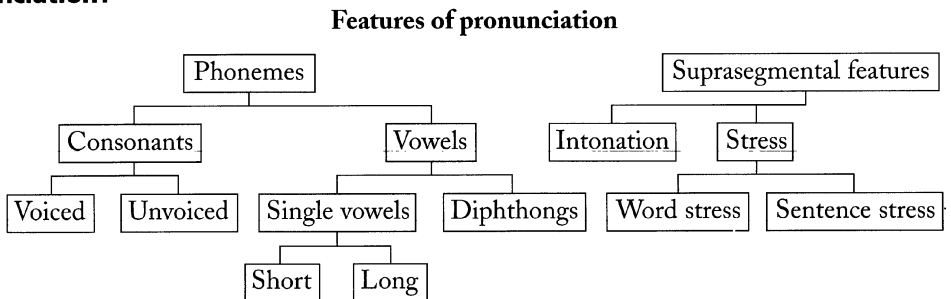


1 The description of speech

- What are the main features of pronunciation?
- The physiology of pronunciation
- The articulation of phonemes
- Phonemic transcription
- Phonetics and phonology

What are the main features of pronunciation?

In order to study how something works it is often useful to break it down into its constituent parts. The following diagram shows a breakdown of the main features of pronunciation.



Phonemes

Phonemes are the different sounds within a language. Although there are slight differences in how individuals articulate sounds, we can still describe reasonably accurately how each sound is produced. When considering meaning, we see how using one sound rather than another can change the meaning of the word. It is this principle which gives us the total number of phonemes in a particular language. For example, the word *rat* has the phonemes /ræt/. (Refer to the **sounds chart** on the next page if you are not familiar with the symbols used here.) If we change the middle phoneme, we get /rɒt/ *rot*, a different word. If you or I pronounce /r/ in a slightly different way, the word doesn't change, and we still understand that we mean the same thing. To make an analogy, our individual perceptions of colours may theoretically vary (i.e. your notion of 'green' may not be the same as mine), but intuitively we know that we are likely to be thinking about more or less

the same thing. We can both look at a green traffic light and understand its significance, and how it differs from a red one.

Sounds may be **voiced** or **unvoiced** (sometimes referred to as 'voiceless'). Voiced sounds occur when the vocal cords in the larynx are vibrated. It is easy to tell whether a sound is voiced or not by placing one or two fingers on your Adam's apple. If you are producing a voiced sound, you will feel vibration; if you are producing an unvoiced sound, you will not. The difference between /f/ and /v/, for example, can be heard by putting your top teeth on your bottom lip, breathing out in a continuous stream to produce /f/, then adding your voice to make /v/. Hold your Adam's apple while doing this, and you will feel the vibration.

The set of phonemes consists of two categories: **vowel** sounds and **consonant** sounds. However, these do not necessarily correspond to the vowels and consonants we are familiar with in the alphabet. Vowel sounds are all voiced, and may be single (like /e/, as in *let*), or a combination, involving a movement from one vowel sound to another (like /eɪ/, as in *late*); such combinations are known as **diphthongs**. An additional term used is **triphthongs** which describes the combination of three vowel sounds (like /aʊə/ in *our* or *power*). Single vowel sounds may be short (like /ɪ/, as in *hit*) or long (like /i:/, as in *heat*). The symbol /:/ denotes a long sound.

Consonant sounds may be voiced or unvoiced. It is possible to identify many pairs of consonants which are essentially the same except for the element of voicing (for example /f/, as in *fan*, and /v/, as in *van*). The following table lists English phonemes, giving an example of a word in which each appears.

Vowels		Diphthongs		Consonants			
i:	<u>bead</u>	eɪ	<u>cake</u>	p	<u>pin</u>	s	<u>sue</u>
ɪ	<u>hit</u>	ɔɪ	<u>toy</u>	b	<u>bin</u>	z	<u>zoo</u>
ʊ	<u>book</u>	aɪ	<u>high</u>	t	<u>to</u>	ʃ	<u>she</u>
u:	<u>food</u>	ɪə	<u>beer</u>	d	<u>do</u>	ʒ	<u>measure</u>
e	<u>left</u>	ʊə	<u>fewer</u>	k	<u>cot</u>	h	<u>hello</u>
ə	<u>about</u>	eə	<u>where</u>	g	<u>got</u>	m	<u>more</u>
ɜ:	<u>shirt</u>	əʊ	<u>go</u>	tʃ	<u>church</u>	n	<u>no</u>
ɔ:	<u>call</u>	aʊ	<u>house</u>	dʒ	<u>judge</u>	ŋ	<u>sing</u>
æ	<u>hat</u>			f	<u>fan</u>	l	<u>live</u>
ʌ	<u>run</u>			v	<u>van</u>	r	<u>red</u>
ɑ:	<u>far</u>			θ	<u>think</u>	j	<u>yes</u>
ɒ	<u>dog</u>			ð	<u>the</u>	w	<u>wood</u>

(Pairs of consonants (voiced and unvoiced) are thickly outlined. The boxes containing unvoiced phonemes are shaded.)

