

Pittman, I. (2015). Integration of pronunciation in first-year German textbooks. In J. Levis, R. Mohammed, M. Qian & Z. Zhou (Eds). *Proceedings of the 6th Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching Conference* (ISSN 2380-9566), Santa Barbara, CA (pp. 229-242). Ames, IA: Iowa State University.

## INTEGRATION OF PRONUNCIATION IN FIRST-YEAR GERMAN TEXTBOOKS

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This paper investigates the ways in which pronunciation is integrated into popular first-year German textbooks used in American colleges. Most students who register for a German college course have not had any experience with the German language. Research indicates that it is important to focus on pronunciation early in the learning process. First, college students of German are well past the critical age for language learning, and attaining good pronunciation in the foreign language becomes harder and harder with every passing year. Second, not focusing on pronunciation from the very beginning will allow fossilization to occur in students' speech. The longer these bad habits have to form, the harder it is to correct them later. A review of the ten most popular first-year German textbooks used in American colleges shows that only half of the textbooks include any information on pronunciation and only 20% of the textbooks present it in an effective way. The paper discusses possible reasons why this important aspect of language learning is not given more attention and offers recommendations for increasing awareness to the teaching of pronunciation in first-year German courses.

### INTRODUCTION

According to the 2009 Modern Language Association (MLA) Enrollments in Languages other than English, German is the third-most commonly taught foreign language in American universities (with more than 96,000 students enrolled in a college German course). While a few programs use in-house materials, more than 97% of first-year German programs use one of the ten textbooks available on the market at the moment<sup>6</sup>. Because it is unreasonable (and not advisable) to expect a textbook to cover extensively every aspect of the language, the emphasis on different aspects of the German language may vary from textbook to textbook. Given that communication is a primary goal of language learning, we can expect to see considerable attention given to speaking. Thus, pronunciation, a subset of teaching students how to interact orally in the foreign language, should not be ignored (Henderson & Jarosz, 2014). The focus of this article is to explore the extent to which pronunciation is covered in German first-year textbooks and the ways in which it is integrated.

#### **The importance of focused instruction**

Research has found that explicit instruction is highly correlated with improved pronunciation in both a foreign and a second language (Saito, 2012). This improvement extends itself to comprehensibility, accent, and fluency (Derwing, Munro, & Wiebe, 1998). Kun-Ting et al. (2013) found that the technique of "shadowing" improved learners' pronunciation in English. In a study on form-focused instruction and corrective feedback on L2 pronunciation of the retroflex "r" by Japanese learners, Saito and Lyster (2012) found significant improvement in both

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<sup>6</sup> Source: anonymous editor from Vista Higher Learning

controlled speech and spontaneous speech. Saito's 2011 study showed significant improvement in the Japanese learners' comprehensibility as a result of explicit phonetic instruction. These findings corroborate Flege's (1999) strong recommendation to focus on pronunciation training in order to improve learners' pronunciation. However, in spite of all the findings that show why teaching pronunciation is important, in reality, it somehow "does not always make for a comfortable fit with instructors who support communicative language teaching" (Foote et al., 2013, 1). Among other factors, Henderson and Jarosz (2014) quote teachers' lack of training in teaching pronunciation. They further suggest two ways of assuring proper teaching of pronunciation to students. These are either providing a structured approach to pronunciation work in the textbooks or training teachers to better instruct their students.

