

Pronunciation in foreign language classrooms: Instructors' training, classroom practices, and
beliefs

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Abstract

The goal of this work was to explore the training, classroom practices, and beliefs related to pronunciation of instructors of languages other than English. While several investigations of this type have been conducted in English as a second/foreign language contexts, very little is known about the beliefs and practices of teachers of languages other than English. It is unknown whether recent shifts to focusing on intelligibility, as advocated by some pronunciation scholars, are borne out in foreign language classrooms. To fill this gap, instructors of Spanish ($n = 127$), French ($n = 89$), and German ($n = 80$) teaching basic language courses (i.e., the first four semesters) at 28 large (e.g., more than 15,000 students), public universities in the United States completed an online survey reporting on their training, classroom practices, and beliefs. Similar to ESL/EFL contexts, the results indicated that instructors believe it is important to incorporate pronunciation in class and that it is possible to improve pronunciation. However, the findings also indicated that instructors have goals which simultaneously prioritize intelligibility and accent reduction. Implications include the need for research on which pronunciation features influence intelligibility in languages other than English and for materials designed to target these features.

Keywords

Pronunciation, teacher beliefs, classroom practices, foreign language teachers, teacher questionnaire

The last 20 years have seen a shift occurring in the field of pronunciation pedagogy as pronunciation scholars have argued for prioritizing goals of intelligibility and comprehensibility rather than those of nativeness or accent elimination (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Levis, 2005). During this time research has demonstrated that pronunciation is a component of successful oral communication (Derwing, Munro, Wiebe, 1997; 1998), pronunciation instruction has been linked to improved listening skills (Rasmussen & Zampini, 2010), and a meta-analysis demonstrated pronunciation instruction to be consistently effective (Lee, Jang, & Plonsky, 2015). Research has also shown that learners believe it is important to improve their pronunciation (Huensch & Thompson, 2017; Steed & Delicado Cantero, 2014), but that learners might value this skill higher than instructors (Harlow & Muyskens, 1994).

While some work has investigated the extent to which current research findings are making their way into the classroom via instructors' beliefs and practices, this research has almost exclusively explored English as a second (ESL) or foreign (EFL) language contexts (Buss, 2016; Breitzkreutz, Derwing, & Rossiter, 2001; Burgess & Spencer, 2000; Foote, Holtby, and Derwing, 2011; Henderson et al., 2012; Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010; Kirkova-Naskova et al., 2013; MacDonald, 2002; Murphy, 2011). In comparison, very little is known about the pronunciation beliefs and classroom practices of foreign language (FL) instructors (i.e., instructors of languages other than English) who teach millions of students in the US (MLA, 2017, n.p.). For both pronunciation researchers and instructors, having this information is crucial to ensure that the advances in understanding and practices of pronunciation reflect and meet the needs of instructors and students in all language learning contexts. The current study directly addressed this gap by reporting on an investigation of the beliefs and practices of 296 FL

instructors of introductory French, German, and Spanish at 28 large, public institutions in the US.

Shifting paradigm from nativeness to intelligibility

In their influential study, Munro and Derwing (1995) demonstrated that accent, intelligibility, and comprehensibility, while related, represent different dimensions of speech. Accentedness, or a perception of the relative strength of one's foreign accent, is connected to the nativeness principle, which states "that it is both possible and desirable to achieve native-like pronunciation in a foreign language" (Levis, 2005, p. 370). Intelligibility, or "the extent to which a speaker's message is actually understood by a listener" (Munro & Derwing, 1995, p. 76) and comprehensibility, or the ease or difficulty with which an utterance is understood, are both connected to the intelligibility principle, which states that the "learners simply need to be understandable" (Levis, 2005, p. 370). Munro and Derwing (1995) investigated these three dimensions using speech recordings from learners of English which were rated by English NSs. They reported that while moderate correlations were found between ratings of accentedness and comprehensibility and between ratings of accentedness and intelligibility scores (based on transcriptions of utterances), that "a strong foreign accent does not necessarily cause L2 speech to be low in comprehensibility or intelligibility" (p. 92). Furthermore, comprehensibility scores were better indicators of intelligibility than accentedness ratings. Ultimately, this work provided evidence that intelligibility and comprehensibility were not synonymous with accentedness.

These findings, in addition to considerations of the practical needs of language learners and maturational constraints on the acquisition of phonology, have been a driving force in an ongoing shift in the field of pronunciation from goals of nativeness to intelligibility (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Levis, 2005). Pronunciation scholars have been at the forefront of this shift, and

while the extent to which the shift has made its way to FL instructors, curriculum developers, and materials designers remains an empirical question, what is clear is that the shift has consequences for how those in the field of pronunciation approach both research and teaching. Regarding research, a focus on intelligibility necessarily entails a listener and therefore research must include both learner productions and listener judgements (Derwing & Munro, 2015). In addition, research must explore which pronunciation features contribute the most to intelligible speech (e.g., Saito, 2011) because it is important “to distinguish aspects of accent that are detrimental to intelligibility from those that, although salient, do not cause communication problems for listeners” (Derwing & Munro, 2015, p. 8). Given the important role of the listener, this shift would also necessitate research investigating listener variables that influence ratings of intelligibility and accent (e.g., Lindemann, 2017; O’Brien, 2014). More importantly for the current study, the shift has implications for teaching. For example, the pronunciation targets focused on in the classroom would come from a principled selection of targets based on research connecting those features to intelligibility, and the goal of instruction would be intelligible speech (Derwing & Munro, 2015, p. 103–105). The shift would also affect the materials used in class: When providing models for students or creating perception practice materials, a mix of native and non-native speaker examples would most likely exist (Murphy, 2014). Finally, the shift would have implications for pronunciation assessment in terms of whether descriptors focus on accent or intelligibility. The current study explored the extent to which a shift from goals of nativeness to intelligibility was evident in the beliefs and practices of those instructing beginning-level foreign language courses.

Beliefs and practices in ESL/EFL contexts

As the field has been shifting, researchers have asked whether and how instructors' beliefs and practices are reflecting this shift. However, much like most investigations of pronunciation instruction (Thomson & Derwing, 2015), these studies have focused almost exclusively on ESL/EFL contexts (although see Delicado Cantero & Steed [2015] who surveyed 51 instructors of secondary and post-secondary Spanish in Australia). For example, ESL instructors' beliefs, attitudes, and practices have been explored in Australia (MacDonald, 2002), Canada (Breitkreutz et al., 2001; Foote et al., 2011), and the United Kingdom (Burgess & Spencer, 2000), and EFL instructors' in Brazil (Buss, 2016) and Europe (Henderson et al., 2012; Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010; Kirkova-Naskova et al., 2013; Murphy, 2011). This body of work has explored instructors' pronunciation training, the amount and type of pronunciation activities instructors use and/or prefer, the target features instructors focus on, and the relative importance instructors place on pronunciation.

