



# SPEAK OUT!

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE IATEFL PRONUNCIATION SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

## August 2013 Issue 49

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## Notes from the Coordinator

It was great to see so many PronSIG members at the annual conference in Liverpool, and I hope that what we put on there inspired others to join us. First, there was the PCE on ELF, where in the space of a day Robin Walker, Grzegorz Spievak and Mark Hancock managed to package the main issues and engage a mixed but appreciative audience. The indefatigable Mark was back the very next day to kick off our PronSIG day. It was a very full and varied programme but I'd like to pick out the first winner of the inaugural Brita Haycraft International House Better Spoken English Scholarship, Sascha Euler, presenting on connected speech. It was a topical and informed presentation and I'm sure there is plenty more to come from Sascha in the future.

During our Open Forum, the chance for people to discuss the work of the SIG, we raised the question of changing the name of the SIG to reflect the growing interest in integrated pronunciation teaching. While there was support for an integrated approach, the consensus was that we should keep the PronSIG name and avoid diluting into a general skills SIG. Consequently, we have decided to remain PronSIG but we have modified our mission statement, as you can see on the IATEFL website, to put more emphasis on the inclusive nature of pronunciation teaching.

Of course, relatively few members can get to the annual conference, which is why we need other ways of reaching them. The main benefit of PronSIG has always been this newsletter and I regularly get requests for specific articles or back copies. We are in the process of digitalising the complete series of *Speak Out!* so this fantastic resource will be much more accessible. Also, to facilitate this, the next issue of *Speak Out!*, the big 50, will be digital. I won't give anything away or steal Robin's thunder but this promises to be a very special edition indeed.

Finally, I am very pleased to say that steps towards collaboration with SPLIS (Speaking, Listening & Speaking), our counterpart in TESOL, are beginning to take fruit. The SPLIS Coordinator, Tamara Jones – who has supported PronSIG in the past when based in the UK – has been working with Alex to set up a series of webinars and linked fielded discussions. There will be more details on this in the autumn but the product of the combined expertise of SPLIS and PronSIG will definitely be worth waiting for.

**Wayne Rimmer**  
**PronSIG Coordinator**

## 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](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](mailto:pronsig_mod@yahoo.co.uk).

We look forward to seeing you online!

**Alex Selman**  
**PronSIG Discussion Group Moderator**



## From the editor

*Robin Walker*

Welcome to Issue 49 of *Speak Out!*. The SIG has had a busy time recently as you'll see from the Coordinator's notes, and the level of this activity is reflected in the level of the articles that members and non-members have contributed to this newsletter. Adrian Underhill brings his vast experience to bear on the still unanswered question of why pronunciation continues to be the Cinderella of ELT. Rachael Roberts gives us practical ideas about how to integrate connected speech into the classroom, while Vicki Kanellou offers us an insightful review of the handbooks we hope teachers have on their bookshelves. Finally, Simon Andrewes picks up on an article in SO! 48 and reports on his action research into ELF pronunciation.

The quality of these and previous articles means that the PronSIG regularly receive requests for back copies and individual articles from teachers and researchers around the world. As Wayne points out in his notes, we hope to improve our response to this demand, and also to reach out to a wider public, by digitalising all back copies of the newsletter over the next year. At the same time, and in keeping with the times, *Speak Out!* is going digital. By doing this, we significantly reduce printing costs, which in turn frees resources for PronSIG events. We will begin our digital experience with *Speak Out! 50*, where leading voices from our field have agreed to contribute to the 'Golden Anniversary' issue of the newsletter.

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### Editorial Office

Correspondence relating to the content of *Speak Out!* should be sent to the Editor by email at [robin@englishglobalcom.com](mailto:robin@englishglobalcom.com)

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Wayne Rimmer

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### Contributions

*Speak Out!* encourages the submission of previously unpublished articles on topics of significance to its readers. If you wish to contribute, you should first send the Editor an outline of the proposed article. If you are interested in reviewing a book for *Speak Out!* you should contact the Editor at [<robin@englishglobalcom.com>](mailto:robin@englishglobalcom.com).

### Copy Deadlines

**51 September–October 2014: May 1<sup>st</sup> 2014**

# Cinderella, integration and the pronunciation turn

*Adrian Underhill*

**Pronunciation infuses all of our language use and experience, just as grammar and vocabulary do. In some way and at some level pronunciation is operating all the time in our students' language activities, even when they are not attending to it, and even if they have not been taught it. But the way we teach pronunciation does not reflect its ubiquitous nature, and in our hands it easily becomes dis-integrated from the rest of language, not for lack of teacher will, but because our methods do not permit integration.**

I suggest this is partly because we do not teach pronunciation as a physical, embodied activity. Instead we teach it in two main non-physical ways:

- Cognitive description and discussion (the way we talk about grammar and vocabulary), which in the case of pronunciation is like teaching someone to dance by talking about it.
- Repetition, which is like teaching someone to dance by telling them to watch me and then do it.

Both have their place, but neither is based on the teacher's experiential, felt and sensed kinesthetic insight into what their own muscles and tissues are actually doing when they speak, which would enable them to develop tactics and strategies to help their learners do the same. Unless learners are helped to renew their conscious kinesthetic contact with the muscles (known as *proprioception*) that make the pronunciation difference, they remain by default in the 'grip' of their mother tongue phonetic set, from which no amount of discussion or repetition will free them.