### **Materials used in teaching pronunciation**

The textbook used in a particular course can greatly affect the way a course is taught. This includes what is being covered, how it is being covered, and what and how material is being tested (Bragger & Rice, 2000). As mentioned in the above paragraph, teachers are not always comfortable teaching pronunciation, but well-written textbooks can help tremendously by guiding teachers in effective pronunciation teaching (Henderson & Jarosz, 2014). Some studies have been conducted to document the extent to which pronunciation is integrated in textbooks. One such study, on English as a Second Language (ESL), authored by Derwing et al. (2012) recommends teaching both segmental and suprasegmental features and focusing on sounds with a high functional load. The authors further suggest having a variety of tasks and including explicit explanations. Given the complexity of the process involved in modifying one's pronunciation, it is also recommended to repeat individual pronunciation features and to link them to other aspects of the language. Another study on first-year Spanish textbooks also stresses the importance of recycling phonetic topics and further recommends exposing students to different common Spanish dialects (Arteaga, 2000). Levac (1991) conducted a study in which she reviewed the integration of French vowels in four popular first-year textbooks. She found that the examples and explanations were often confusing and not offering students a good understanding of the pronunciation rules of French vowels. English as a foreign language in France and in Poland was the topic of investigation in an article authored by Henderson and Jarosz (2014). While suprasegmental features were well addressed, the authors found the overall integration of pronunciation unsatisfactory in the context of a communicative teaching method. They conclude their article with the observation that it is still up to the teacher to improve upon what the textbook lacks. This of course, brings us back to the challenge caused by "time-starved" teachers who feel ill equipped to design and deliver such work (276).

### **The importance of explicitly teaching pronunciation early**

While there are still some unanswered questions with regard to the effect age has on successful foreign language learning, many studies have found support for the idea of multiple critical or sensitive periods (Huang 2014, Granena & Long 2013). Singleton and Lengyel (1995), for instance, suggest that there is no critical period for vocabulary. In other words, there is no point at which vocabulary acquisition stops. Bialystok and Hakuta (1994) state that certain syntactic features are affected by age, whereas others are not. Phonological acquisition is most affected by age (Oyama, 1976). Based on these observations, what is more relevant to the present study is the fact that the skill that is affected more strongly by age is pronunciation (Granena & Long, 2013). The majority of college students enrolled in German start the study of the language with

no prior knowledge and at a post-critical-period age<sup>7</sup>. While most significant differences are generally found between pre-adolescent and post-adolescent learners (Flege, 1987), attaining native-like pronunciation can become harder with every passing year for adult learners. Focused instruction on pronunciation at the beginning level can help in two ways. First, if all other things were equal, the effort it would take an 18 year old to reach a certain level of proficiency may be less than the effort it would take a 21 year old. Second, if pronunciation is first taught explicitly in the learners' third or fourth year<sup>8</sup>, learners will have had several years' time to possibly form some habits, often mispronunciations that are hard to break. The ingraining of these habits is not uncommon in second and foreign language learners' interlanguage speech and is known as fossilization, a concept introduced by Selinker (1972).

Unlike the development of morpho-syntactic features that often go through certain stages of development (for more information, see the Stages of Second Language Acquisition in Hill & Björk, 2008), when it comes to pronunciation, it is best if the learner is exposed to the new sounds and new suprasegmental features early on in the learning process (Arteaga, 2000; Dansereau, 1995). Research found that improved pronunciation helps with confidence in speaking and increased participation (Oyama, 1982a; Harlow & Muyskens, 1994), and it improves learners' comprehension (Meador, Flege, & MacKay, 1997). The earlier these aspects are affected positively, the better the learners can develop their foreign language skills.

### **A REVIEW OF THE TEN MOST POPULAR FIRST-YEAR GERMAN TEXTBOOKS**

This overview includes the ten most popular textbooks used in American colleges to teach first-year German. This list includes:

1. *Sag mal*, Anton Ch. et al. (2014)
2. *Netzwerk*, Dengler et al. (2012)
3. *Treffpunkt Deutsch*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Gonglewski M. T. et al. (2012)
4. *Wie geht's*, 10<sup>th</sup> edition Sevin and Sevin (2010)
5. *Alles klar*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Otto et al. (2003)
6. *Kontakte*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition Tschirner E. et al. (2013)
7. *Deutsch, na klar*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Di Donato, R. et al. (2011)
8. *Neue Horizonte*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition, Dollenmayer D. B. and Hansen Th. (2014)
9. *Vorsprung* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Lovik T. et al. (2014)
10. *Deutsch heute*, 10<sup>th</sup> edition, Moeller et al. (2012)

### **Criteria for analysis of the integration of pronunciation in the textbooks**

Several criteria were selected to rate the selected textbooks on how they integrate pronunciation. While the absence of a pronunciation section in a textbook does not automatically mean that

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that a critical age period does not mean that children and adults past a certain age, usually puberty, cannot master a foreign language with native-like fluency. And the converse is also true: not all children exposed to a foreign language at an early age learn the language with native-like fluency.