While most instructors in ESL/EFL have formal certification in English language teaching (e.g., BA or MA in TESL), they do not have much training in pronunciation teaching specifically. For example, Breitkreutz et al. (2001) and Foote et al. (2011) surveyed ESL instructors in Canada and found that only about 30-50% reported having specific training in pronunciation (e.g., course on teaching pronunciation, linguistics course on phonetics/phonology) compared to 90% with TESL training. Only 5% reported no training in pronunciation. More, however, reported having access to training via conference attendance and/or workshops. Similar results were found in a Brazilian EFL context (Buss, 2016), although fewer instructors had access to conferences and 83% had taken a phonetics/phonology course. Taking phonetics/phonology courses is also a trend in European EFL contexts (Henderson et al.,

2012; Kirkova-Naskova et al., 2013); however, Kirkova-Naskova et al. discovered that in many cases, the courses were designed to improve the pronunciation of the students in the class, not to prepare them to be future pronunciation teachers (p. 33). Given ESL/EFL instructors' limited ability to access training, it might not be surprising that many instructors in these studies wished for more training. Despite a lack of and desire for training in teaching pronunciation, approximately 60% of instructors reported being completely confident teaching pronunciation.

Regarding classroom practices, research has indicated that pronunciation instruction does not comprise a major proportion of class time. For example, while 86% of the ESL instructors in Foote et al. (2011) reported teaching pronunciation, they only did so for about 6% of their class time. Using a different measurement of time, but based on 40 hours of classroom observations, Foote, Trofimovich, Collins, and Urzúa (2016) demonstrated that 17% of instructor input was language-related, but only 10% of that was focused on pronunciation. Results from Delicado Cantero and Steed (2015)'s survey of Spanish instructors in Australia similarly indicated that a majority reported spending only a few minutes occasionally on teaching pronunciation (p. 23). Reading aloud, repetition drills, articulatory descriptions, and use of minimal pairs are typically ranked as activities that are preferred or reported as frequently used (Burgess & Spencer, 2000; Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010). In her investigation of the pedagogical practices of five ESL pronunciation teachers, Baker (2014) discovered that most pronunciation techniques implemented in the classroom could be categorized as controlled (e.g., minimal pair drills), as opposed to free tasks (e.g., role-play, drama). Murphy (2011, p. 13) concluded that there exists a "lack of innovation and diversity in pronunciation teaching" because the most frequently used activities (e.g., repetition, reading aloud) were not rated by instructors' as the most effective. Of

course, there are clear exceptions such as Galante and Thomson (2017) who reported on the effects of using drama as a means of improving oral skills.

Regarding target feature selection, two influential concepts in the ESL/EFL pronunciation teaching literature have been (1) the relative importance of segmentals (i.e., individual consonants and vowels) and suprasegmentals (e.g., those that span across segments such as rhythm and intonation), and (2) using a principled approach to select target sounds such as that of functional load, in which segments are ranked based on the minimal pairs they differentiate (McAndrews & Thomson, 2017). Ultimately, current research encourages a focus on target features that have been demonstrated to be linked to intelligibility, whether they be segmental or suprasegmental (Derwing & Munro, 2015). Foote et al. (2011) demonstrated that while an awareness of the importance of suprasegmental features seemed to be growing in ESL contexts, the actual practices reported by teachers indicated the targets are more often segmental.

Finally, regarding beliefs and attitudes, a consistent finding is that an overwhelming majority of instructors think it is important to teach pronunciation (Breitkreutz et al., 2001; Buss, 2016; Foote et al., 2011; Henderson et al., 2012). The same was indicated by instructors of Spanish in Australia (Delicado Cantero & Steed, 2015). Most instructors in ESL/EFL contexts disagreed that elimination of foreign accent should be paramount, and even more indicated that that instruction should focus on intelligibility (Breitkreutz et al., 2001; Buss, 2016; Foote et al., 2011). The same instructors also reported that learners in their contexts would benefit from such instruction.

Overall, findings from ESL/EFL contexts have indicated that instructors often lack specific training in pronunciation teaching and desire more training in this area. Pronunciation instruction represents only a minor focus, and when it is taught, it is typically done so using

controlled tasks with segmental targets. Finally, instructors in ESL/EFL contexts think pronunciation is important and that learners can benefit from instruction.

Pronunciation instruction in FL contexts

While much less research on pronunciation instruction has focused on languages other than English (Thomson & Derwing, 2015), there does exist a small body of work in this area. This section focuses on pronunciation literature from French, German, and Spanish teaching contexts as they were the languages taught by instructors in the current study. One common theme that emerges from a review of this literature is an exploration of the efficacy of using phonetics instruction to improve the pronunciation of learners (e.g., Arteaga, 2000; Dansereau, 1995; Kissling, 2013; Lappin-Fortin & Rye, 2014; Lord, 2005). A course in phonetics is typically an optional or required component of a FL degree, occurring in the third or fourth year. While the content and format of these courses vary across institutions, course descriptions indicate a focus on teaching about the structure of the sound system and/or improving the pronunciation of the students in the class. Lord (2005) investigated the effects of taking one such upper-level Spanish phonetics class on the production accuracy of segments (i.e., p, t, k, β, ð, γ, r, diphthongs) and compared learners' productions to those of NSs. Similarly, Kissling (2013) used acoustic analyses to compare the segmental development of learners of Spanish that received explicit phonetics instruction to those who did not to determine whether instruction resulted in more native-like pronunciation. While these studies both demonstrated increases in segmental accuracy for learners, more importantly for the current study is the fact that they were focused on segments and used acoustic analyses compared to NS baselines. These procedures demonstrate a trend in studies on teaching these languages where the goal (either implicitly or

explicitly stated) is the acquisition of ‘correct’ or native-like pronunciation (e.g., Arteaga, 2000; Dansereau, 1995; Dlasaka & Krekeler, 2008; Lappin-Fortin & Rye, 2014). This is not to say that the goal of acquiring ‘correct’ or native-like pronunciation exists in all of the literature. In fact, even studies that methodologically prescribe to NS norms often comment on the need for learners to be intelligible (e.g., Dlasaka & Krekeler, 2008). Other recent work (Drewelow & Theobald, 2007; Kissling, 2013; Lord & Fionda, 2014; Morin, 2007, Müller, 2008) has acknowledged this tension, for example, Kissling (2013) concluded her article with a discussion of “whether accentedness is in fact worthy of future study” given the recent shifting away from this goal. Similarly, Lord and Fionda (2014) called for research to better understand “what sounds are important to acquire for L2 learners to be intelligible and communicatively proficient” (p. 525). To meet the need that Lord and Fionda highlight of “combin[ing] empirical findings with classroom practices,” a first step is to investigate the extent to which research findings from ESL/EFL are making their way into FL classrooms via better understanding of instructors’ beliefs and practices.

