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Teaching Pronunciation

A series of booknotes

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Those who are genuinely concerned with facilitating the acquisition of oral proficiency in adult second language learners must—directly or indirectly—deal with pronunciation. Research on the oral proficiency of foreign teaching assistants (e.g., Hinofotis & Bailey, 1980) indicates that no matter how high individuals might score on the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), their speech will not be readily comprehensible to native English speakers unless they have reached at least a threshold level in their pronunciation. Their ability to produce appropriate stress and intonation patterns fluently, as well as reasonably accurate sound segments, is what contributes to their attaining at least this pronunciation threshold. In other words, non-native teaching assistants must control English pronunciation at the discourse level to be readily comprehensible.

Ironically, within the Communicative Approach to language teaching, which was developed on the premise that the primary objective of language instruction should be communication, there had been very little attention given to the teaching of pronunciation, that is, until recently. Two volumes edited by Morley (1987, 1994) and a set of more than a dozen pronunciation textbook reviews in the TESOL Quarterly (Samuda, 1993) suggest that there is renewed interest and attention being given to the teaching of pronunciation. These publications also highlight the availability of new classroom material for this purpose.

In Spring 1995 I taught a course in practical phonetics for prospective ESL teachers at UCLA using the above materials and another resource in prepublication form (i.e., Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996). Several of the students in the course chose to write book reviews on pronunciation textbooks or teacher reference books for teaching pronunciation which were not part of, or were published subsequent to, the set of book notices edited by Samuda.

The four reviews below, along with Samuda (1993), provide an overview of materials that are now available for teaching pronunciation in the ESOL classroom. We can only hope that the current spurt of publishing activity will continue since communicatively-based materials for teaching pronunciation are still the exception rather than the rule.

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Pronunciation Pedagogy and Theory: New Views, New Directions by Joan Morley, Ed., TESOL, 1994, vii+199 pp.

Reviewed by Angela Burnett and Yen Ngo

During the last 15 years, there has been an interest in bringing pronunciation teaching into the ESL/EFL curriculum. To highlight this new focus, Joan Morley has selected seven articles for her edited anthology that include informative research and practical teaching suggestions on pronunciation.

The first three articles provide effective methods for teaching pronunciation in the classroom. The first of these is "Pronunciation Assessment in the ESL/EFL Curriculum," by Goodwin, Brinton, and Celce-Murcia. They offer procedures for diagnostic evaluation of perception and production, ongoing evaluation with feedback, including self, peer, and teacher correction, and classroom achievement testing. The second article entitled "Empowering Students With Predictive Skills," by Dickerson, describes his "three Ps"—perception, production and prediction—which are a guide to teachers in helping students set goals for spelling and pronunciation, emphasizing prediction skills which are applicable to every level of proficiency. The last article of this series is Gilbert's "Intonation: A Navigation Guide for the Listener," which suggests practical activities using gadgets such as kazoos, magnets, and rubberbands for teaching linking, rhythm, and melody.

The remaining four articles focus on research and program development. Esling's article, "Some Perspectives on Accent: Range of Voice Quality Variation, the Periphery, and Focusing," describes and presents research on voice quality as it pertains to pronunciation variations according to age, sex, regional origin, educational background, and occupational history, and provides implications for instruction in the ESL classroom. For the fifth article, Morley includes her own, "A Multidimensional Curriculum Design for Speech-

Pronunciation Instruction," laying out the foundation for the spread of interest in pronunciation pedagogy, and describing in detail the "micro (pronunciation) and macro (communicability)" level approaches of the University of Michigan's "English for Academic Purposes" program. In the sixth article, "Recent Research in L2 Phonology: Implication for Practice," Pennington reviews six areas of research, which confirm the need for teacher training in L2 phonology, and address the effect of habitual behavior on L2 phonological acquisition. The concluding article by Yule and Macdonald, "The Effects of Pronunciation Teaching," discusses the various patterns of improvement or deterioration in L2 pronunciation as a result of different instructional programs. Morley appropriately places this article at the end of her book to help teachers become aware of their own expectations about program implementation, as well as becoming aware of the natural process of teaching pronunciation. The book can be useful for all teachers and researchers interested in L2 pronunciation.

Pronunciation by Christiane Dalton and Barbara Seidlhofer.
Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. xii+191 pp.
Reviewed by Anna M. Guthrie and Sachiko Nishi

In recent years, the increasing emphasis on teaching pronunciation in the ESL/EFL classroom has led to a growing number of texts which either deal solely with pronunciation or include a specific section on teaching pronunciation. But we should ask ourselves some serious axiological and epistemological questions before we begin working with students specifically on pronunciation. This is precisely what this pronunciation reference requires of the reader.

The book, which is divided into three sections, is designed for the ESL professional/practitioner. It is clearly written, with numerous practical suggestions and ideas for classroom activities. The format is one which encourages the reader, through a series of "tasks," to engage in exploration and discovery of aspects of the English sound system as well as the ideas and assumptions underlying one's own pedagogical practices. These tasks, totalling 131 in number, generally invite the teacher to first engage in an exploratory activity, followed by questions for reflecting either on the value and significance of that endeavor itself, or on the principles underlying it.

Section One introduces the main concepts and terminology used in the field, with considerable attention paid to connected speech, stress, rhythm, and intonation. Based on the assumption that the reader already has some familiarity with the English sound system, this section provides an overview of these interrelated aspects of spoken English. Section Two includes numerous examples of classroom activities from a wide variety of the currently available pronunciation texts. Throughout this section, the reader is invited to reflect on those activities, with an eye for assessing and evaluating them. The reader is

asked to consider not only which activities and methodologies he or she deems valuable, but, more importantly, the reasons why this assessment is made. Section Three includes tasks which encourage the reader to test the concepts and ideas from Section One and the activities and methodologies from Section Two against the reality of his or her own classroom situation.