<sup>8</sup> In many German programs, focused courses on pronunciation are commonly taught in the third or fourth year of study.

pronunciation is not being addressed in the classroom, its presence increases the chances that it will be addressed. This is particularly the case given that the vast majority of textbooks have too much material, and instructors often feel pressured to finish what is included in the textbook, let alone add material that is not there. A first step of this overview, then, is to establish whether a textbook has a pronunciation section to begin with. The next step is to evaluate the *way* in which pronunciation is integrated into first-year German textbooks. A good presentation and integration is important for two reasons. First, learners have to be able to work with the material both inside and outside the classroom. Second, a good presentation of the material makes the teaching of this aspect of language considerably easier for instructors who both feel pressured for time and may not have much background in teaching pronunciation. The criteria selected for this analysis are: the existence of information on pronunciation at the chapter level, the presence of explanations, the presence of examples, the presence of modeling of pronunciation in an audio format available for students to listen to both in and outside of class, and the location and level of integration of the pronunciation section within the chapter. I will elaborate now on these points.

**1. Information at the chapter level** - In order to achieve any kind of success from teaching pronunciation in the first year, the information has to be present and embedded in every chapter. Having a few pages in an Appendix at the back of the textbook is not satisfactory. The information presented is to be broken up into manageable bites and addressed regularly. Ideally, both segmental and suprasegmental features are addressed.

**2. Presence of explanations** - German and English differ quite significantly in terms of their sound systems, and the correct pronunciation of German requires learners to produce sounds with new manners of articulation and in new places of articulation. Guidance that helps learning these new sounds can be helpful to the students in and outside of class.

**3. Presence of examples** - Talking about new sounds will only help to a certain extent. Like with other aspects of language learning, it is useful for learners to see the new sounds in context and receive comprehensible input. These examples ought to be words and sentences containing the newly introduced segmental and suprasegmental features. The context should be appropriate for the level of instruction and relevant to the chapter covered.

**4. Modeling of pronunciation in an audio format** - Correct modeling by the instructor in the classroom when presenting the new sounds is essential, and, without doubt, most instructors offer some sort of corrective feedback to their students regardless of the amount and way in which pronunciation is included in the textbook. However, students can benefit greatly from being able to listen to models of pronunciation outside of the class as well. This can be done by exposing students to audio recordings (on CDs or accessible online). In addition to focused exercises on certain segmental and suprasegmental features, audio recordings also have the benefit of allowing students to hear different native speaker accents of the target language.

**5. Location and integration in the chapter** - Where in the chapter the information on pronunciation occurs and how it is integrated can have a significant effect on whether it will be taught in class or not, and whether it helps students to learn the new sounds or not. It is important to present the new lesson on pronunciation relatively early in the chapter, to include vocabulary relevant to the chapter, and to make it an integral part of the chapter. Lessons of pronunciation are most effective when integrated into the chapters throughout the textbook, rather than added as a separate section at the end of the chapter (Derwing et al., 2012; Arteaga, 2000).

## DATA COLLECTION

The collection of the data consisted of a review of all ten selected textbooks and an analysis of whether and how they were fulfilling the above-presented criteria. The data collection yielded the following results that are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

*Information on pronunciation found in all ten first-year German textbooks*

<b>Title</b>	<b>Each chapter</b>	<b>Explanations</b>	<b>Examples</b>	<b>Audio</b>	<b>Good location and integration</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>1. <i>Sag mal</i></b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-Suggestions -Opportunity to record -Regional variation
<b>2. <i>Netzwerk</i></b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-Deductive reasoning
<b>3. <i>Treffpunkt Deutsch</i></b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	-Suggestions
<b>4. <i>Wie geht's?</i></b>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	-Suggestions
<b>5. <i>Alles klar!</i></b>	9 out of 12	No	Yes	No	No	-Suggestions -Appendix section on pronunciation
<b>6. <i>Kontakte</i></b>	No	-	-	-	-	- Appendix section on pronunciation
<b>7. <i>Deutsch, Na klar!</i></b>	No	-	-	-	-	-
<b>8. <i>Neue Horizonte</i></b>	No	-	-	-	-	-
<b>9. <i>Vorsprung</i></b>	No	-	-	-	-	-
<b>10. <i>Deutsch heute</i></b>	No	-	-	-	-	-

