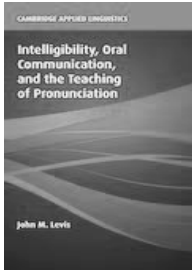


Intelligibility, Oral Communication, and the Teaching of Pronunciation

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Intelligibility, Oral Communication, and the Teaching of Pronunciation			
Author:	John M. Levis (2018)		
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Pronunciation is an important part of the language classroom that has long been neglected, but recently started to receive the attention it deserves (Derwing, 2019). Research has shown that intelligibility, the extent to which a listener can understand a speaker's speech (Munro & Derwing, 1995), is crucial for successful communication (Levis, 2018) and should be the goal in second language (L2) classrooms. John Levis' (2018) *Intelligibility, Oral Communication, and the Teaching of Pronunciation* offers connections between research and teaching practices by providing inspiration, guidance, and innovative approaches to L2 pronunciation instruction.

This book presents a framework for teaching spoken language and highlights priorities in pronunciation teaching. It also covers major findings of relevant research in the field, and what should and should not be taught in an intelligibility-based classroom. It addresses the practical side of teaching and the elements necessary for successful communication when learning a second language; it is therefore of primary interest to professionals interested in teaching pronunciation, but it is also a useful resource for pronunciation researchers. There are four major parts to this book: Part I: *A Framework for the Teaching of Spoken Language*; Part II: *Word-based Errors and Intelligibility*; Part III: *Discourse-based Errors and Intelligibility*; and Part IV: *Teaching and Research Approaches to Intelligibility*. These parts are further divided into 10 chapters.

Part I contains two chapters that frame the need for centering pronunciation teaching around the intelligibility principle, which states that the ultimate goal in pronunciation teaching should

be that the speaker is understandable, rather than achieve a native-like accent. Chapter 1 defines key terms used throughout the book (e.g., intelligibility and comprehensibility), comparing them to Smith and Nelson's (1985) and Munro and Derwing's (1995) foundational definitions. Chapter 2 provides a review of priorities in pronunciation teaching, offering an overview and critique of existing recommendations in the pronunciation teaching field. For example, Levis summarizes studies and findings from various authors, which could serve as a starting point for future researchers (p. 50).

Moving on to Part II, Chapter 3 discusses vowel and consonant research, examining naturalistic and instructed development, as well as the functional load principle. Levis' rank ordering of phoneme pairs (sounds) commonly mistaken by learners (p. 84) is based on the functional load principle (Munro & Derwing, 2006) and is convenient for language teachers by allowing them to set teaching priorities. Chapter 4 is concerned with consonant clusters (i.e., adjacent consonants within a syllable) and their connection to grammatical morphemes, such as past tense inflections (e.g., -ed). Levis suggests that this is an underrepresented area of research and raises questions for future exploration (p. 99). The role of word stress and the way it is perceived by native and nonnative speakers, as well as its importance for intelligibility and teaching, is explained in Chapter 5. Levis treats the effect of word stress on intelligibility similarly to segmentals, because stressing a word incorrectly "can change how vowels and consonants are pronounced" (p. 25).

Part III delves into discourse-based errors and their effect on intelligibility. Chapter 6 details the complex concept of rhythm (including speech rate, fluency, and connected speech) and its connection to intelligibility. Levis proposes that some features associated with rhythm, such as connected speech, may not affect spoken intelligibility but are essential for speaker perception. Intonation and the roles of prominence and tune are discussed in Chapter 7, including prominence's place in the Lingua Franca Core—a revised pronunciation syllabus for English as an International Language (Jenkins, 2002)—and *tune*'s relevance for pragmatics and social interaction. Levis defines *tune* as "the pitch movement from the nuclear syllable to the end of the phrase" (p. 171).

While Parts I-III define, present, and analyze key concepts, the three chapters in Part IV directly address teaching and build an argument for the intelligibility-centered classroom. The aim of Chapter 8 is to provide guidelines for setting priorities in pronunciation teaching. Levis outlines six guidelines for creating intelligibility-based classrooms which can be adapted to various contexts. Furthermore, in Chapter 9, the intelligibility-centered classroom's changing role in language teaching is discussed, providing a rationale for adopting the approach and explaining a realistic proposal for instruction. Finally, Chapter 10 is the most practice-oriented chapter, indicating the "more important" (e.g., initial consonant clusters) and "less important" (e.g., medial consonants cluster) features to be included in pronunciation teaching.

Overall, the major strength of *Intelligibility, Oral Communication, and the Teaching of Pronunciation* lies in its framing and presentation of the rationale for the intelligibility-based classroom. In doing so, it provides clear guidelines for adopting the intelligibility approach. Levis establishes a straightforward connection between research and practice, directly translating literature into practical approaches for teachers and instructors. Furthermore, the book is easy to follow due to the author's use of language that facilitates understanding of concepts. The display and summary of main points throughout the chapters also allow navigating and locating the needed information easily.

What this book seems to be missing, however, is a discussion of pronunciation assessment, although Levis does address this and directs readers to other resources that cover this subtopic. Even though it is not the book's goal to provide hands-on activities, given the focus on teaching, it might have been helpful to include a list of resources containing specific activities that can be used in the classroom. This would have made the book more practical for teachers. Another drawback of the book is the fact that it mainly addresses research for English language learners. It would be beneficial to read how these issues are addressed with learners of other languages. Finally, individual learner differences (e.g., personality, motivation, attitude, beliefs, etc.) and their connection to intelligibility-based pronunciation teaching should have been addressed.

All in all, *Intelligibility, Oral Communication, and the Teaching of Pronunciation* is a helpful and practical resource for English teachers worldwide. It is also a must-read for novice researchers interested in oral communication and pronunciation, as it covers the pronunciation literature and can serve as a step to generate future research ideas. Professionals and instructors interested in teaching applied phonology and intelligibility-related graduate-level courses will also find this to be an engaging textbook.

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