The consequence of not integrating pronunciation fully is that we teach a reduced form of the language, '*right words plus right order minus embodiment*', which I suggest disables the systemic quality of language, making it less coherent and more difficult to learn. This in turn undermines a key motivator, the ongoing discovery by learners that they can go beyond their habitual limits, and escape (relatively but significantly) the 'grip' of their L1 pronunciation and sound more like the speakers they listen to. Before taking this further I will underline the

ubiquitous nature of pronunciation by looking at the four skills.

## Pronunciation and reading

As you read this article you are likely to be sub-vocalising, registering the text internally through an inner voice or an inner ear, without external vocalising and without any detectable movement of your articulating muscles. But whether you register your reading through an inner voice or an inner ear, you are rehearsing your pronunciation while you read. Regarding our students the question is whether the inner pronunciation with which they register the text rehearses the grip of their L1 pronunciation, applied to the L2, or whether it rehearses their best approximation of their L2 pronunciation. I am suggesting that unless some discipline prevails, the activity of 'silent' reading rehearses the mother tongue pronunciation applied to the new language. And the same goes for writing.

## Pronunciation and writing

The activity of writing allows time for inner process of composition, of putting words together to see how they flow, whether they carry the intended meaning and whether they follow the grammar rules as they know them, whether the construction feels like English, and so on. It is likely that learners of a language will say or hear the words of the composition 'silently' though their inner voice or inner ear, and once again an inner pronunciation is employed. Which pronunciation? Unless an aspirational learning discipline has been established, such rehearsal is likely to be in an English gripped by the writer's mother tongue phonetic set.

## Pronunciation and speaking

Obviously pronunciation is at work when speaking. It is the outcome of muscles working using the breath and the soft tissue and hard surfaces of the mouth, throat, nose and tongue. It is a thoroughly physical activity, relating words and meanings to the acoustic formations dictated by L2 and shaped by the agility of the user's musculature, and the degree to which they have managed to become free from the grip of their L1 phonetic set.

## Pronunciation and listening

As for listening, we know that sounds we hear affect how we say them. It is also the case that we may not be able to hear a certain sound discerningly if that sound is one we cannot say, if it is outside our L1 phonetic set. We probably also have the experience that once we can 'get our mouths round' a sequence of sounds in a word or phrase, we suddenly become able to hear it more precisely when spoken by another. The L1 phonetic set, the grip of mother tongue as I call it, affects both the ear and the mouth together. To put it crudely, listening and speaking are like two ends of the same neurology. But

# Connected speech: helping teachers to join the dots

**Rachael Roberts**

**Connected speech is a fairly complex area of pronunciation, and, even when teachers have understood some of the basics, they often have no idea how to go about putting their knowledge into practice in the classroom.**

**In this article, I'd like to look at some practical ways of integrating connected speech into the classroom, both receptively and productively.**

There is a huge difference between what our students see printed on a page and what we actually say in everyday speech.

In his article 'Pronunciation as a Listening Skill', Mark Hancock makes the following joke:

Patient: Doctor, Doctor, I've got two theik, a near rake, sore rise, bruise darms a stummer cake and I far tall the time.

Doctor: I see, perhaps you'd like to way tin the corridor?

(Try reading it aloud)

The joke [apologies for the vulgarity] showcases a good number of examples of features of connected speech. Teachers can tend to shy away from highlighting these in the classroom, but research shows that teaching learners about connected speech can really make a difference in terms of how well they understand native speakers. For example, Brown 2006, reports that after four weeks of work on reduced forms, 'comprehension of reduced form sentences had improved from 35% to 61%'.

Equally, some ability to use these features in their own speech will also be likely to make students more confident and fluent speakers.

There is sometimes a tendency for teachers to assume that the students should be taught *about* connected speech. Students, especially at lower levels, don't need to know all the technical terms, however proud we may feel of having mastered them ourselves!

What students do need, I would argue, is primarily awareness-raising activities and some work on producing English in a natural (if not necessarily native-speaker-like) way.

## Raising awareness

Clearly, although learners may have a sense that words are being 'lost' to them, they may assume that this is down to their inferior language skills, rather than realising that it is a feature of the language.

Perhaps the easiest and most obvious place to start is by demonstrating how words are 'squeezed' together to keep the rhythm. A classic activity often demonstrated (and originated?) by Adrian Underhill involves drilling 1,2,3,4, and then adding a 'little' word each time.

1and2and3and4

1andthen2andthen3andthen4

1andthena2andthena3andthena4

1andthenthere'sa2andthenthere'sa3andthenthere'sa4.

Another good activity to start learners thinking about connected speech and weak forms is to dictate just part of some phrases. For example: 'uvbin'. After students have written these down as best they can (this should be a light-hearted activity), you dictate the full phrase, in this case

'I've been to Paris.'

For a higher level of challenge, you could do something similar with words that show assimilation in the full phrase. For example:

'tem' (ten boys /tem'boiz/ )

'goog' (good girl /gʊ'gɜ:l/ )

These kinds of activities often lead to real 'aha' moments from the students as they realise exactly why they've found it so hard to understand native speakers at times.

## 'Speak more slowly, please!'

Students often ask the teacher to slow down. Obviously, it's fine to adjust your speech to the level of the class. However, it's also very important not to lose the natural features of connected speech.

