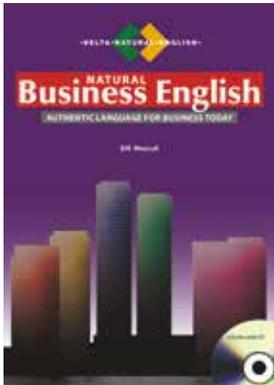


## Natural Business English

Bill Mascull

Delta Publishing 2013

See page 91 for details



Natural is a funny word, isn't it? What a recipe book will call *plain yoghurt* will be called *natural yoghurt* on the packaging; the brand's marketing people will have seen to that. Some years ago OUP put out an underrated coursebook series called *Natural English*, which begs the question: was everything else *unnatural English*? What does *natural* mean in a title called *Natural Business English*? Does it mean *authentic*, as the subtitle – *Authentic language for business today* – suggests? Seemingly not, at least not in the sense of the texts it contains being drawn from the world outside ELT (or BELT – Business English Language Teaching). Indeed, there are few texts, since most of the language is delivered at the sentence level, and they are clearly written to provide a nesting place for the new lexis, not that there is anything wrong with specifically written texts. Would anyone complain about footwear being specifically designed for skiing, football, trekking, snorkelling or dancing? *Natural* here seems not to denote much; what this really is is a 120-page book of lexical input for 20 sectors in the world on Business English. And it's quite impressive.

The author promises and delivers some 800 words, collocations and multi-word units that occur in the professional domain. They're organised into 20 four-page units, with 10 or 11 steps or exercises, three of which are linked with the included

audio CD. After every four units there is a two-page Review spread that is set out rather like a test, which of course you mark yourself, as the Answer Key is at the back of the book, along with the Audio Scripts and a seven-page Glossary that gives you some grammatical information but no phonological guidance or unit references. It still comes across as being very user-friendly. But who is the user? While it's aimed primarily at the self-study market, it could be used in small doses in class. No student–student interaction is envisaged, though there are small hints for any lingering teacher at the bottom of every second page, suggesting a research or homework task. Level? They say B2/C1, and certainly any BEC candidates who sprinkled their output with this lexis would favourably impress examiners at Vantage and Higher level. Having said that, I could see this material being used successfully by many B1 or C2 learners. The fact that there is no grammar as such aids this elasticity.

There is another issue with the nature (ha!) of the end-user. Will learners already working in Finance be interested in the unit on Research and Development? Will those in Marketing want to do the one on Manufacturing? Who would want to use the whole book? Probably pre-service learners. Other than that, I can see it coming in handy as something that makes a guest appearance on a wide range of BELT courses. And a lot of this lexis has very wide coverage: *ripped off*, *herded like cattle*, *(to) exceed expectations*, *(to) go out of their way to help*, and the delightfully supple *delighted* (all on page 31), because we are all customers, clients, consumers, aren't we? Just ask our governments.

Among the selling points are, as already mentioned, how easy it is to use, and the fact that you could use the units in any order, or simply, like most vocabulary books, pick the ones that interest you. It is very strong on meaning, it tackles collocation head-on, it includes a brave range of idiomatic language (some of it even touching on the very tricky area

of newspaper headlines), sporting metaphors and a great section on courtship metaphors that talks about mergers and de-mergers. It contextualises new language well, and doesn't give the impression of overload, surely one of the major potential pitfalls of a book of this nature. There is typically one closed exercise in which the learner uses, chooses or manipulates the input. Apart from the Review spreads, the further exposure and practice that the learner will need to begin to acquire the new language will have to come from outside; here, perhaps, is the role of the teacher lying in wait. There is a fair variety of exercise types – the danger in a book like this is to be far too uniform. And I was delighted to see that it doesn't shy away from some of the more critical ways we talk about people we have to deal with at work. ELT publishers tend to present us with a sweetie-sweetie world that puts me in mind of the Paradise side of a Heaven and Hell / Last Judgement Renaissance diptych. There are nice little touches here and there; study tips, such as the note (page 18) about what happens to phrasal verbs when they convert into nouns, and notes on UK/US usage and spelling. There is a generous amount of attention given to word-formation.