Suprasegmental features

Phonemes, as we have seen, are units of sound which we can analyse. They are also known as **segments**. **Suprasegmental features**, as the name implies, are features of speech which generally apply to groups of segments, or phonemes. The features which are important in English are **stress**, **intonation**, and how sounds change in connected speech.

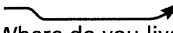
With regard to individual words, we can identify and teach word stress. Usually one syllable in a word will sound more prominent than the others, as in *PAper*, or *BOTTle*. The stresses in words are usually indicated in dictionaries.

With regard to utterances, we can analyse and teach intonation as well as stress, although as features they can at times be quite hard to consciously recognise and to describe. Stress gives rhythm to speech. One or more words within each utterance are selected by the speaker as worthy of stressing, and thus made prominent to the listener. Intonation, on the other hand, is the way in which the **pitch** of the voice goes up and down in the course of an utterance. (When discussing speech the term **utterance** is used rather than 'sentence', as it refers to anything we say including grammatically incomplete sentences, and to different ways of saying the same sentence.)

Utterance stress and intonation patterns are often linked to the communication of meaning. For example, in the following utterance the speaker is asking a question for the first time. In this particular instance as you can hear on the CD, the pitch of her voice starts relatively high and falls at the end, finishing relatively low. This intonation pattern is shown here using an arrow.

①  Where do you live?

If the speaker should ask the question for a second time (having already been given the information, but having forgotten it), then the voice falls on the word *where* and rises again towards the end of the question. This indicates to the listener that the speaker is aware that they should know the answer.

②  Where do you live?

The next examples display how stress can have an equally significant role to play in the communication of meaning. The most stressed syllables within the utterances are in capitals. Changes to which syllable is stressed in the same sentence changes the meaning of the utterance in various subtle ways. The implied meaning is given in brackets after each utterance.

③ I'd like a cup of herbal **TEA**. (A simple request.)
 I'd like a cup of **HER**bal tea. (Not any other sort of tea.)
 I'd like a **CUP** of herbal tea. (Not a mug.)

The first example is like the default choice, a first time request, while in the other two examples there is an apparent attempt to clear up some misunderstanding between the speaker and the listener. On the CD, we can notice how the speaker's voice falls on the syllables which are in capitals, demonstrating how intonation and stress are strongly linked in utterances.

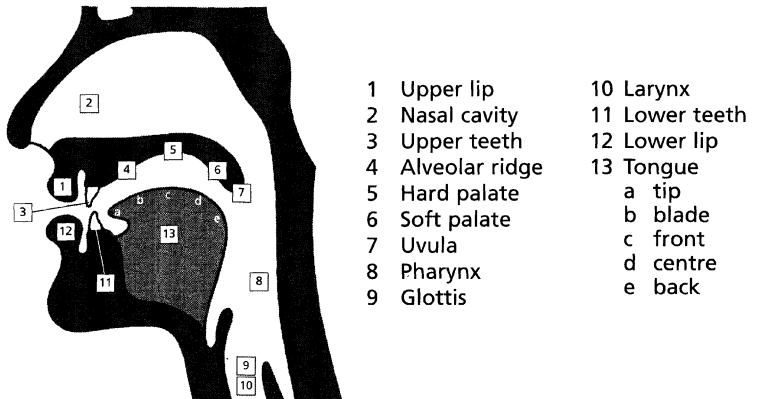
The physiology of pronunciation

Teachers also need to consider how the sounds we use come about, and to study the physiology which allows us to use those sounds. We all use the same speech organs to produce the sounds we become accustomed to producing. The set of sounds we acquire, however, may vary: a child brought up in an English-speaking environment will develop the phonemes of English, a French-speaking child will develop a different set, and so on. We also learn to use our voices in different ways: the English-speaking child will learn to use appropriate stress and intonation patterns, and the Cantonese-speaking child will learn to use **tones** (see page 87) to give distinct meanings to the same set of sounds.

To a certain extent we can learn to use our speech organs in new ways in order to produce learnt sounds in a foreign language, or to lose sounds from our own language which are not appropriate in the foreign language. It seems, however, that after childhood our ability to adopt an unfamiliar set of sounds diminishes somewhat.

The diagram below shows the location of the main areas of the head and neck associated with the production of sounds. In the human larynx (or 'voice box', as it is commonly known), there are two flaps of elastic, connective tissue known as vocal cords, which can open and close. During normal breathing, and also in the production of **unvoiced** sounds, the cords are open. When the edges of the vocal cords come close together, the air which passes between them makes them vibrate, resulting in **voicing**. The **pitch** of the sound (how high or low) is controlled by muscles which slacken and lengthen the cords for low tones, and shorten the cords, pulling them taut, for high-pitched tones.

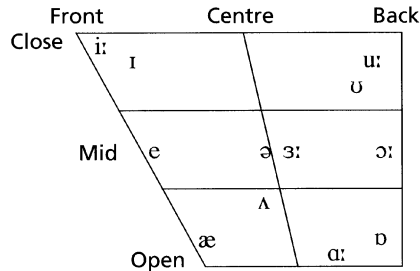
We speak using the lips, tongue, teeth, hard and soft palates and alveolar ridge. (See the diagram below.) The nasal cavity comes into play for certain sounds, and the movement of the lower jaw is also important. Articulation happens when the airstream is interrupted, shaped, restricted or diverted. The role played by each physiological feature in the articulation of vowels and consonants is summarised in this chapter, and there is a more detailed investigation of the articulation of individual phonemes in Chapters 3 and 4.



