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Book review

Pragmatics and Prosody in English Language Teaching

Jesús Romero-Trillo, Ed., Springer, Dordrecht, 2012, 249 pp., ISBN: 978-94-007-3882-9, USD 139.00 (hardcover)

The aim of the recent volume, *Pragmatics and Prosody in English Language Teaching*, as expressed in its introduction, is to bridge the ''gap between studying pragmatic meaning and the study of prosodic features in real interaction'' (p. 1) In the volume's introduction, editor Jesús Romero-Trillo argues convincingly that contextualized speech cannot be understood without analytic attention given to prosody – and that this has important implications for English language teaching. In particular, the volume emphasizes connections between research and pedagogy, and several of its chapters address issues of special relevance to language educators. Following Romero-Trillo's brief introductory chapter, which lays out an overview of the book's structure, the volume is comprised of three parts consisting of a total of 13 chapters. The three parts are organized in a fashion that moves from more theoretical issues to more applied topics.

David Deterding's ''Issues in the acoustic measurement of rhythm'' is Chapter 2, the first of five chapters in Part 1: Theoretical Approaches to the Teaching of Prosody. In it, Deterding's focus is on stress versus syllable timing. He explains that this is better conceptualized as a cline than a dichotomy, and argues that it is more accurate to use the label ''rhythm'' instead of ''timing.'' He also engages with issues related to prosody and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), pointing out that whereas ''Inner Circle'' English varieties are considered to be stress-timed, ''Outer Circle'' Englishes tend to instead have a syllable-based rhythm. Deterding presents the results of an empirical study in which he used a modified version of the PVI (Pairwise Variability Index) – a formula used to measure the rhythm of a speaker – to compare the English produced by a group of British RP speakers and a group of English speakers from Brunei. The findings indicate Brunei English speakers use a more syllable-based rhythm than the British speakers, and that there is also greater inter-group variation in rhythm among the Brunei speakers of English. The chapter concludes with Deterding questioning whether stress-based rhythm should even be taught (as is recommended by some ESL/EFL pedagogical literature) – or whether it is actually non-essential for international intelligibility (the stance of prominent ELF scholars). Ultimately, Deterding suggests that depending on the speech event and the participants involved, there may be contexts in which syllabus-based rhythm might even be preferable to stress-based rhythm in English.

In the third chapter, ''Prosody and second language teaching: Lessons from L2 speech perception and production research,'' Angelos Lengeris provides a review of literature on L2 accents. The author points out that although prosody has been shown to play a significant role in perceptions of foreign accents, L2 teaching usually focuses on segmental rather than suprasegmental features of pronunciation, and that suprasegmental features are often ignored altogether in L2 pronunciation instruction. Surveying past research examining the critical period for phonology, Lengeris shows that an age effect has been found for acquisition of L2 prosody. The literature review continues with a discussion of research that examines the influence of the L1 intonational system as well as length of residence (LOR) – although many of these results are inconclusive. However, recent laboratory studies show that adults can be retrained to both hear and produce suprasegmental patterns which differ from those of their L1. Furthermore, training learners with computerized images of their pitch contours seems to be an especially promising area for both instruction and research. While Lengeris makes several connections from research to implications for teaching L2 prosody, there is no mention of pragmatics in this chapter.

Chapter 4, ''Factors affecting perception and production of L2 prosody: Research results and their implications for the teaching of foreign languages,'' by Thorsten Piske overlaps in some areas with the preceding chapter. Piske's chapter begins with a useful definition of ''foreign accent'' and continues with a discussion of the types of social information conveyed by an individual's accent. In his review of research on attitudes towards foreign accents, Piske argues that segmental pronunciation, prosodic features, as well as fluency all play a role in ''judgments of foreignness'' (p. 47). Piske, like Lengeris, concludes that the body of research points to a clear age effect for L2 prosody. In addition, he, too, notes that the relative contribution of other variables is much less clear, and he attributes this lack of clarity to a number of issues related to research design and methodology. The chapter's conclusions echo those of Chapter 3 (e.g., implications for

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teaching, and the potential for audio/visual training on L2 prosody). In contrast to the previous chapter, Piske's final paragraph does include a mention of a few issues related to pragmatics and prosody, such as considerations of the expression of intention in the L2, and the role of context.

In Chapter 5, ''Function versus form in speech prosody: Lessons from experimental research and potential implications for teaching,'' author Yi Xu provides a review of experimental findings on tone and intonation. Beginning with a discussion of tone contours in Chinese, the author argues that the general articulatory mechanisms involved in tonal languages apply also to non-tonal languages. Xu concludes the discussion of pitch movement in English by stating that ''much of the variations in English result from the parallel encoding of three basic communicative functions: lexical stress, prosodic focus, and sentence type'' (p. 71). Xu also points out that there is not yet much research on other communicative functions of prosody, such as topic or turn initiation, and contradiction contour. Indeed, topics such as these are situated at the very center of the prosody/pragmatics interface.