With each criterion being worth one point, each textbook was assigned a number of points depending on how many of the selected criteria it fulfills. A summary of the points earned by each textbook can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2

*Textbook scores based on five criteria for integration of pronunciation*

<b>Textbook</b>	<b>Score</b>
1. <i>Sag mal (SM)</i>	5
2. <i>Netzwerk (N)</i>	5
3. <i>Treffpunkt Deutsch (TD)</i>	4
4. <i>Wie geht's? (WG)</i>	4
5. <i>Alles klar! (AK)</i>	1.5
6. <i>Kontakte (K)</i>	0
7. <i>Deutsch, Na klar! (DNK)</i>	0
8. <i>Neue Horizonte (NH)</i>	0
9. <i>Vorsprung (V)</i>	0
10. <i>Deutsch heute (DH)</i>	0

## RESULTS

When considering the five criteria selected for analysis, less than half (40%) of all textbooks meet at least four of the five criteria and only 20% of all books meet all criteria. The percentage of textbooks that have absolutely no pronunciation-related content at the chapter level is 50%<sup>9</sup>, while 60% of the textbooks have either no information, insufficient information, or information that is poorly presented and integrated.

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<sup>9</sup> In contrast, only 21.5% of ESL general skills textbooks do not contain sections on pronunciation (Foote et al., 2011).

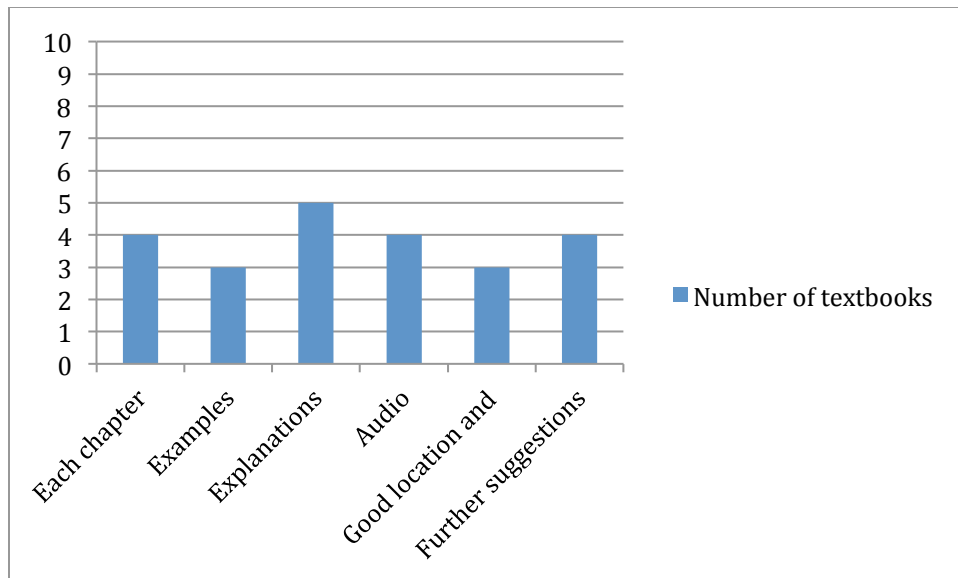


Figure 1. Number of textbooks fulfilling the selected criteria.

## DISCUSSION

In this section, I will discuss the five criteria on which the textbooks were rated. The abbreviations for the textbooks are included in Table 2.

### 1. Information at the chapter level.

Four textbooks (SM, N, TD, and WG) have information on pronunciation in every chapter and a fifth textbook (AK) has such information in nine out of twelve chapters. The former four also clearly indicate the pronunciation sections labeled “Pronunciation” (*Aussprache*) in the table of contents, whereas AK simply lists the focus of the section (for example, “the ch sound” in chapter 2) which makes it a little harder to detect in the table of contents. This latter textbook also has a Pronunciation Guide in the Appendix. In contrast, four textbooks (DNK, NH, V, and DH) have no information on pronunciation whatsoever and one textbook (K) has an appendix at the end of the textbook.