It's an attractive artefact. There are no colour photos, to be sure, just one illustration per unit, but photos would serve no purpose here. The pages breathe; they look less dense than some of the vocabulary books that the prolific Mr Mascull has written for CUP. However, the drawing of skyscrapers on the front cover harkens back to BELT coursebooks of the late 80s/early 90s, and the two large central ones bear an uncanny and unhappy resemblance to the Twin Towers. More could have been asked of Delta's graphic design department in this area, I feel.

The meaning of new words is the heart of this material, and it's an area that is usually very well-handled. Yet it can be tough trying to find new ways to get a closed one-item answer; page 64 asks us what word is defined by 'An

organisation to protect people who work in transport', the correct answer being *union*. Or 'This has to look right in relation to the things on sale' (answer: *store design*). Also on page 32: 'Store owners want to increase figures for this by making their stores as attractive as possible' (answer: *footfall*, a term I didn't know in this particular meaning). It's never easy to know how much detail to go into in these 20 topic areas, or how much transient, trendy language to include. It can become daunting, or it can become too lightweight, but for the most part I think this book gets it just right.

The 48 audio tracks are scripted and delivered with the speed and clarity you'd expect in a B2 examination. Some of the decontracted forms jar, at least for a native speaker, and some of the definitions ("an early pioneer", "back to the drawing board to start again") slip into tautology. 90% of the voices were RP. Only four voices were (intended to be) American, and there was one where a Pom tries in vain to sound Australian. Aren't there thousands of out-of-work Aussie actors in the UK any more? The University of Hereford is mentioned no fewer than four times; no other university is. A case of product placement? It would be, if it existed. At times, and this is by no means limited to this book, you can get all the listening answers right without even getting the CD out of its pocket. Unit 8 Exercise 5 is an example of this. Unit 14 Exercise 6 asks us to put the six near-synonyms of *(to) fire someone* into six different sentences and then listen to check their answers, but in reality any of the expressions (*give someone the boot, let someone go, throw someone out*) could go with any of the answers. People have a choice when they talk. The audio texts are simply there to vocalise or explain the lexis, almost like a talking dictionary, so surely you shouldn't criticise an almond tree for not giving you hazelnuts. However, given the fact that there's no pronunciation as such in this package, I wonder whether some or even all of the CD could simply have been re-cast as a support

for pron, especially important in the multi-word units, expressions and idioms. Isn't knowing how a word sounds a key part of being able to use it?

But perhaps there is another, hidden, end-user for this book. I mentioned before that *footfall*, in terms of studying customer behaviour, was new to me, ditto *stick to your knitting* and *black swans*. I've also learned the cute little word *inshoring*. I wonder how many people teaching BELT out there really know which is which when they hear about *bull market* and *bear market*. Come on, let's be honest! And how about *spot rates, equity* and *leverage*? Here's our chance, oops, I mean *your* chance.

### Brian Brennan

**Brian Brennan** is the Language Training Manager at International House Barcelona Company Training.

## Get on Stage!

Herbert Puchta, Günter Gerngross  
and Matthew Devitt  
Helbling Languages 2012  
See page 91 for details



With so much authentic and ELT specific material available for free online, you might think that photocopiable resource books had had their day. This release from Helbling Languages, however, demonstrates that well-designed, original and creative materials are still very relevant.

Pitched at teens and young adults, *Get on Stage!* is both a collection of drama-based classroom materials and a teacher training resource. For the students, the main body of the book is divided into four parts. There are ten short sketches, three medium-length sketches, five medium-length plays based on traditional stories, and three teenage dramas. A quick-reference guide in the back of the book gives the CEF level (between A2 and B2), language focus, number of roles and performance length. Whether you are looking for something light and humorous for a small class on a rainy afternoon, or a semester-long serious drama project, you will probably find something to suit. If that's not enough, almost all of the plays and sketches are on either the CD or DVD, in pockets inside the back cover. There is also a photocopiable worksheet for each play, focusing mainly on vocabulary and grammar, and a set of answer keys.

