



SPEAK OUT!

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE IATEFL PRONUNCIATION SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

February 2011 Issue 44

- 4 **The role of objective measures of suprasegmental features in judgments of comprehensibility and oral proficiency in L2 spoken discourse** Okim Kang & Lucy Pickering
- 9 **Investigations into pronunciation teaching** Graeme Couper
- 14 **Problems with English stress and rhythm for Japanese listeners: causes and treatment** Clive Lovelock
- 19 **At the talk face 5** Mark Hancock
- 21 **Pronunciation in second language learning and teaching conference report** Kimberly LeVelle & John Levis
- 23 **Review of Rhymes and rhythm: a poem-based course for English pronunciation** Mikhail Ordin
- 25 **2nd PronSIG fielded discussion report** Robin Walker

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The Pronunciation Special Interest Group

The Pronunciation SIG is one of IATEFL's fourteen Special Interest Groups (SIGs) and has been at the forefront of the practice and theory of pronunciation teaching for more than 20 years. We aim to give teachers the opportunity to exchange views and share ideas about methodology and materials, and to discuss theoretical matters and the interdependence of pronunciation and other areas of language learning. We have around 200 members around the world.

PronSIG members receive two issues of our highly-regarded newsletter per year. *Speak Out!* has included many seminal articles and is always at the forefront of debates, controversies and emerging issues. You are invited to contribute to this publication, sharing your ideas, experience, questions and research in the area of pronunciation. Please send your ideas to the editor, Robin Walker, <walkerrobin@wanadoo.es>. PronSIG members throughout the world are interested in learning about YOUR work, and learning from YOUR experience.

Members are invited to attend our events as speakers or as participants. We welcome suggestions for themes and venues, and especially offers to host or co-host events. We also have a day-long PronSIG Programme at each IATEFL Annual Conference.

We are always interested to hear from members who might be interested in a committee role. The committee consists of volunteer members who care enough to keep the SIG going. We would be particularly interested in hearing from members who would be keen to take responsibility in the areas of publicity, finance, sponsorship and events co-ordination.

If you have any queries or are interested in helping the SIG in some way, do get in touch with the co-ordinators:

Jonathan Marks
PronSIG@iatefl.org

The PronSIG Discussion Group

What is it?

The IATEFL PronSIG Discussion Group is an Internet site where people from all over the world share and discuss ideas about teaching and research in the areas of pronunciation, phonetics and phonology. It's also a good way of keeping up to date on conferences or events, making contacts with people of similar interests, and to ask for, and give, suggestions and advice on teaching or theory. It's free and easy to use.

Many of the authors of *Speak Out!* articles are involved. So, if you've been inspired by what you've read in this edition, or want to make a comment, or ask a question, or just say 'hello', sign up now and become part of the online community.

How do I join?

It's very easy. Go to the IATEFL PronSIG Homepage at <http://www.rdg.ac.uk/epu/pronsig_new.htm> and click on the link in the Discussion List section. If you already use Yahoo! for your e-mail, just sign in with your usual Username. If not, click on SIGN UP to create a Yahoo! account. In order to post messages you will need to join the group – simply click on JOIN THIS GROUP at the top right of the page.

How do I take part in discussions?

It's a friendly group so once you have set up an account and signed in, click on START TOPIC at the top right of the page and post a short message saying 'hello' and maybe something about your interests or the work you are involved in. Or, if one of the discussions you read inspires you, jump straight in – just click on REPLY, type your reply and click on SEND.

If you have any questions or difficulties in joining, send an e-mail to me at <pronsig_mod@yahoo.co.uk>.

We look forward to seeing you online!

Alex Selman
PronSIG Discussion Group Moderator



From the editor

As I was taking over as editor of *Speak Out!* I received an email suggesting that the newsletter needed a more international view of pronunciation. Though I didn't actually feel the criticism was fair, I kept the email as a touchstone for my work as editor. This issue, I think I can say, is true to that aim, with articles that come not only from the four physical corners of the earth, but also from a wide range of points on the pronunciation teaching spectrum. Whilst Okim Kang and Lucy Pickering report on current research into measuring comprehensibility, Clive Lovelock offers us thoughts based on a wealth of classroom experience. Bridging the gap between these two extremes, Graeme Couper reports on his recent PhD work, whilst Mark Hancock's regular contribution puts us squarely back in the classroom once again. In addition to this, there are conference and discussion reports, and reviews editor Mikhail Ordin tells us about the welcome new edition of *Rhymes and Rhythm*.