I don't think we're doing students any favours by speaking to them in an over-enunciated unnatural way. Instead, why not take the opportunity to demonstrate to them the

# Phonetics and phonology for EFL teachers; a review of pronunciation handbooks

*Vasiliki Kanellou*

**Do I need to have knowledge of phonetics/ phonology in order to teach pronunciation? Should I first get my students to recognise the sounds of English and then ask them to produce them? Are the segmental or suprasegmental features of pronunciation more important for comprehension, and which ones do I teach first? Do I need to teach phonetic symbols and phonological rules? These are all questions any EFL teacher must address.**

This paper, which has been drawn from my PhD thesis on pronunciation principles and practice, will present answers to the aforementioned questions as provided by the experts in the field of pronunciation pedagogy, the experts being the authors of English Language Teaching pronunciation handbooks for teachers and teacher trainers. I will confine myself to those handbooks that have been pivotal in the teaching of pronunciation in the last 20 years or so. In order to compile a list of appropriate handbooks, I consulted my thesis supervisor (Dr Paul Tench), colleagues and EFL teachers and teacher trainers in Europe. Overall, I have examined 12 ELT pronunciation handbooks. For the purposes of this paper, I have drawn together the main ideas presented in each book in the form of five themes; I will analyse and exemplify each theme and, where appropriate, I will draw links to my review of general ELT handbooks (see Kanellou, 2009).

## 1) Knowledge of phonetics/ phonology and awareness of a variety of techniques for teaching pronunciation

An important theme that runs through pronunciation handbooks refers to the need for teachers to have adequate knowledge of phonetics and phonology with respect to the articulation and function of speech sounds. For example, Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994: 128) insist on the need for teachers 'to have an understanding of both

how sounds are articulated (phonetics), and what the significant sounds are in the relevant languages (phonology)'. And Pennington (1996: 6) views a solid knowledge base for phonology as 'the minimum requirement for effective teaching'. It is worth noting that this particular theme also emerged as part of my analysis of currently used ELT handbooks (see Kanellou, 2009: 19, 21). Teachers should also have awareness of a variety of techniques and procedures for the teaching of pronunciation which can be adapted or implemented according to their learners' needs. As Kelly (2000: 13) puts it: 'Teachers of pronunciation need: a good grounding in theoretical knowledge, practical classroom skills and access to good ideas for classroom activities'. Celce-Murcia et al (1996: 11) agree: 'only through a thorough knowledge of the English sound system and through familiarity with a variety of pedagogical techniques... can teachers effectively address the pronunciation needs of their students'.

## 2) Phonological perception and production

Another theme that runs through pronunciation handbooks refers to the view that receptive competence in pronunciation should precede productive competence and, thus, teachers should first concentrate on recognition activities and then on production activities. This was also the case as far as ELT handbooks are concerned (see Kanellou, 2009: 18, 21). Returning to pronunciation handbooks, we can see that, for example, Fitzpatrick's (1995) approach to 'sound work' involves production tasks being preceded by reception tasks: 'It may help learners to be able to produce the sounds of English if they are first able to recognise them. This will entail listening intensively and trying to distinguish closely-related sounds' (Fitzpatrick, 1995: 11). In Celce-Murcia et al (1996), activities that focus on productive phonology (e.g. oral reading of minimal pair sentences) are preceded by activities that focus on receptive phonology (e.g. listening discrimination tasks). Gilbert's (2005a) *Clear Speech* is also an excellent example of recognition activities (e.g. 'listen and circle the word you hear') being followed by production activities (e.g. 'now practice saying the words you have circled'). Gilbert (2005a) directs particular attention to vowels which, she states, are initially learned best through 'listening' tasks rather than through 'repeating aloud' tasks:

The problem with having students say the words aloud too soon is that they are likely to give themselves a misleading acoustic image. This acoustic image that they hear themselves saying is then likely to become fossilized as a fixed habit of speaking. For this reason, it is better to begin vowel study with tasks that give students the opportunity to listen without having to produce sounds.

Gilbert, 2005a: 12

# Pronunciation issues related to David Deterding's 'English language teaching and the lingua franca core in East Asia'

*Simon Andrewes*

Last summer I was working on pronunciation with a class of international students, a number of them from East Asia. I was concerned with mutual intelligibility and factors that led to a breakdown in communication in ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) settings, rather than with how their pronunciation matched up to some national norm of English.

It was, then, of particular interest to read David Deterding's paper in the last issue of *Speak Out!* (48, February 2013) in which he discusses the implications of Jennifer Jenkins' Lingua Franca Core (LFC) for English users from East Asian countries. The LFC tries to identify precisely those features of pronunciation that are essential for international intelligibility and Deterding's findings seem to confirm LFC proposals that misunderstandings tend to arise from certain L1-influenced consonant substitutions, and vowel length distinction issues plus the quality of the vowel /ɜ:/, but not otherwise from vowel quality, nor from factors such as intonation, stress, or rhythm.

## The test-task

The class I was teaching consisted of twelve students at upper-intermediate level with nine different L1s (Mandarin and Cantonese Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Korean, Thai, Indonesian, Kurdish, and Kazakh). I used a peer dictation activity to find out when deviant approximation of L2 sounds actually led to a breakdown of communication. This is an activity I have used regularly in recent years and it provides useful feedback to teacher and learner.

In this activity, each student read out a definition of a subject or concept that was familiar to them and had

recently come up in class, while six members of the class were 'scribes', writing down the dictated definition.

The task was set up in this way in order to ensure that any breakdown in communication was less likely to be the result of unfamiliar or unknown vocabulary. The intention was to distinguish as far as it was possible problems of pronunciation (production) from problems of listening comprehension (reception).