These resources alone are probably enough to make the book worth buying. However, what I think really

sets it apart is the instructional DVD. Presented by co-author Matthew Devitt and his young cast, it leads the teacher through the basics of stage acting and direction. As a teacher who wants to start putting on plays with his students, but has no experience or background in drama, I found it incredibly useful. Devitt has an extensive CV as both an actor and a director (including an Olivier Award nomination!), and engagingly demonstrates such concepts as staging and blocking, voice projection and learning lines. The DVD is pitched to the teacher rather than the student, although some sections may be helpful to show in class. The information presented on the DVD can also be found in a more succinct and organised form in the introduction of the book, along with a number of shorter warm-up activities.

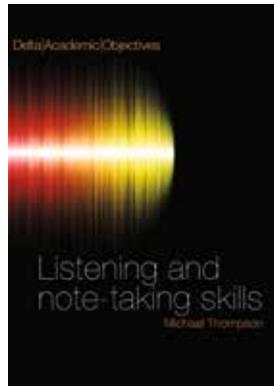
An enterprising teacher may be able to put together a similar collection of materials from *YouTube* videos and online scripts, but I really think Helbling have published such a well-crafted and thorough collection that there is no need. I have already had very positive student feedback from the first couple of sketches I tried out in class, and I'm looking forward to testing more of the ideas in the book in future.

### Darren Elliott

**Darren Elliott** has been teaching and training teachers in Japan and the UK since 1999. He has published material on teacher development, technology and language education, and learner autonomy. He maintains a blog at [www.livesofteachers.com](http://www.livesofteachers.com).

## Listening and Note-taking Skills

Michael Thompson  
Delta Publishing 2013  
See page 91 for details



This material falls within Delta's *Academic Objectives* series, which also includes reading and writing skills. The current volume's aim is stated simply: to prepare students for academic listening.

The material is intended to be used either for self-study or in a teacher-led context. The Student's Book contains CDs with all the listening passages. The Teacher's Book includes explanatory notes, plenty of teaching ideas, a number of extra photocopiable activities, the answer key and the whole of the Academic Word list (developed by Averil Coxhead at the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, based on data from several disciplines according to range and frequency).

There are six main units in all: Higher Education, Rock 'n' Roll Inc, Whose law is it?, Death by universe, Happiness is ... and Brand new. The first is self-explanatory: the others roughly approximate to the disciplines of business, law, marketing, psychology and social studies, and general science. The very clear Contents page shows how each unit is further sub-divided into sections: topic focus, language focus, listening for production, listening for meaning and a final extension section. The progression through each unit is easy to follow, from topic and vocabulary warm-up, listening to

short extracts for specific points, then finally to more extensive listening practice. Throughout each unit are a number of shaded boxes: green for "going further" (i.e. a short extra task if time and/or inclination allow) and blue indicating an information box with more extended explanations, for instance on note-taking, summarising, the AWL, the structure of talks, and so on. In addition, there are two consolidation sections, each reviewing the work done after a block of three units. The four appendices in the Student's Book provide: 1 the pairwork data for the relevant tasks; 2 exercises related to the AWL; 3 transcripts for the audio recordings and 4 the answer key.

Each unit is self-contained and can be selected for study according to preference and interest. There is a wide range of activity types throughout. To give just a flavour, these include vocabulary brainstorming; sentence completion; recognising given lexical items in a talk; notes completion; matching exercises; reordering sentences; choosing appropriate headings for sections of text; rewriting. Quite a lot of this practice is intended to be done in pairs, and occasionally in small groups.