Editorial Office

Correspondence relating to the content of *Speak Out!* should be sent to the editor by email at robin@englishglobalcom.com

Disclaimer

Views expressed in the articles in *Speak Out!* are not necessarily those of the Editor or the members of the PronSIG committee.

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IATEFL retains the right to republish any of the contributions in this issue in future IATEFL publications or to make them available in electronic form for the benefit of its members.

Contributions

Speak Out! encourages the submission of previously unpublished articles on topics of significance to its readers. If you wish to contribute to *Speak Out!* you should first send the Editor an outline of the proposed article. If this is felt to be of interest to our readership, we will send you details of how the manuscript should be prepared.

If you are interested in reviewing a book for *Speak Out!* you should contact the Reviews editor, Mikhail Ordin, at [<ordin@zmail.ru>](mailto:ordin@zmail.ru), copying the editor in to any correspondence.

Copy Deadlines

45 September–October 2011: May 1st 2011

46 March–April 2012: November 1st 2011

Contents

- 2 From the coordinator
- 3 From the editor
- 4 The role of objective measures of suprasegmental features in judgments of comprehensibility and oral proficiency in L2 spoken discourse
Okim Kang & Lucy Pickering
- 9 Investigations into pronunciation teaching
Graeme Couper
- 14 Problems with English stress and rhythm for Japanese listeners: causes and treatment
Clive Lovelock
- 19 At the talk face 5
Mark Hancock
- 21 Pronunciation in second language learning and teaching: conference report
Kimberly LeVelle & John Levis
- 23 Review of *Rhymes and Rhythm: a Poem-based Course for English Pronunciation* (Garnet Education)
Mikhail Ordin
- 25 2nd PronSIG fielded discussion: report
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The role of objective measures of suprasegmental features in judgments of comprehensibility and oral proficiency in L2 spoken discourse

Okim Kang & Lucy Pickering

In the light of ongoing research into the importance of suprasegmental features in the assessment of non-native speaker discourse, our study uses samples from the iBT TOEFL test to investigate the relationship between NS listener judgments of non-native oral proficiency and comprehensibility and the results of a detailed profile of objectively-measured suprasegmental features. Our findings suggest that prosodic features play a significant role in listener ratings and we consider some of the possible teaching implications.

The role of suprasegmentals in spoken discourse

For some time now, our field has been concerned with the relative importance of segmental and suprasegmental features in judgments of comprehensibility and oral proficiency in English language learners. While proficiency is normally standardized through some kind of established testing, there is no universally agreed-upon definition of what constitutes the construct of comprehensibility. There is, however, a commonly drawn distinction between 'matters of form', usually referred to as intelligibility, and tested using orthographic transcription, and 'matters of meaning' describing the extent to which the message is meaningful in its context. Field (2003) suggests that comprehensibility includes both form and meaning, and it

is this more broadly construed idea of comprehensibility that we are interested in here.

In a series of seminal studies, Tracy Derwing, Murray Munro and their associates have prioritized suprasegmental or prosodic components, and concluded that improvement in non-native speaker (NNS) comprehensibility for native speaker (NS) listeners "is more likely to occur with improvement in grammatical and prosodic proficiency than with a sole focus on correction of phonemic errors" (Derwing & Munro, 1997: 15). Prosodic features that researchers have found to be significant include speaking rate (Derwing & Munro, 2001), pause structure (Anderson-Hsieh & Venkatagiri, 1994), nonstandard word stress (Field, 2005), pitch range (Wennerstrom, 1998) and intonation structure (Pickering, 2001).

The comprehensibility and proficiency judgments that many of these studies rely on are the result of asking raters to listen to a language sample and assign to it a number on a scale (e.g., 1 = extremely easy to understand, 9 = extremely difficult to understand.) However, human raters come to the task with a host of possible biases. These may include partiality based on familiarity with different accents (Bent & Bradlow, 2003), listeners' attitudes to speakers' cultural heritage (Rubin, 1992), listener expectation based on negative stereotypes (Lindemann, 2003), or listener bias due to attributions of a group membership (Kang & Rubin, 2009), to name just a few. Ideally then, some more objective measure would be preferred that could stand as a more reliable and valid substitute for rater judgments. Thus, our goals were twofold: First to create a suprasegmental profile of our NNS samples using computer assisted analysis and then to compare these profiles to comprehensibility and proficiency ratings given by NS raters.

