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Cat Got Your Tongue? Recent Research and Classroom Practices for Teaching Idioms to English Language Learners Around the World
Paul McPherron and Patrick T. Randolph
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Paul McPherron and Patrick T. Randolph write in a lively and informal style to provide a timely and thought-provoking introduction to teaching idioms. The book is targeted at practicing teachers and graduate students, and it aims to relate research on idioms to classrooms. The authors take on the ambitious task of providing a coherent account of a rapidly expanding field of research that lacks a commonly accepted theoretical orientation. Consequently, rather than providing a single approach to idiom learning, the book provides an accessible window on key theoretical perspectives and suggestions for classroom practice grounded in a variety of different approaches.

Part 1, Theoretical and Pedagogical Research Into Learning and Teaching Idioms, surveys a wide range of literature. It discusses the theoretical issues around the definition, psychoneurological processing, and teaching and learning of idioms. Part 2 of the book, Teaching Idioms to English Language Learners Around the World, focuses on the classroom, provides a stimulus for reflective practice, and offers a guide to available resources and lesson ideas.

Specifically, Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of the book while Chapter 2 explores how idioms have been defined in various research paradigms. The authors' working definition of idioms includes any lexical item that problematizes a grammar translation/generative grammar perspective. Hence, figures of speech, collocations, formulaic language use, phrasal verbs, and one-word idioms are all brought under the umbrella term *idioms,* alongside more traditional idioms. This preserves an unbiased and broad perspective on idiomatic language use, although it can at times leave the reader with considerable work to do. As the authors explain, not all of the research on idioms that they cite will apply to all idioms equally.

In Chapter 3 the authors introduce a broad sweep of neurological and psychological research and connect it to teaching idioms. More specifically, the discussion is centered on the parts of the brain involved in learning, theories of lexical storage, and psychological principles of effective learning. Chapter 4 engages with a range of insights from vocabulary studies and corpus linguistics, and it surveys various approaches to presenting idioms in published materials.

Somewhat unaddressed by the authors are the issues of idiom selection and how much classroom time to spend on direct learning of idioms. The authors mention an idioms dictionary that presents 10,000 idioms, but they themselves define idioms far more broadly than this. At the same time, they recommend teaching five idioms in a one-hour lesson. For this reason, a more in-depth treatment of these issues would have been helpful, as would a discussion of idiom-learning strategies that parallels discussion of strategies and direct teaching in vocabulary studies more generally.

Chapter 5 provides a bridge between the research-oriented section of the book and the practice-oriented section of the book by outlining a wide range of activity types that could be used in classrooms: cognition and brain-based activities, conversation analysis activities, corpus-based activities, digital media activities, idioms-in-action activities, and dictionary activities. The postmethod, theory-neutral perspective of the authors really comes into its own here as each approach to teaching idioms leads to a distinctive lesson style that teachers can explore.

The second part of the book is oriented toward hands-on practice. It begins with two chapters that report small-scale, descriptive surveys. The first, Chapter 6, consists of teacher perspectives on teaching idioms, while the second, Chapter 7, reports a survey of learner perspectives. These chapters provide a welcome change of pace and ample opportunity for the reader to reflect on his or her own experiences of teaching and learning idioms.

Chapter 8 offers 12 lesson plans focused on teaching idioms, contributed by 12 different teachers from around the world. This chapter will no doubt make the book a great resource for teachers struggling to think of interesting ways to teach idioms. However, it should be noted that the lesson plans tend to be focused on teaching traditional, prototypical idioms; teachers may struggle to adapt some of the lessons to the more frequent and abstract idioms listed in the book, such as "at all" and "of course." Chapter 9 provides detailed reviews and critiques of textbooks and websites dealing with idioms. Taken together, the chapters presented in Part 2 provide a wealth of resources for teachers interested in selecting or developing materials for idiom learning.

The final chapter steps back from a focus on the details of idiom learning to reiterate some of the authors' core beliefs about SLA: the Five-E System of learning (emotion, examples, energy, exercise, and euphoria). This represents an appeal by the authors for idioms to be integrated into the regular curriculum of an English language-learning course, a reminder that teaching idioms should go hand in hand with fostering an engaging, student-centered classroom.