The current study

The current study investigated the training, practices, and beliefs related to pronunciation of FL instructors to fill a gap in the literature that has almost exclusively focused on ESL/EFL contexts. Multiple FLs were targeted to allow for comparison of general trends both among FLs and between FL and ESL/EFL contexts. Specifically, instructors of French, German, and Spanish were chosen because these languages represent the most commonly taught (spoken) languages in the US (MLA, 2017, n.p.). In addition, because the highest enrollments are in introductory

courses and an early focus on pronunciation might be desirable and effective, instructors who teach at the first four semesters were recruited. Following are the research questions:

1. What training do FL instructors of introductory language courses have in teaching pronunciation and what access do they have and/or desire for continued training opportunities?
2. What are FL instructors' reported classroom practices regarding (a) how often pronunciation is taught, (b) what target features are problematic for learners, (c) what pronunciation activities are employed, and (d) how pronunciation is assessed?
3. What are FL instructors' beliefs and attitudes toward pronunciation instruction regarding (a) the importance of teaching pronunciation, (b) goals for instruction, and (c) the potential benefits of instruction?

Methods

Participants

A total of 1168 foreign language instructors (those teaching basic language courses from the first four semesters) and program supervisors from 28 large (e.g., more than 15,000 students), public universities in the United States were contacted via email to participate. Of those 1168, 300 participants (26%) completed the entire survey. After four participants' responses were discarded (e.g., because they were not teaching an introductory level foreign language class), the final dataset included responses from 296 foreign language instructors of French ($n = 89$), German ($n = 80$), and Spanish ($n = 127$). Participants who completed the online survey received a \$10 Amazon gift card. As with much survey research, it is important to keep in mind that the current results represent only a portion of the FL instructor population. Data collection relied on

respondent self-selection; therefore, the sample may not represent the population (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). For example, those who completed the survey may be those who were already interested in pronunciation. Other factors such as the timing of administration (the end/beginning of the semester, a busy time for instructors) or the survey length (30 minutes, relatively long for online survey standards) may have influenced rates of self-selection and dropout.

Similar ages (and ranges and standard deviations) were reported for each group. Instructors were also asked what their position was and the most commonly reported was teaching assistant ($n = 197$) followed by full-/part-time instructor ($n = 79$). Table 1 provides descriptive information about the number of years the instructors had been teaching separated by their position type and the language being taught. In total, the instructors in the current study had been teaching on average for approximately six years, but ranges varied from almost no time to 40 years. Table 2 demonstrates that a majority of participants were teaching a first semester course.

[Insert Table 1 here]

[Insert Table 2 here]

Survey

The online survey was a modified version of the survey used in Foote et al. (2011). It was administered via Qualtrics in fall 2016 and spring 2017. It contained 81–103 questions (depending on follow-up responses) and took approximately 30 minutes to complete. In addition to questions about institution and participant demographics (26–31 questions), there were

sections related to pronunciation and (a) classroom practices (22–39 questions), (b) teaching beliefs (24 questions), and (c) learning and acquisition beliefs (9 questions). The full survey is available on IRIS.

Data analysis

A subset of the questions asked participants to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with a given statement using a sliding-scale rating bar. Qualtrics reported scores on a scale from 1–100. For data analysis, counts of each score per language group were converted into percentages (because the Spanish group was larger than the French and German groups) and grouped together in intervals of 10 (e.g., anyone whose sliding-scale response was between 0–9, 10–19, 20–29, etc. were combined). For open-ended responses, two coders (the author and a research assistant) coded all of the responses following a key created by the author. Any instances of disagreement were discussed and resolved. Throughout, results are presented separated by language group with a corresponding total across instructors to allow for comparison of general trends across groups.

Results

RQ1 explored the training and opportunities for training that FL instructors have in teaching pronunciation. To contextualize these results, instructors' reported formal certification in FL teaching is provided in Table 3.

[Insert Table 3 here]

As shown in Table 3, half of the 296 instructors reported no formal certification in teaching foreign languages. The remaining reported having a bachelor's degree in FL teaching (14%), a master's degree (22%), or a doctorate (7%). Regarding pronunciation teaching specifically, Figure 1 represents the frequency counts converted to percentages of the pronunciation training received by respondents. Thirteen percent of instructors had taken a university course on teaching pronunciation, 63% had taken a linguistics course (e.g., phonetics and phonology), and 50% had taken a general foreign language teacher education (FLTE)/linguistics course. Twenty-one percent of respondents had no formal pronunciation training.