Data

Our NNS data comprised twenty-six male responses (6 Chinese, 6 Spanish, 8 Korean and 8 Arabic) to an iBT TOEFL integrated task. Students responded to a question that asked them to summarize and demonstrate understanding of a passage they had just read. Each sample is 60 seconds in length. One hundred and eighty eight North American undergraduate students listened to the NNS samples. Using 7-point scales, the listeners rated each sample for oral proficiency in the areas of pronunciation/accent, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, rate of speech, organization and how well the requirements of the test prompt were met. Additionally, the raters judged comprehensibility of the samples using five 7-point bipolar scales comprising the following:

Investigations into pronunciation teaching

Graeme Couper

This article reports on the main findings of my recently completed PhD (Couper 2009) and discusses the implications for the classroom. The findings are based on a series of three cumulative studies. With the insights gained and the focus provided by a Cognitive Phonology framework, Critical Listening (CL) and Socially Constructed Meta-language (SCM) emerged as two key variables which play a role in effective pronunciation teaching.

The investigations in this thesis were prompted by a very practical classroom problem of what the teacher should or can do about poor achievement in pronunciation. In addition to establishing that pronunciation teaching can be effective, the aim was to develop general principles which would provide teachers with a clear rationale for classroom actions and activities relating to pronunciation. This required investigations into what it is that makes it work.

While there has been little focus on this in traditional SLA theory, Cognitive Phonology provided a framework which helped in teasing out which variables might be important in making teaching effective. The view taken here is that pronunciation both can and should be taught. It is an inseparable part of communication and as such should have a significant role in Communicative Language Teaching. Pronunciation is seen as much more than a motor-skill; it is seen as a cognitive skill which can be learned by everyone given the right circumstances.

Theory and practice

As a teacher, it was very important to find a theoretical perspective compatible with my own observations of what seemed to work in classroom practice. A very brief overview of the theoretical perspective and its relevance to practice is outlined below.

Drawing on traditional SLA theory to provide explanations of observed teaching and learning behaviour leaves many unanswered questions: in particular, the role of explicit

instruction is unclear given the various views on the relationship between implicit and explicit knowledge.

Fortunately there are many related disciplines, and indeed views of SLA, which do provide useful theoretical perspectives. I drew on insights from: phonology, language teaching pedagogy, SLA theory, educational psychology, social and cultural theories and speech perception. Cognitive Phonology provides a coherent framework which can bring all these insights together.

Cognitive Phonology (CP) is a branch of Cognitive Grammar (CG), within Cognitive Linguistics, a usage-based approach to language stemming largely from the work of Langacker (1987) and more recently Taylor (2002). It is based on the premise that the cognitive abilities required for language are similar to those used on other cognitive tasks. Instead of beginning with a theory of language acquisition, it begins with what is known about cognition and uses that to build theories of language acquisition (Taylor 2002). Thus it is diametrically opposed to Chomsky's Generative Theory which sees language as in the mind and autonomous, and uses cognitive in a different sense.

Pronunciation depends on the ability to categorize and is therefore a cognitive phenomenon which is 'grounded in the human ability to produce, perceive and above all, to categorize sounds, and to form mental representations of sounds' (Taylor 2002:79-80). Fraser (2006) has explored the implications of this for pronunciation teaching, concluding that learning the concepts of the L2 phonology (phonemes, syllables, stress, etc) is a prerequisite to successfully categorising the sounds of the language. For teachers, this implies the need to draw on their pedagogical knowledge to find ways to effectively communicate the nature and boundaries of phonological concepts and categories. They also need to provide effective practice and feedback as it takes time for learners to fully form new concepts.

The research

The thesis is based on three studies which represented the cumulative exploration, development and refinement of ideas as to what makes pronunciation teaching effective.

An earlier action research project (Couper 2003) had already explored a number of ideas related to pronunciation teaching and found tentative evidence for the effectiveness of systematic explicit pronunciation instruction and its validity in the eyes of learners.

Problems with English stress & rhythm for Japanese listeners: causes & treatment

Clive Lovelock

This article aims to identify the causes of problems Japanese learners encounter with stress and rhythm in English. Rhythm poses more difficult problems at a more global (therefore more fruitful) level than phonemes. I believe that if teachers understand these problems and their causes, they are better equipped to deal with them in class. General suggestions for remedial action are provided, but, due to limitations of space, details of implementation are left to individual choice.