### 2. Presence of explanations

Only three textbooks (SM, N, and TD) have explanations that accompany the new pronunciation lesson introduced. The explanations in SM and TD are in English, and they help students acquire new sounds in German or make subtle distinctions between English and German sounds. The third textbook, N, is published by a German publisher and is aimed at both non-native speakers of German in Germany and learners of German as a foreign language in many different countries. In order to accommodate many different native languages, the textbook is written completely in German. The extra guidance offered in this textbook is more deductive in nature. For instance, in the lesson on the distinction between short and long “e”, learners are to come up with the rule that applies to these sounds. The rule can be easily formulated with the help of a simple multiple-choice exercise that comes after an exercise in which students have the opportunity to listen to many examples of long and short “e” sounds. Knowing the time

constraints instructors face and lack of information on teaching how to articulate new sounds, the explanations found in these textbooks can make the teaching of pronunciation more effective.

### **3. Presence of examples**

All five textbooks (SM, N, TD, WG, and AK) that include information at the chapter level about pronunciation also include examples with the specific segmental and suprasegmental features. The examples in SM consist of a variety of formats in every chapter. These include lists of words, sentences, and proverbs. In N, the format of the exercises varies from chapter to chapter. They include multiple choice exercises, lists of words, minimal pairs, sentences including the sounds under discussion, or even pictures to help elicit the right word choice from the student. TD includes generally one exercise with lists of words (which focuses on segmental features) and sometimes another exercise with sentences. The format in WG is fairly consistent throughout the textbook. The first 11 chapters include lists of words and minimal pairs, and the last four chapters only include lists of words. Similarly to TD, there are no suprasegmental features in this textbook. The examples (only segmental features) in AK are presented in a paragraph.

### **4. Opportunity to listen**

Four (SM, N, TD, and WG) out of the five textbooks that have information at the chapter level also include audio recordings available for students. All four textbooks come with a CD so that students can listen to the different presentations of the new sounds. All recordings are read by native speakers. The textbook SM also offers students the opportunity to record themselves producing the new sounds through the accompanying Supersite and to submit the recordings to the instructor for feedback.

### **5. Location and integration**

Of the five textbooks that include information on pronunciation at the chapter level, only three textbooks have a good location and integration of the information on pronunciation. SM consistently includes a well-written one-page section on pronunciation. These sections are integrated fairly early on in the chapter, and they have a predictable location and format. Although the pronunciation sections in N are significantly shorter, they also appear early in the chapter and use active vocabulary from the rest of the chapter. The pronunciation section in WG is located fairly early in the chapter, but often many of the words in the word lists or minimal pairs are irrelevant and unfamiliar to the students. The pronunciation section on TD is fairly long and well presented, but it is always at the end of the chapter. Not only do students not have the opportunity to practice the new sounds within the chapter, but given its location, one can see how an instructor pressured by time would find it easy to skip this section. While the pronunciation sections in AK are presented earlier in the chapter, they are not labeled well. They are labeled with "*Versuch's mal*" ("You try it"), and given that there are no explanations, no CD exercises, no lists of words or minimal pairs to highlight certain sounds, it is hard to even distinguish that this is a pronunciation section.

Having said all the above, it is important to keep in mind that these findings tell us about what the textbooks include, but they do not necessarily give us an accurate picture of what is actually occurring in the first-year German classrooms. It is possible for an instructor to teach from a textbook that contains no information of pronunciation and yet bring excellent outside resources into the classroom. At the same time, it is possible for an instructor to teach from a textbook that covers pronunciation in an excellent way and for him or her to always skip these sections.