One criterion to determine that misunderstanding was due to deviant pronunciation and not inadequate listening/oral comprehension skills was that a significant proportion of listeners (i.e. at least three of the six scribes) from a variety of L1 backgrounds should have failed to understand a word or phrase, even though the word or phrase and context were familiar. This 'broad' failure to understand would suggest that the listeners were being misled by features of poor pronunciation rather than that all listeners – from as many as six different L1 backgrounds – were being deceived by their L1-induced false expectations of the item uttered. This said, it has to be acknowledged that the East Asian L1s in the study share many similar pronunciation features, which may affect their speakers' comprehension in a similar way.

### Sentences used in peer dictation and relevant for the pronunciation analysis that follows.

*Peacebuilding* is a term describing outside interventions that are *designed to prevent* the start or resumption of violent conflict within a *nation* by creating a sustainable peace.

It came into *existence* on December 27, 1945 when 29 countries *signed* the Article of Agreement, the goal of which was to *stabilize exchange* rates and assist the reconstruction of the *world's* international payment system post-World War II.

Statebuilding *provides* for the emergence of specialised personnel, control over consolidated territory, loyalty and durability, and permanent institutions with a *centralised* and autonomous state that holds the monopoly of *violence* over a given population.

## Findings

An analysis of the results of this class test-task shows that the single biggest cause of communication breakdown was a distorted or deviant pronunciation of certain **consonant clusters** as produced by the Chinese and Thai speakers.

The /ks/ of 'existence' (see box above; see also table of pronunciation problems), for example, was pronounced, by a Thai student, as or like /s/, and the word was understood as 'assistant' or 'assistance' by five out of six scribes. At the same time, the cluster /kstʃ/ in 'exchange' was

# Online resources 4

## Otterwave by Ottercall INC Reviewed by Tim Kelly

I received an iPad for use in class and have been looking for ways to enhance pronunciation work using apps, but on the one condition that the app is free. *Otterwave speech recognition app* is free in the basic version and focuses on situational language for the business environment. It is interesting, as few apps currently offer work on pronunciation beyond individual sound or word level.

### What it does

You receive feedback on your pronunciation of utterances in the form of a graphic wave and a score from A-D. There is also information to analyse individual word and phoneme results.

### What I like about it

- The sound waves are a very visual aid and highlight energy patterns.
- There is feedback from sentence to phoneme level.
- Learners play around with sounds at utterance level and within meaningful situations. At lower levels, where learners are often struggling with syntax, this can be very motivating.

### What it lacks

The software is only programmed to test ability to mimic the model. There is no allowance for intelligible alternatives. I only scored well by using a phoney accent.

There is no overt tone unit or tonic syllable indication. I scored "A" deliberately pausing in the wrong place "this is... Jean I need to talk to Jane". I did lose marks for timing though!

### Classroom applications

- Raise awareness of energy levels and stress on information-bearing words in utterances.
- Highlight the difference between accents (in my case British) and the North American model by looking at individual phoneme deviation.
- Useful for students who are aware of weaknesses to go away and play with.

Otterwave would improve with a variety of accents, including non-native speakers. Then it would be a useful tool for international business training.



Figure 1. Highlighting British and Otterwave pronunciation (North American) of 'what'.



Figure 2. Highlighting weak and strong form of 'will'.

**Tim Kelly** has been teaching English for more than 20 years. He currently works at IH Cordoba in Spain.

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## mailVU

URL: [www.mailvu.com](http://www.mailvu.com)

### *Reviewed by Karina Neira*

MailVU is a useful website which works directly on your browser and it is perfect for video recording and video sharing. All you need is a smartphone, tablet, or computer with any modern browser and Adobe Flash plus a webcam and a microphone. A video can be recorded from its home page with the "Click, Record, Send" functionality completely free of charge. However, users must register for the uploading of pre-recorded videos and to have access to other features. MailVU videos are private which means they are not open to search engines or Youtube unless you choose to make them public.



Figure 3. A screengrab from mailVU.

### Classroom applications

MailVU can be used by teachers as a tool to help students improve their pronunciation and speaking skills. For example, students can record a speech with the webcam recorder and send it to the teacher as a home assignment. This activity is great to train students in public speaking, since it gives them the chance to build up confidence when speaking in front of the webcam as if they were delivering a presentation in front of an audience. Besides, students can view their recordings before they send them and if they are not pleased with their performance, they can record it again. Peers can also be emailed with video presentations in order to give constructive feedback and analyse which features need to be worked on, for example, vowel and consonant sounds, word and sentence stress, word reduction, linking, and intonation.

**Karina Neira** is a graduate EFL teacher who also works as a Laboratory Teacher at CONSUDEC College where she trains teachers-to-be in the area of Phonetics.

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### Call for Contributions

Have you used any online resource to develop your students' pronunciation skills? If so, this is the place for you to share your experience!

Our next Online Resources column will centre around **pronunciation and the IPA**. If you have used any transcription tool or websites which teach learners the IPA symbols through sound, image, video or tips, let us know about it!

Please send your contribution (including URL, a brief description of the resource, a short list of classroom applications and screen captures, adding up to 300 words altogether) to [marinacantarutti@gmail.com](mailto:marinacantarutti@gmail.com) before November 1<sup>st</sup>. Thank you!