A good deal of the content and related activities are of direct relevance to the more specific issues associated with listening in an academic context. Most obviously, much of the vocabulary work is based on the Academic Word List, and there are a number of useful spin-off exercises to do with prefixes, suffixes and other aspects of morphology and 'word families' (*define–definition; territory–territorial; depend–dependable*, and so on). To take a few other examples from across the coursebook, we can find work on dealing with hearing/pronouncing numbers; recognising linking words in the development of a speaker's argument; using common abbreviations in note-taking; recognising speech signals (of importance, or topic switch for instance); structuring summaries. It is positive to see the inclusion of an exercise (Unit 1) on mis-hearing words

and phrases, a common problem in note-taking, but one that does not often feature in comparable materials.

A further positive feature of the material is the explicit attention to language work – a reminder, if needed, that language practice should have a central role in teaching English for academic purposes, alongside the discipline focus on such areas as genre, critical thinking and academic literacy. So as well as the extension vocabulary work already mentioned, we find exercises on such areas as collocations, verb and adjective choice, function words and the use of stress in English speech. That said, in the table of contents it is a little unclear why the sub-heading of 'language focus' mainly contains items that would more usually be recognised as study skills and their sub-skills (aspects of note-taking; organising signals), whereas language work is more likely to appear under the sub-heading of listening for meaning (vocabulary, collocations, word families, function words).

As far as the intended audience is concerned, the author makes it clear in terms of language proficiency that the material is designed for learners of English at the B2 and C1 levels of the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference), i.e. independent (B2) or proficient (C1) users. The introduction to the Student's Book sets this out in more detail. What is, however, surprising is that there is no indication in either the Student's or Teacher's Book of the academic level at which the material is pitched. There is obviously a great difference in terms of knowledge and experience of study between students at pre-undergraduate level on a foundation programme and those studying at postgraduate level for a Master's degree or a PhD. A potential user can only surmise from the nature of the material that it would be most relevant in the earlier stages of academic study, which is not to say that much of the language work would not be useful for higher-grade students. There is an oblique hint in a short video clip of the author

talking about the material on the Delta website, where he says it is for students who do not necessarily wish to study in an English-speaking country, but who do want to learn something more academic than 'general English'. This reviewer assumes that it would, therefore, also be relevant for older school students as well as those already at university.

The listening material itself (referred to as 'the Listeners') covers short extracts for listening to specific points of content or language, to longer stretches lasting several minutes. There are conversations, interviews and whole talks. There is a range of accents including English, Irish, North American (US and Canada), Australian and also proficient non-native English. There is a slight tendency towards North American, as there is in the content of some of the units: Unit 1 on Higher Education, for example, concerns the American university system. (The author himself is an American working in Italy.) It is surprising that the sources for the listening material are not stated, so one can only make the assumption that they were specially written and recorded for this book. They do sound rather scripted and fluent, and not really the kind of speech that would be found in an academic lecture, such as hesitation, use of redundancy and repetition.

This is an attractive-looking set of materials with a variety of content and tasks. It is strong in its attention to vocabulary development. It could fairly be described as value-added general English rather than EAP, and is certainly at the more generalist wide-angle end of the spectrum. Those seeking practice of more direct relevance to university-level students, particularly in an English-speaking environment, would more likely turn to one of the several coursebooks that use authentic lecture material, such as Campbell and Smith (2009), Lynch (2004), Sarosy and Sherak (2006). However, *Listening and Note-taking Skills* would certainly be useful for learners wishing to develop their language proficiency towards more formal study and professional environments.

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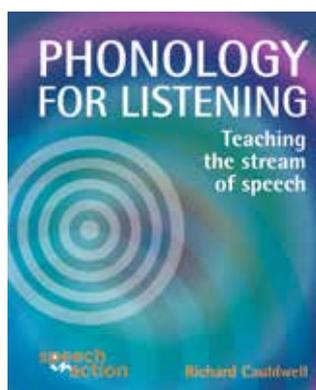
## Jo McDonough

**Jo McDonough** was senior lecturer in ELT at the University of Essex and Director of the EFL Unit. Her main interests are in EAP and teacher research. She has been a long-standing member of BALEAP and was an inspector for Accreditation UK.

