

REVIEWS

KATARZYNA DZIUBALSKA-KOŁACZYK & JOANNA PRZEDLACKA (eds.), *English pronunciation models: A changing scene* (Linguistic Insights – Studies in Language and Communication 21). Bern: Peter Lang, 2005. Pp. 476. ISBN: 3-03910-662-7 (pbk). doi:10.1017/S0025100308003289

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This book arose out of the papers presented at two linguistic meetings in 2003 and 2004 in Poznań, Poland. The debate focuses on the kind of English that should be offered as a model for learners of English, particularly whether some kind of modified international variety might be adopted in place of a native model.

There are three main themes in the book. After the two introductory chapters, in which Joanna Przedlacka documents recent changes in RP pronunciation and Dennis Preston argues that the concept of a General American accent is a myth, the dominant theme of the book unfolds. It involves a spirited and at some times rancorous debate over the Lingua Franca Core (LFC), the limited set of pronunciation features for English which Jennifer Jenkins suggests are essential for international intelligibility and which she argues should represent the focus of English-language teaching. A second theme, with just three contributions, concerns the teaching of intonation, whether it is important, and how it might be approached. And the third theme is a discussion over the relative merits of the three best-known pronunciation dictionaries. Finally, in summary chapters, Magdalena Wrembel discusses the English teaching materials available in Poland, reporting that their focus is mostly at odds with the priorities suggested in the LFC, and Dafydd Gibbon argues that the LFC has arisen out of the teaching of English to heterogeneous students in a British university environment and it does not cater well for the multitude of other English-teaching scenarios, such as high-school foreign-language classes in various European countries.

Much heat and some light are generated in the main debate. Basically, there are two camps with diametrically opposed views. The paper by Barbara Seidlhofer argues that patterns of native speech are irrelevant for English used for international communication where the majority of interactions do not involve a native speaker, so constant reference to native speech norms is no longer relevant in the modern world. Most learners of English nowadays seek to achieve easy interaction with other non-native speakers and may never actually encounter a native speaker, so there is little desire among them to sound like someone from Britain or North America or to learn about cultural practices in such places. And the contribution from Jennifer Jenkins seeks to defend her well-known proposals for establishing an LFC in place of native-speaker norms. However, other papers, particularly by Peter Trudgill as well as most of the writers from Poland, argue that a native accent such as RP provides a viable, living model and it is condescending to suggest that second-language learners do not need to try and achieve a mastery of this style of pronunciation. Indeed, some of the Polish contributors express considerable indignation at the suggestion that there is no need for them to aspire to native speaker norms, with Sylwia Scheuer arguing that the introduction of a reduced standard is only harming learners, especially as pronunciation with the strongest foreign accent is generally judged by listeners as the least acceptable. Similarly, Włodzimierz Sobkowiak contends that just because RP only has a small number of native speakers, that does not invalidate it as a target for learners, and he insists that the LFC does not provide a suitable model for teaching English in Poland.

Although Michał Remiszewski appeals for a careful reading of the arguments, to avoid strengthening of prejudices, there is little evidence of this actually happening in

the papers in this book, as the contributors by and large reiterate their own entrenched positions. The writers from Poland claim that any suggestion for a watered-down model of pronunciation is patronizing and offensive, while Jennifer Jenkins pleads against the constant misinterpretation of her own position, as she insists that the LFC is not at all condescending but is derived from empirical research and practical concerns about enabling efficient international communication.

An issue we might note regarding all of this debate is that one important voice is not heard: that of second-language speakers of English from places such as West Africa, the Caribbean, India or Singapore. While the results of a number of surveys of students in Poland are presented, with Ewa Waniek-Klimczak & Karol Klimczak reporting that the overwhelming majority of students in Poland would like to sound like a native speaker, either British or American, it is very doubtful that the same result would be found in India or Nigeria, and we might conclude that there is indeed a movement in many parts of the world away from adherence to native-speaker orientation, but that this trend is not apparent in places such as Poland.