**Marina Cantarutti, Editor 'Online resources'.**

# Clear Speech (4<sup>th</sup> edition)

**Reviewed by Jonathan Marks**

Judy B. Gilbert (2012). *Clear Speech. Pronunciation and Listening Comprehension in North American English. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition.*

New York: Cambridge University Press, 174pp.  
ISBN 978-1-107-68295-5 Paperback + Teacher's Resource and Assessment Book, 104pp.  
ISBN 978-1-107-63706-1 Paperback

Apart from the Student's Book and the Teacher's Resource and Assessment Book, the complete *Clear Speech* package includes a set of four Class Audio and Assessment CDs, a Clear Speech App with which you can 'play games and practice pronunciation in a fun interactive way' and a website where the audio material (except the tests and quizzes) can be downloaded as MP3s.

The main part of the Student's Book text comprises five sections: 'Syllables' (1 unit), 'Vowels and Word Stress' (4 units), 'Sentence Focus' (4 units), 'Consonants' (5 units each) and 'Thought Groups' (1 unit). These sections are followed by three appendices - 'Parts of the Mouth', 'Tongue Shapes' for selected vowels, and 'How often do the vowel rules work?' – and two 'Extra Practice' sections: 'More Consonant Work' (on consonant contrasts which are commonly found to be problematic) and 'Advanced Tasks' ('Word stress', 'Sentence focus' and 'Thought groups'.)

A 'Letter to the Teacher' introduces the six principles of *Clear Speech*: prioritisation of the most important topics; dual focus on listening comprehension and intelligibility; use of spelling and phonics rules to help with guessing the pronunciation of unfamiliar words; visual and kinaesthetic support for key points; use of memorable phrases and sentences to embody signals of spoken English in combination; use of pair work to maximise speaking and listening practice.

The *Clear Speech* approach is broadly communicative; it seeks to help learners both to understand spoken American English and to practise features of pronunciation which will enable listeners to understand *them*, in other words to achieve a 'listener-friendly pronunciation'. It prioritises the 'musical signals of spoken English': stress, vowel lengthening and pitch change, since 'Students who learn to recognize important signals of the natural rhythms and melodies of English often report improved understanding of speech on TV, in movies, and in face-to-face conversations' and 'If you say a word using its correct stress pattern, it is easier for other people to understand you, even if you do not get every sound right'. But it also integrates a concern for the accurate articulation of specific sounds into the suprasegmental framework –

'People learning new languages tend to practice new sounds in the rhythm of their first language, and this makes it harder to get the target sounds right.'

The pronunciation pyramid (see below) shows learners (and teachers!) how segmental and suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation are interrelated. As learners work through the course, they keep switching between levels of the pyramid and are continually reminded how the activities they are working on fit into an overall system – how, for instance, it is particularly important to pronounce the peak vowel in a thought group clearly.

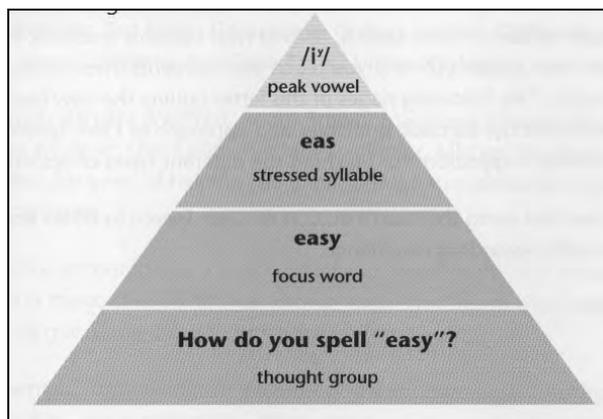


Figure 1. The Pronunciation Pyramid.

In the book, the four levels of the pyramid are colour-coded, and the corresponding colours are used as background for the recurrent components of Vowel Work, Vowel Rules (which relate spelling to pronunciation), Stress Rules, Focus Rules and Thought Group Rules. Other graphic devices in the text help to make key points clear and memorable – these two, for example, for the lengthening of stressed syllables and the use of pitch change for emphasis respectively:

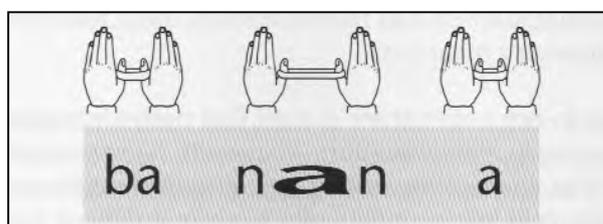


Figure 2. Visual and kinesthetic learning.

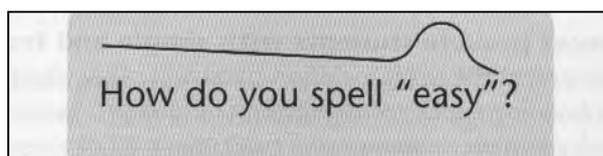


Figure 3. Pitch change for emphasis.

Other reader-friendly aspects of the material include the easily-graspable terminology used to label and explain features of pronunciation, such as 'thought group', 'focus word', 'new thought', 'old thought', and the accessibly formulated rules – e.g. 'Stress Rule for Two-Syllable Words: Except for verbs, two-syllable words are stressed on the first syllable 90% of the time', 'Focus Rule 6: When there is a disagreement or a correction, the word that corrects the information from the previous statement is the new focus word.'

Links are made with elements of grammar which are particularly important in understanding messages, such as interpreting structure words, which are de-emphasised by being contracted or reduced, noticing final sounds such as those in 'tickets' or 'planned', and understanding when -es and -ed do and do not constitute an extra syllable,

The work on sounds and spellings is designed to encourage learners to make informed guesses about the pronunciation of written words, and is supported by mostly very powerful Vowel Rules; for example, -ai- is pronounced /e<sup>y</sup>/ 95% of the time.

