

## ***The Journal of Second Language Pronunciation*** **– Evaluation and directions**

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This editorial responds to a review of JSLP published in the *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* and uses that review to explore directions for the future.

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With this issue, we reach three years of the *Journal of Second Language Pronunciation* (JSLP). Each issue has been filled and produced on time (which I discovered is an important milestone for new journals). Numbers of submissions are increasing significantly, submissions concern a wide variety of languages and questions, and a Best Paper Award has been instituted for L2 pronunciation research based on a recent dissertation. The winner of the first award will be published in the spring issue of 2018.

Another significant milestone has been being reviewed by another journal. I have asked other editors about how common such a practice is, but none have been able to remember a similar situation. When approached by Linda Shockey, the Reviews editor of the *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* (JIPA), a year after we started publishing, about doing such a review, I said yes. This kind of formative review is a rare professional gift, and it also offered an opportunity for greater visibility among a group of scholars that are natural allies of, and potential contributors to JSLP.

In the JIPA review, Patricia Ashby (2017), an accomplished phonetician and the Examinations Secretary of the International Phonetic Association, and an established scholar who has a strong interest in the teaching of pronunciation, used the first two issues of JSLP to review the new journal. In her review, she historically contextualized L2 pronunciation teaching in the field of phonetics, rightly pointing out that the two areas were closely intertwined in the beginning but that

practical and theoretical concerns have often grown apart, despite institutions where practical and theoretical concerns have remained close. She reviews JSLP in terms of “its value for phoneticians (including phonetically trained teachers of pronunciation),” an important group for the journal, but one that is narrower than that actually targeted by JSLP, which also includes many researchers and language teachers who have not received extensive training in phonetics for a variety of historical reasons (e.g., Burgess & Spencer, 2000; Foote, Holtby & Derwing, 2012; Murphy, 1997) but for whom second language pronunciation questions are of great relevance.

It is clear that there was a potential downside to being reviewed by the longest established and most prominent phonetics journal, as it had the potential to discredit JSLP in the eyes of some of the very experts that we hoped to attract. Professor Ashby’s review of the journal gives us much to be proud of (that we fill an important niche, as L2 pronunciation is once again being recognized by research standards groups; the editorials for each issue; JSLP’s unique and timely place in the field; and the high standards we hope to adhere to for L2 pronunciation research, as evidenced by Murray Munro and Tracey Derwing’s (2015) prospectus for pronunciation research in the first issue). She also points out some concerns to be aware of going forward.

One area that distinguishes JSLP is our unusual practice of including an editorial in each issue of the journal, a practice Ashby describes as more in line with “special or themed editions.” I agree that this feature is an unusual feature of professional journals. As the editor, these short pieces give me an extra chance to interact with readers and perhaps highlight or shape broader themes within the field. Some of the editorials are cited by other researchers, gratifying evidence that they are being read.

## Types of articles

As a reminder of the scope of the journal, JSLP publishes four main types of articles (Table 1). Through the first three years, feature articles (Categories A–C) have dominated, as should be expected for an empirically-oriented peer-reviewed journal.

**Table 1.** Numbers of articles (by type) published in the first three years of JSLP

Types of articles solicited by JSLP	Eungjun Min
A. Experimental, instructed, and naturalistic research about second language pronunciation	19
B. Review articles that synthesize research perspectives of key pronunciation issues from different disciplines	3
C. Teaching-oriented papers detailing successful practices and research-based instruction	8
D. Reviews of technology and books focused on second language pronunciation	20
E. (Editorials)	6

In the first issue raised in her review, Ashby says she has a concern with

what I might call the *reach* of the journal, in terms not only of readers but also, and in particular, of contributors. To develop and improve, we need to hear from practitioners of all kinds – not just academics researching a project, but also from front-line practitioners, teachers, and even students engaged in the day-to-day business of pronunciation training. I am not convinced that many of the contributors have hands-on experience of what they are researching and yet it is in the field that many important insights and experiences wait to be discovered and reported.

There are two elements to her concern that bear comment. First, there is the assertion that researchers of L2 pronunciation are not front-line practitioners. In reality, many of JSLP's articles come from practitioners (or former practitioners) who are also researchers. Typical of applied linguistics researchers, many JSLP authors start with extremely practical concerns, and report results that test practical interventions, such as the study on shadowing by Foote and McDonough (2017) in a recent issue of JSLP.