# Background books

## Phonology for Listening

Richard Cauldwell  
*Speech in Action* 2013  
 See page 91 for details



From the title, you will probably ask yourself if this is a book about pronunciation or about listening. The answer is the latter but, as the book explains, understanding and preparing learners for the challenge of listening involves a thorough awareness of what English sounds like. Richard Cauldwell is one of a small number of professionals, Sheila Thorn (see her article in MET 19/2) and especially John Field (e.g. 2008) are others, who are exposing the deficiencies of current methodologies for teaching listening and proposing an approach which is based on a much sounder (literally) analysis of what listening actually involves.

The agenda for the book is put succinctly in the Introduction: "... to teach listening more effectively we need to focus on the realities of spontaneous speech." The problem for many learners, and not just low-level ones, is that what they hear doesn't correspond to the words and structures they have learned. If they saw the text written down, they would cope, but the speech comes to them all in a rush with severe phonological modifications. There is an aural equivalent of punctuation, basically rhythm, but speech is fleeting and

the signals none too obvious for the untrained ear. Pretending that natural speech is just classroom English speeded up does nothing to help the bemused listener.

Aimed primarily at teachers, *Phonology for Listening* patiently and coherently goes through the reasons why extracting meaning from speech is so elusive, and it presents a framework for helping learners with listening. There are 20 chapters, divided into four parts, with all the spoken examples available as downloadable soundfiles from the Speech in Action website. Parts 1 and 2 focus on the linguistic factors which characterise the spoken language and frequently obscure meaning. Part 3 has a sociolinguistic orientation, examining perceptions of speech and how this impacts on listening. Part 4 turns the theory into classroom activities, a blend of the traditional and the exciting developments made available by technology.

It is necessary to go into some detail about the nature of the sound stream and so Parts 1 and 2 introduce a fair amount of terminology. If you are a teacher brought up on the "listening is a passive skill" spiel, you might get impatient. Wouldn't a few listening for gist and detail tasks do the job? Enough practice and they'll get the hang of it, won't they? If you're in this club, and it's a big one, read on because you're about to get a rude reality shock. What comes out of our mouths is effectively mutilated by a mixture of phonotactics, socio-pragmatic considerations and the pressures of real-time communication. The result can be almost unrecognisable.

There is a beautiful example on pages 113–114 from a university seminar. The utterance from the lecturer runs: "This is one I'm going to be looking at in slightly more detail in fact". It

looks innocuous written down, but when Richard Cauldwell played the soundfile at an IATEFL PronSIG event in London last year, the shock from the audience was palpable. What on earth is he saying? The utterance is delivered at such speed, an incredible 9.3 syllables per second – more than double the average rate (p. 96) – that its soundshape is effectively distorted into a blur. Looking more closely, it's very difficult to listen that closely, there are 16 words but only two syllables, ONE and the DE in *detail*, are stressed, the rest of the sounds are squeezed together using all the tricks of connected speech and beyond. For example, the /k/ in *looking* is deleted and the word becomes a monosyllable, linked to the following word at with a /j/ sound. This particular utterance is extreme, but the phenomenon itself is very typical and learners who cannot perform the audio gymnastics necessary to decode the sound stream will be lost.

If the listening task were not hard enough, a further factor to throw into the mix is the extreme diversity of English as spoken globally by so many people in so many different contexts. Put crudely, people saying the same thing sound different according to their origins and individual intentions. Part 3 examines the complications arising from this, with plentiful examples of regional and international Englishes. For me, the most interesting part of this discussion is Chapter 15, Emotion in speech. There is a tradition in pronunciation teaching (coursebooks are full of it) of associating certain intonation patterns with speech acts and emotional states: high fall means anger, a rise tentativeness, etc. The message is that you should use pattern x to sound like someone feeling y. The sound file examples demonstrate this causal relationship to be misleading. First, intonation is just one of a range of prosodic

features to colour an utterance (others include loudness, key and rhythm). Second, prosodic choices only make sense in the context of an individual's departure from their normal vocal settings, attuned to the situation at hand. Sadly, the majority of bite-sized intonation sections in published material are way off the mark and a complete distraction from the learning process.

