

## What matters for the assessment, teaching, and acquisition of comprehensible second language pronunciation?

### What this research was about and why it is important

In a globalized world, wherein many languages, such as English, are used as a lingua franca, many scholars have emphasized that what matters in real-life second language (L2) communication is comprehensibility rather than linguistic nativelikeness. To date, there are a number of empirical studies examining what matters for the assessment, teaching, and acquisition of comprehensible vs. nativelike L2 pronunciation proficiency. Whereas individual studies have demonstrated somewhat mixed findings, the author used a special statistical procedure (i.e., meta-analysis) in order to summarize the findings of 54 empirical studies. The findings of these analyses are intended to not only inform L2 pronunciation pedagogy, but also to draw tentative conclusions regarding our theoretical understanding of the complex relationship between speakers, listeners, L2 speech assessment, and acquisition.

### What the researcher did

- The author searched, identified, and read a total of 57 empirical studies examining the same topic with similar research designs (i.e., the linguistic and listener influences on pronunciation assessment and teaching).
- The author statically summarized the findings of the studies. The goal was to find out which linguistic measures distinguish comprehensible vs. nativelike pronunciation as a means to inform assessment and teaching.

### What the researchers found

- Listeners use different information while assessing comprehensible vs. nativelike L2 pronunciation.
- Listeners pay an equal attention to various areas of phonological information for L2 comprehensibility (segmentals = prosody = fluency).
- Listeners prioritize segmental accuracy for L2 nativelikeness (segmentals > prosody > fluency).
- Pronunciation training is facilitative of the attainment of comprehensible L2 pronunciation.
- Nativelike pronunciation proficiency is resistant to change even if instruction is provided.

### Things to consider

- Two global constructs of L2 pronunciation proficiency—comprehensibility and nativelikeness—are readily distinguishable.
- It is important to make learners aware that what matters for successful L2 communication is comprehensibility rather than nativelikeness.
- Comprehensibility can be achieved if learners meet minimal requirements by practicing multiple dimensions of L2 pronunciation (accuracy *and* fluency alike) in a balanced manner, although foreign accentedness may remain unchanged even after instruction.

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