Second, Ashby calls for a different sort of teaching-oriented article, those written by “not just academics researching a project” but by other people teaching pronunciation in other contexts. Teaching-oriented studies of this sort are clearly desirable, and I have written about this in previous editorials (Levis, 2016, 2017), but such articles are only desirable if they match the standards for carefully designed research that we want to publish. Clearly, Table 1 shows a dominance of Category A articles, and even those teaching-oriented articles in Category C are strongly empirical (as should be expected in a scholarly journal), but Ashby's concern is worth considering. Other scholarly journals, such as *TESOL Quarterly*, have special sections for teaching issues of the sort described in the review. But it remains a fact of life that refereed journals are primarily by academics for academics, and that front-line teachers neither have the time nor desire to write in such

a way that they will be published in such journals. Other valuable venues such as conference proceedings, *Speak Out!* (The newsletter of the IATEFL Pronunciation Special Interest Group), social media outlets, webinars, specialized training, and specialized newsletters offer more welcoming alternatives of information for many teachers. Yet, there is clearly a place where teacher and researcher collaborations can be especially profitable (such as the article by Brinton & Butner, 2012).

Another concern shown in Table 1, albeit one not commented on in Ashby's review which only covered one year, is that there have been very few Review articles, fewer than we would have liked to see by now. This may be because review articles are demanding, and they often require a significant command of the research literature from a wide range of research venues, but going forward, we would hope to see more than one per year.

### Terminological accuracy

Ashby expresses a concern for what she calls "a small criticism of the issues to date." This criticism concerns the "editing and proofing of contributions" and her expecting "to find proper phonetics" in the articles, but instead finding errors in phonemic and phonetic representations, wrong symbols, and simplistic descriptions of some language systems. Examples of such editorial shortcomings all come from one paper in the first year, which was, it must be said, particularly difficult to edit and proofread for various reasons, and in which several phonetic symbols often changed from one proof to the next. John Benjamins (the publisher of JSLP) has a rigorous process to make sure that mistakes of this sort are minimized, with two sets of proofs and fabulous editors. The article that is rightly critiqued by Ashby, is we hope, evidence of JSLP's growing pains rather than characteristic of the journal itself. Nonetheless, we take seriously the need to be as accurate as possible in our descriptions and representations of sounds and will take steps to ensure this happens.

A more serious criticism, however, has to do with the charge of insufficient rigor in making distinctions between phonological and phonetic levels of description. This is a deficiency in many journals, and is even a challenge for accomplished phoneticians trying to write for a more general audience. Recently I edited a paper written by a phonetician about what he described as /r/, which included the phones [ɹ], [ɾ], [ʁ] and [r], sometimes written with /phonemic slashes/ and sometimes with [phonetic brackets]. Rough distinctions that do not insist on phonemic/phonetic distinctions are also common in introductory linguistics courses and in L2 pronunciation research, a field sometimes called Applied Phonology (e.g., Yavaş, 2016), but in which the phonetic level of representation is often more

critical for pronunciation accuracy than phonological representations despite the common use of phonemic slashes to teach (e.g., [p<sup>h</sup>] rather than /p/ for Arabic speakers learning to pronounce the English voiceless bilabial plosive). Ashby calls this “a common error in the applied linguistics literature” but it can also come from the fluid boundaries of category and allophone, especially when working across L1/L2 boundaries, where the L1 and the L2 linguistic systems can divide phonological spaces differently.

All in all, I deeply appreciate the willingness of JIPA to review our new journal, Dr. Shockey for thinking of it, and I am especially grateful to Dr. Ashby for taking on this unusual task and providing us with valuable feedback as we move forward.

### **The best paper award for recent dissertation research**

JSLP has also instituted a new Best Paper award for new scholars in the field. The award is given to the best paper based on dissertation research done in the previous two years. The first winner, Dr. Mari Sakai, will be published in Spring 2018, in Volume 4, Issue 1. Next year’s deadline will be April 20, 2018. For further information, see the Call for Papers at the end of this editorial.

### ***This issue of Journal of Second Language Pronunciation***

The papers in this issue of JSLP raise three main questions related to the field: the importance of comprehensibility, L2 and L3 pronunciation development, and ways to most effectively target L2 pronunciation teaching. In the first paper, Anja Ludwig and Joan Mora explore the relationship between processing time and comprehensibility judgments using native English listeners, and low and high proficiency speakers and listeners of Catalan and German. Variations in comprehensibility judgments are often explained by presumed increases in processing time (e.g., Munro & Derwing, 1995). Yet the connection has largely been assumed rather than established by empirical research. In this study, Ludwig and Mora look at non-native listeners’ perception of L2 speech as a function of a match between speaker and listener L1 and listener proficiency. They show that lower-proficiency learners found it easier to process and understand L1 matched speech than native English speech, while higher proficiency learners found speech of their own L1s easier to process though there was no difference in their ability to understand L1-matched speech and native English speech.