The articulation of phonemes

The articulation of vowels

Vowels are produced when the airstream is voiced through the vibration of the vocal cords in the larynx, and then shaped using the tongue and the lips to modify the overall shape of the mouth. The position of the tongue is a useful reference point for describing the differences between vowel sounds, and these are summarised in the following diagram.



The diagram is a representation of the ‘vowel space’ in the centre of the mouth where vowel sounds are articulated.

- ‘Close’, ‘Mid’ and ‘Open’ refer to the distance between the tongue and the roof of the mouth.
- ‘Front’, ‘Centre’ and ‘Back’ and their corresponding ‘vertical’ lines refer to the part of the tongue.
- The position of each phoneme represents the height of the tongue, and also the part of the tongue which is (however relatively) raised.

Putting these together:

- /i:/ *bead* (a close front vowel) is produced when the front of the tongue is the highest part, and is near the roof of the mouth.
- /æ/ *bat* (an open front vowel) is produced when the front of the tongue is the highest part, but the tongue itself is low in the mouth.
- /ɒ/ *dog* (an open back vowel) is produced when the back of the tongue is the highest part, but the tongue itself is low in the mouth.
- /u:/ *food* (a close back vowel) is produced when the back of the tongue is the highest part, and is near the roof of the mouth.

The articulation of consonants

Consonants, as mentioned earlier, can be voiced or unvoiced. The articulation of /p/ or /b/ is effectively the same, the only difference being that the latter is voiced and the former is unvoiced. As the relative force involved in producing /p/ is greater than that used to produce /b/, the terms **fortis** (strong) and **lenis** (weak) are sometimes used. Try holding a small slip of paper in front of your mouth and making both sounds; the paper should flap for /p/ and hardly move for /b/. Essentially, in English at least, ‘fortis’ applies to unvoiced consonant sounds like /p/, whereas ‘lenis’ describes their voiced counterparts like /b/. In addition to the presence or absence of voicing, consonants can be described in terms of the **manner** and **place of articulation**.

With regard to the manner of articulation, the vocal tract may be completely closed so that the air is temporarily unable to pass through. Alternatively there may be a closing movement of the lips, tongue or throat, so that it is possible to hear the sound made by air passing through. Or, as in the case of nasal sounds, the air is diverted through the nasal passages. The various terms used are explained in the following table:

Manner of articulation	
plosive	a complete closure is made somewhere in the vocal tract, and the soft palate is also raised. Air pressure increases behind the closure, and is then released 'explosively', e.g. /p/ and /b/
affricate	a complete closure is made somewhere in the mouth, and the soft palate is raised. Air pressure increases behind the closure, and is then released more slowly than in plosives, e.g. /tʃ/ and /dʒ/
fricative	when two vocal organs come close enough together for the movement of air between them to be heard, e.g. /f/ and /v/
nasal	a closure is made by the lips, or by the tongue against the palate, the soft palate is lowered, and air escapes through the nose, e.g. /m/ and /n/
lateral	a partial closure is made by the blade of the tongue against the alveolar ridge. Air is able to flow around the sides of the tongue, e.g. /l/
approximant	vocal organs come near to each other, but not so close as to cause audible friction, e.g. /r/ and /w/

With regard to the place of articulation, the following table summarises the main movements of the various articulators:

Place of articulation	
bilabial	using closing movement of both lips, e.g. /p/ and /m/
labio-dental	using the lower lip and the upper teeth, e.g. /f/ and /v/
dental	the tongue tip is used either between the teeth or close to the upper teeth, e.g. /θ/ and /ð/
alveolar	the blade of the tongue is used close to the alveolar ridge, e.g. /t/ and /s/
palato-alveolar	the blade (or tip) of the tongue is used just behind the alveolar ridge, e.g. /tʃ/ and /dʒ/
palatal	the front of the tongue is raised close to the palate, e.g. /j/
velar	the back of the tongue is used against the soft palate, e.g. /k/ and /ŋ/
glottal	the gap between the vocal cords is used to make audible friction, e.g. /h/

Voicing, manner and place of articulation are together summarised in the following table:

		Place of articulation								
		Front						Back		
		bilabial	labio-dental	dental	alveolar	palato-alveolar	palatal	velar	glottal	
Manner of articulation	plosive	p	b		t	d		k	g	
	affricate					tʃ	dʒ			
	fricative		f	v	θ	ð	s	z	ʃ	ʒ
	nasal		m			n			ŋ	
	lateral					l				
	approximant		(w)				r	j	w	

(Unvoiced phonemes are on a shaded background. Voiced phonemes are on a white background.)

Phonemic transcription

When writing in English, we use 5 vowel and 21 consonant letters. When speaking English we typically use 20 different vowel sounds (including 12 diphthongs), and 24 consonant sounds.