This book seems designed to enable the ESL teacher to integrate his or her knowledge of the English sound system with available materials. The various tasks emphasize the appropriateness of different pedagogical theories and practices for different teachers with different learners. The open ended nature of the tasks provokes the reader to both question and become more aware of his or her underlying assumptions about language teaching and learning, so that texts and materials can be adapted to fit one's assumptions and purposes.

This book is invaluable for encouraging teachers to adopt an analytic perspective. And when teachers engage in this type of critical inquiry, they can be better equipped to provide sound pedagogical planning and informed application of theory to their students.

The Pronunciation Book: Student-Centred Activities for Pronunciation Work by Tim Bowen and Jonathan Marks. Essex, UK: Longman Group UK Limited, 1992. viii+85 pp.

Reviewed by Zoë Argyres

Authors Tim Bowen and Jonathan Marks have compiled innovative suggestions for teaching pronunciation in their teacher-text, *The Pronunciation Book*. The goal of this volume is to heighten both students' and teachers' awareness that teaching and learning pronunciation are not only feasible but enjoyable. It is intended as a supplement to core texts in a pronunciation or multi-skills course; the activities presented are pronunciation components that may be integrated into larger pronunciation lessons or linked with non-pronunciation activities.

From years of teaching experience in many countries, Bowen and Marks' present pronunciation activities for all learner levels. The authors have meticulously organized the activities with reference to the level(s) for which they are appropriate (elementary through advanced), the focus of the activities, (from phonemes to connected speech), the materials necessary (quite often none or just simple ones), the time needed to complete them (anywhere from "variable" to 45 minutes to "ongoing throughout the class"), and the types of lessons where they may be optimally integrated (recycling vocabulary, relating stress to meaning). This detailed and helpful information is conveniently found both in the table of contents and in the margin next to each activity.

The Pronunciation Book is divided into eight chapters and includes a concise glossary of linguistic terms, a pronunciation table, and a current bibliography of essential English language texts related to pronunciation. It is weighted toward a

segmental approach; phonemic activities occupy chapters one through five. Chapter One covers the basics of sound identification, meant both for the teacher and the student. Chapter Two, "the beginnings of awareness", focuses on sensitizing students to the features of English pronunciation both in perception and production as well as on lowering their inhibitions when speaking a new language. Chapter Three covers the inventory of sounds, Chapter Four presents relationships between sounds and spelling, and Chapter Five, "Sounds in Sequence", is a prelude to the remaining chapters devoted to connected speech. Chapters six through eight emphasize word stress, tone groups, rhythm, intonation, and trouble shooting, in which frequently difficult features are presented.

An effective introductory activity that the authors suggest for pre-beginners is "Radio dial" (Chapter Two). In this exercise, the teacher uses a radio to switch to broadcasts in different languages. The students can begin to describe what makes English sound English. Though commenting on the overall sounds of English seems abstract for pre-beginners, on a more concrete level they can imitate the sounds and contours of the language and accustom themselves to English even before understanding many words. An amusing connected speech activity is the pronunciation role play (Chapter Seven), in which students imitate famous native speakers and discover the necessary adjustments in articulation that must be made. More unusual activities include sculpting and throwing phonemes and chanting vowels Mongolian-style.

Teachers of North American English need only note that the phoneme chart is suited to (British) Received Pronunciation, and must be altered to reflect the American sound system. Otherwise, *The Pronunciation Book* presents a flexible, comprehensive array of "tried and true" activities which allow teachers to supplement lesson plans with creative and practical activities.

Communicating Effectively in English: Oral Communication for Non-Native Speakers (2nd Ed.) by Patricia A. Porter and Margaret Grant. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1992. xviii+251 pp.

Reviewed by Joan Stein

Communicating Effectively in English gives advanced non-native English speaking students the opportunity to concentrate on improving their oral communication skills by using a variety of public speaking activities to provide students with oral communication practice. These activities are extremely effective in making students aware of such important aspects of public speaking as organization of presentation, cultural expectations, and levels of formality. In fact, the text deals with some issues of public speaking at a level advanced enough to be used (with some modifications) for native speakers of English who want to improve their public speaking and general communication skills.

Following the basic philosophy that effective communication can evolve only through extensive practice, the text offers students an enormous number of activities (12 per unit on average), even more than in the previous edition of this text. The six units in the second edition of *Communicating Effectively in English* progress from fairly simple speaking/listening activities such as interviewing classmates and then presenting the information obtained to the class (Unit Two) to more complex tasks such as researching a topic in preparation for a class debate (Unit Six). What makes this text especially effective is that in addition to putting students in situations that require them to communicate orally, the units also alert students to the importance of suprasegmental features of communication and such cultural aspects of communication as eye contact, posture, and audience rapport.

The assumption of this text is that students already have some familiarity with pronunciation skills and that they do not need to focus on these skills. If a student has an especially difficult time with a specific feature of pronunciation, extra help is available in the appendix. Although the scope of the appendix is very limited (it discusses rate of speech, pauses and phrase grouping, emphasis, the final *-s* and *-ed* suffixes, and word stress) these aspects of pronunciation are probably most important for students working specifically on public speaking skills.

Communicating Effectively in English is geared for students who have already completed or are concurrently enrolled in a pronunciation class. This text gives students the opportunity to learn skills that are essential to their academic and professional success and to continue to improve their pronunciation.