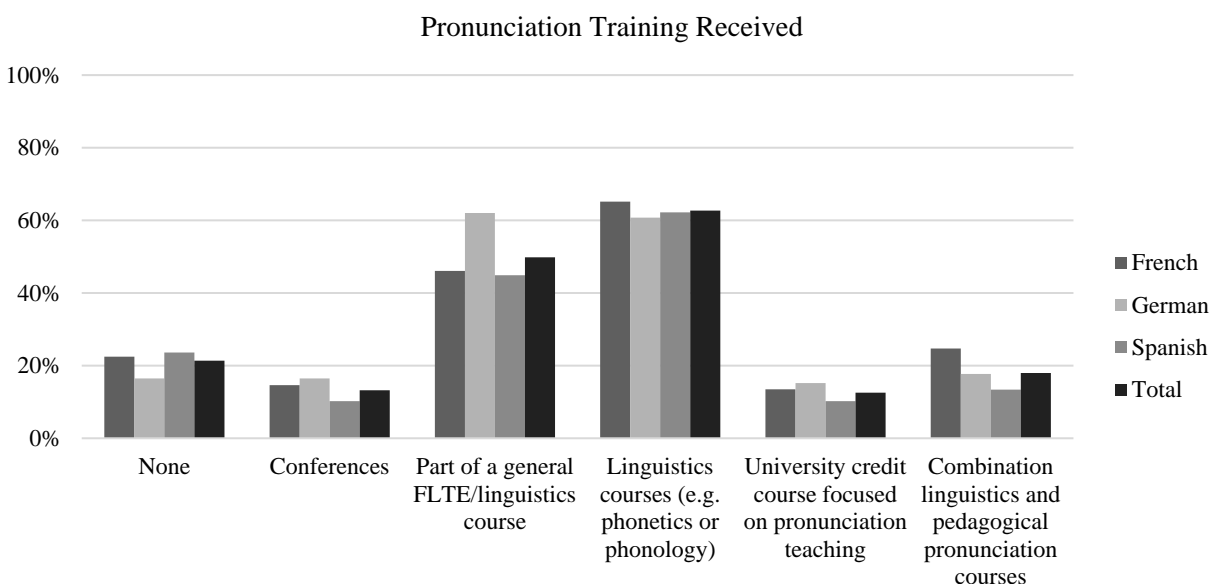


Figure 1. Types of pronunciation training received by foreign language teachers of French, German, and Spanish.

As seen in Table 4, relatively few instructors reported having access to training opportunities in pronunciation, with fewer than 20% reporting access to in-house or conference workshops and just below 30% reporting access to university classes.

[Insert Table 4 here]

Figure 2 demonstrates that a majority of respondents (67%) agreed that they wished they had more training in teaching pronunciation, as indicated by the percentage of instructors with a response between 0–49.

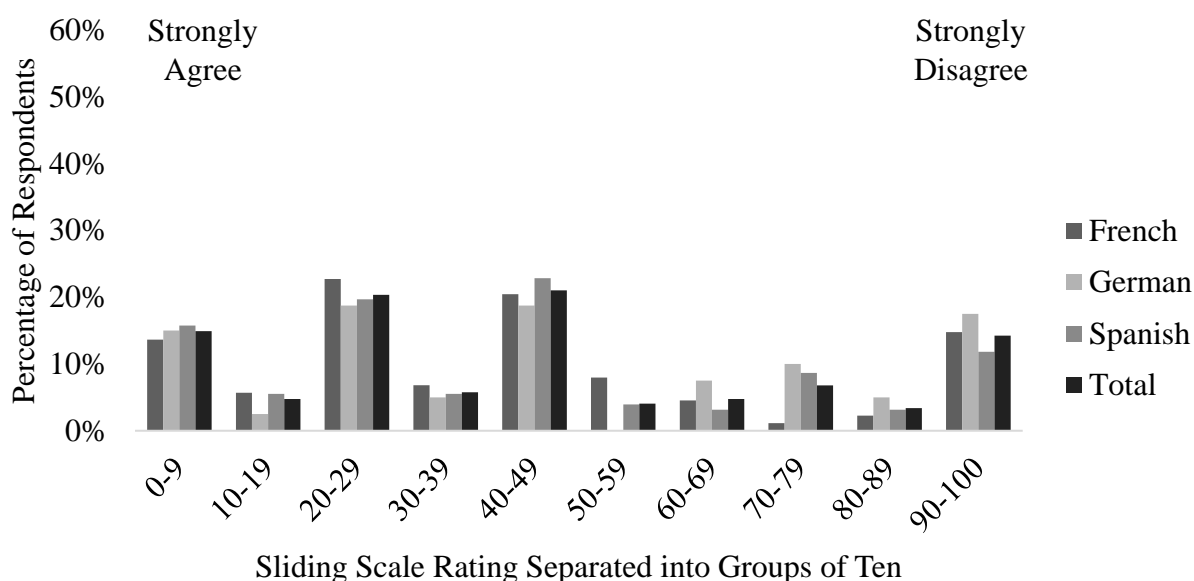


Figure 2. Response to the sliding-scale question “I wish I had more training in teaching pronunciation.”

Although they wished for more training, most instructors indicated that they could integrate pronunciation into their classes (92% French, 93% German, 77% Spanish), and approximately 73% indicated that they felt confident in their ability to teach pronunciation. When asked to

explain their choice of selecting *yes* or *no* to feeling confident, 35% of respondents provided a rationale connected to their previous training or lack thereof. Slightly more respondents (40%) provided a rationale connected to their status as a native or non-native speaker of the language they were teaching. For example, 89 of the 216 respondents who indicated they were confident teaching pronunciation provided responses such as “I am a native speaker” or “I’m not a native speaker of the language, though I’ve been told that my pronunciation is good”. Twenty-four of the 80 respondents who indicated they were not confident teaching pronunciation provided responses such as “Since it is not my native language, it is difficult to feel confident, particularly since it has been a number of years since I’ve been to a country where the language is predominately spoken”.

In general, instructors’ responses indicated limited training or access to it. Despite reporting being capable of and confident in their ability to teach pronunciation, a majority wanted more training in pronunciation teaching. Participants most often referred to their previous training, or lack thereof, or their status as a native/non-native speaker status to explain the presence or absence of confidence.

RQ2 investigated the classroom practices of FL instructors related to teaching pronunciation. Eighty-two percent of respondents reported that 15 minutes or less was allocated to teaching pronunciation each week. As shown in Figure 3, a majority of respondents agreed that they included pronunciation in their lessons, although more Spanish instructors strongly disagreed than French or German instructors (16% vs. 1% and 4%).

