

Edward Y. ODISHO. *Pronunciation is in the Brain, not in the Mouth. A Cognitive Approach to Teaching it.*
Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press LLC, 2014, xxv + 248 pp.
ISBN 978-1-4632-0415-0

Maria da Graça L. Castro Pinto

mgraca@letras.up.pt

Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto [Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Porto]

Centro de Linguística da Universidade do Porto (Portugal) [Linguistics Centre of the University of Porto]

In 2003, I came into contact with the main research interests of Edward Y. Odisho, professor at the *Loyola University Chicago* and the *Northeastern Illinois University*, through his book “Techniques of Teaching Pronunciation in ESL, Bilingual & Foreign Language Classes”, published by Lincom Europa. The manner in which he proposed the teaching of pronunciation through a multicognitive and multisensory approach piqued my curiosity because it resounded with that which I believe is the way in which language is processed.

The proximity with Odisho’s theory and the seminal way in which he applies it to the teaching of foreign languages became even more patent when I asked him to write an article to be submitted to the Scientific Board of the recently founded journal at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Porto, called *Linguística. Revista de Estudos Linguísticos da Universidade do Porto*. The article “A Multisensory, Multicognitive Approach to Teaching Pronunciation” was thus published in 2007 in the journal’s Volume 2, a text I set as compulsory reading in ‘Psycholinguistics and Language Learning’ and ‘Psycholinguistics and Teaching Languages’, subjects offered to master’s students studying the teaching of foreign languages.

Odisho’s approach, which rapidly became known as MMA (*Multisensory, Multicognitive Approach*), provides a wealth of teachings by advocating that more than one sense comes into play when pronunciation is in focus – vision, touch and obviously hearing – as well as cognitive activities – “thinking, associating, analyzing, synthesizing, comparing, contrasting” (Odisho 2007: 3). The argument put forward by the author covering also classical notions of the “acquisition of a second language”, adopting, to simplify, the expression of Rod Ellis (1994), once again proves that the author does not merely recover existing terminology, but rather provides us with a critical and subsequently enriched view of it.

Eleven years after my encounter with Edward Y. Odisho through the abovementioned publications, the author informed me that a new book had just been published, which could be of interest to pursue the themes in the 2003 work and 2007 article. The book Odisho announced, dating from 2014, is the object of this review and once again focuses on pronunciation. However, in this new

book, his approach is perhaps bolder in (multi)cognitive terms, by highlighting its connection to the brain more explicitly. In the main title, we are thus confronted with the location of pronunciation in the brain and not in the mouth. The subtitle maintains the idea of the brain, by employing to this end the adjective “cognitive”. The book is called “PRONUNCIATION *is in the* BRAIN, *not in the* MOUTH. A Cognitive Approach to Teaching it” (the uppercase letters and italics in the title were maintained on purpose). The focus bestowed on the brain and cognition does not mean however that Odisho disregards in this work the intervention of more than one sense in the teaching of pronunciation. On the contrary, he again stresses the multisensory approach of his previous works, the result undoubtedly of his extremely rich trajectory as a speaker and learner of languages from different families and his extensive experience in teaching foreign languages, which have made him keenly aware, as would be expected, of the various learning styles. On the back cover of Odisho’s 2003 book, his pedagogical attitude was clear in opting for the MMA in the following passage: “The approach is consistent with the recent orientations in cognitive sciences, especially Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences Theory [MIT]”. The similarity which Odisho believes exists between MMA and MIT, with regard to teaching/learning situations in general and pronunciation in particular, is clear in the following passages from his present work: “The diversity of the teaching/learning styles will serve the significant purpose of discovering the intelligences of the learners and design future instruction accordingly.” (p. 92), and “The book applies all the above concepts on a wide variety of languages supported with a combination of visual, auditory, and tactile-kinesthetic as well as cognitive strategies.” (back cover).

“Pronunciation *is in the* Brain, *not in the* Mouth. A Cognitive Approach to Teaching it” starts with the “Table of Contents” (pp. v-xi), followed by a “Foreword” by Odisho (pp. xiii-xviii), the “Acknowledgments” (pp. xix-xx), and a section dedicated to the “Lists of Symbols and Phonetic Labels” (pp. xxi-xxv). The work itself starts on page 1, comprising fourteen chapters (pp. 1 to 239), and ends with the “References” (pp. 241 to 248).

I highly recommend reading the “Foreword” before beginning the book. It works as an introduction to the work, where Odisho not only mentions the topics he will be dealing with, grouping the chapters according to objectives (p. xvii), but also states the reason for his love of pronunciation supported in his life story. Having grown up trilingual and having later learnt another three languages, apart from teaching English language, linguistics and pronunciation for five decades in different countries to speakers of many languages, it is not surprising that he writes at one stage that, deriving from his fascination with the diversity of accents he came across, “teaching pronunciation did not just become my favorite subject, but it also became the focus of my academic research” (p. xiii).