In some languages, there is essentially a one-to-one relationship between spelling and pronunciation, and there will be (with the occasional exception) the same number of phonemes used in the language as there are letters in the alphabet.

The lack of a one-to-one relationship between spelling and pronunciation in English, while by no means being unique, presents learners with many problems. A typically cited example is the pronunciation of *ough*, which has at least eight distinct sound patterns attached to it:

cough /kɒf/	through /θruː/
bough /bau/	bought /bɔ:t/
rough /rʌf/	thorough /θʌrə/*
although /ɔ:lðəʊ/	lough /lɒx/**

* British English. /θʌrəʊ/ is more common in US English.

** /x/ represents the same sound as at the end of the more familiar 'loch'; the spelling used depends upon the variety of English.

Examples abound of spellings and pronunciations which can cause difficulties for learners:

Why don't you read /ri:d/ this book?

Oh, I've already read /red/ it.

Look over there! I can see /si:/ the sea /si:/.

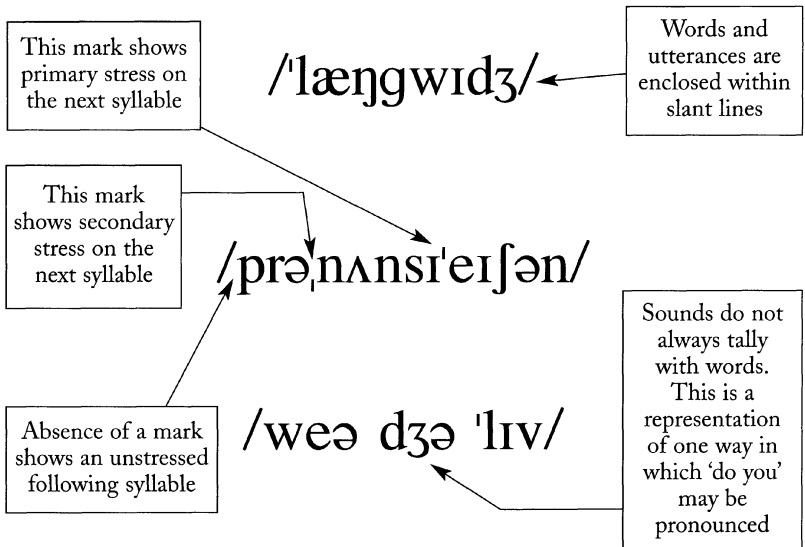
The difficulties that individual learners have may stem from one or more of the following:

- The learner's first language (referred to as **L1**) may have a one-to-one relationship between sounds and spelling. The concept of there not being such a relationship may be new.
- Even if such a concept is not new for the learner, they will have to become familiar with new sound-spelling relationships.
- There may be sounds, and combinations of sounds in L1, which do not occur in English.
- There may be sounds, and combinations of sounds, used in English which do not occur in L1.
- English may use stress and intonation patterns which feel strange to the learner.

Phonemic transcription gives both teachers and students a way of accurately recording the pronunciations of words and utterances.

It is not suggested that teachers should introduce their students to all of the phonemic symbols at once. It makes far more sense to work on those sounds which cause difficulty first, and introduce other phonemic symbols as appropriate. It is possible to tie in the teaching of new symbols with dictionary work, when the teacher can show students how the symbols are used. Be aware, though, that dictionaries may vary in the conventions they use. The best advice is to use a class set of the dictionary you or your students have chosen, and familiarise students with the conventions it uses.

The following examples are used to show certain conventions used in this book, and found in most dictionaries and reference books. It is useful for teachers to know these conventions, and to help students become familiar with them to aid independent study away from the classroom.



Other conventions exist for marking stress and intonation, which may be easier for students to understand. Chapters 5 and 6 will explain the theory behind their use and will also show teachers how to incorporate both standard and alternative notations for indicating stress and intonation in transcription. As suggested above, dictionary work can be very useful, not only because it helps foster independence in the learner, but also because learners will get used to seeing stress symbols used in the word transcriptions.

Phonetics and phonology

The study of pronunciation consists of two fields, namely **phonetics** and **phonology**. Phonetics refers to the study of speech sounds. A phonetician usually works in one or more of the following areas:

- the anatomical, neurological and physiological bases of speech (collectively known as **physiological phonetics**)
- the actions and movements of the speech organs in producing sounds (**articulatory phonetics**)
- the nature and acoustics of the sound waves which transmit speech (**acoustic phonetics**)
- how speech is received by the ears (**auditory phonetics**)
- how speech is perceived by the brain (**perceptual phonetics**)

Phonetics is a wide-ranging field, and it does not necessarily have a direct connection with the study of language itself. While the phonetic disciplines listed above can be studied independently of one another, they are clearly connected: speech organs move to produce sounds, which travel in sound waves, which are received by the ears and transmitted to the brain.

If phonetics deals with the physical reality of speech sounds, then **phonology**, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with how we interpret and systematise sounds. Phonology deals with the system and pattern of the sounds which exist within particular languages. The study of the phonology of English looks at the **vowels**, **consonants** and **suprasegmental** features of the language. Within the discipline of phonology, when we talk about vowels and consonants we are referring to the different sounds we make when speaking, and not the vowel and consonant letters we refer to when talking about spelling. It would be wrong to assume that phonology is always monolingual. Much work in phonological study deals with generalisations concerning the organisation and interpretation of sounds that might apply across different languages.

