

UNDERSTANDING

English Pronunciation

An integrated practice course



Teacher's Book
Includes photocopiable
material

By **Susan Boyer**

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English
Pronunciation

An integrated practice course

Teacher's Book

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How this book came about:

Many teachers have expressed the opinion that greater emphasis is needed on the explicit teaching of pronunciation in English language courses. I know from my own experience, that my students needed more attention given to their pronunciation needs than they were receiving. The dilemma for me has been *how* to integrate pronunciation practice into general English language classes in an effective, relevant and stimulating way.

I had tried, with varying degrees of enthusiasm and success throughout the years, to integrate pronunciation teaching into my own language classes. I was conscious of highlighting the stressed syllable in new vocabulary and modelling the pronunciation of unfamiliar expressions. However, pronunciation always seemed to end up as an ‘add on’ and I felt it was never enough.

One day after class, an idea came to me.

My students and I had been discussing the use of ‘contractions’ in spoken language. I had been giving the full form and eliciting the contracted form. When I asked for the contracted form of ‘will not’, a student replied ‘want’, so by way of correction, I modelled the pronunciation: ‘won’t’. A Polish student put up her hand and asked: ‘Is that the same as, ‘I *want* a coffee?’ Clearly more than one student had trouble distinguishing between want/won’t. I wrote minimal pairs in two columns on the board, cot/coat, rod/road, hop/hope (headed by the relevant phonemic symbol) and drilled these individually and chorally. But this didn’t seem particularly stimulating for students; I felt that they didn’t see the relevance of the exercise to ‘real communication’ and it clearly wasn’t enough for some students – they still couldn’t perceive or produce a distinction between the sounds in focus.

So to the idea...

I went home and wrote a short story about ‘A Holiday in Poland in November’, with lots of words with the focus sounds: hot, cold, socks, coat, not, know, want, won’t, as well as some follow-on activities which I hoped would be stimulating for students and provide effective practice.

During the next lesson, I gave out the story with the focus sounds underlined and as I read the story aloud, the students wrote the applicable symbol above each word. (These had been introduced in previous lessons and there was a phonemic chart on the wall.) They then compared and discussed their answers. The students responded well – they could see the importance of the distinction between the sounds within the discourse.

I then gave out a dialogue containing the same vocabulary which students practised and ‘role-played’ in pairs. Students could see the relevance of the pronunciation exercise to ‘real’ language.

As a follow-on activity, I wrote place names (eg. Rome, Ottawa, Tokyo, Tonga) on the board and students (in groups) checked the location of the places in atlases, discussed and decided if the place would be hot or cold in November and checked the pronunciation of the place names. Students clearly enjoyed the lesson. They’d practised the pronunciation of the problematic sounds and added to their general knowledge of the world. The students who hadn’t had a particular problem with the sounds in focus also had useful and informative language practice.

From that lesson – and in direct response to students’ needs and their response to that lesson, *Understanding English Pronunciation: An integrated practice course* and this teacher’s resource have developed to incorporate much more than sound discrimination exercises. Suprasegmental aspects of English (ie. intonation, stress and features of connected speech) are presented and practised within the framework of topics, providing relevant, interesting and informative contexts to practise pronunciation within a communicative approach to language learning.

General Introduction to Teachers

Aims of this resource

The approach to teaching pronunciation taken in this book is a communicative one.

A communicative approach emerges from the principle that for language learning to be effective, useful and motivating, it needs to be based on 'real' communication. It needs to incorporate language that will be encountered outside the classroom. Within a communicative approach, students are encouraged to practise communicating (both listening and speaking), rather than just receive information *about* sounds.

- The aim of the student's resource *Understanding English Pronunciation- an integrated practice course* is to provide stimulating, informative and topical material through which specific aspects of English pronunciation can be examined and practised.

Each unit of *Understanding English Pronunciation – An integrated practice course* contains a large amount of informative material, your students will therefore benefit greatly from having their own personal copy. As well as having access to useful reference material, students will have a permanent record of their progress. Homework can be set on a regular basis, then checked and revised in class.

- The aim of this Teacher's Book is to provide some basic background information to the teaching of pronunciation, some suggestions for extending material in the student's course book and to present practical photocopiable activities which will motivate students to practise the aspects of pronunciation they have been learning about.

