

## Instruction helps second language pronunciation but this depends on the measures used

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

In the past few decades, many studies have examined the extent to which instruction on specific aspects of second language pronunciation is effective. Given that these studies have frequently differed in the ways they measured the development of pronunciation, it is often difficult to compare the results of these studies and to extract general patterns of findings. In this article, the researchers first proposed a framework of different measures of second language pronunciation (e.g., learners' accuracy in producing or perceiving specific sounds, learners' overall accentedness or fluency in speaking) and different types of test (e.g., controlled tasks such as perception of individual sounds or spontaneous picture description tasks). The researchers then used this framework to examine studies from the past 40 years, bringing together findings about the effectiveness of pronunciation instruction according to the different measures and tests of pronunciation.

### What the researchers did

- The researchers proposed a framework for thinking about what kind of knowledge is learned from pronunciation instruction.
- The researchers used this framework to re-analyze the effects of instruction found by 77 previous studies investigating the teaching of pronunciation. These studies had been published in peer-reviewed journals between 1982 and 2017.

### What the researchers found

- Explicit pronunciation teaching (e.g., teaching how to produce and perceive sounds or stress patterns) was found to be generally effective across the sample of previous studies.
- However, the usefulness of pronunciation teaching seemed to depend on:
  - whether the focus of measurement was “global” (e.g., the degree to which language was “comprehensible,” or easily understood) versus “specific” (e.g., the degree to which specific consonants or vowels were accurately produced or perceived);
  - the scoring method (using listeners to judge learners' production versus specialized software to analyze acoustic properties of speech); and
  - the test type (narrowly-focused perception or production tests versus more spontaneous production in an interview).
- Instruction appeared to be effective when measured at specific levels (e.g., focusing on specific consonants and vowels). Effectiveness of instruction was less clear at global levels (e.g., when judged by listeners for overall “accentedness” or “fluency”).
- Learning gains were clear when tests were “controlled” (e.g., reading aloud) and speech was analyzed using computer-aided acoustic analyses.
- Learning gains were not very clear or reliable when tests were less controlled, such as more spontaneous speech tasks (e.g., interviews).

### Things to consider

- To maximize the effects of pronunciation instruction, teachers might wish to consider focusing on aspects of pronunciation that influence whether language is comprehensible (i.e., pronunciation issues that influence the successful communication of meaning).
- Teachers might also wish to use not only controlled pronunciation practice activities but also conversational and meaning-oriented activities so that learners practice transferring what they have learned to other contexts.

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