

Foreword

Part One of this book is largely the effort of Ray Clark. Part Two is based on the work of Richard Yorkey, a well-known figure in the world of TESOL for many years. Dick died recently, but before his death he discussed the possibility of Pro Lingua publishing his booklet, *American English Pronunciation Practice*, originally developed at the American University of Beirut in 1967, and privately published by Dick in 1991.

In the 1991 printing, Dick stipulated that: “Any part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic or mechanical including photocopying, recording, or by an information storage or retrieval system, with the full permission, personal happiness, and professional satisfaction of the author.”

At the same time, Dick also offered his 1991 version to Pro Lingua. With his death his manuscript lay dormant until Ray Clark, taking Dick at his word, began to use selected pages as handouts in a variety of teacher training workshops and courses. They proved to be useful, and Ray began to develop additional material to accompany the handouts. Little by little, Ray’s material took shape as what is now Part One of this book. It is essentially a simplified introduction to English phonology for practicing teachers who do not need or want a semester-long course. It is correlated with Dick’s Part Two, described above as a pronunciation practice booklet for English language learners.

We are pleased that this revision of Dick’s 1967 booklet will be used by English language learners in the second decade of the twenty-first century. As a creative and tireless contributor to our profession, Dick, too, would be pleased.

Introduction

This book is for the person who is helping a learner of North American English develop and improve their pronunciation. Part One introduces the basics of English phonology with reference to the writing system that represents it. Part Two is a collection of photocopyable handouts that can be used to help English language learners of all ages from the high beginning to advanced proficiency level.

In Part One, Section One is about the part of the phonological system called the segmental phonemes.* Essentially these phonemes represent the individual sounds of the language: the vowels and consonants. Section Two is about the suprasegmental aspects of the phonological system: in essence, stress, intonation, and phrasing. Techniques for teaching the various aspects of the sound system are described at the conclusion of these sections.

Part Two is a collection of photocopyable worksheet handouts. Although the teacher may serve as the model for the various practices, using the CDs will give the learners additional voices to listen to. Learners could use Part Two as a self-study guide by using the CDs.

For the teacher, using the two parts of the book can be a “Teach as you learn, learn as you teach” professional development experience in a face-to-face classroom context with learners, or the book can be used as a self-study course. The latter learning experience would definitely be enhanced by the use of the CDs.

There is a brief appendix that includes problem areas for different learners of English, and a compilation of phonetic alphabets.

* A phoneme is actually a class of sounds that are very similar to each other, but are actually slightly different physically. For example, the phoneme /P/, when it is actually spoken, will have different sound, depending on whether it is the first consonant in a word, in the middle of a word, or at the end of a word. Compare *pal*, *apple*, and *lap*. A phoneme, therefore, is strictly speaking not a physical sound but a collection of similar sounds that share common physical properties that are distinct from those of all other phonemes.

Preface:

The Goal and the Challenge

Human babies are born with the ability to produce a very wide variety of sounds. As they grow and develop, the sounds of their nurturers gradually become their sounds, and as they become speakers of a language, they acquire a sound system that includes only part of the sounds available to the new-born baby. As a second-language learner tries to acquire another, different sound system, one of the challenges they face is that they will tend to use the sound system they already have, and they may develop a very heavy accent. For example, a learner may have an “r” sound in their own language, but it is not the same sound as an English “r.” Consequently, the learner may have a tendency to use their own “r” instead of the English “r” and they are misunderstood, or perhaps just sound “funny.”

Learners of English are faced with many challenges, including the ability to learn new sounds and to produce the sounds of English with reasonable accuracy, and although good pronunciation is obviously important, it is neither necessary nor realistic for learners to be able to produce perfect “native speaker” English. The goal is to be understood by people who speak any one of the world’s Englishes.

In fact, there is no official and “correct native speaker” pronunciation of English. In addition to the existence of several national varieties of English, the “North American” English of this book’s title is also a variety of English. To be sure, Canadians and Americans do not have great difficulty in understanding each other’s pronunciation, but every teacher and learner using this book should keep in mind and remind themselves that there are minor differences in pronunciation from one corner of North America to another and even among individual native speakers.