Notes on terminology:

Am. = educated American; Br. = educated British;
Japanese or learners = Japanese learners of English;
native speakers (NS) = native speakers of English.

Main assumptions

Listening perception requires priority attention

From childhood, we construct a mental listening filter to identify only sounds relevant to our first language (Renard 1975). Consequently, we are deaf to the sounds of other languages. For most Japanese learners, listening perception is more difficult than speaking because they lack experience in listening to English. Just as reading comprehension is contingent on understanding basic orthography (spelling, punctuation, etc.), listening requires accurate perception and recognition of the sounds of English (decoding) before comprehension is possible. Japanese learners can speak English at their own pace, with their own English repertoire, and interlocutors will often adjust to their accent. But when listening, the learner has to cope with the speaker's pace and accent. Moreover, it's difficult to pronounce what you cannot hear. Speaking

may help listening perception, but it is not a substitute for listening–noticing activities.

Reasons for focusing on rhythm and related phenomena

- Rhythm is crucial for understanding the global meaning of English discourse.
- English sentence rhythm is very hard for most learners to perceive and understand, because few are taught it at school.
- Though context often provides clues to a speaker's intended meaning, stress is also used to highlight meanings which contradict expectations. Here, context may be misleading.
- Rhythm in different NS varieties of English varies less than phonemes do. The following features are common to all native varieties of English: use of pitch change, vowel lengthening and loudness for sentence stress, vowel weakening or elision for un-stress, and consonant clusters. The last feature enables us to use fewer syllables in English words than in Japanese, What learners can learn from rhythm is more generalizable across varieties of English than from phonemes, which vary more geographically (Ferguson).

A NS model is used, but is not the learning target

Most learners in Japan request a native speaker (NS) model, so I keep to an educated (non–regional) NS model. Naturally, learners will still retain their NNS accent, but hopefully, not an incomprehensible one. Many learners say they want to be able to hear the lyrics of songs, or (for higher level learners) dialogues in movies. This is NS English.

Checking comprehension does not teach listening perception skills

Listening is a mental activity, so not directly observable. What students say in response to oral input is usually a guide to what they have heard or understood. Comprehension depends on, and is partly a result of, sound and sound pattern recognition. Comprehension also depends on knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and the world. Listening means paying attention so as to perceive more clearly. Listening perception activities improve perception, and therefore word or phrase recognition.

At the talk face 5

Mark Hancock

Initial consonant clusters

English initial consonant clusters present problems for learners whose native languages do not contain such clusters. Faced with such problems, learners often try to simplify the cluster in one of three ways:

- by eliding a sound eg *scare* instead of *square*
- by adding a sound at the beginning eg *eschool* instead of *school*
- by adding a sound in the middle eg *support* instead of *sport*.

Of these three simplifications, the first is perhaps the most damaging to intelligibility, but all three can lead to misunderstandings and are best avoided if possible. One teaching strategy is to show how the cluster can be built up in increasing complexity, e.g. 1 *eight* 2 *rate* 3 *trait* 4 *straight*. Notice that, although the spelling is significantly different in these words, in pronunciation terms they are identical except that a single consonant sound is added to the beginning at each step. The three games/puzzles in this edition of *At the talk face* are all based on this strategy.

1 Noughts and crosses

Copy one of the three grids on the board and divide the class into two teams. Teams take turns to try and win squares. As in normal noughts and crosses, a team must win a row of three squares, horizontal, vertical or diagonal to win. To win a square, they must make a word combining the consonant sound on the left of the row and the sound of the word at the top of the column. For example, in the middle top square of 1, they could suggest *flew* or *blue*. They must pronounce the word, spell it and say it in a sentence to win the square.

Optional extra rules to get more practice:

* A team can win a square off the other team by offering a different correct word for that square. For example, if team A got the square with *blue*, team B could win it off them with *flew*.

* Teams could compete to win as many squares as possible. At the end, they get 1 point for each square they've won plus a bonus 3 points for any row of three.

Key of possible words:

- 1 bride/fried; blue/flew/flu; brain; dried; glue; drain/grain; cried/pride/tried; clue/true; crane/train
- 2 breast; tries; blow; dressed; dries/tries; glow/flow; crest/pressed; cries/prize; slow
- 3 throw; bread/bred/thread; fry; grow; dread; dry; crow; tread; cry/try/pry.

