

Keynote Lecture

L2 Prosody learning and teaching: bridging the gap between research and practice

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Outline

In our increasingly multilingual society, communicating in foreign languages (L2) is important for building and maintaining interpersonal relationships, as well as active participation in society as a whole. While adult L2 learners often practice individual L2 sounds (vowels and consonants) in class, they barely receive instruction about the form or function of the prosodic features of their L2. These language features that extend across longer stretches of speech, such as lexical stress, speech rhythm, and sentence intonation, differ substantially across languages. This, together with a lack of existing methods for L2 prosody training, complicates prosody acquisition by L2 learners in the classroom. However, prosody is essential for communication, as it is an important factor in word recognition, turn-taking, and discourse focus marking, among many other linguistic functions. Therefore, understanding the prosodic differences between languages and teaching and practicing them in the foreign language classroom has both theoretical and societal impact. L2 researchers, teachers, and learners would all benefit from recognizing the importance of L2 prosody acquisition, but how do we overcome the challenges that come along with it and bridge the gap between theoretical research findings and the practice of an L2 classroom?

This keynote addresses what we know about the acquisition of different prosodic features in the L2, focusing on the factors that influence L2 development and the effects of prosodic errors on L1-L2 communication, providing a current state-of-the-art overview from a theoretical perspective. Next, it will review the practical implications of the research to date, with emphasis on individual learner differences and the possibly beneficial role of gestural information.