In a second paper, Kazuya Saito and Yuka Akiyama explored the comprehensibility of L2 Japanese, examining the factors that affected the comprehensibility

ratings that native speakers of Japanese (both expert and novice raters) gave to oral picture descriptions produced by L2 learners of Japanese. Like earlier studies involving English (e.g., Isaacs & Trofimovich, 2012), this study shows that comprehensibility judgments are associated with multiple linguistic factors: some phonological, some temporal, some lexical, and some grammatical. The influence of segmental errors appeared to be small in ratings of comprehensibility, while suprasegmental issues were more influential.

The second main theme in this issue is pronunciation development over time, both for adult learners in college classrooms and children learning Spanish both as a second and third language. In the first paper, Charles Nagle explores the learning trajectories and growth curves of native English speakers learning Spanish in foreign language college classrooms. Learners of Spanish typically have trouble producing allophonic approximants even at advanced levels of proficiency, in this study the Spanish sound [β]. Production of this sound was tracked at five different points over a year. While most of the developmental trajectories were flat, there were both positive and negative changes throughout the study, demonstrating the presence of highly variable developmental trajectories.

In the second study, Alexandra Morales Reyes, Begoña Arechabaleta and Silvina Montrul look at possible differences in L2 and L3 phonological acquisition for relatively young children (average age 5.5). They investigated whether bilingual children (Korean-English) had any advantages over monolingual students in acquiring two Spanish rhotics, /r/ and /r/, the first of which is found only in Spanish, and the second which is allophonic in both English and Korean. The children learning Spanish varied in amount of exposure from 140 to 500 hours. All children rapidly acquired Spanish rhotics, indicating that children's progress is guided by universal development strategies more than transfer strategies. The study also suggests that bilingual children demonstrated some advantages over monolingual children, but that this may be due to previously acquired linguistic and metalinguistic competence from already having learned another language.

The last area of interest focuses on teaching and includes one research study and three reviews. In the final study, Mark McAndrews and Ron Thomson analyze the spoken language samples of 10 Spanish, 10 Mandarin, and 10 Slavic language speakers to argue for ways ESL teachers can take a principled approach to pronunciation priorities for learners. The results provided specific suggestions of high priority, medium priority and low priority targets to emphasize in pronunciation instruction, both those areas that were relevant to the Spanish, Mandarin and Slavic groups as a whole, and those that were particularly relevant to a single L1.

In the first review, Edna Lima reviews *Well Said Intro* 2nd Edition, and *Well Said* 4th Edition, both written by Linda Grant. These two books are mainstays of ESL pronunciation training and are among the few books that have consistently

been offered in new, updated editions. Lima especially discusses the improved on-line workbook, its wider range of activities, a focus on motivation and intelligibility, and the promotion of language awareness through self monitoring that are key parts of the approach espoused by the books.

The next two books are related to German, one targeted toward German speakers learning the pronunciation of English, and the other targeting the learning of German pronunciation. In the first review, Mary Grantham O'Brien reviews Holger Schmitt's *Teaching English Pronunciation: A textbook for the German-speaking countries*. This book has an audience of teachers in mind, assuming that its readers already have sufficient background knowledge to apply the concepts in the text. The first half of the book discusses issues of teaching pronunciation in a non-target language (foreign language) setting, while the second half focuses on specific problems that German speakers have with English pronunciation.

Finally, and serendipitously, Shannon Barrios *German Phonetics and phonology: Theory and practice*, written by Mary Grantham O'Brien and Sarah M. B. Fagan. This book matches seven chapters on theory and seven on practice. In the first half of the book, on theory, the authors investigate articulatory and acoustic phonetics, German phonology, and prosody. In the second half of the book, on practice, the authors help learners to develop practical skills through tools, strategies, and exercises centered on German pronunciation. This is the kind of book that I would have liked while studying German, and it would be particularly useful for more advanced learners in a practical course on German phonetics and phonology. It is exciting to see well-grounded, practical books on pronunciation in varied languages.

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