As well as a host of practical suggestions as to how to go about selecting or developing lessons on idioms, this book provides the reader a wide-ranging and stimulating discussion of idioms and their place in the curriculum; this is achieved in part by an openness to multiple definitions of what constitutes an idiom and a willingness to draw upon research from diverse research traditions. However, this same openness also problematizes the topic at hand: Readers familiar with lexicogrammatical perspectives on language may find the authors' treatment of idioms too traditional.

In sum, teachers without a background in vocabulary studies, cognitive linguistics, or corpus linguistics who are interested in learning more about perspectives on language that see idioms as central to nativelike use may find this book a useful starting point, as well as an accessible classroom resource book for developing lessons on idioms.

Final Draft 4
Wendy Asplin, Monica F. Jacobe, and Alan S. Kennedy
New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

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The pitfall of plagiarism is an issue with which most ESL composition instructors have an unfortunate familiarity. Fortunately, plagiarism is also one of the major topics addressed by authors Asplin, Jacobe, and Kennedy in *Final Draft 4,* an exceptional content-based textbook that blends both current, corpus-based language research and good, old-fashioned practice in order to equip intermediate-advanced English language learners with the essential skills they need to become proficient academic writers.

Each of the first seven units of *Final Draft 4* is anchored by a rhetorical mode and an academic topic. In each unit the authors provide students with an interesting and level-appropriate academic reading from a variety of fields, including psychology, anthropology, and media studies, among others. Each reading features elements of the par-

ticular rhetorical mode being addressed in the unit. For example, the unit focusing on narrative writing and history presents an authentic narrative piece titled "An Immigrant's Silent Struggle." The authentic text provides learners with a real-world example of how a particular rhetorical mode is used in writing.

The rhetorical modes featured in *Final Draft 4* systematically progress from basic to advanced. In Unit 1, the basic characteristics of the traditional five-paragraph academic essay are introduced. This introductory unit is followed by six units, each addressing one particular rhetorical mode. These modes include narrative, cause and effect, comparison and contrast, problem-solution, summary-response, and argumentation. Each unit also includes a model student essay that corresponds with each rhetorical mode. The model essays are followed by questions that check for reading comprehension and that encourage students to analyze the effectiveness of the rhetorical features the student writers used in composing their essays. After learners read and analyze a unit's model essay, they are asked to finish a partially completed outline of the model. This "essay, questions, and outline" format is followed in each unit, giving ELLs multiple opportunities to see examples of exceptional student writing and practice their own outlining skills. Additionally, the authors provide several sample essay prompts with which students can practice planning and drafting their own essays.

Essential writing skills are another salient feature of each unit. Each unit targets one or two writing skills. The difficulty level of the skill(s) increases as the learner progresses through each unit. The initial skills are concrete (e.g., composing thesis statements and parallel structure) and progressively become more abstract, with the last few units focusing on topics such as considering audience and avoiding biased language. Also included are language patterns associated with the rhetorical mode being addressed in a particular unit. For instance, phrases such as "The challenge is" and "One solution to" are presented with usage examples in the problem-solution unit.

In addition to essay composition and writing skills, the authors address the grammar and vocabulary needs of advanced ELL writers. Units 1 through 7 include a grammar topic informed by the Cambridge Learner Corpus (CLC), a collection of English writing-exam samples produced by ELLs. Based on the CLC, each unit covers a grammatical form that is commonly employed in academic writing. These topics vary from gerunds and infinitives to complex noun phrases. Practice exercises follow each grammar explanation, and discourse-level editing exercises focusing on the errors commonly associated with the grammar topic complete the grammar focus.

The CLC also effectively informs the vocabulary focus in *Final Draft 4*. Eight high-frequency vocabulary words from the academic word list are introduced in each of the first seven units. Vocabulary exercises assist learners in determining the definition of each word as it is used in context, and presentations of high-frequency collocations provide learners with exposure to idiomatic usage of the target vocabulary. The unit vocabulary exercises prepare students for the unit reading that follows.

What sets *Final Draft 4* apart from other writing texts is that the authors not only claim that their textbook is "informed by classroom teachers," but they genuinely deliver on this claim. This can be seen in the fact that the authors have given special attention to several topics and skills that are of special concern for college-level ELLs, most notably plagiarism. In Units 1 through 7, the authors have included specific skills and techniques to aid learners in avoiding plagiarism. Units 1 and 3, for example, address citing sources and paraphrasing respectively, while Units 5 and 6 cover time management and note taking respectively. Collectively, these unit subsections devoted to avoiding plagiarism are one feature that many composition instructors will find invaluable.