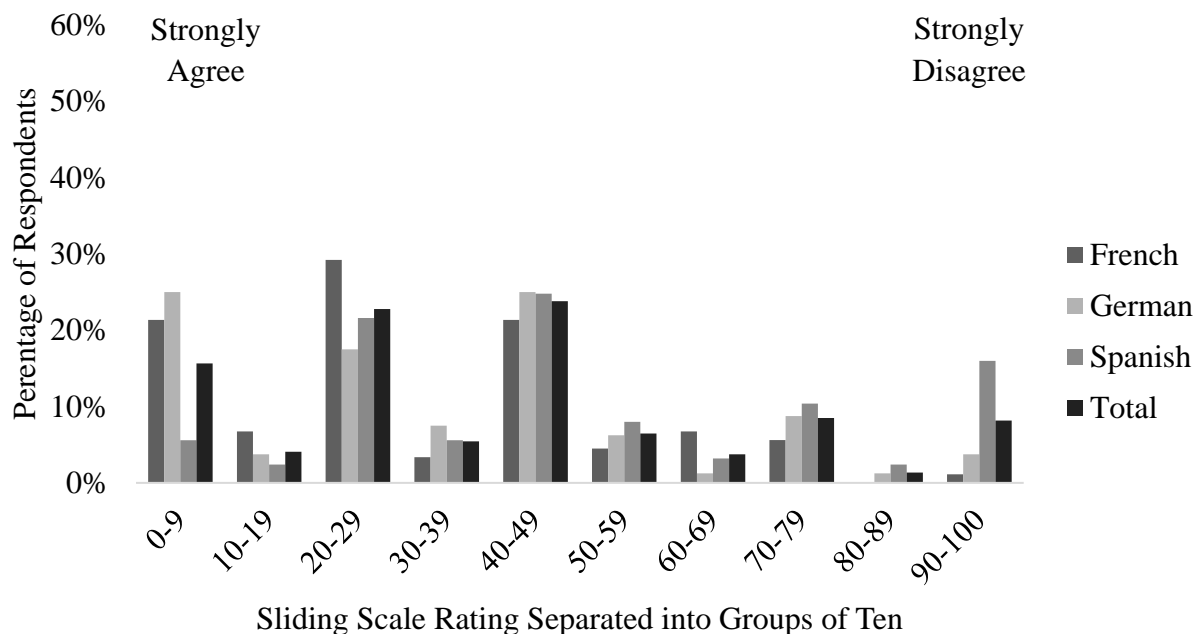


Figure 3. Response to the sliding-scale question “I include pronunciation instruction in my lessons.”

Respondents were also asked to describe the most serious pronunciation problems experienced by their students. The target features mentioned for each language group were tallied and then categorized as segmental, suprasegmental, spelling, or crosslinguistic influence (for the full data table, see the Appendix). The crosslinguistic influence category included mentions such as difficulties with cognates and sounds that do not exist in the learners’ L1 English. Although also related to crosslinguistic influence, any comments about letters/sounds where orthography plays a role were categorized as Spelling. For example, mentions of English L1 learners of Spanish producing the /h/ in Spanish words like *hambre* or learners of German having difficulty with *ie* vs. *ei* (e.g., *Wein/Wien*) combinations were categorized as Spelling. For all three languages vowels, the respective rhotic sounds, and crosslinguistic influence had multiple mentions (see the Appendix). Figure 4 displays the percentages of each of these four categories for each of the language groups. The French and Spanish groups have similar

distributions of percentages, while the German group had more segmental features.

Comparatively, all groups had a lower percentage of suprasegmental features mentioned than segmental.

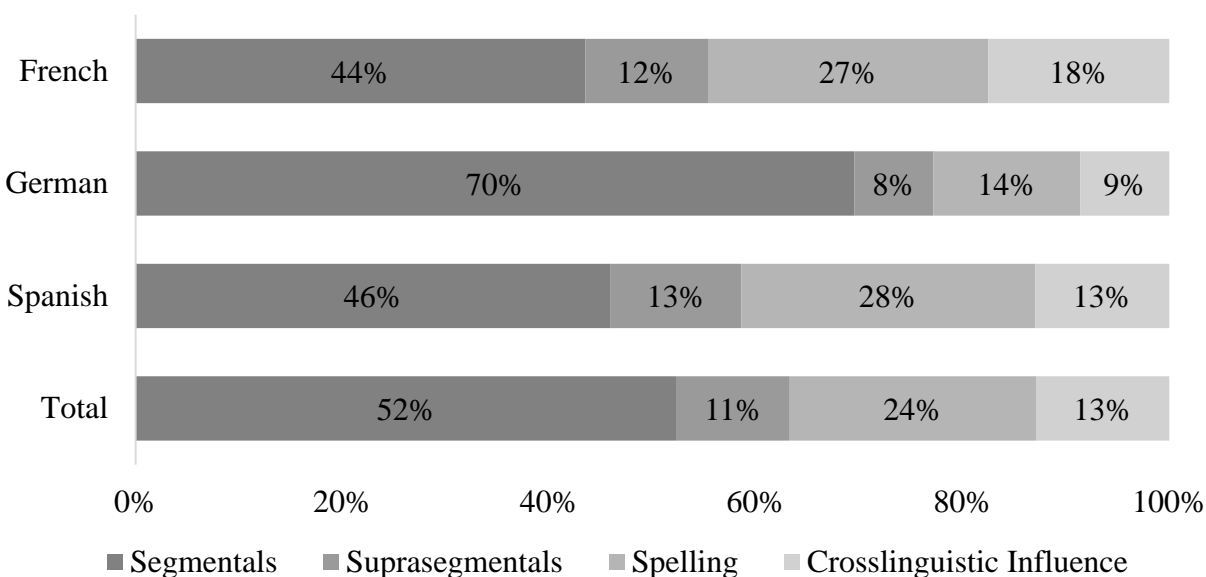


Figure 4. Percentage of target features mentioned as most difficult.

When asked if they used textbook pronunciation activities, a majority of instructors either said *no* or indicated that there were no such activities (46% French, 51% German, 68% Spanish). Approximately half of the instructors indicated that online homework containing pronunciation activities was assigned as part of the course (54% French, 62% German, and 44% Spanish). Those 141 participants were asked to describe the online pronunciation activities, and 70% of the descriptions included reference to listening exercises and/or repetition of words or phrases. Instructors were also asked whether they used any outside pronunciation materials to supplement their instruction and 27% indicated they did, with a majority of those being French instructors (43% French, 29% German, and 16% Spanish).

Regarding assessment, 66% of instructors indicated that pronunciation was part of a major assessment in their classes (78% French, 75% German, and 51% Spanish). When asked to provide an example of how pronunciation is assessed, 87 of 194 responses discussed whether assessment criteria were based on being understood/meaning vs. accuracy (native-like accent). Of the 87 responses, 47 referenced intelligibility/comprehensibility with statements such as “During a partner chat, the comprehensibility of each student's pronunciation is assessed. It counts for 10% of the entire grade and focuses on pronunciation that affects comprehension only.” Twenty-three referenced accuracy with statements such as “Accuracy in vowel production and required liaisons” and “If certain vowel combinations of consonants gone over in class are repeatedly pronounced incorrectly, points will be deducted.” Finally, 17 referenced both aspects with statements such as “We have to determine if students pronunciation was impressive for their level, if it was just good, if it caused some problems in the conversation...” and “During the oral exams, pronunciation is taken into consideration. whether it does not interfere with communication, and whether some basic things are respected, such as silent ‘h’.” Those instructors who indicated that pronunciation was not part of assessment were asked why it was not, and a majority of responses (72 of 102) indicated that it was either a curricular decision (39 of 101) or because the focus of the course is on communication (33 of 101). The former included comments such as “I’m not sure but it’s not written into any of the rubrics” and “Unknown. I don’t have control over the syllabus”. The latter included comments such as “We don't include it as part of the syllabus and we don't focus on accuracy but communicative skills rather”, and “We focus on students’ ability to communicate effectively with sympathetic native speakers, not on perfecting the pronunciation of people with very little background in the language”. These statements appear to suggest that pronunciation is being conceptualized using a nativeness

paradigm as it is seen as being related to ‘perfection’ and ‘accuracy’ and disconnected from successful communication.