This resource is intended as a practical text for teachers, however it could not have been developed without the theoretical knowledge derived from many experts in the field. On page 131 of this book you will find a list of authors whose work has inspired and influenced the ideas and concepts contained in this book, as well as practical texts which are recommended as sources of useful classroom material.

The approach to pronunciation teaching followed in this book is underpinned by several important principles:

- Pronunciation practice should be immersed in relevant, interesting and meaningful contexts.
- Hearing new sounds and patterns should precede production.
- An understanding of some simple pronunciation terms (eg. vowel, syllable, stress) will greatly facilitate learning. It is best to begin with simple concepts upon which more complex notions can be built, so the use of simple terms to talk about pronunciation is preferable to more 'scientific' terminology.
- Visual cues (phonemic symbols or some other visual cue) for each sound will demonstrate the relationship between spelling and pronunciation. (See 'Teaching the Sounds of English with Symbols – Suggestions, on the following page.)
- Short, informative sessions are more useful for students than trying to assimilate too much information at once. (The exercises in each unit of *Understanding English Pronunciation* should be divided between several lessons and/or with the suggested Communicative Activities.)

About Phonemic Symbols

(A teacher's reference copy of the **Phonemic Chart of English Sounds** can be found on page 130.)

No previous experience or ability in reading phonemic symbols is necessary, for either students or teachers, when using *Understanding English Pronunciation* - example words containing the focus sounds are always given. Students are encouraged to use whichever symbols their dictionary uses or symbols they are familiar and comfortable with.

General Introduction to Teachers

Some teachers feel apprehensive about using phonemic symbols as part of their pronunciation teaching, however, there are some distinct advantages in doing so:

- Many dictionaries and pronunciation textbooks use the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) symbols.
- Many students are already familiar with them.
- They provide a useful way of drawing attention to contrasting sounds of English.
- They can be utilised on a 'need to know' basis (they *do not have to be memorised* as 'a complete set of additional symbols').

Note: The term **phonemes** refers to the different sounds of a particular language.

The sounds (phonemes) of English are represented on the phonemic chart - Student's Book, page 154.

The term **allophones** refers to the different realisations of phonemes; the subtle variation in pronunciation of particular sounds (phonemes) used by individual speakers and in particular contexts.

Teaching the sounds of English with symbols - suggestions

- Display the **Phonemic Chart of English Sounds*** where it can be readily referred to during class.
- Refer to phonemic symbols on the chart to exemplify sounds in words as they come up during lessons or teaching material.

The colour coding system incorporated into the **Phonemic Chart of English Sounds*** gives added benefit, as the symbols with example words, ie. blue for /u:/; red for /e/; pink for /ɪ/, are displayed on a background of that colour, making the association between the sound and the symbol much easier for students (and teachers). You can use the laminated colour chart available from the author (see order form) or students can add the applicable colour to the phonemic chart provided in the back of their book. (Student's Book, page 154).

Alternatively, words containing the focus sound could be listed on a large sheet of coloured paper, headed by the corresponding phonemic symbol (better still if the paper is the corresponding colour eg. red for the sound /e/) and displayed on the classroom wall. Words can be added as they are learnt in class.

- Elicit, and write on the board, examples of words that contain the sound in focus, thus exposing any misapprehension.
- Encourage students to keep a notebook for 'sounds of spelling', in which they record examples of words with the same sound, on a separate page, headed with the corresponding phonemic symbol. This will highlight patterns of typical and atypical spelling.

Teaching the Sounds of English with diagrams

Explaining how particular sounds are made can be useful for *some* students, if they don't seem to be having success making a distinction between contrasting sounds. Some students however, can find this approach more confusing than helpful, so discretion needs to be used with this technique. There are many excellent textbooks available which use diagrams to illustrate the articulation of both vowel and consonant sounds. (See references, page 131.)

A diagram, showing the basic organs of speech, has been provided at the back of this teacher's book (page 129) to be used where necessary to illustrate the articulation of particular sounds. The diagram can serve as a master copy from which a transparency can be made and used to draw on to illustrate how particular sounds are made, for example, the different positions of the tongue when pronouncing 'r' and 'l' or 's' and 'th'.

* Phonemic Chart of English Sounds (A3 size, colour, laminated) ISBN 978 1 877074 05 9 is available from Boyer Educational Resources.

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