The final chapter in this section, Chapter 6 by Marie Nilsenová and Marc Swerts, ''Prosodic adaptation in language learning,'' begins with an engaging introduction about what is typically lost in a transcription of speech: many readers will be able to relate to the authors' description of ''seeing'' a conversation as opposed to hearing it. Furthermore, this is the first chapter to provide a definition of prosody: i.e., ''. . .the whole gamut of features that do not so much determine what people say but rather how they say it. It includes features such as intonation (speech melody), tempo, rhythm, loudness, and specific variations in voice quality'' (p. 77). Because all languages in the world have prosody, the authors discuss three ''universals'' or ''codes'' of prosody: frequency, production, and effort. In addition, they point out that prosody has a biological basis and is an early feature of infants' first language acquisition. Imitation is a process by which we acquire L1 prosody, and while this tendency to imitate the prosody of our interlocutors has been shown to generally decrease with age, mimicking behavior is linked to interpersonal rapport. The authors discuss a number of studies which illustrate how pitch adaptations made by different speakers (politicians, television personalities, etc.) in different contexts can serve pragmatic purposes. They conclude with a discussion of some of the inherent challenges in teaching prosody. Once again, it is noted that speech-visualizing technologies appear to be more effective than audio-only input.

The second part of the book (Pragmatics, Prosody and Communication) begins with Chapter 7 ''Prosody and meaning: Theory and practice'' by Tim Wharton. Adopting a cognitive approach to pragmatics, Wharton contends that prosodic features such as intonation, pitch, and volume are crucial elements in the process of conveying and comprehending meaning. He provides readers with clear and well-illustrated definitions of related constructs, such as the Hallidayian distinctions between sign, signal, and code. Especially useful is Wharton's discussion of the differences between ''linguistic'' and ''natural'' types of prosody: the former can be viewed as an encoding device, whereas the latter functions more as a means to help determine a relevant interpretation of an utterance. Wharton transitions from theory to practice and engages with issues related to the challenging nature of teaching prosody in the EFL classroom – not only because of its inherent complexity, but also because it entails linguistic, cultural, as well as emotional/affective dimensions. Finally, Wharton also touches on questions about the relevance of teaching such sociocultural features of language in (English as a Lingua Franca) contexts, where students' future interlocutors will likely be other non-native speakers of English. Ultimately however, he seems to advocate for at least some role for addressing prosody in English Language Teaching.

In Chapter 8, ''Prosody and feedback in native and non-native speakers of English'' authors Jesús Romero-Trillo and Jessica Newell explore the role of prosody in native speakers' and non-native speakers' production of ''pragmatic markers,'' or listener response tokens, such as *mhm* and *yeah*. For their framework, they draw on Nuclear Tone Theory, which states that a major accented syllable in a word or utterance (called a tone unit or element) is assigned a semantic/pragmatic value in a specific context. The authors' analysis of the length and pitch of pragmatic markers produced in conversations (from a segment of the LINDSEI corpus) between native speakers of English and Spanish speakers of English reveals a significant difference between the two groups. These differences, the authors suggest, may inadvertently signal various stances (affirmative vs. assertive) in interactive behavior. In the chapter's conclusion, it is clear that Romero-Trillo and Newell adopt native speaker prosodic competence as the norm, since they – unlike some of the other authors in the volume (who frame their recommendations in the context of work on ELF) – argue for ''correct linguistic behavior'' in the use of prosody to realize diverse pragmatic functions in interaction.

Heather L. Balog, in Chapter 9 on ''Early prosodic production: Pragmatic and acoustic analyses for L2 language learners,'' focuses on the early development of the prosodic system, particularly intonation, to convey pragmatic meaning in communication. She provides a thorough account of research that describes the development of pragmatic and prosodic competence in early years of infancy. The development of pragmatic and prosodic skills takes place in two distinct transitional stages namely prelinguistic and linguistic communication (also referred to as preintentional and intentional communication). The early instances of linguistic and intentional pragmatic communication are observed when the child interacts with his/her interlocutors in various situational environments via the use of various discourse categories such as commands, requests, and related or unrelated utterances in response to interlocutor utterances. Balog labels these and other discourse categories as co-participatory (CP), initiation (IN), and narrowed focus (NF), and analyzes the intonation abilities of young children within these three categories. Balog contends that findings of

early childhood prosodic and pragmatic acquisition may also be useful in constructing appropriate research frameworks and methodologies for studies investigating late second language acquisition of pragmatic patterns with older children and adults.