In short, results regarding classroom practices indicated that most instructors spend little, if any, time on teaching pronunciation, and that online exercises, when included, are typically listen and repeat. When asked to identify their students’ most serious problems, instructors’ responses focused heavily on segmentals and spelling-based issues. Finally, results indicated that many assessments focused on intelligible/comprehensible speech; however, some comments appeared to indicate that pronunciation is being conceptualized from a nativeness perspective.

RQ3 explored FL instructors’ beliefs and attitudes regarding the importance of teaching pronunciation, goals for instruction, and the potential benefits of instruction. A full 90% of respondents indicated that they thought it was important to incorporate pronunciation instruction in class (92% French, 94% German, 86% Spanish), and that they should do so (88% French, 86% German, 77% Spanish). Instructors were asked both if the goal of instruction should be to eliminate foreign accent and if pronunciation teaching should help make students comfortably intelligible to their listeners. As shown in Figure 5, most respondents disagreed that foreign accent elimination should be the goal of pronunciation instruction, with a majority of responses in the 50–79 range. Even more respondents strongly agreed that intelligibility should be a goal of pronunciation instruction, with almost all of the responses between 0–29 (see Figure 6). Finally, 89% of instructors indicated they had students who would benefit from pronunciation instruction (93% French, 93% German, 84% Spanish).

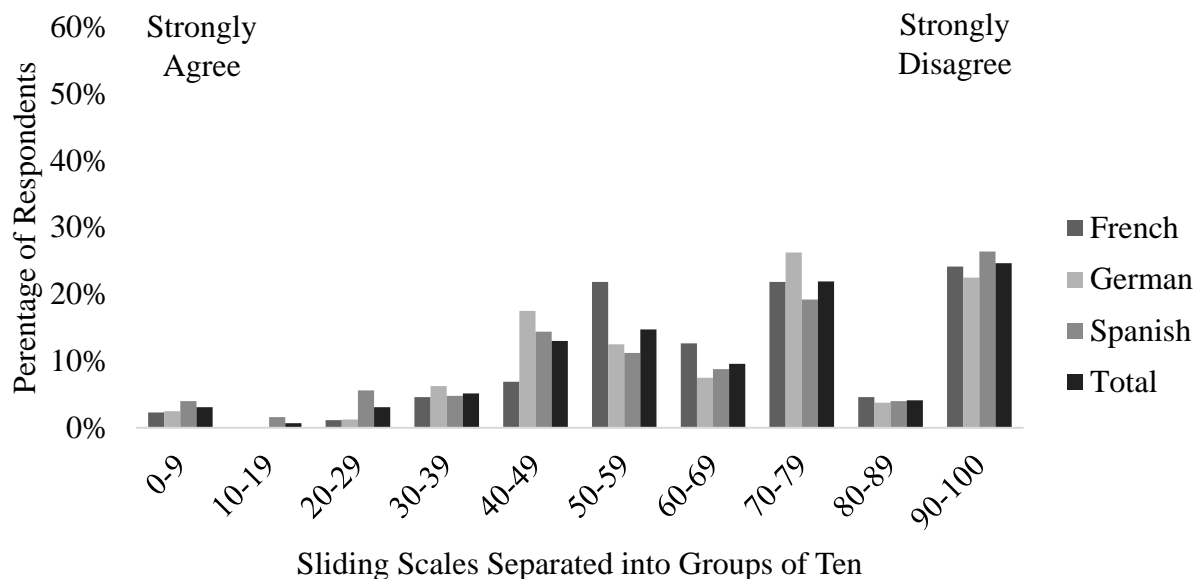


Figure 5. Response to the sliding-scale question "The goal of pronunciation instruction should be to eliminate, as much as possible, a foreign accent."

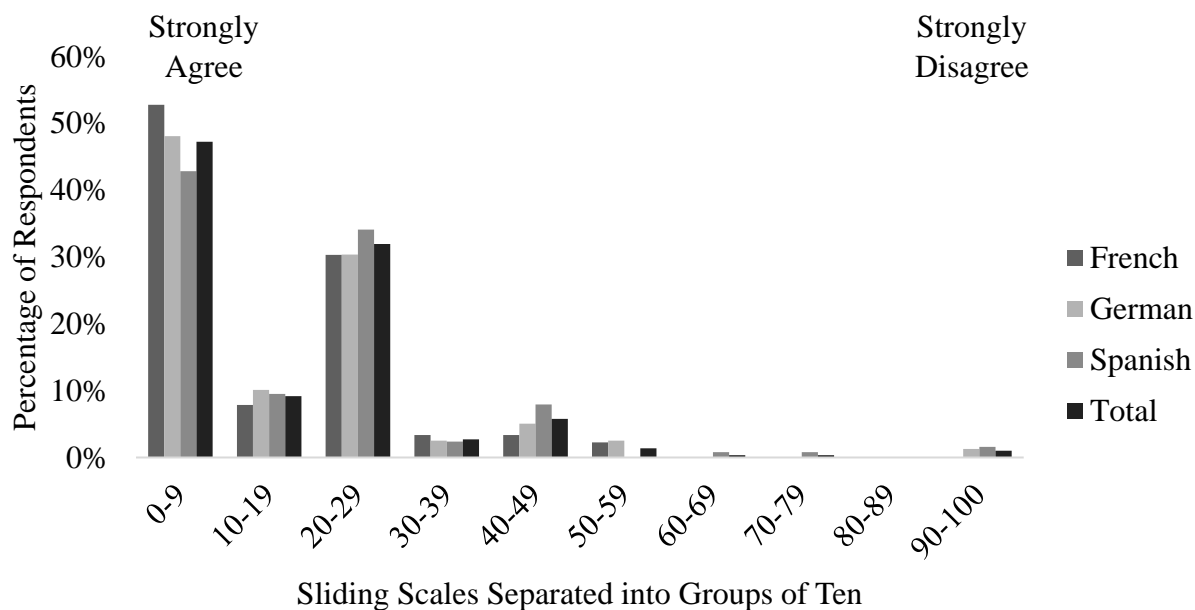


Figure 6. Response to the sliding-scale question "Pronunciation teaching should help make students comfortably intelligible to their listeners."