This book, while being primarily concerned with the phonology of English and how it might be integrated successfully into language teaching, will also draw on aspects of phonetics, particularly those concerned with articulation. As we will see, both fields have practical significance and application in the classroom.

Conclusions In this chapter we have:

- introduced the main features of pronunciation, and distinguished between phonemes and suprasegmental features.
- introduced the vowel sounds. Vowel sounds are usually described in terms of the tongue position, which may be shown diagrammatically.
- introduced the consonant sounds. Consonant sounds are formed when the airflow is interrupted, restricted or diverted in a variety of ways.
- considered stress and intonation. Stress is described in terms of the prominences made in words and utterances. Intonation is described in terms of how the voice goes up or down across utterances.
- thought about reasons for using phonemic transcription in the classroom, as a way of accurately noting pronunciation and shown how transcription can be used to show sounds, stresses and intonation.
- distinguished between phonetics and phonology, and suggested that both areas have practical significance for teachers.

Looking ahead In Chapter 2 we will:

- look closely at various ways of dealing with pronunciation in the classroom, and exemplify three different types of pronunciation lesson.

Teaching pronunciation

- Why teach pronunciation?
- Problems and approaches in pronunciation teaching
- What pronunciation model to teach
- Techniques and activities
- Sample lessons
 - Lesson 1: 'Alice': Planning an Integrated lesson
 - Lesson 2: Organising a party: Remedial lessons
 - Lesson 3: Minimal pairs: A Practice lesson

Why teach pronunciation?

A consideration of learners' pronunciation errors and of how these can inhibit successful communication is a useful basis on which to assess why it is important to deal with pronunciation in the classroom. When a learner says, for example, *soap* in a situation such as a restaurant where they should have said *soup*, the inaccurate production of a phoneme can lead to misunderstanding (at least on the part of the waitress). A learner who consistently mispronounces a range of phonemes can be extremely difficult for a speaker from another language community to understand. This can be very frustrating for the learner who may have a good command of grammar and lexis but have difficulty in understanding and being understood by a native speaker.


The inaccurate use of suprasegmental elements, such as stress or intonation, can also cause problems. For example, the following request was made by a Turkish learner in a classroom:

4

Do you mind if I Open the window?

Notice how the sentence stress is on the /əʊ/ of *open*. As it was a first request, one might have expected the first syllable of *window* to have been the most prominent, rather than the first syllable of *open*. Had the teacher not known better, the utterance could have been interpreted as being a second request (the first request perhaps not having been heard), and possibly being uttered with some impatience. In short, it could appear rude.

The intonation pattern used in the following question caused the listener to misunderstand it.

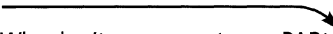
- 5  How long have you been in London?

This example was spoken by an Italian learner, as a ‘getting to know you’ question to a new friend. The unexpected fall of her voice on *been* led to the friend not understanding her question. (One would expect the voice to fall on the first syllable of *London*). She had to repeat the question before making herself understood.


Intonation and stress can also indicate the **function** of an utterance. The function of an utterance is what it is being used for. For example, the following sentence has the function of a ‘request’:

Can you help me, please?

Now consider this sentence:

- 6  a) Why don't you come to my PARTY?

As a first ‘suggestion’ or ‘invitation’, we might expect the first syllable of *party* to be stressed, as indicated with capitals, and we might expect the voice to go down at the end, as shown by the arrow. Now consider this variation:

- 7  b) WHY don't you come to my party?

When spoken in this way the question is no longer a simple invitation. It suggests instead that someone has refused the invitation and that the speaker is upset by this and needs to know why it has happened. If a student uses this stress and intonation for a straightforward invitation rather than speaking as in example (a), it is possible that there will be a misunderstanding.

The above examples all show problems caused by pronunciation errors which led to a problem of **reception**, or comprehension of the meaning or function of an utterance. But pronunciation can also affect the perceived tone or mood of an utterance. Aspects of a student’s first language can interfere with the pronunciation of a second language not only in terms of accent but also in terms of mood. For example, features of certain German accents may lead to German people sounding, completely unintentionally, abrupt or impolite when speaking in English. Spanish speakers tend to use a narrower range of intonation than L1 English speakers, and as a result may sometimes sound rather bored to a native speaker. Even though these difficulties are subtle, they are very real, and worthy of investigation and remedial action in the classroom.

Not all pronunciation difficulties necessarily get in the way of communication, of course. If a German student wants to ask permission to open a window, for example, if she pronounces *window* as /'vɪndəʊ/ it is unlikely to get in the way of the message. Teachers, therefore, need to prioritise, and not correct everything. It is, however, important to recognise

that even if students are not having difficulties communicating, they often like to have their pronunciation mistakes brought to their attention.

Problems and approaches in pronunciation teaching

There are two key problems with pronunciation teaching. Firstly it tends to be neglected. And secondly when it is not neglected, it tends to be reactive to a particular problem that has arisen in the classroom rather than being strategically planned.