Explaining to some extent the book’s title, Odisho reminds the reader that the content of this work covers especially accent and its cognitive roots, with a

view to identifying a basis from which it is possible to teach pronunciation (p. xiii). In this section, I draw attention to what is considered “accent” in this work, using the author’s words: “From the perspective of this book, it is one of the normal symptomatic side effects of the cognitive and physical maturation of human beings and the gradual transformation in delegating the majority of conscious biological and social survival functions, foremost of which being language, to the subconscious brain.” (p. xv). This passage essentially condenses the underlying themes discussed in the book: acquisition and learning related to the degree of immersion in a language or a minimally “context/situation-embedded” environment (pp. 2, 12 and 13); phonological vs. phonetic accent (p. xvi) and the view of accent as a linguistic phenomenon associated with adults (p. 57); the understanding of the cognitive nature of accent and pronunciation; the importance of applying a multisensory, multicognitive approach to the teaching of pronunciation, with a view to reducing “psycholinguistic deafness”, which the author prefers to call in this book “psycholinguistic insensibility”, because “fossilization”, a term retrieved from Selinker 1972, or “deafness”, the term he used in the 2003 work and the 2007 article, now seem perhaps too “loaded” (p. 53); the need for qualified professionals in the areas of pedagogics, linguistics and phonetics to teach the pronunciation of a L2 to adults; and advice to reduce the “accent” of L2 speakers, leading them to focus their attention on aspects that distance them from a native speaker of that language (p. 225).

Chapter 1, “My Story with Languages, Pronunciation and Accent” (pp. 1-24), contrary to the author’s opinion in the “Foreword” (p. xvii), should be unquestionably read before starting the chapters he considers the “core materials”. His life story as a speaker of several languages, his academic background and teaching experience make up the profile of a scholar with excellent foundations to write about a topic for which, as he confesses, he felt a growing fascination the more he came into contact with it. Moreover, only his account of his history with languages, with pronunciation and accent justifies the occurrence of “anecdotes” – veritable life stories – with which he illustrates, always in the most appropriate manner, the diverse topics he addresses in his book. Odisho, as in the case of any lecturer with teaching experience, knows all too well how this way of complementing theory attracts students; but this touch of wisdom can only be imparted by someone who has had experiences which, unfortunately for many, are not included in any compendium.

Chapter 2, “The Cognitive Base of Language” (pp. 25-40), presents a general overview of the characteristics of language and narrows the topic to the systems that permit its realization, highlighting both the double functions of some organs or “exaptation” (p. 28), and the brains, which he calls conscious and subconscious. He further adds that something is processed in this direction from the conscious (brain) to the subconscious when one transitions from childhood to the adulthood in terms of learning a language and the accent. This chapter ends, as do all the others, with a section called “Concluding Remarks”, which provides the reader with a summary of the main ideas of each chapter.

Chapter 3, "Language in the Brain of a Child" (pp. 41-57), introduces the terms "learning" and "acquisition", which the author suggests should not be viewed as mutually exclusive, stating rather, as he has already done before, the existence of compound verbs of the type "acquire-learn" and "learn-acquire", terms that tend to translate what happens in the child and adult, respectively (Odisho 2007: 10). This chapter also addresses the role of cognition in sound perception and production, in the transition from phonetics to phonology and the mastering of more than one language as long as the appropriate exposure is provided. A critical reading of accent stands out in the case of the subject being a child because, as Odisho states, "Accent is a linguistic phenomenon that is associated with adults." (p. 57). In other words, only an adult can adapt to the progressive existence of a *psycholinguistic insensitivity* to the sounds that are not contained in the phonological inventory of their L1 (p. 53), reason by which the MMA becomes the recommended pedagogical approach. Useful to all, Odisho further establishes the dissimilarity between "hearing", corresponding to a sense, and "listening", which is a skill, as well as the way in which he regards the relation of the two notions with the brain (p. 46).

In Chapter 4, "Linguistic Accent: Definition, Classification and Demonstration" (pp. 59-77), Odisho lists the types of accent, emphasizing the difference between phonetic and phonological accent. The author draws attention to the fact that accent is a normal linguistic phenomenon. As he asserts, "It emerges as a result of the cognitive attitude of the brain of a child acquiring L1 versus that of an adult learning L2." (p. 64). Moreover, he tells the reader what is meant by the acquisition, reduction and "impersonation" (p. 69) of accent, noting at the end that a pronunciation of L2 without an accent is only achieved by children (see in this regard McLaughlin 1992), a few teenagers and even fewer adults, who adopt a singular attitude to pronunciation. Advocating always the use of MMA, the author concludes the chapter thus: "Serious and purposeful instruction in accent reduction should be handled exclusively by professionals with general linguistic knowledge and specific phonetic/phonological expertise who implement a multisensory and multicognitive approach." (p. 77).

