The Sounds of English: Introduction

This volume of ELOPE is dedicated to phonetics and phonology. The seven papers contributed by nine authors present a selection of topics that reflect the developments in these traditional fields of linguistics that have been (re)gaining momentum in recent years.

The idea for the issue stems from the 14th conference of the European Society for the Study of English (Brno, Czech Republic, 29 August–2 September 2018), where the guest editors of this issue convened the seminar group “The Sounds of English: Cross-Linguistic and Cross-Cultural Aspects”. The seminar participants who contributed their articles are joined by other researchers working in the field.

The papers in this issue are organized alphabetically, by authors.

Biljana Čubrović (University of Belgrade, Serbia) presents a study that examines how non-native speakers of American English with Serbian as their mother tongue produce L2 vowels. She identifies vowel duration as an important feature that non-native speakers rely on in their production of American English vowels.

Nataša Hirci (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia) writes about the role of pronunciation in speech technologies used by translation professionals. Her findings show that translation students see good pronunciation as an important feature of their skillset that also enables them to use speech recognition tools more easily.

Saša Jošt and Andrej Stopar (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia) assess the perception of foreign language phonemes by devising an experiment that tests several phonemic contrasts. Their findings identify some of the most problematic pairs for Slovene L1 speakers, while showing that in the process of acquiring non-native phonemes, Slovene students tend to prioritize vowels over consonants.

Oleksandr Kapranov (Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway) presents a mixed-method study that explores the sounds of English that pre-service and in-service teachers of English as a foreign language identify as challenging. While the results of self-assessment in the two groups are similar, they do not necessarily match the participants’ errors in transcription tasks. The study also lists some problematic phoneme contrasts relevant for Norwegian speakers of English.

Smiljana Komar (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia) studies the oral production of General British phonemes in connected speech as read by Slovene EFL students. Her paper compares the performance of the students before and after their systematic training in English pronunciation. The findings confirm the influence of their L1 and the positive effects of explicit instruction in phonetics.

Emilija Mustapić and Frane Malenica (University of Zadar, Croatia) discuss the relationship between sign languages, spoken languages, and co-speech gestures. They examine the phonology of spoken and sign languages, while providing an insight into the basic features of co-speech gestures in order to explore how these means of communication convey or complement the meaning.

Serkan Şen (Başkent University, Ankara, Turkey) provides a comparative analysis of Turkish and English with respect to their vowel systems and orthography. He identifies the most problematic non-native vowels for Turkish speakers of English and devises a set of activities that address their production and perception.

The guest editors would like to thank the authors for their contributions, and the reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions.

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