A paradox

The fact that pronunciation tends to suffer from neglect may not be due to teachers lacking interest in the subject but rather to a feeling of doubt as to how to teach it. Many experienced teachers would admit to a lack of knowledge of the theory of pronunciation and they may therefore feel the need to improve their practical skills in pronunciation teaching. In spite of the fact that trainees and less experienced teachers may be very interested in pronunciation, their concern with grammar and vocabulary tends to take precedence. Language learners, on the other hand, often show considerable enthusiasm for pronunciation. They feel it is something that would help them to communicate better. So, paradoxically, even though both teachers and learners are keen on the subject, it is often neglected.

Teachers of pronunciation need:

- a good grounding in theoretical knowledge
- practical classroom skills
- access to good ideas for classroom activities

From reactive to planned teaching

A lot of pronunciation teaching tends to be done in response to errors which students make in the classroom. Such reactive teaching is, of course, absolutely necessary, and will always be so. Grammatical and lexical difficulties arise in the classroom too, and teachers also deal with these reactively. However, when it comes to planning a lesson or devising a timetable of work to be covered, teachers tend to make grammar their first concern. Lexis follows closely behind, with items of vocabulary and longer phrases being 'slotted in' where appropriate. A look at the contents pages of most coursebooks will show that we tend to think of the organisation of language in terms of grammatical structures, although some more recent publications claim to have a lexically arranged syllabus. Therefore, it is quite natural to make grammar the primary reference when planning lessons.

Yet pronunciation work can, and should, be planned for too. Teachers should regard features of pronunciation as integral to language analysis and lesson planning. Any analysis of language that disregards or sidelines factors of pronunciation is incomplete. Similarly, a lesson which focuses on particular language structures or lexis needs to include features of pronunciation in order to give students the full picture, and hence a better chance of being able to communicate successfully. While planning, teachers should decide what pronunciation issues are relevant to the particular structures and lexis being dealt with in the lesson. They can also anticipate

the pronunciation difficulties their students are likely to experience, and further plan their lessons accordingly. There will still, of course, be reactive work to be done in the classroom, just as there is with grammar and lexis, but by anticipating and planning, the teacher can present a fuller analysis to learners, and give them the opportunity for fuller language practice. Integrating pronunciation teaching fully with the study of grammatical and lexical features has the further incremental benefit that learners will increasingly appreciate the significance of pronunciation in determining successful communication.

In the light of this and throughout this book, sample lessons are divided into three main types:

- **Integrated** lessons, in which pronunciation forms an essential part of the language analysis and the planning process, and the language presentation and practice within the lesson.
- **Remedial** or reactive lessons, where a pronunciation difficulty which arises in class is dealt with there and then, in order to facilitate the successful achievement of classroom tasks.
- **Practice** lessons, in which a particular feature of pronunciation is isolated and practised for its own sake, forming the main focus of a lesson period.

What pronunciation model to teach

English long ago outgrew the limits of the land from which it takes its name. If we compare the languages of countries or regions where it is used as a first language, we can see that it has changed significantly. One need only think about the varieties of English used in Britain, Ireland, the USA, Australia and Canada. As the use of English spreads further in countries where it is not the first language, such development continues with ever new varieties of English emerging. The growth in the use of English, together with the ease of communication worldwide, means that English is increasingly being used as a medium of communication between speakers for whom it is not a first language.

This can raise both theoretical and practical issues for teachers. There can be disagreement over the **model** of English one should provide for one's students. The term 'model' here is used to refer to the pronunciation characteristics of the language a teacher presents to learners in the classroom.

In the past the preferred pronunciation model for teaching in Britain, or among British teachers abroad, was **Received Pronunciation** (or RP). There are many different accents within the variety known as British English, and most of these give some clue as to the regional origins of the speaker. RP is different, in that it says more about social standing than geography. It is still perceived as signifying status and education, and 'the Queen's English', or 'BBC English' are often used as synonyms. The accent was first described as 'Received Pronunciation' by dialectologist A. J. Ellis, in 1869. However, the number of people who speak with an RP accent in Britain is currently estimated at about only 3% of the population and declining. It is also falling out of favour as a teaching model because few British teachers naturally speak with this accent. However, RP has been the

basis of much modern investigation into pronunciation and so its influence persists.

As a teacher the model one uses in the classroom will usually be close to the language one uses outside the classroom. Many teachers modify their accent slightly for the benefit of their students, but few could consistently teach with an accent significantly different from their own, even if they wanted to. However, language teachers need to be aware of variations and differences, and the more knowledge one has with regard to different accents and varieties of English, the more informed one's teaching is likely to be.

As ever, it is important to consider the needs of learners. For many, RP is still the target for pronunciation, because of its traditional status, though this is slowly changing. Learners will usually have a target model in mind, whether this be British, American, Irish, Australian or any other variety of English. Targets tend to be highly personal, and on occasion rather vague. They may also vary within a class where learners aiming for British English are seated alongside others aiming for American English (perhaps because of the people they meet or work with outside the classroom). And if the teacher is Australian, what model can and should she provide? This may be a theoretical situation but, particularly in multilingual classes, one finds students who have already been taught by teachers with different accents and varieties of English. In monolingual classes too, one finds a range of personal targets for pronunciation.