In Chapter 5, "A Broad Base for Understanding the Pedagogy of Teaching Pronunciation" (pp. 79-94), when referring to speech as a cognitive phenomenon, the author includes the sensory and multicognitive modalities as a means to access pronunciation. After developing some theoretical positions regarding pronunciation, he stresses the idea that teaching an L2 to adults requires a methodology that encompasses a vast array of sensory and cognitive modalities and strategies that confer better control over L2. It should be noted how Odisho evokes the several memories that are used until a sound is perceived (p. 88) and reiterates the pertinence of using a technique that makes adults avoid repeating "after themselves" (p. 86), that is, departing only from the phonology of their L1. The entire account of the contents is unequivocally based on his extensive experience as a plurilingual and language teacher, with a background in linguistics and phonetics, as well as a specialization in the pronunciation of

foreign languages. Among other possibilities, he naturally chooses to work the pronunciation of languages whose vowel systems are centripetal and centrifugal, based on the MMA.

Chapter 6, “Ten Commandments for Teaching Effective Pronunciation” (pp. 95-103), addresses the relationship that should exist between “instructors” and “learners” in terms of teaching and learning strategies based on the senses and cognition, so that the teaching of the pronunciation of L2 to adults achieves the best results possible. It should be noted that the “commandments” put forward in this chapter are no more than marks of Odisho’s experience in the teaching of an L2 to adults based on MMA and pedagogical foundations similar to those adopted by Girolami-Boulinier in the (re)education of children (see Girolami 2006 and Girolami-Boulinier 1988, 1993). The commandments are thus the following: “1. Thou shall teach pronunciation as a cognitive undertaking” (p. 97); “2. Thou shall teach children and adults differently” (pp. 97-98); “3. Thou shall be qualified for instruction in pronunciation” (p. 98); “4. Thou shall familiarize learners with human speech production” (p. 99); “5. Thou shall orient learners psychologically” (pp. 99-100); “6. Thou shall use all sensory modalities to prop up instruction” (p. 100); “7. Thou shall use all cognitive modalities to prop up instruction” (p. 101); “8. Thou shall transform learners from listeners into performers” (pp. 101-102); “9. Thou shall refrain from insistence on a learner” (p. 102); “10. Thou shall make the classroom a place for learning and fun” (pp.102-103).

Odisho’s training in phonetics allows him to explore in Chapters 7, 8 and 9 the aspects that cause the most problems related with pronunciation and accent. Chapter 7 offers “Examples of Cross-Language Accent-Causing Consonants” (pp. 105-115); Chapter 8, “Examples of Cross-Language Accent-Causing Vowels” (pp. 117-132); Chapter 9, “Examples of Cross-Language Accent-Causing Suprasegmentals” (pp. 133-145). It should be noted that, according to Odisho, a study of the teaching of pronunciation can only be declared complete if it includes the segmental and suprasegmental features of the speech of any language (p. 145). Closely associated to the preceding three chapters, Chapter 10, called “The Role of Articulatory Settings in Pronunciation and Accent” (pp. 147-165), points out that the proficiency of a native speaker is not confined to the mastering of phonological contrasts (p. 149), because “The articulatory settings jointly represents the most characteristic consonantal, vocalic and prosodic features that are ingrained in the overall speech production in a given language.” (p. 148). Closing the chapter, Odisho adds that if one does not have a special preparation in that which he calls the “science” of pronunciation, he/she may not be aware of the complexity of the “articulatory settings” and may disregard their pedagogical importance (p. 165). In other words, not just anyone can take it upon themselves to teach L2 pronunciation to adults.

Chapters 11 and 12, respectively, “Principles of a Multicognitive Approach to Teaching Pronunciation” (pp. 167-182) and “Principles of Multisensory Approach to Teaching Pronunciation” (pp. 183-195), masterfully examine MMA, the potential of which was already evident in Odisho’s prior writings. The scholar’s concern

with the preparation of those who teach the pronunciation of an L2 to adults is such that it is not surprising that, in Chapter 11 (p. 176), he puts forward the following questions: "Are you, as instructor, academically and professionally qualified to teach pronunciation especially when it involves a second language and adult learners? Have you had enough linguistic and educational orientation to tackle a technical subject that requires ample professional preparation?". These questions are perhaps quite harsh when proposed coldly to those who, without the preparation Odisho considers essential, engage in teaching the pronunciation of an L2 to adults. They do, however, serve to caution instructors who exercise these functions without the necessary qualifications and may lead them to seek the means they lack. In its turn, Chapter 12 contains teachings and advice regarding the learning styles and strategies based on multisensory elements. The importance of the senses and their relationship with the brain, establishing thus a bridge between the sensory and the cognitive, is very clear in the following passage: "the senses are the five windows of the brain to the outside world if they are closed the brain will wither in darkness." (p. 183).

