



## FROM THE SPECIAL ISSUE EDITOR

In the field of language learning, the teaching of pronunciation has undergone many changes. It has progressed from the early days of drills and strict error correction, through periods of disappearance from the classroom, to contemporary approaches that address the segmental and suprasegmental features within their discourse contexts. Technological advances have provided a range of tools to assist learners in the development of pronunciation skills in a variety of target languages. Visual displays of some features of speech production such as pitch are user-friendly and valuable sources of feedback. Increasing numbers of learners can avail themselves of such tools to practice the sounds of another language as a complement to classroom instruction or for self study. The four articles in this special issue highlight several of these important elements: creating meaningful visual displays, developing self-directed computer-assisted pronunciation practice, assessing learners' attitudes toward the use of technology in pronunciation improvement, and rating the components of second-language speech.

In the first article, "[Promoting Increased Pitch Variation in Oral Presentations with Transient Visual Feedback](#)," Rebecca Hincks and Jens Edlund addressed the effect of a different type of intonation feedback generated from speech analysis. Instead of pitch contours, their system produced flashing lights of different colors, which showed users how much pitch variation they produced. Results of a training study revealed that learners of English as a foreign language showed a significant increase in pitch variation in giving an oral presentation and improvement in naturalness, and that they were satisfied with their training.

In "[The Effects of Computer-assisted Pronunciation Readings on ESL Learners' Use of Pausing, Stress, Intonation, and Overall Comprehensibility](#)," Mark Tanner and Melissa Landon explored the effects of self-directed computer-assisted practice involving cued pronunciation readings by learners of English as a second language. Of interest were the learners' perception and production of pausing, word stress, and sentence-final intonation. Results indicated a significant reduction in the number of instances where they were unable to perceive pauses and stressed syllables. Participants also improved in their ability to use word stress appropriately in a controlled production task.

Learners' use of technology outside the classroom was investigated by Lara Ducate and Lara Lomicka in "[Podcasting: An Effective Tool for Honing Language Students' Pronunciation?](#)" Learners of French and German engaged in both scripted and extemporaneous podcasting of texts in their respective target languages over a period of a semester. Improvement was noted for some learners in terms of comprehensibility and accentedness. Overall perception of the podcasting project by learners was positive, and suggested a way to address pronunciation as a companion to classroom instruction.

In the final paper, "[Comprehensibility and Prosody Ratings for Pronunciation Software Development](#)," Paul Warren, Irina Elgort, and David Crabbe addressed the issue of identifying the parameters to be used in establishing automated feedback systems for pronunciation. Native-speaking raters evaluated the comprehensibility of learners' recorded utterances, noting areas of difficulty. The segmental information in these utterances was then filtered out, and they were rated for nativeness. Findings pointed to important roles for sentence prosody (stress, intonation, and rhythm), word stress, and consonant and vowel pronunciation in the assessment of comprehensibility. In addition,



the authors found no significant differences between naïve and experienced raters on either task.

This special issue would not have been possible without the contributions of LLT Editor Dorothy Chun, and Managing Editors Hunter Hatfield and Matthew Prior. I am very grateful to the many reviewers who offered extensive comments on the submissions.

Debra M. Hardison  
Special Issue Editor