

## Phonology for listening

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In the PronSIG open forum at IATEFL Liverpool in 2014, there was some discussion as to whether or not the SIG should change its name, given the complex interplay between listening and pronunciation. In the end the committee decided to keep the existing name and mission statement, but to give listening greater visibility in the work of the SIG. What better way of beginning to generate this increased visibility than with the publication of PronSIG member Richard Cauldwell's *Phonology for Listening*, the aim of which 'is to improve the teaching and learning of listening in English'.

*Phonology for Listening* is divided into four parts. In the first of these Cauldwell introduces his window on speech, a framework for the rest of the book that is designed to represent the rhythm and intonation of spontaneous speech in writing (although all of the samples analysed in the book can be downloaded free for listening purposes). Having worked side-by-side with David Brazil at Birmingham University, we can expect the author's window on speech framework to be precise and, at the same time, accessible. We're not disappointed. In fact, precision, accessibility and clarity are hallmarks of the whole book.

The second part of *Phonology for Listening* goes about the crucial business of describing spontaneous speech. Crucial, as Cauldwell points out, because although conventional phonology courses do a very good job at describing language 'as it ought to be' (p4) through a 'careful speech model', the listener needs a description of speech as it really is when produced naturally. Cauldwell offers readers this description through his 'spontaneous speech model', though at the same time he warns them that '[t]he spontaneous speech model is a counterbalance to the careful speech model. It is not something to copy, or emulate' (p62). ELT authors and materials writers take note.

Part 3 (Chapters 11–15) could well be the section of *Phonology for Listening* that readers pay least attention to, initially at least. For me, however, it was refreshing to see accents, identity and emotions being covered in such an open way. They are often seen as a marginal aspect of pronunciation teaching, but it is not enough to put one or two non-standard accents into an ELT coursebook and think that you've dealt with variety in speech. As Cauldwell points out, accents are the norm, whilst standard accents are an idealization of reality, and in that respect his attention to variety in Part 3 is simply a question of coherence with his spontaneous speech model.

The final part of *Phonology for Listening* could well be the part that the busy teacher or trainer heads for first. The five chapters in Part 4 deal with teaching listening. Starting from a review of the issues and difficulties that underlie the teaching of listening in the ELT classroom, Part 4 goes on to look at the need to change our mindset when it comes to listening, and to learn to see the 'messiness' of spontaneous speech as the norm. The remaining three chapters then go on to look at ways in which students' and the teacher's voices can be used to create and 'savour' the changes in the soundshapes of words that are likely to occur in spontaneous speech (Chapter 18), at the ways in which technology helps us to help our learners become familiar with these changes (Chapter 20), and at

the ways that as teachers we can adapt traditional listening comprehension materials in order to provide learners with that vital window onto spontaneous speech.

There is so much that I like about this book that it is hard to know where to begin, but first Cauldwell has to be congratulated for making everything in *Phonology for Listening* accessible to its intended readership through clear, jargon-free language. Too many teacher's handbooks that make for grim reading. This isn't one of them. Equally commendable is the way that on p13 Cauldwell openly invites the reader to go through the book in his or her own way once the key concepts in Chapters 1 and 2 have been assimilated.

But there are numerous other positive qualities to this book. My own favourites include the way the author debunks a number of pronunciation 'urban myths'. I'm not sure how many times we're going to have to tell teachers that the syllable-timing/stress-timing opposition doesn't reflect reality. However, if you find yourself dragged back there during future training work, you could do worse than turn to pp141–142 of *Phonology for Listening*.

Equally valuable is the treatment of tones and attitudinal meaning, and the lack of any causal relationship. This is an issue that also needs disseminating more widely among ELT professionals (and which Cauldwell dealt with in some depth in *Speak Out!* 50). Undoubtedly, a given tone in a given context carries a specific meaning, but as Cauldwell makes clear in section 15.2, '[t]here is no one-to-one relationship between vocal effects and attitudes. Instead there is a 'many-to-many relationship': any single vocal effect can occur with many different attitudes and any single attitude can occur with many different vocal effects'.

Invaluable, in my opinion, is the treatment of accent in Part 3. This goes beyond a superficial comparison of the prestige accents from either side of the Atlantic, and enters (too?) briefly in the difficult waters of identity, prejudice, and emotion. PronSIG members will remember Cauldwell's candid exploration of this issue in *Speak Out!* 48, and will not be surprised to see the same honesty here: '... every accent will have – somewhere – a social group which has a prejudice about it' (p210).

Because of my own research interests, I was inevitably drawn to Chapter 14 on global English accents. It was interesting to see these dealt with from different perspectives. As an exercise it certainly brings out what a bad investment of time an accent-reduction approach is for ELF users of English. But I wonder if one day we'll reach the point at which authors will deal with all accents, NS or NNS, in the same way. It would be interesting to see Chapter 14 re-written, for example, with the sort of comments that characterize the previous two chapters on the accents of Britain and North America.

With *Phonology for Listening*, Cauldwell contributes to a growing interest in the teaching of listening, though unlike Field (2008) and Vandergrift and Goh (2012), he limits his attention to the pronunciation side of decoding the speech stream. But this focussed attention is born out of an wealth of knowledge and an enviable capacity for clear thinking, and so the book handsomely achieves its stated aims.

For teachers preparing students to work in an English-L1 environment, *Phonology for Listening* is essential reading. It will be especially helpful for those who have to prepare

learners for one-way listening, as in university lectures, for example. And, whilst not directly relevant to ELF contexts, (where interlocutors have to learn to accommodate to each other), *Phonology for Listening* indirectly shows ELF practitioners how to help their learners to deal with speech streams where the citation forms are squeezed and mangled into all sorts of odd shapes because of L1-transfer. In short, *Phonology for Listening* is a title that should be on every teacher's shelf.

## **References**

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