There are no easy answers here, though teachers can, in catering for their students' needs, work on issues of **production** and **reception** independently, enabling students to understand a wide range of varieties, while allowing them to choose their own target model so long as it is widely comprehensible. In work on reception, teachers can, for example, focus on vowel differences between British and American English, or the rising intonation of Australian utterances in contrast to the way such utterances are completed by speakers of other English varieties. The best advice for teachers is to teach what they know and use, and be as informed as they can be about other varieties.

Techniques and activities

Once having decided to make pronunciation an integral part of their teaching, and adopted a policy on models, what techniques and activities can teachers employ? The range is multifarious from highly focused techniques, such as drilling, to more broad-reaching activities such as getting students to notice (look out for) particular pronunciation features within listening texts. Furthermore, as indicated above, there are two key sides to pronunciation teaching – namely, the teaching of **productive** skills on the one hand and the teaching of **receptive** skills on the other. In terms of reception, students need to learn to hear the difference between phonemes, for example, particularly where such a contrast does not exist in their L1. They then need to carry that knowledge through into their production. Drills, by way of example, are useful in the development of both kinds of skill, while noticing tasks used with listening texts will be most effective in the development of receptive skills.

Drilling

One of the main ways in which pronunciation is practised in the classroom is through drilling. In its most basic form, drilling simply involves the teacher saying a word or structure, and getting the class to repeat it. Being able to drill properly is a basic and fundamental language teaching skill. The technique has its roots in behaviourist psychological theory and 'audio-lingual' approaches to teaching; these are both now largely consigned to history, though drilling has stayed with us as a tried and tested classroom technique. Drilling aims to help students achieve better pronunciation of language items, and to help them remember new items. This is a crucial part of classroom pronunciation work, and is possibly the time in the lesson when students are most reliant on the teacher.

Drilling often follows on from the process, known as **eliciting**, of encouraging students to bring up a previously studied word, phrase or structure. The teacher generally uses prompts, pictures, mime etc, to help the process along, and can give the relevant item to the students if none of them is able to offer it. Given the complex relationships between English spelling and pronunciation, drilling is best done before students see the written form of the language. Once the item in question has arisen, teachers can then drill it in order to work on pronunciation. The teacher's main role in drilling is that of providing a model of the word, phrase or structure for the students to copy. You can hear an example of drilling on the CD. Teachers generally drill 'chorally' first of all, which means inviting the whole class to repeat the item in unison. Choral drilling can help to build confidence, and gives students the chance to practise pronouncing the drilled item relatively anonymously, without being put on the spot. It is typically followed by individual drilling, where students are invited one-by-one to repeat. This gives the teacher the chance to ascertain how well individuals are able to pronounce the item being drilled. Teachers usually select individuals more or less at random; doing so is seen to help keep students on their toes.

8

Chaining can be used for sentences which prove difficult for students to pronounce, either because they are long, or because they include difficult words and sounds. The following examples show how the teacher isolates certain parts of the sentence, modelling them separately for students to repeat, and gradually building the sentence up until it is complete.

Back chain

The sentence is drilled and built up from the end, gradually adding to its length. Certain parts may be drilled separately, if they present problems. Each part of the sentence is modelled by the teacher, and the students repeat.

...told him.
 ...would've...
 ...would've told...
 I would've told him.
 If I'd seen him...
 If I'd seen him, I would've told him.

Front chain

The sentence is drilled and built up from the start, gradually adding to its length. Certain parts may be drilled separately, if they present problems. Each part of the sentence is modelled by the teacher, and the students repeat.

If I'd seen him...

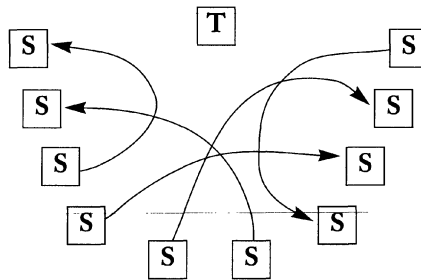
If I'd seen him, I would've...

I would've...

I would've told him.

If I'd seen him, I would've told him.

Another common variation is '**open pair**' drilling, where, for example, question and answer drills might be set up across the class, with one student (S) asking, another responding, and so on. Having drilled a question and answer chorally and individually, the teacher (T) uses prompts (for example a big letter 'Q' and a big letter 'A' written on cards) and invites students to question each other and respond in turn across the class, as shown in the following diagram.



The resulting question and answer routine might then sound like this:

Student 1: Have you ever been to Paris?

Student 4: Yes, I have.

Student 5: Have you ever been to New York?

Student 2: No, I haven't.

etc.

Substitution drilling is another important and useful variation. This involves drilling a structure, but substituting items of vocabulary into the sentence being dealt with, as follows:

Teacher: It's in the corner.

Student 1: It's in the corner.

Teacher: It's on the table.

Student 2: It's on the table.

Teacher: It's under the chair.

etc.

