



Isaacs, T. (2012). Book review: English phonology and pronunciation teaching, by P. Rogerson-Revell. London: Continuum. *BAAL News*, 102, 15-17. http://www.baal.org.uk/baalnews/baalnews_2012_102.pdf

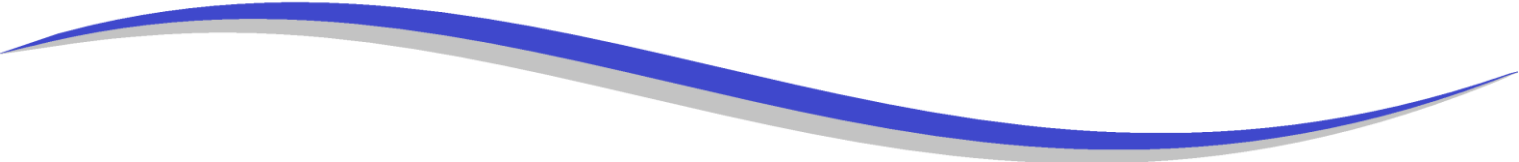
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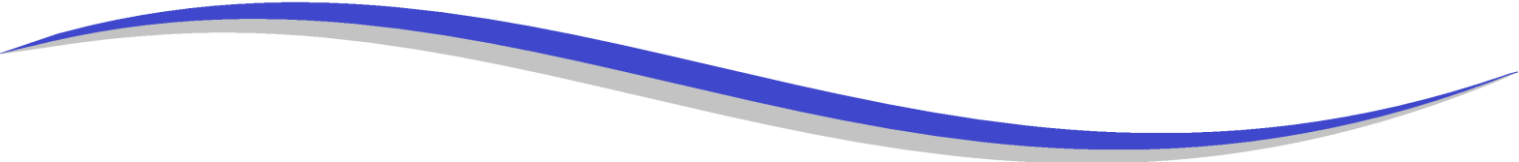
Rogerson-Revell, P. 2011. *English phonology and pronunciation teaching*. London: Continuum. ISBN: 978-0826443564, Hardcover: 368 pages, £65.00, Paperback, £19.99.

The renewed focus on second language (L2) pronunciation instruction after a period of relative neglect has largely arisen from a growing acknowledgment among applied linguists and practitioners of L2 teachers' responsibility to help their learners be intelligible to their interlocutors, since struggling to be understood can be both personally and professionally detrimental to L2 learners. This shift has brought with it the concomitant need to train a new generation of teachers in L2 phonetics/phonology to address students' communication needs, although pronunciation has yet to establish itself as a staple of teacher training programs. In particular, teachers need guidance on which L2 pronunciation features to prioritise in instruction and how to integrate a focus on pronunciation with other skills in the communicative classroom. Rogerson-Revell's volume is a welcome contribution in that it aims to address these issues to a target audience of L2 teachers while exposing them to basic principles of English phonetics and phonology. Her work is situated in the global reality of "English as an International Language" (EIL) and is written primarily with this context in mind (i.e., learners' predominantly interacting with other L2 speakers as opposed to with native English speakers). No prior knowledge of phonetics and phonology in the target readership is assumed. Thus, the book is marketed as an introductory text for EFL teachers or as reference material for teachers or teacher trainers.

The book is divided into fifteen chapters and additionally consists of audio recordings on the publisher's website, a short bibliography of L2 pronunciation resources (websites, CD-ROMs, and textbooks), an answer key to exercises, a glossary of