The recordings provide very clear models for students to emulate; it is rather a pity, however, that the extracts intended for dictation and other kinds of listening work are acted in such an unnatural, stylised manner.

The Teacher's Resource and Assessment Book is an essential complement for teachers who want to make full use of *Clear Speech*. It contains guidance for using the material in class, Audio Scripts and Answer Keys, Diagnostic Tests and Unit Quizzes, a Glossary of key terms defined in student-friendly terms, with examples, and a Bibliography.

But, as well as providing support for the Student's Book, the Teacher's Book repays careful study in its own right by teachers who want to develop their own understanding of English pronunciation and their range of methodological options. It will take them behind the scenes of the deceptive simplicity of the Student's Book, and contains a wealth of wisdom, experience, anecdote and analogy, which throw light on the principles which have guided the author as she has taught students, trained teachers and developed *Clear Speech* over the years.

For example, 'Intonation is commonly thought of as showing attitude. This is true, but it takes up a lot of classroom time to establish a context for a particular attitude, and the carryover to real communication is relatively limited. For practical language use, the most crucial function of English intonation is to highlight a focus word. [...] it provides a navigational guide for the listener.' The corollary of this in the Student's Book is Focus Rule 1: 'There is a pitch change on the vowel of the stressed syllable of the focus word. The pitch change can be up or down, but it must be a change.'

There are many references in the Teacher's Book to the challenges faced by speakers of particular L1s, and numerous highly practical Teaching Tips, many of which make use of kinaesthetic techniques. The references to the literature will be useful pointers for teachers who wish to delve deeper.

One of the conundrums of writing a pronunciation course is that there is no obvious way of drawing up a syllabus, since *everything* is required right from the start, even in the very first lesson. The *Clear Speech* solution to this is an approach which visits and revisits the different levels of the pronunciation pyramid while always maintaining an awareness of adjacent levels.

Another peculiarity of pronunciation, as opposed to other areas of language, is that exactly the same work might need to be done by learners who are, in terms of their grammar, vocabulary, etc, at vastly different levels. The *Clear Speech* response to this is to contextualise pronunciation in situations, dialogues and language functions which will be relevant to learners at a variety of levels, while keeping the vocabulary and grammar load for the most part low, so that the language in the exercises and the metalanguage in the book is reasonably accessible even to learners at relatively low levels. More challenging terms such as 'sibilant' are introduced in a way which is easy to follow.

In her very informative and readable introduction to the Teacher's Book, consisting of 'Linguistic underpinnings' and 'Pedagogical reflections', the author writes: 'Conscientious teachers often ask, "How can we reduce student errors?" It is useful to turn that question around and ask, "How can we increase student clarity?" Instead of trying to remove mispronunciation, which is often simply a transfer of something from the first language, it is more helpful for teachers to concentrate on adding new elements required by the target language.' This attitude provides teachers and learners with a much more realistic agenda and a better chance of success. *Clear Speech* has already helped, and will continue to help, many learners to succeed in becoming more listener-friendly speakers of American English, and more aware and competent listeners.

Former PronSIG Coordinator **Jonathan Marks** is a freelance teacher trainer, author and translator based in Poland. His publications include *English Pronunciation in Use Elementary* (CUP 2007) and *The Book of Pronunciation* (Delta Publishing 2012).  
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# Cool Speech: Hot listening, cool pronunciation

*Reviewed by Carol Begg*

Richard Cauldwell (2012) Firsty Group  
<http://www.speechinaction.org>

As a diehard iPad fan and devoted English teacher, I was intrigued when introduced to the *Cool Speech* application. Despite the proliferating apps market and the huge number of students with smart devices, I am continually disappointed by a lack of suitable language learning and teaching tools. The vast majority of pronunciation apps on the market are either tied to textbooks, merely offering supplementary exercises, or focused on individual phoneme study and isolated sound production. In contrast, *Cool Speech*, based on the work of British linguist, David Brazil, is designed to be a course in listening and pronunciation for upper intermediate and advanced learners.

*Cool Speech* is a very impressive looking app, with strong colours and bold design, and once the user has got her bearings, the app is fairly easy to use, although I'd have preferred instructions on each page (at least when accessing exercises for the first time) rather than having to jump back to the *Help* page. The language used is appropriate for higher level learners. It is both accessible and suitably academic. However, with a more advanced student and one who is, as the *Introduction* suggests, preparing to work or live in an English environment, more explicit description of the aims of each section and descriptions of the language points might have been appropriate. The activities are very focused and designed for intensive study, suggesting that the user would be an informed and motivated one. But, again this goes back to who is using the app.

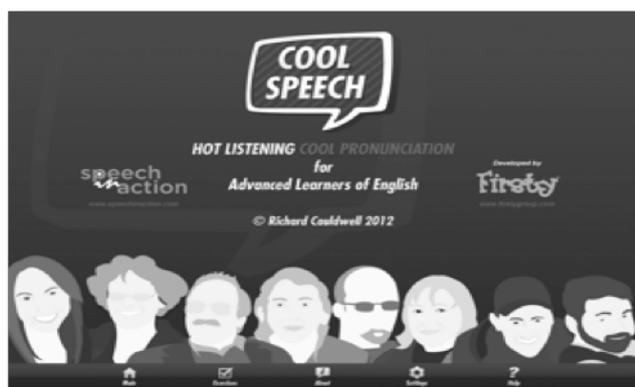


Figure 1. Cool Speech home screen.

