

Pronunciation in the Classroom

The Overlooked Essential

TAMARA JONES (ED.)

TESOL Press, 2016

REVIEWED BY ARIZIO SWEETING

Pronunciation in the Classroom: The Overlooked Essential is concrete evidence that the pendulum is finally swinging back towards pronunciation. Packed with practical ideas for the classroom, the book contains 12 chapters by prominent people in the professional and academic pronunciation arena. The overarching message of the book is the incorporation of pronunciation into lesson planning, and it achieves its objective of guiding teachers through different strategies to integrate both segmental and suprasegmental features of English pronunciation into the classroom.

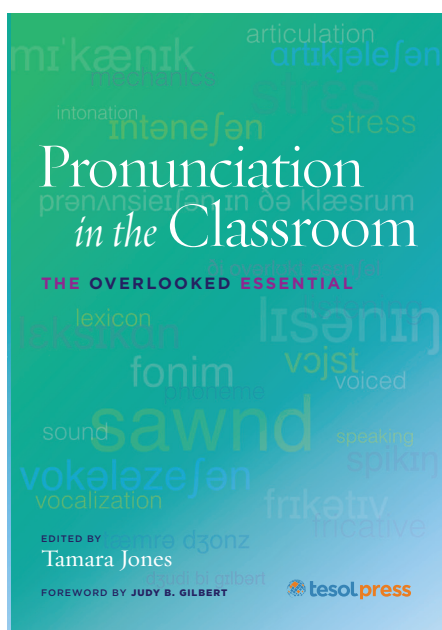
Chapters 1 and 2 deal with the integration of pronunciation with vocabulary. Chapter 1 explains word stress, segmental features (that is, vowel and consonant sounds), word endings, and word partnerships (for instance, phrasal verbs, collocations and idiomatic expressions), and provides a variety of awareness-raising and practical activities for teachers to use when working with syllables, word families, content-based vocabulary, vocabulary in contexts, word forms, homophones, easily confused words, polysyllabic words and phrasal verbs, collocations and idioms. The chapter also draws the readers' attention to two pronunciation-related resources, Taylor and Thompson's Color Vowel™ Chart, and Gilbert's Prosody Pyramid.

In the subsequent chapter, Michael Burri, Amanda Baker and William Acton describe the Haptic Pronunciation Technique, an innovative and easy-to-use method for integrating pronunciation with vocabulary development. For those unfamiliar with the term, haptic means 'movement and touch'. Taking the reader through a concise yet informative introduction to the technique, the writers discuss its benefits for integrating pronunciation with second language vocabulary teaching. Central to the chapter's message is the idea of haptic anchoring, a concept which is illustrated

through the instructions for the Rhythm Fight Club (RFC), a form of muscle memory technique which aids students to place correct stress (e.g., primary and secondary) on words from the Academic Word List by holding a tennis ball in the right hand and enthusiastically punching it forward into a squeeze to mark the stressed syllable. This powerful kinaesthetic technique makes pronunciation learning memorable and fun and is simple to implement on the part of the teacher.

The next four chapters are centred on pronunciation in listening and speaking skills instruction. In Chapter 3, Greta Muller Levis and John Levis raise teachers' awareness of the value of prominence and falling intonation in speaking activities and attempt to reduce teachers' anxiety with an easy-to-follow system which exploits familiar topics for controlled and less-controlled pronunciation practice. Here teachers will also find samples of practice activities which they can readily use in class. Chapter 4, my favourite chapter in the book, talks about prominence within the context of oral presentations. The writers put forward the importance of throwing the onus of pronunciation learning back to the learners. Here, teachers will also find ready-to-use slides for introducing technical pronunciation features such as prominent syllables, last content word, last functional word and explicit contrast to academic learners.

In the same vein, John Murphy argues the case of pronunciation in the teaching of listening skills in Chapter 5. Drawing on contributions from *Phonology for Listening* by Richard Cauldwell (Speech in Action, 2013), Murphy proposes that teachers devote time to teaching prominent and non-prominent syllables alike. Among some practical ideas for the classroom, the writer offers a list of awareness-raising topics for teacher-learner discussions about pronunciation in different teaching contexts. In her turn, Marnie Reed, in Chapter 6, steers the focus of pronunciation teaching towards pragmatics. Here, the writer emphasises the importance of implicational intonation in the teaching of listening, a viewpoint she exemplifies with a practical application involving learners reading text in contrastive sentences such as *My boss said he'd fixed all the problems* and *My boss **said** he'd fixed all the problems*.



Three chapters are dedicated to ways of integrating pronunciation into grammar instruction for different levels. Chapter 7 gives the reader ideas for including stress into the teaching of common grammatical forms such as tenses. Generally, this chapter works well as a reminder of traditional pronunciation techniques, such as choral repetition, body movement and focused listening. Chapter 8 also emphasises stress in grammar teaching; however, it does so by talking about syllable reduction and de-emphasis through listening activities. It also reinforces the use of classic techniques such as handheld mirrors for tongue placement and presents rules for the pronunciation of intermediate-level grammar such as questions, adjectives, adverbs, articles and phrasal verbs. Wayne Rimmer, in Chapter 9, however, alerts the reader to challenges involved in integrating pronunciation into an advanced level curriculum. For the writer, advanced learners require discourse-based pronunciation and shares suggestions for using transcripts from the coursebook for such a purpose. A useful example of this is the writer's recommended steps for using excerpts from the coursebook for shadowing, a learner-centred pronunciation technique which involves the marking up of recording scripts for thought groups and the simultaneous imitation of the recording.

Moving to a perhaps less obvious role for pronunciation, Chapter 10 discusses the importance of bottom-up pronunciation strategies for helping learners with the reading process in English. The writers divide these strategies into lower and mid-level processes and link the former with the use of phonemic awareness and phonics and the latter with practice of multisyllabic words, phrases and sentences. Examples of classroom activities for these processes are recognising minimal pairs, fly swatter games to develop grapheme awareness of phonemes and the use of jazz chants, songs and rhymes to develop awareness of thought groups and collocations. Chapter 11 explores ways of adding pronunciation to the practice of speed reading, reading aloud, mirroring and extensive reading. The writer points out that an integrative approach ensures that students receive pronunciation practice in time-constrained English classes. For this, the writer offers practical ideas for combining pronunciation work with passage-level reading. Adam Brown closes the book with a discussion about the origins of the 'troubled' relationship between pronunciation and spelling in English in Chapter 12. He also shares useful exercises which teachers can use to awaken students to sound-spelling correspondences such as spellings and pronunciations which are permissible and impossible in English, silent letters, homophones and the pronunciation of words borrowed from other languages like French and Greek.

As a pronunciation enthusiast, I have read many good books on the topic, and this book is certainly at the top of my list of favourites. Although it would have benefited from tighter proofreading and possibly a more systematic index, the book is an indispensable

resource for teachers wanting to learn more about pronunciation instruction. It is also of special relevance to teacher trainers, as it provides creative ideas for inserting pronunciation into the content and design of pre- and in-service programmes.

Arizio Sweeting is a teacher and teacher trainer at the Institute of Continuing & TESOL Education at the University of Queensland (ICTE-UQ). He is undertaking his PhD studies on teacher education and pronunciation instruction at the University of the Sunshine Coast.

arizio.sweeting@gmail.com

Twitter: @ariziosweeting

If you would like to write a review for the *English Australia Journal*, please contact the Reviews Editor: reviews@englishaustralia.com.au