So what do we teach, then? Part 4 addresses this in a thought-provoking rather than didactic way. We do need to jettison much of the traditional listening comprehension exercises, which test more than they teach. There has to be more exposure to authentic spoken language and analysis, using the tools in the book, of what actually happens in a sound stream. A range of activities is demonstrated, from familiar pronunciation activities, the aim being to sensitise learners to the possibilities available in the acoustic shape of an utterance, to high-tech solutions, including the author's award-winning application *Cool Speech* (Cauldwell, 2011). The unifying feature is work on much smaller units of text, perhaps just a few words, than is usual in the typical listening classroom. Quality not quantity of listening seems the maxim.

*Phonology for Listening* is the most important ELT book I have read this year, and I read a lot of books. Such is the persistence of classroom myths like "don't worry about getting every word", that much of the content will make uncomfortable reading. Given that the coursebook is the main driver of teaching programmes, what intrigues me is whether publishers will incorporate this material into new products. It would be a brave move in a market which is notoriously conservative, but it is one that is necessary to get results. As things stand, learners become good listeners more as a matter of chance than through targeted instruction, a situation which is very damaging to our professional integrity.

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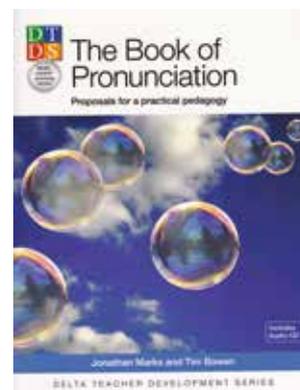
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## Wayne Rimmer

**Wayne Rimmer** is author of *Cambridge Active Grammar*, a practice grammar for teenagers.

## The Book of Pronunciation: Proposals for a practical pedagogy

Jonathan Marks and Tim Bowen  
Delta Publishing 2012  
See page 91 for details



My dentist is Swedish. While that sounds like a 1950s language-learning paradigm, with its nice symmetrical rhythm, it just happens to be true. Now, while Dr Stefan is fiddling around in my mouth he likes to watch TV, Swedish TV. Living in Barcelona, he doesn't get much of it. Silly me, I thought that large screen he swivelled round next to my head would be showing infrared images of my mouth. But no, last time it was a kind of team game with a live blond audience where Swedish singers had to continue popular songs, and most of the songs were in English. You know how it is when one of your senses shuts down; the others take up the slack. So with my eyes closed against the scraping and drilling, I was listening closely to those Swedish singers, and my God they were good; that is to say, their English sounds were absolutely flawless. There was no way I could have spotted them as non-native speakers of English (or non-native singers). Is it because they're singers, and have a good ear (now *there's* a tantalising expression), or because they are Swedes, and have exposure to un-dubbed film and TV? Or do Swedes acquire such good English sounds for some other reason? Why do some people get it when it comes to pronouncing English, and so many of my students don't?

Jonathan Marks and Tim Bowen have produced one of the most thorough books yet to address this

