

# **Phonology for Listening**

## **Teaching the stream of speech**

**RICHARD CAULDWELL**

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**REVIEWED BY ARIZIO SWEETING**

Richard Cauldwell's award-winning *Phonology for Listening* sheds light on the intricate relationship between listening and pronunciation. Using the analogy of a window, Cauldwell frames the work of the book around the practice of representing unruly prosodic features (e.g., rhythm and intonation) in written form. This framework is called the 'window on speech', a descriptive system in which teachers use orthographic and symbolic transcriptions to help learners decode the 'mushiness' of sounds in the stream of speech. Whilst the book will interest teachers with an enthusiasm for pronunciation, its main audience is the listening skills teacher. From the start of the book, Cauldwell emphasises that listening is a poorly learned skill and argues that learners require more than a series of listening comprehension questions for successful listening practice; they require help with coping with speech dynamics if they are to make sense of familiar words when they hear them in the stream of speech.

The book contains four main parts, each of which is subdivided into five chapters. In Part 1, teachers are introduced to the rationale behind the framework of the 'window on speech'. In Part 2, a description of spontaneous speech is provided. Part 3 deals with the concepts of accents, identity and emotion in speech, and Part 4 covers the teaching of listening. An added bonus of the book is the inclusion of a summary, references for further reading and language awareness activities at the end of each chapter. There is also a glossary of terms and four appendices, the latter providing a comparison of careful speech with spontaneous speech, notes on how to calculate the speed of speech, a list of examples of word clusters, and guidelines on how to create an 'acoustic blur' (where sounds merge, disappear or change in the stream of

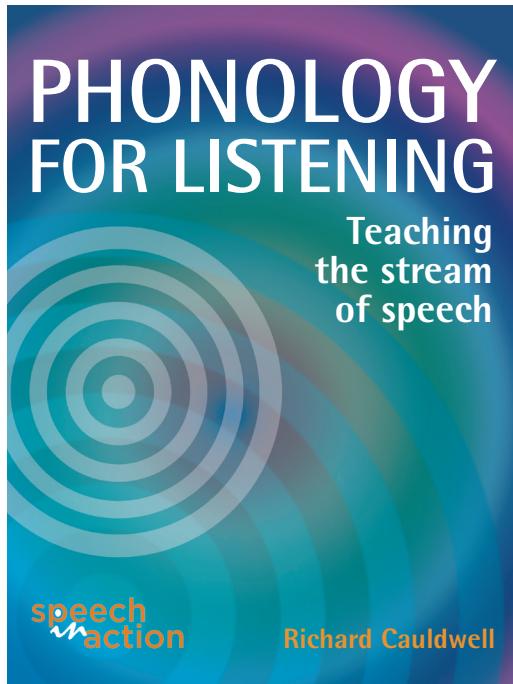
speech). Another positive feature of the book is its section on symbols and notation, essential information for smooth navigation of the book's content.

Part 1 sets the theoretical basis of the 'window on speech' and introduces teachers to the main differences between the careful speech model and the spontaneous speech model. Cauldwell also brings teachers' attention to the fact that speech is dependent on the speaker's choice. For instance, using five-column tables, the author compares

various samples of spoken discourse to show how prominent and non-prominent syllables behave in real speech as opposed to the emulation model. For me, the most interesting point made here is the author's argument against the assumption that non-prominent syllables are less important than prominent ones. For Cauldwell, non-prominent syllables, or syllables which receive less emphasis from the speaker at the time of speaking, should be prioritised in the listening classroom. Learners need to be made aware of the sound changes that these syllables undergo in fast speech. The author calls this process 'squeeze zones'. One example of these zones is the change in sound we get when we pronounce the word

association in a sentence like '*It was DONE in association with the SPORT council*' (with secondary and primary stresses highlighted in block letter, respectively). In this sentence, we might hear '*so-say-shun*' or '*show-shay-shun*' instead of the dictionary model '*a-SO-ci-A-tion*', as the part of the sentence containing this word is squeezed and reshaped to accommodate the speed of speech.

In Part 2, Cauldwell continues on the topic of spontaneous speech by paying attention to various details of 'the sound substance of speech'. Some of these are the drafting phenomena (e.g., pauses, fillers, repetitions, vague language and softeners). Other speech aspects are the speed of speech and soundshapes (the various acoustic forms which words can take). Perhaps the most controversial aspect of this section concerns Cauldwell's views on stress-timing. For Cauldwell, the general notion that speech occurs at equal intervals is a useful assumption for the field of pronunciation



instruction. For listening, however, the author claims that such a belief doesn't stand up to research evidence.

The five chapters in Part 3 discuss the role of accent, identity and emotion in speech. While acknowledging the use of standard accents such as Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GenAm) as the common referential in English language teaching, Cauldwell suggests that these accents are mainly useful as dictionary models. As for resolving acoustic blurs in listening practice, learners should be encouraged to notice sound differences in the speakers' accents. Cauldwell argues that what second language learners actually need is more regular exposure to a vast range of regional accents or dialects (e.g., Irish, Birmingham, Canadian, Global English accents, etc.). For instance, teachers should give learners practice of hearing a rhotic /r/ in *born* uttered by an American English speaker and its /r/-less equivalent produced by a Standard Southern British English speaker.

Part 3 might also resonate well with EFL/ESL teachers, as it includes a chapter on how to decode speech sounds produced by speakers of English as a lingua franca (ELF). Using the examples of five speakers of Global English, Cauldwell illustrates the significance of non-native speaker norms as a resource for focusing learners on the sound substance. In this part, the author also shows how the perspectives of the 'window on speech' and accent reduction can be used to provide non-native English speakers with recommendations for speech improvement. This part finishes with a thought-provoking discussion on the relationship between emotions and speech. Cauldwell argues that there is no one-to-one relationship between vocal effects and emotions, and demonstrates this argument by convincingly showing how the perceived meaning of a speech form can change when it is heard in isolation and then within the parameters of a social context.

As a teacher and teacher trainer, I read Part 4 closely, as it deals with the practical aspects of the teaching of listening. It starts with a trenchant critique of current approaches to listening pedagogy and argues that teachers should stop testing listening and begin establishing achievable listening goals for learners using samples from genuine speech. The author provides a range of activities for teaching, one of which is the use of 'impromptu dictations' which target the learners' perceptual skills. In this, teachers are recommended to stop the recording during listening practice and ask the students to take note of the last four words they heard, which is supposedly the number of words a person's short memory can normally hold. By extending the strategy to speech units of different lengths, however, Cauldwell suggests that teachers will be focusing the learners on the elements which go through the greatest soundshape changes.

*Phonology for Listening* is a masterpiece of its time. The book is user-friendly to both experienced and less experienced teachers. However, those with prior knowledge of the literature will have an advantage. Personally, the only difficulty I had with reading this e-book regards the access to the accompanying sound files. While reading the book, I had to download the files to a folder in my computer, as the Kindle for PC reader I was using did not allow me to playback the recordings. All in all, Cauldwell is to be commended for this outstanding addition to the contemporary literature and teachers, trainers and academics are encouraged to read such an innovative resource.

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