In Chapter 10, ''Prosody in conversation: Implications for teaching English pronunciation,'' Beatrice Szczepek Reed provides a welcome overview of the ways in which findings from Conversation Analysis (CA) may be useful for the teaching of prosody to English language learners. Specifically, Reed illustrates how the findings of CA can contribute to the understanding of prosodic phenomena from a broader perspective that encompasses social interaction and collaboration in meaning making, rather than a formal perspective that involves discourse functions of individual linguistic forms. She underscores the role of prosody in turn-taking and sequence management in conversational actions and outlines implications of the interface between prosody and interaction for teaching English pronunciation in the classroom. Providing a detailed discussion of CA research on the intonation patterns of Yes/No and WH-questions in English, Reed suggests that in teaching English conversational pronunciation, a form-function based approach neither reflects real-life conversational practice nor does it lead to successful conversational actions. She concludes by pointing out that teaching and assessment methods must aim at improving learners' interactional negotiating skills rather than engaging them in decontextualized drill and pattern practice.

Finally, Part 3 (Pedagogical Implications for English Language Teaching) contains four chapters, including a final synthesis, written by editor Romero-Trillo. In Chapter 11, Silvia Riesco-Bernier's ''Same but different: The pragmatic potential of native vs. non-native teachers' intonation in the EFL classroom,'' explores the interface between meaning making process and prosodic realization in EFL teacher talk, with particular emphasis on the discourse produced by native and non-native English-speaking teachers. Her study is framed by Speech Act Theory, with the addition of phonology, specifically the inclusion of intonation as a meaning making tool. This framework is further elaborated by a discussion of research on Child Directed Speech (CDS), which describes how emotions and meanings shape intonation in the communication between adults and infants. The results of Riesco-Bernier's study indicate that non-native teachers use fewer prosodic patterns and less complex intonation than native teachers. Although she acknowledges that less complexity in intonation is not necessarily ineffective, the author nevertheless stresses the importance of raising EFL teachers' awareness of prosodic contours so that they can better teach their students these patterns, enabling them to become more competent in their speech production in and out of the classroom.

Chapter 12, ''The pragmatic function of intonation: Cueing agreement and disagreement in spoken English discourse and implications for ELT,'' by Lucy Pickering, Guiling Hu and Amanda Baker is concerned with discourse-pragmatic function of prosodic features in managing interaction. Their study focuses on the role of intonation in cueing agreement and disagreement. Comparing a group of North Americans with a group of Chinese speakers of English, the researchers found that for Americans, agreement was not always associated with pitch matching, but disagreement was consistently associated with a discordant pitch choice. For the Chinese group however, there was greater variation in disagreement: they did not consistently use discordant pitch, like the Americans did, to signal disagreement. Pickering et al. suggest that this may be an important area for pedagogical intervention in the future, especially because it represents a potential source of miscommunication. This chapter is an excellent example of an empirical study which represents the volume's dual focus on prosody and pragmatics.

The focus of Chapter 13, ''Trouble spots for the learning of English intonation by Spanish speakers: Tonality and tonicity,'' by Francisco Gutiérrez Díez is one of cross-linguistic comparison. Specifically, Gutiérrez Díez describes a number of challenges in tonality and tonicity for Spanish speakers of English. This chapter provides a discussion of both developmental as well as L1 transfer issues, and centers around those features in English which represent difficulty for Spanish speakers. In terms of tonality, Spanish speakers tend to produce an excessive number of tone units when speaking English; however, Gutiérrez Díez explains that Spanish children also tend to do this as they are learning their L1, making it a developmental rather than a transfer issue. In addition, the author does identify several sources of L1 transfer – for example, placing stress on auxiliary verbs and pronouns (tonicity). This chapter has a number of interesting pedagogical implications, especially for teachers working with Spanish learners of English.

The concluding chapter, by Jesús Romero-Trillo ''Teaching prosody with a pragmatic emphasis: A synthesis'' highlights some of the major themes of the volume: the numerous ways in which distinct languages differ in terms of their prosodic features, the variation in rhythmic patterns found in global Englishes, and the potential of computer programs for assisting learners in monitoring their L2 prosodic production – among others.

Clearly, the topic of this book is an important one, and it is evident that the interface of prosody and pragmatics is an area in which much further research is needed. Although the book presents itself as concerned with this interface, the extent to which this stated goal is actually achieved varies considerably throughout individual chapters – some of which do address the interface squarely, while others seem to concentrate almost exclusively on prosody, and not very much on pragmatics. Presumably, readers of this journal are likely to find the chapters in Parts 2 and 3 the most interesting, since that is where the greatest emphasis on pragmatics can be found. In addition, the fact that each chapter includes at least some consideration of pedagogical implications is commendable – and the range of issues presented here is likely to be of

interest to English language teachers everywhere. Finally, scholars with an interest in the prosody/pragmatics interface will find many useful suggestions for topics requiring further research throughout the pages of this volume.

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