topic. Its 174 pages cover the usual suspects in any practical look at the phonological system of the language (no less important than the grammatical or lexical systems, when all's said and done): Sounds, Sounds and spelling, Word stress, Connected speech, and Stress, rhythm and intonation. What sets it apart from other published material, forgetting for the moment the excellent integrated pronunciation work that we get in many general English coursebooks such as *New English File* (Business English titles unwisely tend to ignore pronunciation), is the step-by-step procedure on each page, and each page is a kind of pronunciation lesson, so what we get is: Proposal, Preparation, Procedure, Prolongation. These are thoughtfully-designed classroom tasks to assist less experienced teachers in helping their students to build up a critical mass of phonological awareness and confidence. And this really is where the heart of this book lies. I wish I'd had it when I started out. Having said that, any teacher worth their salt is going to want more, if only to be one step ahead of their learners, so I was surprised not to see terms like *onset*, *head*, *pre-head*, or *nucleus* getting a mention anywhere. These were the nuts and bolts terms I learnt when doing the Diploma, from J D O'Connor's *Better English pronunciation* (CUP 1981), but *The Book of Pronunciation* only refers to "tonic prominences". That term was unknown to a friend who has just done the DELTA, where they simply used "main stress" and "secondary stress". It's a pity that the taxonomy isn't more consistent. Surely teachers, as they develop greater awareness of pronunciation, need to be conversant with key words for tools? A glossary of phonological terms would have made a good starter for an index; sadly, another omission.

The introductory pages (Part A) give us a kind of FAQ section where eminently sensible answers are given to questions and objections such as: *Learners find pronunciation work boring*, *There's no time for pronunciation*, *Can I teach*

*pronunciation even if I'm not a native teacher myself?*, *Is there such a thing as a pronunciation syllabus?* One is a reasoned discussion about varieties of English, including the question of whether learners should aim for a rhotic or non-rhotic pronunciation (and if you don't know what this means, you definitely need this book), so I was a little surprised to read on page 37 that "The speakers on the recordings are native speakers of English whose pronunciation is typical of young people from the south of England". This seems to me to be too small a sample.

I have heard it argued that a commonly-used phonemic chart only shows the sounds that RP speakers have, something that ought to be mentioned in any book about pronunciation, though I see that Macmillan reps are now giving out versions of it that have American sounds on the other side. And to be fair, there is a short section on *exotic* (their word, my italics) phonemes in Part C, though it lacks for example that /wh/ sound that most Scots and some Americans (a phoneme that would blow out a nearby candle) have, the trilled /r/ and /ch/ that give Scots such a head-start in Spanish and Italian, and the long /ae:/ that Aussies and Kiwis have in words like *art*, the grimacing sound that in isolation reminds you of an exclamation of sharp pain.

One of the things I really like about this book is that it fills what was a gaping gap between the very classroom-focused/student-friendly *English Pronunciation in Use* (CUP 2003) by Mark Hancock, and Adrian Underhill's more discovery-based/teacher-friendly *Sound Foundations* (Macmillan 2005). In Part A, there is a wealth of information ("There are 26 letters available for the 44 phonemes" or "... the spelling of many words represents the way they were pronounced centuries ago, and they have since changed beyond recognition"), and awareness-raising for the teacher, and this part, if read in detail, also helps you find your way around the famous pron chart I mentioned: e.g. "... the

fourth and fifth lines show the plosives, fricatives and affricatives in pairs, voiceless and voiced ...".

There are times when teachers sort of throw in the towel and play along with learners' impressions that the sound system of English is a complete lottery. That's why I was thrilled to see a section on pages 35–36 called Rules of Thumb (what a handy expression that is for ELT!), but it limits itself to word stress, while rules for pronouncing – or not – the *-ed* and *-ied* endings on past simple regular verbs are begging to be included in a section with this name, as is the *i* + consonant + *e* for transforming the first vowel into a diphthong (or sometimes a long vowel): e.g. *pal*–*pale*, *sit*–*site*, *mad*–*made*. I have read, and it is more or less reproduced here, that 75% of English words "are reliably predictable in accordance with general principles", but "... most of the unpredictable ones are to be found among the most frequent words...".

Let's turn back to the audio recordings for a moment. Page 27 tells us that "Learners can use them to practise *listening* for details of pronunciation and/or as a model to approximate towards in their *own* pronunciation" (italics in the original). Leaving aside my earlier objection that the range of accents was too restricted, and the fact that the recordings are perfect for the tasks set, this still seems set for a head-on collision with the thinking behind *Be Understood!*: *a pronunciation resource for every classroom* (Smolder CUP 2012), whose introduction states: "It is ... unhelpful for students of ELF to learn features of English pronunciation that are specific to native English accents and that do not affect international intelligibility." Get into groups and don't start tweeting until you hear the whistle.

