Current Debates in the Theory and Teaching of English L2 Pronunciation

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Abstract

Ironically, the single concept that appears to be universal in the field of English pronunciation research and instruction, its common denominator as it were, is diversity. Research theory and classroom practice have both convincingly proven that explicit training may indeed lead to improvements in a learner's clarity of speech, but it seems that everything else is open for debate. Variability in opinions begins with different interpretations of basic concepts, of individual speech sounds, syllables, phrases and utterances. Correctly identifying research foci, and by extension, educational priorities for classroom instruction also divides English L2 pronunciation professionals. Models are yet another area of contention – whether to focus on traditional pronunciation points of reference, e.g. features of Received Pronunciation or General American, or to concentrate instead on interactions where no native speaker is present, as proposed by the English as an International Language (EIL) framework. Next, dispelling doubts about its effectiveness can be a challenging endeavour when progress often manifests in small increments which require a significant investment of time and effort. Finally, the decision to incorporate digital technology and the Internet into the pronunciation classroom remains a dividing line between enthusiasts and those that call CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) a fad that will soon pass. The purpose of this paper is to examine these hotly debated issues, while acknowledging that its emphasis on depth may be at the expense of breadth. Its scope will allow it to touch upon but the most significant disputes, those that bridge research theory with English L2 pronunciation classroom practice.

Keywords: English L2 pronunciation instruction; curriculum and materials design; pronunciation teaching effectiveness

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –

I took the one less travelled by,

And that has made all the difference."

(*The Road Not Taken* by Robert Frost – excerpt)