2 Monday mornings

Give out a copy of the text. Explain that the words in italics are misprints and that the correct word has exactly the same pronunciation but with one extra consonant sound at the beginning. These are given below as the *clue letters*. Students should write the correct word in the gap. Use the examples given to show how to do it. In particular, use the *rest-dressed* example to point out that we're focusing on sounds here and the spelling can be quite different. At the end, get students to practice saying the words and their corrections *lock - clock, rest - dressed* etc.

Key: lock-clock; rest-dressed; water-quarter; rain-train; cool-school; refer-prefer; top-stop; treat-street; white-quite; low-slow; tarts-starts

(Note – the *water-quarter* example doesn't work for rhotic varieties of English, where the letter R in the first syllable of *quarter* would be pronounced, so that it would not rhyme with the first syllable in *water*)

3 Rebus

Copy the exercise and ask students to solve the puzzles as shown in the example. In each of these puzzles, the final word in the line contains a consonant cluster beginning with S. Get students to practice saying these. If they elongate the S at the beginning: ssss, this may help them to avoid adding a vowel sound. Make sure they pronounce all of the consonants in the clusters by asking them to say the word with and without each one, for example for sky: /skai/, /kai/, /sai/, making a clear difference.

Key: 1 ? = sky; 2 ? = sw; 3 ? = start; 4 ? = speak (or stop); 5 ? = spring; 6 ? = air; 7 ? = sk; 8 ? = no/know (for *snow*, or *tar* if they interpret the picture as being a star); 9 ? = sn; 10 ? = air

Mark Hancock is author of *Pronunciation Games (CUP)*, *English Pronunciation in Use Intermediate (CUP)* and co-author of *English Result (OUP)*.

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CONFERENCE REPORT

**Kimberly LeVelle and John Levis,
Conference Organizers**

Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching (PSLLT)

Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa USA, September 10-11, 2010

On September 10-11, 2010, the second annual conference of Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching was held at Iowa State University (USA). About 70 participants attended, coming from 6 different countries (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Venezuela, and Serbia) and 12 US states. This year's theme was Intelligibility, and the plenary speaker was Murray Munro of Simon Fraser University, Canada. The complete conference schedule, topics and presenters can be seen at PSLLTconference.com.

Murray Munro spoke on Intelligibility: Buzzword or Buzzworthy?. The talk discussed the relevance of intelligibility for spoken language, and was framed partly as a response to a criticism of the concept of intelligibility in an opinion piece in the journal *Applied Linguistics*. The talk surveyed the long history of the term, the range of practical and research fields that are interested in intelligibility, and argued that intelligibility is a fundamental requirement in human interaction. From the serious to the humorous, Murray showed how unintelligibility's penalties ranged from minor inconvenience to matters of life or death. While recognizing that many aspects of intelligibility are not well understood, the talk called on a wide range of research findings to make the concept far easier to understand for everyone. It also gave a variety of ways to make it applicable for teachers.

In addition to the plenary, the conference included a panel discussion in which a group of researchers, teachers and textbook writers (including Tracey Derwing, Murray Munro, Beth Zielinski, Marnie Reed, John Levis, Joanna Smith, Greta Muller Levis, Laura Hahn, and Bertha Chela-Flores) listened to two learners of English and discussed what features of their spoken English seemed to impact their intelligibility. They also invited comment and took questions from other conference participants.

There were 15 (non-concurrent) individual papers given during the conference. There were also 8 poster presentations. Topics included not only the pronunciation of English but also the pronunciation of French, Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Vietnamese. The conference kicked off with three presentations on the conference theme. Laura Hahn and Patricia Watts (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) discussed research into many informants' experiences with misunderstanding in "Intelligibility Tales". Ron Thomson (Brock University, Canada) presented research on the role of word familiarity and context on the intelligibility of English vowels, and Marnie Reed (Boston University) gave a teacher and textbook writer's view of how intelligibility is connected to listening comprehension.

Other talks included research on learning Vietnamese tones using technology (Alina Smith, University of Maryland), Vietnamese speakers learning to pronounce English syllable margins (Lucy Pickering and Pam Pearson, Georgia State University), pronunciation learning strategies (Veronica Sardegna, University of Texas), the pattern of destressing preceding tonic syllables (Wayne Dickerson, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), teacher practices in learning to teach pronunciation (Amanda Baker, Georgia State), oral fluency development (Bertha Chela-Flores, Universidad Simon Bolivar), and further research into Somali-accented English (Ettien Koffi, St. Cloud State, Minnesota).