However, it is safe to assume that if the textbook integrates pronunciation well, the chances are higher that it will be taught to the students. The top-selling textbooks for first-year German on the Higher Education market are as follows:

*Deutsch, na klar* (ranked 7<sup>th</sup> from the top on my list of 10, with a score of 0 for pronunciation)

*Kontakte* (ranked 6<sup>th</sup> from the top, with a score of 0 for pronunciation)

*Deutsch heute* (ranked last, 10<sup>th</sup> out of 10, with a score of 0 for pronunciation)

*Treffpunkt Deutsch* (ranked 4<sup>th</sup> out of 10, with a score of 4 for pronunciation)

The results above show clearly that the most popular textbooks do not pay sufficient attention to integrating information on pronunciation. Overall, the findings corroborate findings of studies on textbooks for ESL, French, Spanish, and English as a foreign language in France and Poland, all of which show that pronunciation is an area that needs more focused attention in textbook authoring. In contrast with these studies, the current study found a greater prevalence of segmental features as the focus of pronunciation. In the two textbooks (SM and N) that include suprasegmental features, these constitute a small percentage of the lessons, and three textbooks (WG, TD, and AK) focus exclusively on segmental features.

### **Why is pronunciation not addressed to a greater extent in first-year German textbooks?**

Textbook authors generally collaborate with the publisher during the writing process, but authors do have a great say in what goes into a textbook, considering that they are the experts in the field. One place to look for an answer for the variation in presence of pronunciation information in textbooks is the area of expertise of the authors of the textbooks themselves. An internet search was conducted to establish the authors' teaching and research expertise and to find out if their area of expertise had any correlation with the amount of pronunciation integrated into the various textbooks. Information was gathered from university bio pages and the textbook bio information, when available. The following table summarizes the areas of expertise of each author for each of the ten selected textbooks.

Table 3

*Textbook authors and their teaching/research background*

	<b>Literature</b>	<b>SLA</b>	<b>Pedagogy</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>1. Sag mal</b> , Author 1	Yes		Yes	
<b>1. Sag mal</b> , Author 2		Yes		
<b>1. Sag mal</b> , Author 3		Yes		
<b>1. Sag mal</b> , Author 4		Yes		
<b>2. Netzwerk</b> , Author 1		Yes		
<b>2. Netzwerk</b> , Author 2		Yes		
<b>2. Netzwerk</b> , Author 3		Yes		

<b>2. Netzwerk</b> , Author 4		Yes		
<b>3. Treffpunkt Deutsch</b> , Author 1		Yes		
<b>3. Treffpunkt Deutsch</b> , Author 2		Yes		
<b>3. Treffpunkt Deutsch</b> , Author 3	Yes (culture)			
<b>4. Wie geht's</b> , Author 1	Yes		Yes	
<b>4. Wie geht's</b> , Author 2				Yes (conversation)
<b>5. Alles klar</b> , Author 1	Yes		Yes	
<b>5. Alles klar</b> , Author 2	Yes			
<b>5. Alles klar</b> , Author 3	Yes		Yes	
<b>5. Alles klar</b> , Author 4			Yes	
<b>6. Deutsch, na klar</b> , Author 1			Yes	
<b>6. Deutsch, na klar</b> , Author 2	Yes		Yes	
<b>6. Deutsch, na klar</b> , Author 3	Yes		Yes	
<b>7. Kontakte</b> , Author 1		Yes		
<b>7. Kontakte</b> , Author 2	?	?	?	?
<b>7. Kontakte</b> , Author 3		Yes		
<b>8. Neue Horizonte</b> , Author 1	Yes			
<b>8. Neue Horizonte</b> , Author 2	Yes			
<b>9. Vorsprung</b> , Author 1		Yes		
<b>9. Vorsprung</b> , Author 2				Yes (photography)
<b>9. Vorsprung</b> , Author 3		Yes		
<b>10. Deutsch heute</b> , Author 1			Yes	
<b>10. Deutsch heute</b> , Author 2		Yes		
<b>10. Deutsch heute</b> , Author 3	Yes			
<b>10. Deutsch heute</b> , Author 4				Yes (Authentic materials)
<b>10. Deutsch heute</b> , Author 5				Yes (creative activities)
<b>Total</b>	11	14	9	4
<b>Only one</b>	5	14	3	4