In summary, almost all instructors believe it is important to incorporate pronunciation into their classes, that they should do so, and that their students would benefit from instruction. While most instructors strongly agreed that comfortable intelligibility should be a goal, they simultaneously held weaker beliefs about whether eliminating a foreign accent should be a goal.

Discussion

While multiple investigations of the pronunciation beliefs and practices of ESL/EFL instructors have been conducted, little is known about the beliefs and practices of teachers of languages other than English. The current study sought to address this gap by surveying 296 instructors of French, German, and Spanish teaching introductory language courses at large, public universities.

The results of the current study paralleled previous work in ESL/EFL contexts in that a minority of FL teachers reported having received training in pronunciation teaching. In fact, whereas fewer than 5% of instructors in Foote et al. (2011) and Buss (2016) indicated no training, 21% of FL instructors indicated no training in pronunciation in any form. Another difference found between FL and ESL/EFL contexts related to the amount of general language teaching certification between the contexts. While between 2%–10% of ESL/EFL instructors reported no certification, over half of the instructors in the current study had no formal language teaching certification. One possible explanation is that many instructors of introductory language courses are those with less teaching experience (graduate teaching assistants comprised 67% of respondents in the current study). Given that novice instructors have been demonstrated to rely more heavily on the “guidelines laid down by people with authority”, at least more so than more experienced instructors (Tsui, 2003, p. 25), the content of the available teaching materials,

including their textbooks, may provide some explanation for the teaching practices of the instructors in the current study. For example, 30% of the instructors reported that their textbooks did not include pronunciation activities, which corroborates previous work exploring the coverage of pronunciation in Spanish and German textbooks (Arteaga, 2000; Pittman, 2015).

The relatively high proportion of teaching assistants in the current study might call into question the potential role training/experience plays in the beliefs and practices of instructors. The current study was designed to explore the experience/training, practices, and beliefs of those teaching introductory language courses, which includes instructors with a varying range of experience/training. Although the samples are unbalanced, a brief comparison of the results separated by position type are provided in Table 5 for exploratory purposes. Table 5 demonstrates that while teaching assistants had less certification and training compared to full-/part-time instructors and program supervisors, their wish for more training, their confidence in teaching pronunciation, how much time they report teaching pronunciation, and whether they think is important to incorporate pronunciation, were similar to full-/part-time instructors (although both differed somewhat from program supervisors). These tentative results appear to indicate that classroom practices and beliefs related to pronunciation are not strictly a result of training and teaching experience; however, future research designed specifically to investigate the role of experience in the practices and beliefs of FL instructors is necessary before definitive conclusions can be made.

[Insert Table 5 here]

Approximately half of the instructors reported using online homework that included pronunciation activities, many of which were described as listen and repeat/controlled activities, which is again in line with findings of ESL contexts (e.g., Baker, 2014; Murphy, 2011). Given that many instructors in these contexts are novices and may therefore rely on materials and textbooks provided to them, it is perhaps not surprising that findings from the current study indicated that pronunciation instruction comprises a relatively small portion of class time and is dominated by controlled practice. In fact, with 82% of the respondents indicating that they spend 15 minutes or less each week on pronunciation, as one reviewer pointed out, it could be that pronunciation is being addressed through the infrequent correction of salient errors rather than comprising pre-planned instruction. These findings have direct implications for materials and textbook developers such that the principled incorporation of pronunciation targets and activities is necessary, especially given that instructors in these contexts are less likely to supplement materials with other sources. A priority for pronunciation scholars thus becomes providing empirical evidence of those features which affect intelligibility and principled strategies for their incorporation such as those provided by McAndrews and Thomson (2017) for ESL/EFL contexts.

When identifying the most serious pronunciation problems of their learners, instructors' responses were heavily segmental and spelling-related, the former paralleling previous ESL literature (Foote et al., 2011) and echoing FL investigations of pronunciation improvement (e.g., Kissling, 2013; Lord, 2005). Instructors from all three language groups indicated a majority of issues were segmental and a minority were suprasegmental (8%–13%). While instructors across the languages mostly agreed that segmental problems were the most serious for learners, it is unclear whether they viewed those targets as problematic for accent, intelligibility, or both. The

identification of target features that contribute most to intelligible speech is a major gap in the current literature, especially for languages other than English. Future work is needed to provide evidence for a principled selection of targets in languages other than English as well as how listener variables influence ratings of intelligibility and accent in these languages (e.g., O'Brien, 2014; Saito, 2011).

Parallel to findings from ESL/EFL contexts (Buss, 2016; Foote et al., 2011; Kirkova-Naskova et al., 2013), many FL instructors in the current study reported having taken phonetics/phonology courses. Course descriptions of the phonetics/phonology courses in FL programs indicate that the type of knowledge instructors acquire is about phonetics/phonology rather than about pronunciation pedagogy (see Baker & Murphy, 2011 for a discussion related to ESL/EFL instructors). While it is encouraging that many instructors potentially have content knowledge about the sound systems of the languages they teach, a lack of pedagogical knowledge necessitates better training in this area for these instructors. One option might be training at national conferences such as ACTFL, but of the 800 sessions at the 2016 conference, only 13 were related to pronunciation (and the lasting impact of attending a single conference presentation is unknown). Another option, stemming from current work in the ESL/EFL field, would be creating resources such as those providing detailed descriptions and explanations of the practices of expert practitioners in pronunciation (Murphy, 2017) to be used as models.

Focusing on intelligibility as a goal for pronunciation instruction provides multiple implications for language teachers such as choosing target features that affect intelligibility, incorporating varied models (as opposed to prioritizing and relying on an ideal NS norm), and assessing improvement in terms of increased intelligibility/comprehensibility rather than reduced accent. The results from the current study demonstrated a tension between accent and

intelligibility in terms of instructors' reported beliefs and practices. For example, when those who reported that pronunciation assessment was not part of the course were asked why this was so, one third of the responses indicated that it was because the focus of the course was on communicative abilities. Their comments relating pronunciation to "accuracy" and "perfection" appeared to indicate that some instructors view pronunciation instruction as synonymous with accent reduction. If instructors' prior experience with pronunciation has been focused on accent reduction, this might explain why some view pronunciation instruction as disconnected from a communicative framework. A similar finding emerged concerning the goals of instruction. On the one hand, an overwhelming majority felt strongly that pronunciation instruction should help make learners comfortably intelligible, but it was not the case that the same majority thought that the elimination of foreign accent should not be a goal. Ultimately, the current findings indicated that accent reduction remains as a goal, although it has been deprioritized to focus on comfortably intelligible speech. Moving forward, the highest priority for pronunciation scholars is to investigate which features contribute most to intelligible speech in different languages. With this evidence, it will become possible to establish principled pedagogical priorities for the incorporation of pronunciation targets into language classrooms from an intelligibility paradigm perspective.