The second day included longitudinal research on L2 speakers' impressions of the roles of accent and intelligibility from Tracey Derwing (University of Alberta, Canada), the role of computer technology in teaching French /u/ and /y/ (Viviane Ruellot, Western Michigan), speech recognition (Brian Teaman, Osaka JoGakuin College, Japan), and a paper from Joanna Smith (Unitec, New Zealand) on helping learners develop their own voices. There were also 8 posters on topics from aspiration to the use of mobile technologies in developing oral proficiency.

And what conference is complete without social times? The conference included a delicious catered Indian dinner and a picnic/barbecue with participants attending the concurrent Technology in Second Language Learning conference (apling.public.iastate.edu/TSLL).

We are working on the proceedings from this year's conference and expect that they will be available by June 2011. The electronic proceedings for the first year's conference have already been published and are freely available at:

<http://apling.public.iastate.edu/PSLLT/2009/>

Rhymes and Rhythm: A poem-based course for English pronunciation

Reviewed by Mikhail Ordin

Michael Vaughan-Rees (2010)
Reading: Garnet Education, 120pp.

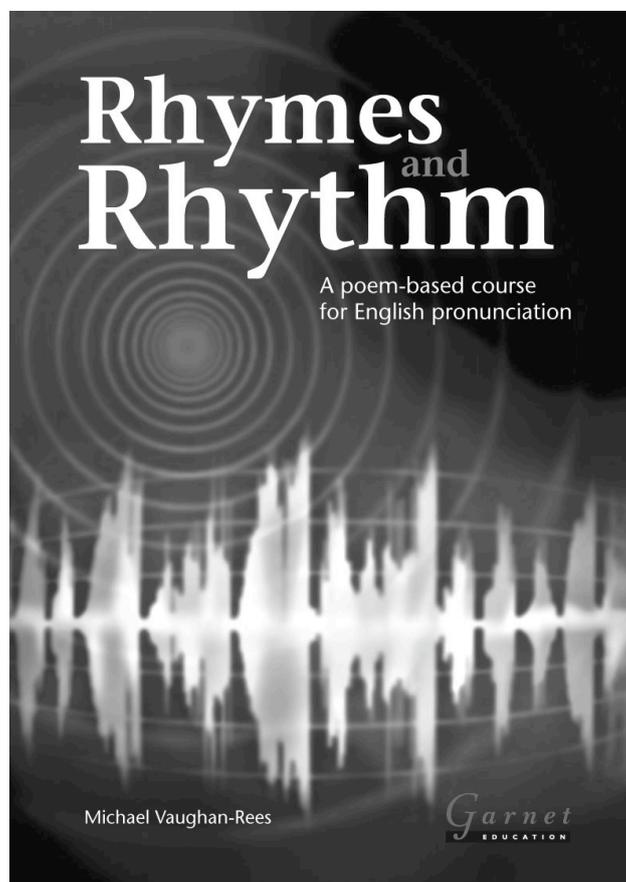
ISBN: 9781859645284
(Book, audio DVD, teacher's CD ROM)
Price: £25.00

In 1990 the PronSig ran a day of workshops, during which two of the participants - Charlyn Wessels and Kate Lawrence - used simple but effective raps for pronunciation training sessions. This was so efficient, that the PronSIG founder Michael Vaughan-Rees, who was the SIG coordinator then, came up with the idea of a whole resource pack for pronunciation training based on verse and music, ideally with backing tracks, to ensure that the beat does not escape the teacher and the learner. The project was heartily supported by the then IATEFL Chairman, Alan Maley, and it greatly benefited from the contribution by Brita Haycraft, pronunciation writer, and Justin Rees, a talented musician.

This is how a special issue of *SpeakOut!*, with input from Young Learner and Literature SIG, a 48-page special issue of the newsletter with a one-hour audio supplement, was released. The extended version of this newsletter was published by Macmillan four years later.

The author kept on working on the project and finally a new version of *Rhymes and Rhythm* was published by Garnet Education. This new version is a pronunciation course based on music ranging from classical conventional limericks to modern rap, and on verse in a variety of different poetry styles. Unlike other books and resources which make practicing pronunciation fun, *Rhymes and Rhythm* provides a very systematic agenda for both learner and teacher. Unlike other books with a systematic approach to pronunciation training, this one will not overwhelm you with linguistic theory and will give you lots of enjoyment in using it.

