

Book Review

A Review of *Pronunciation Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching*

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An increase in the emphasis on helping students with pronunciation has left many educators feeling uncomfortable as they address this important aspect of English. Most current ESOL teachers did not study the teaching of pronunciation as part of their professional preparation (Baker, 2011, p. 279). Linda Grant's new book, *Pronunciation Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching*, meets this need.

After providing a framework for the book and a succinct summary of the elements of pronunciation, Grant turns each of the most common myths over to a current expert on the subject. Educators may recognize some of their current beliefs in the list below.

- Fossilized speech cannot be improved.
- Beginners do not need to pay attention to pronunciation.
- Pronunciation teaching should focus on helping students recognize distinct sounds.
- Intonation is hard to teach.
- Students would make more progress if they practiced more.

The experts thoroughly dissect and debunk these myths and others. Even

more importantly, the discussions include effective techniques that teachers can easily use to implement new understandings about the teaching of pronunciation.

Throughout the book, the approach to each myth is consistent and easy to follow. First, the author describes an authentic "Real World" situation in which the effects of a myth are demonstrated. Next, a concise survey of "What the Research Says" brings the reader up to date on the validity of the myth. "What We Can Do" offers a variety of usable techniques for bringing the current research into the classroom. Lastly, a myth-specific reference list points the reader to additional resources and the underlying studies.

A good example of the book's approach is Myth #4, in which Judy Gilbert challenges the myth that intonation is hard to teach. She leads off with real-life examples of errors in English intonation and their consequences: a speaker emphasizes the wrong word in a sentence and causes an unintended insult; a speaker fails to signal the end of a list with a falling tone and leaves the listeners waiting for the rest of the message.

Gilbert's review of the research establishes that instruction in intonation produces the greatest improvement in speaker intelligibility. She also tackles the reluctance of teachers to address intonation. Gilbert ascribes this phenomenon to outdated and ineffective theories of intonation instruction that advocate the use of grammar rules, pitch level rules, and subjective rules about speaker attitudes. She tried them all and could not make them work for her students. Fortunately, she did not give up but went on to develop a very usable system of teaching intonation.

The primary elements of Gilbert's system include helping students understand the role of intonation in English, guiding their use of intonation

through self-correction of dialogs, and exploring their use of intonation to improve listening comprehension. Several specific techniques, such as template sentences, the stress pyramid, and kinesthetic reinforcements round out a teaching tool kit for intonation.

In a similar fashion, *Pronunciation Myths* overturns each of seven myths and offers alternative theories and practices. Educators who cannot find time to take a graduate course on teaching pronunciation or to spend hours catching up on the research should read Linda Grant's latest book. It offers a fresh understanding of pronunciation teaching and, more importantly, the techniques to implement these newly adopted beliefs.

References

- Baker, A. (2011). Discourse prosody and teachers' stated beliefs and practices. *TESOL Journal* 2(3), 263-292.
- Grant, Linda. (2014). *Pronunciation Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Teresa Cunningham Byrnes is new to the TESOL field, receiving her M.A. TESOL in 2014 from Portland State University. She specialized in the teaching of pronunciation, especially prosody. Her final M.A. project, Prosody Now: Activities to Teach Stress and Intonation in Adult ESOL, Includes ready-to-use prosody lessons that can be worked into a variety of ESOL classes.