In Chapter 13, "Exemplary Applications of Accent Remediation Techniques" (pp. 197-224), Odisho details an approach to teaching various sounds based on techniques that resort to different orientations of a cognitive and sensory order. The reader is further confronted with numerous examples and illustrations that facilitate their understanding and open the way to the intended future application of the techniques described. The book ends with Chapter 14, "Tips for Accent Reduction and Accent Detection" (pp. 225-239), which positions accent at the heart of the discussion and highlights two noteworthy points: "First, how does one discover that he has an accent? Second, how can accent lead one to the identification of the linguistic affiliation of the speaker?" (p. 225). These two questions lead to the explanation of the contents of this chapter through the author's uncommon ability to conjugate the multisensory and multicognitive modalities. The reader thus finds: tips for L2 learners/speakers to improve their pronunciation; advice regarding the detection of the "linguistic background" of a speaker based on their accent, bringing to mind moments of George Bernard Shaw's play, "Pygmalion"; and instructions for professionals in several areas ("instructors of languages, actors, newscasters, spontaneous interpreters and under-cover agents") (p. 235).

In the same line that Odisho has accustomed us to, this book is required reading for all those who study language processing, for those who teach an L2 to adults with a concern for pronunciation, and for those who have to deal with pronunciation professionally. The relation Odisho establishes between the sensory and the cognitive, and the role given to the brain in pronunciation, will undoubtedly attract the attention of scholars. What arguments could scholars use if they wanted to refute the title of the book?

Furthermore, Odisho's background in linguistics places any specialist, even a phonetician without a history of languages, a few steps behind while also arousing a sense of "coveting", since they can hardly achieve the detail of linguistic sensibility he possesses.

The lack of a remissive index seems to be the work's only drawback, perhaps a detail to be reviewed in a forthcoming edition. It is indeed true that the "Table of Contents" is very detailed; however, the wealth of terminology in "Pronunciation is in the Brain, not in the Mouth. A Cognitive Approach to Teaching it" and the skill with which Odisho employs it leads the more observant reader to want to return to the book and to more easily locate certain terms by means of a remissive index.

I can only conclude this review by stressing that this work should be required reading and the multisensory and multicognitive approach to the teaching/learning of pronunciation proposed by Odisho should be assimilated and put into practice by lecturers with qualifications in linguistics, phonetics, pronunciation and pedagogics. I have no doubt that the teaching/learning of pronunciation would reach much more diversified profiles of learners and in a much more promising manner.

What more can we aspire to than to teach students the pronunciation of foreign languages efficiently?

Recebido em março de 2015 ; aceite em maio de 2015.

REFERENCES

- Ellis, R. 1994. *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Girolami, A. 2006. *Controle das aptidões para a leitura e a escrita. CALE*. [Control of reading and writing abilities] Tradução e adaptação de [Translated and adapted by] Maria da Graça Castro Pinto e João Veloso. Edições Cadernos de Apoio Pedagógico da FLUP (C02). Porto: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto. Edição original [Original edition]: *Contrôle des aptitudes à la lecture et à l'écriture. CALE*. Montreuil : Editions du Papyrus (2001).
- Girolami-Boulinier, A. 1988. *Les premiers pas scolaires. Acquisitions indispensables pour prévenir l'échec scolaire* [The first school steps. Indispensable acquisitions to prevent school failure]. Issy-les-Moulineaux: Editions et Applications Psychologiques (AEP).
- Girolami-Boulinier, A. 1993. *L'apprentissage de l'oral et de l'écrit* [Oral and writing learning]. Collection "Que sais-je?", N.º 2717. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- McLaughlin, B. 1992. Myths and misconceptions about second language learning: what every teacher needs to unlearn. *Educational Practice Report 5*. University of California, Santa Cruz. 13pp. Retrieved form: <https://www.usc.edu/dept/education/CMMR/FullText/McLaughlinMyths.pdf>, on 28-12-2014.
- Odisho, E. Y. 2003. *Techniques of teaching pronunciation in ESL, bilingual & foreign language classes*. Lincom Language Textbooks 05. München: Lincom Europa.

- Odisho, E. Y. 2007. A multisensory, multicognitive approach to teaching pronunciation. *Linguística – Revista de Estudos Linguísticos da Universidade do Porto*. **2**: 3-28.
- Selinker, L. 1972. Interlanguage. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*. **10**: 209-231.