# Developing Pronunciation by Intelligibility-Centered Classroom: A Book Review

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With English universally considered as lingua franca, and with the increasing amount of English being spoken in education, business, medicine, technology, government policy, and public affairs around the world, it is natural that an expansion of variations of the English language follows. The phenomenon turns the world into a global village and makes communication more accessible, especially if intelligibility is taken into account. Intelligibility, the degree to which a listener can understand a speaker's speech, is essential for effective communication and should be the objective of the second language (L2) learning and teaching. One of the elements of intelligibility is pronunciation. The way teachers pronounce words impacts students' comprehension. Furthermore, studies suggest that pronunciation is the make-it-or-break-it component for effective conversations.

The book "Intelligibility, Oral Communication, and the Teaching of Pronunciation" by John Levis (2018) provides concepts, reminders, and new approaches to teaching the second language and emphasizes the importance of pronunciation instruction. It also shows how the crucial findings of relevant research in the field inform teachers about what should and should not practice in an intelligibility-based classroom. It addresses the practical aspects of teaching and the factors necessary for effective communication when learning a second language.

In terms of organization, the book started with an introduction and was followed by four sections: a framework for teaching spoken language; word-based errors and intelligibility; discourse-based errors and intelligibility; and teaching and research approaches to intelligibility. Furthermore, these sections are subdivided into ten chapters.

Section I consists of two chapters that conceptualize the relationship between pronunciation and intelligibility and the relationship between intelligibility and communication. This part also asserts that the ultimate goal of pronunciation teaching should be to make the speaker understandable rather than produce a native-like accent.

Chapter 1, "Intelligibility, Comprehensibility, and Spoken Language", defines the key terms used throughout the book. Intelligibility refers to a listener's ability to understand a speaker, whereas comprehensibility measures how easy something is to understand (Chan, 2021). However, spoken language is the utterance itself.

Chapter 2, "Priorities: What Teachers and Researchers Say", discusses the priorities in teaching and learning pronunciation using an intelligibility-based approach: what characteristics should be emphasized, what should be taught, and what should not be taught. The author presents three reasons why the practice of intelligibility-oriented approach is recommended: English is the universal language franca; not all English speakers have a native-like accent; effective communication is its aim. This chapter also discusses relevant studies and existing recommendations in teaching pronunciation that may serve as a basis for future researchers.

Section II, "Word-based errors and Intelligibility", consists of three chapters that explore intelligibility and English language word-based pronunciation features. Word-based pronunciation features influence intelligibility the most. We sometimes have difficulties identifying, processing, and understanding the word said by other speakers. This circumstance is likely to occur with nonnative speakers of the English language, in which uttering is unnatural English words is different from uttering words in their native language. Each chapter of this section presents various word-based pronunciation features.

Chapter 3, "Segmentals and Intelligibility" discusses phonemes and allophones, which are frequently uttered incorrectly by second-language speakers; thus, interferes intelligibility on the part of the listeners.

Chapter 4, "Consonant Clusters and Intelligibility" focuses on the complexity of the English language in terms of consonant clusters and grammatical morphemes, such as past tense inflections (e.g., -ed, -t, -d) and their effect on intelligibility. Second language learners often mispronounce consonant clusters due to the unfamiliarity of the language. The book argues that the consonant cluster mispronunciations are more alarming for the speaker's intelligibility than individual consonant mispronunciations. The author illustrates that consonant clusters are adjusted into speakers' native language systems, specifically into vowel epenthesis (when some Spanish speakers say sC words with an initial vowel: eschool for school; and espeak for speak) or deletions of sounds (such as when some Vietnamese speakers say cas instead of clasps). Changing the expected syllable structure is likely to influence intelligibility, so it is vital to consider specific consonant cluster pronunciation.

This section is concluded with Chapter 5, "Word Stress and Intelligibility" which is about the role of word stress on intelligibility and teaching pronunciation. The author shows that stress-related mispronunciations are more alarming than segmental mispronunciations regarding the intelligibility among the listeners. Although segmental and lexical-stress errors might not negatively affect word recognition, some second language learners may perceive the mispronounced stress of words differently, such as the noun OBject and the verb obJECT.

Section III, "Discourse-Based Errors and Intelligibility" consists of two chapters that address the effects of discourse-based errors on intelligibility. Pronunciation may not affect word recognition negatively, but in some way, it impacts the overall message or perceived message of a listener. Specifically, how pronunciation in terms of rhythm and intonation contain this section.