The new version of the package consists of a student book, audio DVD with all the songs and poems recorded, and instructor's CD with teacher's notes, complementary materials, visuals for projector or interactive whiteboard, suggestions, ideas and print-outs for in-class training. The book comes with the keys to the exercises, and a map to help users find the supporting material on the teacher's CD for the book chapters.



The book consists of four parts. The first part is based on syllable length and rhythm in English, the second one is focused on stress and stress-shifts in phrases and sentences, the third part is about the phonetic processes in connected fast natural speech, and the fourth part is a consolidation of all the aspects covered in the course.

Each part is further divided into chapters. Within each chapter the exercises are arranged in order to build new skills on information and competence which has just been acquired in the same chapter.

The resource pack is practically oriented, and you will not find an extensive theoretical background on the phonemic structure of the English language, or detailed discussions of the intonation system. Whenever the author touches on

any aspect of English pronunciation, e.g. elision, assimilation, stress shifts in connected speech, reduction, syllable length, linking, weak forms, stress placement, etc., he starts from examples derived from connected speech and gradually moves to a do-it-yourself section. Learners will gradually become more and more aware of what happens in natural connected speech and then practice it.

Poems are arranged on a difficulty scale from 1 being the simplest ones to 5 being the most difficult. This will give the teacher the initial idea of how long each exercise will take at the lesson, and how much effort will be required from the student. With some learners it is worth splitting the exercises or particular sequences of poems into pieces and practicing each piece separately.

This resource pack can be used as a course, but it allows the teacher to come in at any point of the book in order to target those areas of pronunciation that need most attention.

Whether you are training children or adults (unless they are would-be linguists or phoneticians), or whether you are planning to learn or to teach English pronunciation, this resource pack is thoroughly recommended.

Mikhail Ordin, Moscow Academy of Humanities and Technology, Bielefeld University, Mikhail is a phonetician, pronunciation trainer and researcher in bilingualism, second and first language acquisition, and in prosodic systems.

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2nd PronSIG Fielded Discussion

Robin Walker

At Alex Selman's suggestion I agreed to lead the second PronSIG fielded discussion on the subject of pronunciation for the 21st century. In a poster advertising the discussion, I centred the discussion on English as a Lingua Franca, explaining that:

Jennifer Jenkins' work on the phonology of English as an international language (or lingua franca) is considered by some experts to be the most significant contribution to the teaching of pronunciation of the past decade or so. Others are fiercely critical of Jenkins' proposals. Which is it – revolution or rubbish? Or could it be that teaching pronunciation for English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) via the Lingua Franca Core is simply evolution in response to the changing role of English over the last twenty years? In this fielded discussion, I'll try to answer these questions, and any others you care to bring up about the basic notions behind teaching pronunciation for ELF, and about the practicalities of doing this in the ELT classroom.

The discussion itself was scheduled for October 10–17, but for different reasons was continued until October 24th. In this time there were close on to 100 postings from places as far apart as Argentina, Australia, Japan, Korea, Bangkok, Iran, France, the UK and Poland. The postings came from a wide range of backgrounds – from teachers to teacher educators, from pronunciation specialists to ELF pronunciation researchers, or from those who simply wished to know what terms like ELF and LFC referred to.

To get the ball rolling I suggested a number of issues participants might like to discuss. Once underway, one point seemed to lead on to another, but some strands stood out quite clearly. The most important of these were:

- ELF pronunciation and change
- Intelligibility and ELF pronunciation
- Falling standards
- Validating the LFC
- Classroom practice
- Testing for ELF pronunciation.

Strand 1 – ELF pronunciation and change

The so far limited impact of ELF on pronunciation teaching around the world became more than apparent in this strand. Not that this should have come as a surprise to anyone that has been in ELT for any length of time. We are all aware that established systems resist change. ELF is coming up against this resistance right now, just as Communicative Approaches did in the 1980s, for example. One contribution to the discussion gave interesting data indicating that parents only want prestige accents. Another suggested that change can only come from the top. In contrast some contributors described their own process of change, from initial rejection of an ELF approach the pronunciation, to its adaptation to the requirements of their own teaching situations.