A further issue emerges from one of the surveys reported by Katarzyna Janicka, Małgorzata Kul & Jarosław Weckwerth (though this issue is not one which they highlight): just as with the survey by Waniek-Klimczak & Klimczak mentioned above, most trainee teachers indicate that they are strongly in favour of a native-like model of pronunciation, though some prefer British and others American. Furthermore, the respondents said that they plan to impose the accent they select on their own students and insist on the consistent use of its features. So what happens if a pupil has a British-oriented teacher one year and an American-oriented one the next? Presumably the second teacher would attempt to correct any absence of postvocalic /r/, regarding this style of pronunciation as a serious error, and the pupil will end up mightily confused. So it seems that, after all, even in Poland there may be a place for a hybrid variety that tolerates and perhaps encourages features of pronunciation that are found in a range of accents without adhering strictly to one native accent or another. And one way or another, teachers must be more tolerant of variation and should not insist that the style of pronunciation which they themselves have selected is the only correct one for their pupils.

The primary issue about the LFC is whether a reduced inventory of pronunciation features is appropriate and attractive for learners, particularly in the absence of any actual speakers of this variety that might bring it alive. The debate that is outlined above suggests that little agreement is likely to emerge over this matter in the immediate future, especially in Poland. However, there is one paper that offers a fresh perspective which we might seriously consider: Peter Trudgill argues that what non-native speakers and listeners actually need is not a reduced system but an enhanced one, because their lack of a substantial background in an English-speaking environment makes top-down processing difficult, so they depend substantially on bottom-up processing of the speech signal. Moreover, for international communication around the world, there is likely to be little common cultural background among the speakers, and this once again suggests the need for careful enunciation to overcome the relative difficulty in drawing inferences from context.

Let us pursue this line of argument a little further, assuming that successful international communication requires extra-careful enunciation, even though this is something that native speakers are not known to use. For example, native speakers usually drop the word-final /t/ in the middle of phrases such as *best man* and *last month*, but should we encourage learners to do this? After all, native speakers have notoriously casual speech habits, eliding and assimilating sounds all over the place (Shockey 2003), but there is no need for learners to be so lazy just because native speakers are. We might therefore suggest that, for truly successful international communication, you have to do better than native speakers, and merely mimicking the habits of people from Britain and America is not enough. Of course, learners will have to be able to perceive speech with plenty of assimilation and elision if they want to

understand native speakers, but that does not necessarily mean that they have to produce it themselves.

We might also consider the use of reduced vowels in the weak forms of function words and the first syllable of words such as *computer*. Should we encourage students to use reduced vowels here? Surely use of full vowels can actually enhance intelligibility in many circumstances, and the fact that native speakers use reduced vowels is irrelevant. And if reduced vowels are not taught (as is indeed the suggestion of the LFC), what about stress-based rhythm (the perception of which depends substantially on vowel reduction)? Should we tolerate, and maybe sometimes even encourage syllable-based rhythm, which seems to be the norm in many, if not most, new varieties of English? Indeed, Crystal (2003: 172) warns against the imposition of models of rhythm in places where they are not appropriate.

A major issue here is with the details of what is included in the LFC and what is not: the suggestion that we might encourage use of full vowels and syllable-based rhythm would meet with strong objections from many linguists and teachers on the perfectly valid basis that a clear contrast between strong and weak syllables serves to highlight the important information-carrying words in an utterance and de-emphasise the less important function words. Furthermore, although use of syllable-based rhythm might make one better understood in places like Jamaica, Nigeria and Singapore, it would interfere with intelligibility in most of Britain, America and Australia.

Indeed, quite apart from the debate about whether the LFC is condescending or attractive for learners, deciding on the details of what might constitute the LFC is also a major source of disagreement in this book, and it is interesting to note that two papers which both consider the issue from the perspective of language teaching in Poland come to opposite conclusions about at least one feature. Jolanta Szpyra-Kozłowska argues that the focus on vowel duration, especially the allophonic variation that arises from the influence of the voicing of the following consonant, is problematic for Polish learners of English, and its inclusion in the LFC does not make sense from an international perspective as it is not common in the languages of the world. But Geoffrey Schwartz, who teaches in Poland, argues that, from an acoustic and perceptual point of view, the use of vowel-length distinctions to signal the voicing of the final consonant is an attractive feature of the LFC and should be retained. If agreement on one feature such as this cannot be reached within a single context such as that found with teaching English in Poland, what hope is there of achieving world-wide consensus on a universal LFC? Indeed, in the final chapter, Dafydd Gibbon argues that there is very little overlap in the various Englishes found in the world, so although there is usually substantial common ground between any two varieties, finding a shared core that might be adopted universally would require substantial negotiation.