Chapter 6, "Rhythm and Intelligibility" describes the concept of rhythm (including speech rate, fluency, and connected speech) and its connection to intelligibility. The author mentioned that he had not wanted to write this chapter but was influenced that the elements related to rhythm, such as connected speech, may not be related to production but are vital for speaker perception. Rhythm assists the listeners in receiving, processing, and organizing each linguistic unit produced by the speaker.

Chapter 7, "Intonation and Intelligibility: The Roles of Prominence and Tune" examines the importance of prominence and tone for pragmatics and social interaction. Prominence is when we give more emphasis to some parts of a major grammatical unit than others. On the other hand, the tune is "the pitch movement from the first syllable to the phrase's end" (p. 171). The book demonstrates how incorrect prominence and intonation patterns interfere with intelligibility or even cause unintended insults. The placements of prominence and tune on phrases depend on how information is arranged in speech. Since there are no definite rules regarding the placement of prominence and tune on grammatical units on a text, speakers and listeners must consider contextualization and familiarity to improve intelligibility. The author concluded this chapter by stressing the need to include an intonation-based way of teaching pronunciation, in addition to word-based and sentence-based practices of teaching pronunciation.

The last section of the book, Section IV, "Teaching and Research Approaches to Intelligibility" consists of three chapters that conclude all the key concepts on the first three sections of the book and addresses its' relationship with teaching specifically, using the intelligibility-centered approach.

In Chapter 8, "Teaching for Intelligibility: Guidelines for Setting Priorities" the author provided a list of principles for intelligibility-based teaching. These principles provide guidelines for selecting teaching/learning content that can be adapted to various contexts.

Chapter 9, "The Intelligibility-Based Classroom" explores the role of the intelligibility-based approach in language teaching. It supports the adaptation of the approach and provides realistic pronunciation teaching recommendations. The author also critiques the nativeness approach in second language teaching, emphasizing drills and traditional pronunciation exercises to develop native-like pronunciation. The goal of second language learning is cannot and does not have to speak like a native; all that is necessary is intelligibility.

Finally, Chapter 10, "What Should and Should Not Be Taught: An Intelligibility-Based Approach," presents "what-to-dos" associated with planning and implementing pronunciation teaching. Teachers must not be selective, rather be adaptive in their approaches to teaching pronunciation. They must base the approaches on researches and experience. Additionally, the author recommends "more important" (e.g., initial consonant clusters) and "less important" (e.g., medial consonants cluster) suggestions for intelligibility-centered pronunciation teaching. This chapter discusses practical methods that second language educators can use to teach language in general and pronunciation in particular.

John Levis' (2018) book "Intelligibility, Oral Communication, and the Teaching of Pronunciation" is a timely, user-friendly, and practical book that caters overview of knowledge and approaches in second language teaching to foster intelligibility. It showcases the existing practice of pronunciation teaching reinforced by relevant studies. It promotes the adaption of the intelligibility approach that focuses on understanding and comprehension rather than native-like fluency with these traditional practices. The book outlines guidelines for planning and implementing the intelligibility approach. The author derives research findings and implications into helpful strategies teachers can use in teaching pronunciation. For example, the third section shows how intonation and prominence are "heavily implicated in the loss of intelligibility" (p. 2) and might be an eye-opener for educators and interest in future research. Moreover, the book is easy to understand because of the language use and well-described technical terms that facilitate understanding.

This book can be more practical if the guidelines for the intelligibility approach include a chapter that discusses pronunciation assessment and provides a list of specific classroom tasks teachers can facilitate in an intelligibility-centered classroom. However, the author clarifies that the book would not provide this part and suffices it by referring readers to a reference that addresses this topic. Another content that can make the book more comprehensive is a chapter dedicated to how individual differences affect second language pronunciation learning. Factors such as age, sex, motivation, beliefs, personality, culture, learning style, and autonomy contribute to learners' individuality (Griffiths & Soruc, 2021).

This book, with comprehensive concepts on pronunciation and intelligibility concerning the second language, is recommended for teachers, students, and researchers interested in the development of communication skills of English as second language learners. Educational practitioners and linguists will be informed of the language trends, which can be used as a reference for future studies. While native-like speaking is generally considered standard, readers will recognize that intelligibility is more important, particularly for second language learners.

## References

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## Bio-note

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