi (St. Cloud State University) approaches intelligibility judgments for English vowels from an instrumental approach rather than from an approach using listener perceptions. Examining the acoustic vowel space of 10 Somali speakers and comparing their lax vowels with those of General American English, Koffi quantitatively predicts which lax vowels are most likely to cause intelligibility challenges when these Somalis speak English.

Murray Munro (Simon Fraser University), Tracey Derwing and Amy Holtby (University of Alberta), in “Evaluating individual variability in foreign accent comprehension,” looked at how people vary in their ability to understand foreign-accented speech. They describe a pilot tool for assessing listeners’ comprehension abilities depending on age and L1 background. Both age and proficiency were found to affect comprehension.

Audrey Roberson (Georgia State University) examined how native and nonnative speakers from various L1 backgrounds rated NNS speech samples for comprehensibility. She found a significant effect for listener L1 background in comprehensibility ratings of several speakers. The results are discussed in light of previous findings related to the acoustic quality of utterances and interlanguage intelligibility benefits. The paper concludes that the relationship between L1 background and comprehensibility among NNS of English remains complicated and needs further exploration.

Shannon McCrocklin (Iowa State University) critiques an element of Jennifer Jenkins’ Lingua Franca Core, the importance of word stress. Word stress is not considered part of the core by Jenkins for three reasons: because it does not pose intelligibility issues, because it is too complex to be teachable, and because its patterns are variable among native English dialects. McCrocklin

argues that each of these reasons is flawed and that each argument can be seen as equally compelling for word stress to be considered a core feature.

REFERENCES

- Flege, J. (1995). Second language speech learning: Theory, findings and problems. In W. Strange (Ed.), *Speech perception and linguistic experience: Issues in cross-language research* (pp. 229-273). Timonium, MD: York Press.
- Gatbonton, E., Trofimovich, P. & Magid, M. (2005). Learners' ethnic group affiliation and L2 pronunciation accuracy: A sociolinguistic investigation. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39, 489-511.
- Golombek, P. & Rehn, S. (2005). Becoming "black lambs" not "parrots": A poststructuralist orientation to intelligibility and identity. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39, 513-533.
- Lenneberg, E. (1967). *Biological foundations of language*. New York: Wiley & Sons.
- Levis, J. & Moyer, A., Eds. (forthcoming). *Social influences in L2 pronunciation*. Boston: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Lindemann, S. (2002). Listening with an attitude: A model of native-speaker comprehension of non-native speakers in the United States. *Language in Society*, 31, 419-441.
- Lippi-Green, R. (1997). *English with an accent: Language, ideology and discrimination in the United States*. New York: Routledge.
- Miller, J. (2003). *Audible difference: ESL and social identity in schools*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Moyer, A. (2004). *Age, accent and experience in second language acquisition: An integrated approach to critical period inquiry*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Munro, M. J. (2003). A primer on accent discrimination in the Canadian context. *TESL Canada Journal*, 20 (2), 38-51.
- Piller, I. (2002). Passing for a native speaker: Identity and success in second language learning. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 6, 179-206.
- Rubin, D. (1992). Nonlanguage factors affecting undergraduates' judgments of nonnative English-speaking teaching assistants. *Research in Higher Education*, 33(4), 511-531.
- Schumann, J. (1986). Research on the acculturation model for second language acquisition. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 7(5), 379-392.
- Scovel, T. (2000). A critical review of the Critical Period research. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 20, 213-223.
- Zuengler, J (1988). Identity markers and L2 pronunciation. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 10, 33-49.