

## ***Book Review Section:***

### **Minimal Pairs and Beyond:**

#### **Current Pronunciation Textbooks, Part 1**

For many years pronunciation was relegated to secondary importance in language teaching. The communicative approach told us that what was of primary concern was the ability of the student to communicate his/her ideas--grammatical errors and poor pronunciation could be ignored, so long as the listener could understand the message. Textbooks concentrated on functional activities with, at times, little attention given to either grammar or pronunciation.

Recently the world of English language teaching has been changing. Textbooks are being directed at the teaching of grammar communicatively and pronunciation textbooks are reappearing. This issue of the MEXTESOL Journal will include reviews of two that are easily available and the Summer Issue will review two other pronunciation textbooks books.

We hope that these reviews will help you find a book to meet your needs, whether you just want some exercises to include in your regular classes or whether you are looking for a text to be used as the basis of a pronunciation course.

***Ann Baker and Sharon Goldstein. Pronunciation Pairs: An introductory course for students of English. Cambridge University Press, 1990. 152 pp.***

***Pronunciation Pairs*** is an American English adaptation of the British English version, *Ship or Sheep?* (Baker 1977). It is designed for beginning to intermediate level students and includes a Student's Book, Teacher's Manual and a set of four cassettes.

The text is divided into two major sections: vowels and consonants. The Vowel Section includes twenty units covering the major vowel sounds of English, as well as three review lessons. The Consonant Section is made up of forty-six units.

A typical unit includes diagrams of the lips and a cross-section of the mouth showing how the sound practiced in that unit is produced, along with a brief description of its production. Practices begin with isolated words, some illustrated with drawings representing the vocabulary words. This presentation is followed by a dialogue including the targeted sound. After the dialogue, there is a

section dealing with intonation, stress or joining sounds. All of these practices are recorded on the accompanying tape.

After the suprasegmental practice, there is a conversation practice, game or reading. These activities often give the student communicative practice using the sounds and intonation patterns studied. Examples of how the sounds are spelled usually closes out the unit.

In general, the text could be very useful in a course dedicated to improving pronunciation or, specific activities could be taken out and included in any four-skills course to allow students to practice with problem sounds. The book would be especially useful in a low-intermediate to intermediate level course where the grammar and vocabulary presented would not be so difficult and would allow the students to concentrate on correct pronunciation.

The only obvious weakness found in the book is the lack of any systematic explanation and practice of intonation and word stress beyond the brief practices offered in each unit. These aspects need to be dealt with in a more organized and concentrated fashion.

***Gertrude F. Orion. Pronouncing American English: Sounds, stress, and intonation. Heinle & Heinle Publishers, 1988. 320 pp.***

***Pronouncing American English: Sounds, stress, and intonation*** was written for beginning, intermediate or advanced level students and consists of a Student's Book, Answer Key and sixteen accompanying cassettes.

The book is made up of four major parts: *An Overview: Sounds of American English* (3 Units), *Stress and Intonation* (4 Units), *Vowel Sounds* (12 Units) and *Consonants* (16 Units).

The *Overview* includes a very general discussion of the English spelling system, speech mechanisms and a rather confusing unit on long and short sounds.

Part Two is dedicated to stress and intonation and includes both syllable and words stress, a unit dedicated to content and function words and, finally, one dealing briefly with intonation. All of the ideas presented in this part are recycled in each of the following 28 units.

Parts Three and Four deal with the sounds of English, either individually or in pairs of difficult sounds (i.e., /s/ and /z/ or /θ/ or /ð/). Many are related to previously practiced sounds which are in some way related to the targeted vowel or consonant sound (i.e., in the unit on /a/, the vowel is compared to both /æ/ and /ε/. which were practiced in preceding units).

A typical unit in Parts 3 and 4 includes a section explaining how a specific sound is produced, illustrated by a cross-section of the head. These explanations are often so detailed that they are hard to understand or reproduce. Following the *Producing* Section, the sound is contrasted to some already presented sound using isolated words, a listening discrimination section based on isolated words often follows. In the fourth section, the sounds from the second section are contrasted using minimal sentences, "rejoinders," (Bowen 1972) illustrated through pictures or with spaces so students can illustrate them on their own. All of these sections are on the tape.

Each unit includes a taped *Stress and Intonation* section in which the student reviews the ideas presented in Part Two of the book as they practice the sounds presented in the unit. After this section, there is a taped dialogue and students are asked to mark stress and intonation and to practice it in pairs. All units wind up with a Home Assignment designed so students can review the ideas presented in class at home.

One of the strong points of the textbook is the inclusion of stress and intonation practice in every unit, reinforcing the theory presented at the beginning of the text. The tapes are also helpful, especially for the non-native teacher. However, since there are a total of sixteen tapes, the price is quite out of reach for an average classroom teacher or interested student.

The book does have some theoretical flaws that can confuse the student. The unit on *Long and short sounds* is not clearly presented and not followed up adequately either. Often the speakers on the tapes do not quite understand the purpose of the practice and occasionally make errors in stress or exaggerate reductions. Also, stressed syllables in words of more than one syllable are written in capital letters. This is often confusing since the students are attracted to these syllables in a sentence, even though a word written in lower case may be marked as having the sentence stress. By the way, this sentence stress is marked with an accent mark over the stressed word, but this accent mark is placed in the middle of the word, often over a consonant, which is distracting to Spanish speakers.

|MaRIE and Paúl| |went to the muSÉum | YESTérday| .

| I'm not IN térested in GOing |.

| MáRIE | have you séen | the PAINTings by PiCASSo ?| (p. 34)

Another misleading trait is the following decision: "doubled letters [are] syllabized phonetically and stress in such words is indicated as in 'aNNOY' and 'suPPOSE.'" (p. xx) Therefore, on page 25, students see the word *immediately* divided into syllables as i-MME-di-ate-ly. If this were to carry over to a student's writing, the result would be very different from accepted word division: *im-me'di-ate-ly*.<sup>3</sup>

In general, this text has more weaknesses than it does strengths. A future revised edition could improve the book and an addition of more communicative practices would be welcome.

--JoAnn Miller

### Bibliography

Baker, Ann. 1977. *Ship or Sheep? Introducing English Pronunciation*. Cambridge University Press. 229 pp.

Bowen, J. Donald. 1972. "Contextualizing Pronunciation Practice in the ESOL Classroom." *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 1, March. pp. 83-94.

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<sup>3</sup>Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language. Warner Books Edition, 1971.