Out of the 33 authors, five authors (15%) name literature as their main and only area of expertise, fourteen (42%) name second language acquisition or linguistics as their main area of expertise, three (9%) consider pedagogy, and five authors (15%) list other areas. It is common for professors to have teaching and research interests in more than one field. As such, the table shows that six authors (18%) do work in both the fields of literature and pedagogy. The percentage of authors with various backgrounds was compared to the scores the textbooks received for pronunciation. It must be noted that, since it is not always clear what the background of the authors in the “Other field” column is, and there is variation within the group, these authors were left out of this analysis. The textbooks were divided into two groups, “high” (the four textbooks that received a score of higher than 4) and “low” (the six textbooks that received a score lower than 2). It was found that author background affects the degree to which pronunciation is integrated into textbooks. Specifically, the chances were significantly higher (75%) for a textbook to include information on pronunciation if the author’s background was second language acquisition or linguistics. In contrast, the percentages of authors of textbooks that scored high on pronunciation were much lower for the areas of literature (8%), pedagogy (0%), or both (17%). The percentages of authors in the “low” group did not vary much one from the other in terms of author’s area of expertise.

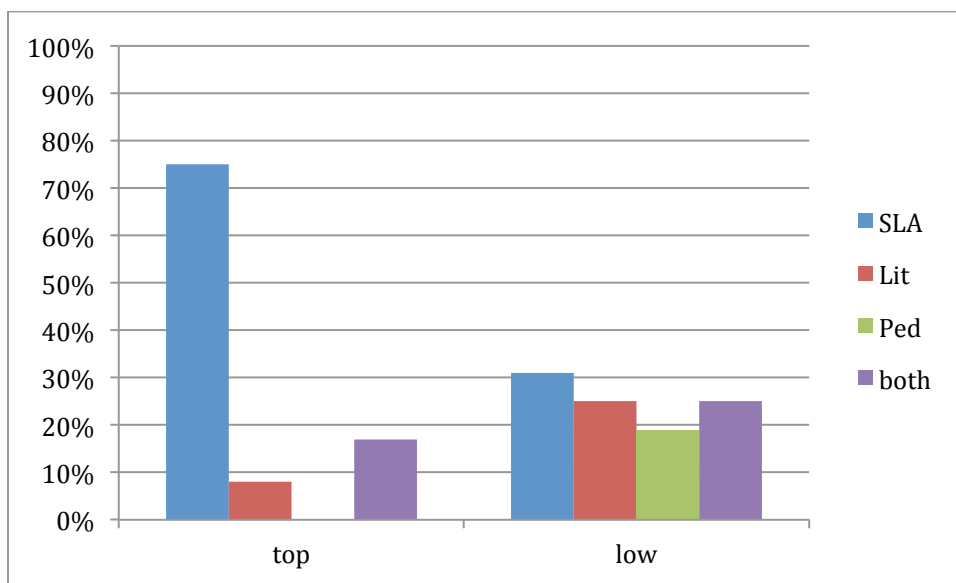


Figure 2. Percentage of authors with various backgrounds in “high” and “low” textbook category.

### Implications of lack of information on pronunciation in first-year German textbooks

As mentioned above, given the fact that most textbooks are already overloaded with information, unless it is on the instructors’ radar to begin with, chances are high that they will not add sections on pronunciation to their busy curriculum if it is not already included in the textbook.

## Recommendations

The first recommendation is to raise publishers' and textbook authors' awareness of the importance of integrating information on pronunciation into future editions. Second, when selecting new books, faculty members should pay attention to this aspect of foreign language teaching and select textbooks that have a good section on pronunciation. Third, when working with an otherwise great textbook that has comparatively little pronunciation information, instructors should strongly consider supplementing with outside information.

## Future study

I would like to continue this study with an in-depth investigation of what is happening in the classroom. Information from instructors from a large number of institutions collected via electronic survey can supply insightful information about how pronunciation is taught in class. The data can further tell us how much of what is going on in the classroom depends on the textbook used.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this paper show that surprisingly little attention is given to the integration of pronunciation in first-year German textbooks. Lack of addressing focused pronunciation at the elementary level or delaying it to the advanced levels can result in students experiencing fossilization of their pronunciation mistakes. Instructors are recommended to use supplementary materials whenever there is a need.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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