Another noteworthy feature of this text is the final unit, which is dedicated to timed writing. This unit prepares students for timed in-class essays, college admissions exams, and university writing exams. In addition, the unit presents strategies for quickly and accurately analyzing writing prompts by focusing on words and phrases that frequently appear. This is followed by activities for identifying the rhetorical mode that a writer might use to respond to a prompt after analyzing it. Additionally, the authors provide a chart that shows learners how to use their allotted time efficiently by dividing the timed-writing process into six steps: determining the use of the allotted time, analyzing the prompt, brainstorming, outlining, drafting, and editing.

Despite its truly teacher-informed approach and well-balanced presentation of essential academic writing skills, this text does have a few minor weaknesses. First, although academic word list vocabulary is included in each unit, the eight words per unit may be insufficient. During the course of a semester, students will be exposed to only 56 lexical items, hardly sufficient for developing an adequate working academic vocabulary. Moreover, instructors may find themselves struggling to find and create supplemental readings, model essays, and grammar and vocabulary exercises to thoroughly cover the content and skills presented in this text.

Notwithstanding these minor shortcomings, *Final Draft 4* is truly an excellent guide for the college ELL writer. The authors, Asplin,

Jacobe, and Kennedy, provide a comprehensive range of fundamental rhetorical and linguistic resources needed to assist intermediate-advanced ELLs in establishing themselves as competent architects of their own polished final drafts.

Pronunciation Fundamentals: Evidence-Based Perspectives for L2 Teaching and Research
Tracey M. Derwing and Murray J. Munro
Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, 2015.

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Easily to become *the* definitive quick reference for both pronunciation experts and ESL pronunciation teachers for years to come, *Pronunciation Fundamentals: Evidence-Based Perspectives for L2 Teaching and Research* presents an impressively thorough summary response as to *why* and *how* L2 communication and acquisition succeeds or breaks down in L2 pronunciation. Intended for anyone interested in second language pronunciation, language education expert Tracey Derwing and TESL professor Murray Munro base their book on emerging empirical approaches to L2 pronunciation instruction. While more accessible to language teachers familiar with linguistic theory and experimental research, in 10 chapters the authors establish clear and precise links between theoretical L2 phonetic learning processes and pedagogical implications involving intelligibility.

According to the authors, the principle of intelligibility is concerned with aspects of an accent that interfere with listener comprehension while not slavishly striving to help learners sound nativelike. In other words, successful L2 communicative pronunciation involves not just production from the speaker but also perception from the listener. After providing a helpful historical overview of pronunciation instruction in Chapters 1 and 2, four subsequent chapters draw on numerous case studies over several decades to reiterate that intelligibility is a viable and effective principle for teaching L2 pronunciation and assessing learners' expectations and individual needs. In Chapters 3 through 6, the authors emphasize three empirically based points that pronunciation teachers might consider when striving to help learners produce intelligible L2 pronunciation: (a) Not all features of an L2 impact intelligibility, (b) noticeable L2 accent features might not need to be addressed, and (c) current research can help instructors focus on the most significant L2 pronunciation features that influence intelligi-

bility. The authors then turn their attention to incorrectly produced L2 pronunciation features, or errors. Errors are defined by the authors as L2 production structures and features that consistently differ from those used by proficient members of the larger speech community (p. 56).

Derwing and Munro work from the assumption that most pronunciation teachers and researchers are aware that an L2 speaker can speak with a heavy or thick foreign accent yet be perfectly intelligible. In Chapter 4, however, the authors point out that L2 phonetic acquisition research demonstrates that certain sound patterns and features in languages such as English can and do compromise intelligibility for L2 speakers. In English, these features vary from the segmental features (individual vowels and consonants in the phonetic inventory) to the suprasegmental or prosodic patterns (syllable stress, intonation, rhythm) that carry across an utterance. For instance, speakers of languages prosodically close to English, such as Dutch, may experience few difficulties with English prosody. In contrast, speakers of Hungarian and French, which are syllable-stressed languages, may face more difficulty with English stress and rhythm, and, thus, the authors note, "Prosody outweighs individual segment pronunciation as a concern" (pp. 73-74).