Strand 2 – Intelligibility

Given the central importance of intelligibility to any approach to teaching pronunciation, this strand provoked quite a lot of postings spread over the whole of the discussion. Of course, intelligibility is such a slippery term, despite the best attempts of all involved to pin it down. Mention was made, however, of research that indicates that 'learners of an L2 (such as EFL) find the L2 speech of someone from the same L1 as intelligible as or possibly more intelligible than native speakers'. There is also ample anecdotal evidence suggesting the NSs are not per se the most intelligible interlocutors. However, the main conclusion from this strand was that more research is needed into ELF intelligibility before anyone can pin down with precision how the interlocutors are intelligible to each other in ELF contexts.

Strand 3 – Falling standards

A number of postings shared the common concern that an ELF approach to pronunciation was an excuse to accept anything our students produce as correct. Contributing from his experience in Iran, one participant painted a very bleak picture, with ELF being seen as 'a green light to errors and mistakes', and with students and teachers justifying anything under the cover of the ELF movement.

Related to the idea of a lowering of standards is the belief the ELF pronunciation is a simplification, as a result any lingua franca suffers in order to function as such. The discussion here considered whether NS accents with less complex vowels systems than RP were simplifications of the latter.

Strand 4 – Validating the LFC

Not unnaturally, this strand produced a number of significant contributions to the discussion, with people expressing reservations and doubts that they have about the exact contents of the LFC and how it might play out for them in their own teaching situation, particularly with respect to substitutions for the dental fricatives.

In reply to these very genuine concerns, it was pointed out that Jenkins' herself had always indicated the need to fine-tune the LFC. But it was a response from Poland that seemed to hit the nail right on the head here: 'People tend to imagine that the earth's core is solid, but it isn't, apparently, and I don't think the LF core is, either.'

A number of contributors gave examples of their experience of interpreting Jenkins' LFC in their local context. Participants from Japan and the UAE looked at the role the learners' L1 plays in achieving competence in the LFC. The strand then went on to look at the differences between empirical and experimental data, and how each of these might be brought to bear on deepening our understanding of ELF pronunciation.

Strand 5 – Classroom practice

Despite the fact that at the outset there seemed to be an open interest in the practicalities of an ELF approach to pronunciation, this strand was not as strong as might have been expected. Taking an absolutely practical approach, an experienced PronSIGer from Japan asked how you help a student due to compete in a speech contest and whose pronunciation you can barely understand. On a different tack, another participant from Japan raised the issue of accommodation, one of the main classroom issues brought up in Jenkins' *The Phonology of English as an English Language*. His concern was the danger that students in monolingual classes would accommodate towards their shared L1, and away from international intelligibility.

Within the same strand, there was interest shown in how to tease out the classroom practicalities when working with learners of English whose L1 background naturally included weak forms and word stress patterns. 'Does this mean that if a learner has an L1 background where there are weak forms and word stress patterns they need to learn to speak without using these?'

Not unexpectedly, the question of models for the ELF classroom was brought up. This is a real concern to most practising teachers, although one contributor pointed out that he has had long been an advocate of using fluent

Japanese speakers of English as models for Japanese pronunciation of English.

Strand 6 – Testing

This was another strand that produced a number of interesting postings. It was suggested on various occasions that international examining boards needed to include a range of NS and NNS accents in their tests.

From France, we were asked to reflect on how we might deal with the testing of two NNSs of English, both with 'excellent intelligible accented pronunciation', but one of whom has achieved a NS accent. The ensuing discussion brought out the need in certain circumstances to mark candidates to established objective scales, and not automatically by proximity to a NS accent.

Conclusion

This is a necessarily brief summary of the 2nd fielded discussion and all of the original postings can still be seen by clicking on the message history for October 2010. This can be found at the bottom of the home page of the PronSIG Discussion Group, which can be accessed at:

http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/iatefl_pronsig/

The value of this 2nd fielded discussion seems to be nicely summed up, however, by a remark made by Joel Brodsky:

This discussion has been both stimulating and confusing, with so many ideas swimming in and out of my mind. One of the beneficial transformations that I'm deriving from this discussion is letting go of my uncompromising "General North American accent only" standard that I've been clinging to, and beginning to ponder what other standard, with some ELF features, might become effective for both me and for learners, ...

The idea of these fielded discussions is to get us thinking. This seems to have happened here, and it is to be hoped that future fielded discussions will provoke similar outcomes.

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