One thing that is lacking in most of the debate found in this book is new speech data that might add to our background understanding of the issues. While there are plenty of surveys on language attitudes in Poland, they mostly confirm what we already knew, that Polish learners of English aspire to achieve something close to native-speaker pronunciation. However, one chapter that does report on a substantial investigation of data is in the second theme of the book, the one focusing on intonation. Esther Grabe, Greg Kochanski & John Coleman investigate the intonation patterns of speakers from Cambridge, Newcastle and Belfast, and they find that although there is widespread variation in the tones adopted in these different places, there is much less variation in the location of accented syllables, particularly the identity of the nucleus. They conclude that this lends support to the inclusion of nuclear accents within the LFC and the exclusion of details about pitch movement which, after all, is highly variable not just between different regional accents but also within a single accent. This new analysis of speech data which offers some empirical evidence for what is important in pronunciation teaching is a breath of fresh air in what can seem like a re-hash of established positions.

The two other papers in the section on intonation come to quite contrasting conclusions. John Levis compares the teaching of intonation in America and Britain, concluding that the former is more prescriptive because it tends to adhere to simple rules. While prescriptive rules for intonation are admittedly rather simplistic, and for example in normal language usage we do not necessarily find rising intonation with yes/no questions and falling intonation with *wh*-questions, this mapping does probably capture an underlying tendency in English and furthermore it has the advantage of being teachable. In contrast, the British tradition has focused on description of naturally occurring speech, and while this offers a solid basis for research, it may not be so straightforward to teach. However, Jane Setter argues that, within the British tradition, the Discourse Intonation model of Brazil (1997) is eminently suitable for the classroom even though it focuses on the choices made by speakers, and she recommends that more teachers should become familiar with it and adopt it in their teaching.

Such divergent conclusions also characterise the third theme in the book, which considers the relative merits of the three best-known pronunciation dictionaries. While Peter Roach discusses in a fairly dispassionate manner the decisions that went into the current edition of the *Cambridge English pronouncing dictionary* (which he was centrally involved in), for example the extent to which assimilation should be represented in such cases as the /t/ in the middle of *football*, the other two papers each make a case for the advantages of one of the other dictionaries. John Wells illustrates how his own *Longman pronunciation dictionary* offers a greater range of variants than the other two, for example including the optional deletion of the [k] in *asked*, indicating the potential stress shift in *fundamental*, and showing alternative two- and three-syllable pronunciations of *glorious*, though he does admit that, at times, the notation might be 'arguably too complicated' (406). In contrast, on the basis of an analysis of recordings done in the 1960s in Leeds, Clive Upton, Lawrence Davis & Charles Houck note that pronunciation is always changing and that the role of a dictionary is to reflect this change rather than be a pawn of the English language teaching industry, and they argue that the *Oxford dictionary of pronunciation for current English* offers a more accurate representation of modern RP pronunciation largely because of its adoption of updated symbols for words such as *flat*, *fair* and *fine*. It is interesting to note that both John Wells and Clive Upton argue that their dictionary reflects modern pronunciation more accurately, and it is hard to decide who to believe. But, in presenting their cases side-by-side, these two papers actually enable us to grasp quite clearly how the dictionaries differ. One even wishes that Peter Roach might have been a bit more forthright in arguing the case for the *English pronouncing dictionary*!

This book is therefore characterised by debates around entrenched positions: about the value of the LFC, about the relative effectiveness of the British and American models of intonation, and about the merits of the different pronunciation dictionaries. While language teachers might decry this lack of agreement, as we seem to be no nearer to deriving common models or materials that can be adopted in the classroom, the clear reiteration of different viewpoints and their collation in a single volume is actually both interesting and valuable, and it does substantially enhance our understanding of the various approaches. While old hands might express heartfelt frustration at the lack of progress, many newer researchers, especially non-partisans, will find this book useful in exposing so many different and often conflicting viewpoints.

References

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