So what can the app do? *Cool Speech* features samples of real, spoken, British English from eight people, four men and four women. The app contains exercises for:

## Pronunciation

- Vowel sounds
- Consonant sounds

## Listening

- Hotspots
- Rhythm
- Speed
- Dictation

## Pronunciation

Users can focus on vowel or consonant sounds, by listening to language chunks that contain each sound in action. Users can then record themselves imitating these chunks and compare themselves to the target. This is a great feature, provided that students can identify the differences between themselves and the target. This is made easier because the chunks can be played at one of three different speeds, whilst the target sounds are given in both male and female voices.



Figure 2. Work on vowels.

## Listening

*Hotspots* are short bursts of speech with comprehension questions. They are designed to help learners understand high frequency words and notice how the pronunciation of these is altered in natural speech. Clicking the *Explore* button takes you to a transcript with the prominent syllables highlighted. The user can then listen to each chunk individually, although it would have been nice to have been able to hear the whole text, with the highlighted transcript, to gain a more holistic understanding of the content. There is a nice variety of voice and content in the *Hotspots*. The language is really natural, much closer to that which learners will normally encounter in an English environment, and worlds away from the stilted language of most textbooks.

*Speed* contains an example speech chunk from each speaker delivered at natural speed, and an additional example given at a "target" speed by another male or female speaker, respectively. Instructions on the page would have been helpful, as would an explanation of how such an activity benefits the user. We then listen to other examples of the chunk and identify if it is faster or slower than the target. The touch screen makes this easy and the sliders are really intuitive.

*Rhythm* gives the user another chance to hear each speakers' sample accompanied by a transcript divided into syllables. While listening to each line - again I'd prefer the option of listening to the whole track again from this screen - the learner identifies the prominent parts of speech, before checking the answers. I feel that an explanation of why these parts are given more importance, and perhaps even how this can be done, would be of benefit to the user.

The *Dictation* exercises (gap-fill or micro-dictation is perhaps more apt) are great for breaking down and understanding natural speech. At the original speed, each speakers' monologue is broken into speech units with words missing. Through focused listening, the user can identify and practice listening to these frequent words in natural speech. Looking at the blending that occurs in natural speech is always challenging for learners (and me), so exercises like this are really practical for higher level students. I also feel that clearly defining this activity as one of listening is much more meaningful, and useful, than texts I have used in the past that insist on learners trying to imitate them.

*Cool Speech* is certainly an innovative and focused app. It looks the part and would really suit motivated and informed higher level learners. The exercises are practical and provide real examples of language in use. There are a few small errors that need to be ironed out; this is after all a very new app. The first issue I had was one of target audience. It is difficult to tell to who the app is intended for; is it for teachers or for independent study? The *Home* screen doesn't help here, as it only contains the title and credits. Indeed, navigating and understanding what you have to do took me a while. Personally, I'd have preferred the *Home* screen to be a brief message while the app loaded, and to then have had the *Help* page as the main screen, as this contains all the necessary information on how to use the app. After visiting the *Speech in Action* homepage, I am slightly the wiser because the site contains both resources for teachers to use in class, and worksheets for students. A link to this site in the app would have been useful.

These minor issues notwithstanding, I sincerely hope that this is a start of things to come, and that language learning apps of the future follow Richard Cauldwell's example: treating users like informed adults, and offering focused and authentic content. With a few adjustments to the user interface or a bit of time to get orientated, *Cool Speech*

makes a great addition to both the learners' and the teachers' toolkits.

**Carol Begg** is a lecturer at Kanda University of International Studies within the Multiple Languages Department. She designed the elective Language Lab. course for first and second year students. She is also the Co-editor of the journal *PeerSpectives*.

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### CONGRATULATIONS Richard!

PronSIG member Richard Cauldwell was the winner of the 2013 British Council ELT Award for Digital Innovation. You can see him talking about the award-winning *Cool Speech: Hot listening, Cool pronunciation* app at:

<http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/eltons/speech-actionfirsty-group-eltons-2013-winner-award-digital-innovation>

Congratulations to him from all PronSIG members for this well-deserved ELTon! This his second, the first being in 2004 for his CD-ROM pronunciation programme, **Speechinaction**.

# Oxford English Grammar Course 'Pronunciation for grammar' CD-ROM

*Reviewed by Wayne Rimmer*

Michael Swan and Catherine Walter (CD-ROMs by Bill Bowler & Sue Parminter and Rebecca Sewell & Gavin Bloor) (2011)

Oxford: Oxford University Press

Basic ISBN 978 0 19442 078 5

Intermediate ISBN 978 0 19442 082 2

Advanced ISBN 978 0 19431 250 9

Every book seems to come with a CD-ROM these days for further practice or something like that, although I suspect many of the disks remain unopened in their plastic wallets or end up adorning desks as coasters. You'd expect the same with a grammar practice series, however – yes, you can use *however* as a conjunction (Leech & Svartvik, 2002: 399) – the CD-ROMs with the Oxford Grammar Course add something rather different, a pronunciation element. It's not often you see much on pronunciation at all in general learning English titles so the inclusion of a 'Pronunciation for grammar' CD-ROM should make even the most gimmick-weary teacher sit up and take notice.

Actually, the coupling of grammar and pronunciation is not so bold a move. Michael Swan argued in his recent *Speak Out!* article (2012) that the two should be taught together because they coincide. As a basic example, a tone unit is roughly equivalent to a clause. In fact, all the work in discourse intonation is predicated on the Hallidayean principle of how old and new information is packaged into a clause. That grammar and pronunciation tend to be taught separately, grammar getting by far the most attention, is due to a, in my view, misguided sense of pedagogical priorities rather than any fundamental division between the two areas.