Chapters 7 through 10 offer insights and recommendations based on pronunciation research regarding technology in L2 pronunciation instruction, an overview of social and ethical aspects of accents and accent reduction, and a discussion of future directions for teaching and research. Emphasizing intelligibility in these chapters, the authors recommend "the enhancement of native speakers' listening skills" (p. 169) in TESL teacher-training programs.

One weakness of *Pronunciation Fundamentals,* limiting its audience reach, is that it assumes basic knowledge of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). While Derwing and Munro cite the general lack of technical pronunciation training in teacher-education programs as one challenge facing evidence-based approaches to L2 teaching, the technical IPA is nevertheless called upon frequently by the authors. In Chapter 2, despite acknowledging that "teachers need to know how vowels and consonants are articulated" (p. 14), the authors omit the IPA consonant and vowel chart that could prove useful to those less familiar with descriptive phonetics. Furthermore, beginning in Chapter 3, this basic IPA knowledge does prove essential for fully grasping links the authors make between the theoretically driven research and any concrete intervention techniques for the classroom.

For example, in Chapter 3, the authors draw upon a seven-year longitudinal study of the pronunciation of the English aspirated bi-

labial stop /pʰ/ (Derwing & Munro, 2013) by Slavic-speaking adult immigrants. It suggests instruction improves intelligibility and accent and that terms such as *fossilization* (the point at which L2 improvement plateaus) do "not apply to the *instructed* learning of pronunciation" (p. 44). In another instance, the authors employ technical articulatory terminology such as dental and retroflex stops or the tongue tip and palate (p. 35) to illustrate that training improves perception and pronunciation as found in a study (Strange & Dittman, 1984) involving native adult Japanese speakers learning the English consonants /ɹ/ and /l/.

This inclusion of IPA characters has proved to be a temporary minor challenge to some of the college ESL and language tutors whom I train (all of whom have a BA in linguistics or a language) and who have not necessarily been trained to *teach* using IPA before being hired to tutor. I compensate for this minor shortcoming by doing exactly as the authors suggest for ESL teachers—supplement the content with practical pronunciation texts, such as Celce-Murcia, Brinton, Goodwin, and Griner's (2010) *Teaching Pronunciation: A Course Book and Reference Guide,* which uses the IPA extensively. Together with minimal IPA training, both texts will readily help ESL instructors explain and emphasize in class what learners are capable of achieving (intelligible speech) and what learners *cannot* usually achieve (perfect pronunciation)—and why, as supported by their review of relevant research.

In *Pronunciation Fundamentals*, Derwing and Munro have established themselves not only as prolific pioneer researchers in pronunciation but as cogent articulators of the current promising state of pronunciation instruction and empirical research. In sum, the authors argue persuasively for formal and conscious pedagogical attention to teaching pronunciation according to empirically based findings and based heavily on the principle of intelligibility. Having used the text over recent months as an ESL adjunct and as a college ESL tutor trainer, I heartily recommend that *Pronunciation Fundamentals* be used as an indispensable supplement in adult noncredit, undergraduate, graduate, and certificate programs in English as a second language, phonetics, applied linguistics, and second language acquisition.

References

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Perspectives on Teaching and Learning English Literacy in China
Jiening Ruan and Cynthia Leung (Eds.)
Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Springer, 2012.

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With more than 300,000 international students from China studying in American colleges in 2014-2015 (*China Statistical Yearbook-2015,* 2015), *Perspectives on Teaching and Learning English Literacy in China* serves as a valuable resource for teachers teaching abroad in China and teachers teaching stateside. Editors Ruan and Leung seek to bring clarity to the multifaceted subject of English education in modern China. In China, speaking English has become a symbol of prestige, yet instituting an effective way to teach the language has challenged the educational system. Published in 2012, *Perspectives on Teaching and Learning English Literacy in China* is among the most updated and comprehensive accounts of the education system in China. The text demonstrates a balanced point of view as it explains the challenges of both teaching and learning English in China. At the same time, it discusses the Chinese government's plight in dealing with its large population and struggling to modernize the education system with limited resources.