It is important to acknowledge some limitations of the current work. Because this study relied on self-report data, and research has demonstrated that there can be a mismatch between what instructors think is best to do and what they actually do (Murphy, 2011, p. 13), future work must expand upon data collection methods to provide evidence from classroom observations to better understand classroom practices with regard to pronunciation (e.g., Baker 2014; Foote et al., 2016; Tergujeff, 2012 for examples of this in ESL/EFL contexts). Given the potential

influence of materials on the teaching practices of novice teachers, it would also be important to analyze how, if at all, pronunciation is presented in commonly-used textbooks, both in terms of the content and approach and whether they implicitly or explicitly state learner goals of nativeness or intelligibility. In addition, the current study was limited to exploring the beliefs and practices of French, German, and Spanish instructors. While findings were similar across the three language groups, future investigations can increase the generalizability of the current findings with the inclusion of data from a wider variety of languages.

Conclusion

The current study provides new insights on instructors' beliefs and practices related to pronunciation by representing those who teach languages other than English. As a first step to better understanding the role of pronunciation in foreign language contexts, it contributes information that can help ensure that the advances in the field in understanding and practices of pronunciation reflect and meet the needs of instructors and students in all language learning contexts. It is encouraging that, similar to ESL/EFL contexts, almost all instructors indicated that they think it is important to incorporate pronunciation in class. Nevertheless, in addition to providing training opportunities for instructors, a crucial next step must be to explore which features contribute to intelligible speech in languages other than English so that materials can target these features and curriculum designers have a principled basis upon which to make decisions.

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Appendix: Most serious pronunciation problems experienced by students

	French		German		Spanish	
Segmentals	Vowels ^a	54	Vowels ^b	60	Vowels ^c	56
	Rhotic	23	Rhotic	22	Rhotic ^d	48
			Other consonants ^e	55	Other consonants ^f	27
Suprasegmentals	Stress	4	Stress	4	Stress	19
	Intonation/prosody	7	Intonation/prosody	4	Intonation	10
	Liaison	10	Schwa	1	Schwa	4
			‘Long’ words	6	Multisyllabic words	3
Spelling	Orthography/silent letters	44	Orthography	4	Orthography/silent letters	4
	Accents	4	<i>ie/ei</i>	24	<i>h</i>	26
					<i>c/q; g/j</i>	34
					<i>x; s/z; b/v</i>	12
					<i>ñ</i>	5
Crosslinguistic Influence	L1 influence	25	L1 influence	17	L1 influence	37
	L2 influence (Spanish)	6				
Total		177		197		285

^aIncludes nasal vowels and specific mentions of /y/ vs. /i/.

^bIncludes umlauts, short/long vowels, and diphthongs.

^cIncludes diphthongs.

^dIncludes /r/ and /r/.

^eIncludes *ch*, *s*-initial words, consonant clusters (e.g., *sp*, *st*, *pfl*), *z*, final *e*, *v/w*, and final consonant devoicing.

^fIncludes *y/ll*, *d*, *t*, final *l*, and aspiration.

Table 1. Mean (standard deviation) and range of respondent ages and years teaching.

		French	German	Spanish	Total
Years Teaching	Teaching Assistant (<i>n</i> = 197)	3.53 (3.69) 0.25–20	2.92 (2.37) 0.17–9	3.30 (3.39) 0–18	3.26 (3.22) 0–20
	Full/Part-time Instructor (<i>n</i> = 82)	9.85 (10.37) 0.33–40	10.73 (8.61) 0.42–27	11.16 (9.34) 0.5–36.42	10.62 (9.46) 0.33–40
	Program Supervisor (<i>n</i> = 17)	16.5 (8.70) 8–33	20 (5.51) 11–30	24.42 (14.14) 14.42–34.42	18.87 (8.01) 8–34.42
	Total (<i>n</i> = 296)	6.69 (8.06) 0.25–40	6.17 (7.15) 0.17–30	5.86 (7.21) 0–36	6.19 (7.44) 0–40
		32 (9.65) 19–62	32 (8.88) 20–58	31 (8.66) 22–59	32 (9.28) 19–62
Age					

Table 2. Course level taught.

	French (<i>n</i> = 88)	German (<i>n</i> = 78)	Spanish (<i>n</i> = 127)	Total (<i>n</i> = 293)
First semester	38	43	43	124
Second semester	16	13	34	63
Third semester	14	15	25	54
Fourth semester	10	6	14	30
Accelerated (first and second semester)	8	1	10	19
Accelerated (third and fourth semester)	2	–	1	3

Table 3. Instructors' formal certification in foreign language teaching.

	French (<i>n</i> = 89)	German (<i>n</i> = 80)	Spanish (<i>n</i> = 127)	Total (<i>n</i> = 296)
No formal certification	58%	50%	44%	50%
A non-credit foreign language teaching certificate	2%	14%	13%	10%
BA/BEd in teaching foreign languages	10%	13%	17%	14%
MA/MEd in teaching foreign languages or applied linguistics	21%	19%	25%	22%
PhD/EdD in teaching foreign languages or applied linguistics	9%	5%	7%	7%
Other	9%	5%	8%	7%

Table 4. Types of available pronunciation training opportunities.

	French (<i>n</i> = 88)	German (<i>n</i> = 80)	Spanish (<i>n</i> = 124)	Total (<i>n</i> = 292)
In-house seminars and workshops	17%	16%	15%	16%
Conference presentations/workshops	19%	16%	19%	18%
University/college courses	32%	23%	29%	28%
Commercial courses	2%	0%	1%	1%

Table 5. Comparison of results separated by position type

	Teaching Assistant	Full-/Part-Time Instructor	Program Supervisor
No foreign language certification	57%	38%	29%
No pronunciation training received	25%	13%	15%
Wish for more training in teaching pronunciation	67%	67%	65%
Confident in ability to teach pronunciation	71%	76%	82%
15 minutes or less teaching pronunciation each week	83%	77%	100%
Important to incorporate pronunciation instruction in class	89%	91%	100%