mostly phonetic terms, and an index. The first two chapters broadly address the role of pronunciation in L2 teaching and learning, instructional goals and models, variables that affect phonological attainment, and L2 pronunciation acquisition processes. Research evidence that pronunciation errors often lead to communication breakdowns forms the basis of the author's argument for why the instruction of pronunciation is important in our increasingly globalised world. Arguably, readers may have benefited from a historical overview of L2 pronunciation instruction at the outset of the book (rather than in Chapter 14) to help situate them in key issues, including the need to justify a focus on pronunciation in the first place. The next four chapters are dedicated to segmental aspects of pronunciation, with numerous figures illustrating the place of articulation or tongue position for individual sounds. Phonetic and phonemic transcriptions are briefly covered in the last of these chapters (Chapter 6). However, because phonemic symbols are used as early as Chapter 3 to illustrate physiological mechanisms, the explanation regarding transcriptions may come too late for a reader who is unschooled in this area. Similarly, the author does not elucidate that vowel chart categories are an approximation of the vocal tract, which may not be obvious to a non-pronunciation expert. Overall, the organization of the content, including only clarifying terms or concepts after they have already been alluded to several chapters earlier (e.g., functional load), works against the author's claim that the book constitutes a systematic introduction to L2 phonology, although the glossary is a useful resource for the most technical concepts.

Chapter 7 continues with an overview of syllables and syllable-structure errors and is punctuated with "Phonology Review 1" in Chapter 8, which consists of comprehension checks based on key concepts and transcription practice. This is followed by treatment of prosodic aspects of speech in the next



three chapters (word stress, features of connected speech, and intonation), which are the subject of “Phonology Review 2.” Finally, the last three chapters collectively focus on pronunciation activity types for use in the classroom, diagnosing pronunciation problem areas to target learners’ needs, and developing instructional targets. The book concludes with a description of transfer errors for segmental and prosodic phenomena for 11 world languages based on contrastive analysis, including complete vowel and consonant inventories. This resource on crosslinguistic influence is useful for L2 teachers conducting needs analyses, although it is less comprehensive than Swan and Smith’s (2001) book on learner interlanguage in terms of language coverage.

Rogerson-Revell’s volume constitutes an important effort to enhance L2 teachers’ awareness of key issues in L2 pronunciation and uses British rather than American varieties of English (mostly Received Pronunciation) as the point of reference. However, there are some major limitations. Perhaps the most striking is that the references are largely dated and the authors’ explanations often do not take stock of recent developments in L2 pronunciation research and teaching. For example, whereas four out of 18 pronunciation textbooks that the author provides in a list of further resources were published before 1980, only three were published after the turn of the century, the latest of which was in 2005. A similar picture emerges with respect to research citations. For example, the author draws heavily on Jenkins’ (2002) *Lingua Franca Core* as the basis for her suggestions of which pronunciation features L2 teachers in EIL settings should target, although this “pronunciation syllabus” has been vastly underresearched. Thus, using Jenkins’ work as the basis for setting instructional priorities without adequately drawing on the growing body of L2 pronunciation research on the features that most contribute to intelligibility (e.g., Field, 2005) places too much emphasis on inadequately substantiated

claims and does little to bridge the gap between research findings and pedagogical practice.

Another limitation is that the author is not authoritative in guiding teachers about crucial points, including that intelligibility is the essential baseline goal of L2 pronunciation instruction, regardless of whether the learner’s primary goal is to sound like a native speaker, “to increase *intelligibility*, to increase *fluency* or to increase *impact*” (make an impression on the audience; Rogerson-Revell, p. 246, original emphasis). Without a requisite level of intelligibility, all other learner aspirations fall flat, due to the communication breakdowns that arise. Notably, some of the author’s messages are inconsistent or misleading. For example, although she suggests eliciting both an extemporaneous speech sample and a read-aloud passage for diagnostic purposes, which is consistent with the consensus view, her subheading “Collecting *a* speech sample” (p. 254, added emphasis) contradicts this point. Some major omissions that are of potential value for teachers include chapters on pronunciation assessment, materials design, and the use of technology in teaching pronunciation. Thus, although a valuable reference book, it is unclear what novel contribution this book makes other than that it centres on British rather than American English. Teachers would be well-advised to consult Celce-Murcia, Brinton, Goodwin, and Griner’s book (2010), now in its second edition, for a more cutting-edge resource guide that is up-to-date in its discussion of pronunciation issues and is more strongly informed by empirical research.

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