Off my hobby horse and back to the review, there are three CD-ROMS at Basic, Intermediate and Advanced levels, which shadow the contents of the corresponding grammar practice books. They run on Windows and Mac and even a techno inept like me found it easy to install and get going on them. You then pick the grammar area you want to work on and are directed to a menu of exercises.

These are not the usual grammar practice activities, more of the same of what is in the book. The focus is on pronunciation not grammatical accuracy, although these are complementary goals. As the introduction to the Intermediate level says (vii), 'The "Pronunciation for grammar" CD-ROM will help you to pronounce structures fluently, with good rhythm and stress.'

The approach of each section is similar across levels so a peek at a representative area in the Intermediate CD-ROM will illustrate. Section 20 is that old bugbear 'Indirect speech' and there are seven exercises practising intonation, sentence stress and rhythm using features of the target language such as backshifting of tenses and changes to adverbials. To reiterate, this is not grammar practice so there are no reminders of the syntactical rules governing this area. Learners will have had to have done the corresponding section in the book first (pp. 281–292). The CD-ROM methodology is the familiar listen and repeat strategy: first you listen to understand the phrase/sentence and highlight the pronunciation pattern; then you record yourself to match the model.

So, in the first exercise in this section you need to decide whether a list of adverbials, *the day after, in that house*, etc. are pronounced at the end of a question or not by hearing the rise or fall tone. This is actually quite tricky without the context of the sentence – that can't be supplied because the word order would give it away – and is excellent ear training. This 'what do you hear?' technique is extended to full sentences in the other exercises with traditional tasks like identify the sentence stress, dictation and count the number of words heard. Remember that the final step is always the learner trying out the pronunciation themselves. (Tut all you like, guardians of good grammar, but the OED has citations for *themselves* from the 14<sup>th</sup> century.)

Back on firmer ground, albeit behind a computer screen, I really liked the review exercise finishing the section, although it's hardly original, where learners build up the pronunciation of a sentence backwards:

*told her  
everything Max had told her  
Susan believed everything Max had told her.*

This step-by-step approach gives learners confidence in producing chunky sentences and it is a perfect example of how grammar and pronunciation come together: first put together a simple verb phrase (note the omission of the auxiliary), then a complex noun phrase (post-modification), finally the whole sentence. This activity has been prepared for carefully, and if learners do all the exercises in this

section, they will feel confident about using and saying the grammar, the two not always being the same.

Don't look for a lot of variety in these task types across the three CD-ROMs, but there doesn't need to be, as the approach is systematic and effective. There is a lot of listening work, the assumption being that listening must be a prelude to production. This position is questionable – as you would know if you had gone to our Glasgow PCE – but in a self-access context, learners will surely benefit from being able to associate grammar patterns with an audio recording which they can listen to as often as they like, rarely the case in real communication. Given the prominence of listening, I'm surprised that there is no promotion of the CD-ROMs as aural practice, 'Listening for grammar', if you like.

A special, very welcome feature of the Advanced CD-ROM is that learners can listen to non-RP speakers: Scottish, American, Spanish, Indian, Chinese, Japanese and Arabic. Whatever your take on ELF, you have to accept that the vast majority of English language encounters will not be with RP speakers. In fact most of them will be with people who have had to learn English as a foreign language. Even if learners want to aspire to an RP model, as presented predominantly here and exclusively in the first two CD-ROMs, they will need to get used to accommodating to unfamiliar patterns of speech. I considered the non-RP speakers selected to actually have very clean accents compared to some of their compatriots – I wish I spoke as clearly as the Indian gentleman – but they will still represent a challenge to learners brought up on a very restricted diet of RP norms.

How could the CD-ROMs be improved other than incorporating a function which predicts the National Lottery numbers for each week? Sometimes I felt a commentary would be handy on some of the pronunciation features. Consider this sentence from Basic Section 22, Spoken English:

He asked her to dance with him, but she didn't want to.

Learners might not notice how the /t/ sounds in *didn't want to* are not equivalent. The /t/ in *to* is full but the two previous are unexploded so they are almost unsaid. The audio model is faithful to authentic speech, for the first two /t/ sounds would only be audible in very careful diction, perhaps teacher talk, but this might pass the learner by. There is the risk, especially at the Basic level, of clogging the exercises up with tips and jargon, but to be measured against this is the benefit of sensitising learners to the

rules which change sounds according to the acoustic environment. I wouldn't want to overplay this point though, as the CD-ROMs clearly do not aim to compete with dedicated pronunciation titles which do get into all the technical stuff.

Users will buy the *Oxford English Grammar Course* because they want to improve their grammar. The content of the books themselves is beyond my brief, but as someone who has used them a lot, I have to add that they are outstanding in coverage, clarity and practice opportunities. Learners would be well advised to get the edition with the CD-ROM because that gives them the chance to activate their grammatical knowledge. After all, there is not much point in learning a construction if no one understands you when you say it. It was an inspired decision to offer a phonological dimension to the grammar series and the success of this should encourage other publishers to break down the artificial barriers which seclude pronunciation from other components of the language learning system.

In spite of his Manchester accent, **Wayne Rimmer** is Coordinator of PronSIG. In spite of his grammatical aberrations, he is co-author of *Cambridge Active Grammar*.

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