One final thought: recently I attended an annual event that would allow me to assess oral exams for Cambridge Proficiency (CPE) for another year, subject to my marks being within the acceptable parameters defined by the senior examiners. The final dummy candidates we were shown

included a young Swiss woman whose pronunciation sounded to my trained ear virtually identical to that of the native speakers of British English whose voices make up half of the soundtrack of our teachers' room. In my years of teaching I've seldom had CPE students who sounded quite as *English* as this candidate did. Indeed, she sounded just like the southern English female voices of most of the co-examiners in the room. Yet her Official Mark was a mere 3.5 out of 5. What was the candidate's sin? I can only imagine that they pulled her down for her occasional glottal stops (not something that *The Book of Pronunciation* would proscribe, calling it "... a frequent and easily audible feature of English pronunciation"). I sometimes wonder if HM the Queen would manage to get a four. Axe to grind? No, not me; I mention this because there is still something up in the air about pronunciation. We still struggle to know what is good enough. If our flagship examinations will not deign to award more than a C grade to learners whose English sounds are 100% free of ambiguity, and who use a wide pitch range, and who have fully mastered stress-timing, then what is to be expected of the other 99% of our learners? Teach them to sing in Stockholm, maybe.

### Brian Brennan

**Brian Brennan** is the Language Training Manager at International House Barcelona Company Training.

## Technology Enhanced Language Learning

Aisha Walker and Goodith White  
Oxford University Press 2013  
See page 91 for details



This new volume in the *Oxford Handbooks for Language Teachers* series deals with a really crucial topic for today's language teachers. It contains a wealth of background to teaching, academic references to theories of learning, some useful examples of technology in action, all of which will be helpful for teachers early in their career.

The level however is uneven – a little like a student textbook that contains, to use a CEFR analogy, both A1/A2 language and B2/C1 language at the same time.

There is a lot of introductory material on the theories of teaching and learning (e.g. defining the difference between formative and summative testing) which in themselves have little to do with the implementation of technology but are useful primers for inexperienced teachers.

At the same time, there is a lot of dense academic jargon and references to theories that would be of limited use to most practising teachers.

There are also large gaps in the authors' coverage of technology in education – almost no coverage of mobile technology for example – and so the book can appear a little dated.

The stated aim of the book is to “bring together theory and practice with

regard to using technology”, and the authors believe that teachers need “an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings involved in using technology”.

The two authors are primarily academics, one specialising in the theory of ICT in education, one a researcher into listening and distance education. It is apparent that the book has a more academic intent – there is nothing untoward about that, but the content leans more to theory than to practice.

Within the first two pages we read sentences such as “The concept of normalisation is central to Bax's argument with regard to ‘integrated CALL’ and is revisited in Bax (2011)” (p.2) and later “a change in participants may require a new kind of mediational tool” (p.3).

The reader's immediate reaction is: Who is Bax? What is normalisation? What is a mediational tool? None of this is explained. The style begs the eternal question: Why can't academics write in English? There is a glossary that defines “mediational tool” as “physical or cognitive artefacts that people use to achieve their goals within an activity system”. That would be tools, then. Using technology can be a tool for teachers – why not just say that?

One is left with the impression that most of the teachers of English around the world (the 12 million in state education rather than the circa 200,000 native speakers in language schools) might put the book down after browsing these initial pages, as it demonstrates a lack of connection to the real world of teaching (or the world of real teaching).

To be fair, the book also contains a wide range of “practical tasks to illustrate the use of technology”. On the whole, these reflective tasks are helpful and interesting.

The book addresses its issues on a skill-by-skill basis, with chapters on Reading, Listening, Assessment, EAP,