The merit of this book lies in its well-rounded consideration of cultural, historical, political, and social influences on English language education in China since 1949. The authors carefully analyze each of these factors. Understanding how these factors influence international Chinese students provides American teachers with an understanding of their students' educational and cultural backgrounds, enabling them to teach these students more effectively.

Divided into 10 chapters written by professionals around the world, the book covers a wide variety of topics and issues regarding English education in China. The underlying theme of the collection of articles is the significant impact of various social and cultural factors on the Chinese English education system in the past few decades. Chapters 1 through 3 summarize the historical background and context of English education in China. Specifically, Education Professor Ran Hu and Curriculum Studies Professor Bob Adamson outline the

general history of English curricula in China in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, Oklahoma State University professors An Cheng and Qiuying Wang present an overview of ELT curriculum in Chinese higher education and explore the historical, societal, and cultural influences on ELT practices. To conclude this section, Linguistics and Applied Language Professor Yongqi Gu highlights six periods of basic education curricula and educational policy development since 1949.

Chapters 4 through 7 elaborate on curriculum reforms in early childhood, K-12, and college education. In Chapter 4, Professor Zhenyou Yu in Beijing and co-editor Ruan explain that many parents begin early English education for their children because English has become "an important indicator of a person's ability and competence" (p. 54). Despite parents' good intentions, however, the lack of official English-teaching standards for early education and the rarity of qualified kindergarten teachers are obstacles to effective early-education programs. Chapter 5 addresses primary schools. Dongbo Zhang, a researcher in pedagogy, explains that the main issues related to attaining high-quality English education in Chinese primary schools are the lack of printed English materials, the influence of the L1 on English learning, and the inadequacies in teacher training. Zhang puts forth the idea that without sufficient resources, even the most well-intended curriculum goals cannot be attained.

Concerning English curriculum reformation in Chinese high schools, professors Qiang Wang and Zehang Chen from Beijing report on the results of the 2002 National Survey of Senior High School Education in Chapter 6. The study found that the "one-size-fits-all" curriculum does not support individual differences and does not lead to "the development of students' creativity because of the emphasis on standardization" (p. 89). As a result of these findings, policy makers implemented a new curriculum to address these issues. The focus of Chapter 7 moves to higher education. Xiamen University Professor Meihua Li traces the development of the college English syllabi over various points since 1999. Li points out that English syllabi in higher education are increasingly focused on communication competence and speaking—a former weakness of many college students in China.

The last three chapters offer an in-depth discussion of after-school programs, ethnic minorities in China, and technology use. Although the authors focus on the Chinese context, the chapters contain relevant and useful implications for teachers in the US. For example, in Chapter 8, Professor of Education Ping Liu reports that after-school programs have the potential to enrich students' learning experiences, but they have also been an issue of controversy because they overwork students. Chapter 9 discusses the difficulties ethnic minorities face re-

garding English education. Anwei Feng, a professor of Education in the United Kingdom, reasons that not only do minorities tend to live in poorer areas of China where educational resources are scarce, but they also are at a disadvantage because English is their third language. Their local dialect is their first language and Mandarin Chinese is their second language, yet English is often taught through Mandarin.

In Chapter 10, the final chapter in the book, Professor Guofang Li and instructional technology designer Xiaopeng Ni highlight the advantages and disadvantages of the use of technology in the classroom. Some benefits include increased student-centered teaching, increased learner motivation and autonomy, and more opportunities for students to communicate. Two of the noted drawbacks of technology use are a decrease in teacher-student interaction and the need for teachers to regularly update their technology skills. Although the majority of teachers and students have a positive view on using technology in the classroom, Li and Ni warn against the inclination for teachers to use technology as "a teaching presentation tool rather than a student learning tool" (p. 157).

This text is particularly suitable for those seeking an overview of English education in China. It is also an informational resource for teachers in China and the US who desire to cultivate a deeper understanding of the issues involved in the English education of their Chinese students. Moreover, accessible to all teachers, the book does a noteworthy job of providing the necessary contextualization for readers. Considering that 31.2% of international students studying in the US are from China, I highly recommend *Perspectives on Teaching and Learning English Literacy in China* and deem it an influential and significant asset for teachers in both China and the US.

Reference

China Statistical Yearbook-2015. (2015). Retrieved from http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2015/indexeh.htm