Drilling is also fundamental to the teaching of word stress, sentence stress and intonation. Teachers should aim to model utterances as naturally as possible, according to the context in which the language is being used. Bear in mind that slight changes in stress and intonation can have a significant impact on meaning and appropriacy, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Teachers often beat out the rhythm of the stress pattern while drilling. Some teachers beat the air with their finger, some click their fingers, some tap on a surface; teachers should choose whatever comes naturally to them, and then use the same method consistently.

Drilling is an important tool in pronunciation work. Many teachers skimp on drilling because they feel that it is something that only needs to be done at lower levels, yet it is important at higher levels too. As students will spend a lot of time adding new words and phrases to their vocabulary, they will need to be sure of how to say them.

Minimal pairs and related activities

In Chapter 1, the examples *rat* /ræt/ and *rot* /rɒt/ were used to show the phonemic principle in action; changing just one sound leads to a change in meaning. The same applies to words like *soap* /səʊp/ and *soup* /su:p/, and *paper* /peɪpə/ and *pepper* /ˈpepə/.

These are all examples of minimal pairs – words or utterances which differ by only one phoneme. Teachers can use minimal pairs to good advantage in the classroom as a way of focusing on sounds which have been causing difficulties for students. Here is an example for Spanish and Italian speakers:

Words	Sounds	Useful for...(e.g.)	Because...
cat /kæt/ cut /kʌt/	/æ/ /ʌ/	Spanish	/æ/ /ʌ/ and /ɑ:/ correspond roughly to one sound /a/ in Spanish
		Italian	/ʌ/ is often produced as /æ/

The ‘because’ column is very important here. There seems little advantage in practising sounds which do not cause problems for students, except to reinforce a point recently made or investigated in class. In a monolingual class the teacher can practise sounds that are likely to cause problems for their students, but would do better, as mentioned above, to concentrate on sounds which actually do. The same applies to a multilingual class. In this context the possible number of pronunciation difficulties is bigger, but it may be frustrating for students who do not have a problem with the difference between /æ/ and /ʌ/ or /ɔ:/ and /ɒ/, for example, to spend classroom time practising them.

But if half of a multilingual class do have a problem, then something needs to be done. One useful idea is multilingual peer teaching, where students help each other to work on particular sounds. This works more successfully if everyone has something they can teach to their peers, and so some planning and research is required on the part of the teacher to ensure a balance of everyone getting about as much help as they give, as far as is reasonably possible. Smaller, monolingual groups can be set up initially so that the teacher can provide some coaching. Individuals can be coached too.

Some ideas for activities based around minimal pairs are as follows:

1. Students can be given lists of words and work with a partner to decide which words have a particular sound:

Tick the words which have the sound /ʌ/:

cap hat bug cup hut bag

Activities like this one are a good way of gradually introducing students to the individual phonemic symbols relevant to English. Other potentially 'conflicting' sounds can be introduced too, such as the following 'minimal trio':

hat heart hut

2. Students might also listen to a succession of words, and decide how many times a particular sound is heard:

**How many times do you hear /ei/?
Underline each one you hear.**

pepper paper letter later pen pain
wet wait get gate late let

3. Sounds can also be contrasted by appearing in close proximity. The teacher can drill these utterances chorally and individually:

Pass me the pepper and the paper.

I'll post the letter later.

They won't let us in if we're late.

4. In a similar vein, but moving slightly away from the idea of minimal pairs, teachers can also ask students to listen for the odd one out among a list of words that they are given:

cart class heart learn smart part

Although there is no shortage of variations for teachers to experiment with, the difficulty with minimal pairs exercises is that one can end up using words which are unknown to the students, and which are hence less meaningful. Fairly often used pairings such as *bag* and *bug*, *bag* and *bug*, while practising the sounds that the teacher wants to see practised, are of limited use if students don't know what a *bag* or a *bug* is, or are unlikely to have to use these words. The teacher can always teach them, of course, but this might not always be the wisest use of classroom time. It can be more useful to choose words which are recent or current in the students' learning experience, in order to show the sound in its context. If there happen to be minimal pairs available, they certainly provide a useful opportunity for focusing just on the sound in question. If not, then focusing solely on known words can at times be more productive than introducing new words simply for the sake of a minimal pairs exercise. What one loses on the *bag*, one gains on the *bug*, so to speak.

Rather than using words provided by the teacher, it can also make more sense to use the students' active vocabulary in order to practise sounds. Students can be asked to provide (or suggest) their own minimal pairs to try out on their peers.

Pronunciation and spelling activities

It makes sense to tie pronunciation work closely in with spelling work, in order to investigate the different ways in which sounds can be represented on the page. Chapter 8 looks in detail at the relationships between pronunciation and spelling, but some basic ideas are outlined here.

Homographs and **homophones** can provide useful opportunities for such work. Homographs are words which have the same spelling, but with different pronunciations (*Why don't you read this book?* and *I've already read it;* *wind* /wɪnd/as in weather, and *wind* /waɪnd/ as in what you do to a clock). Homophones are words which have the same pronunciation, but have different spellings (*write* and *right*; *there*, *their* and *they're*; *fair* and *fare*).

These may be used as the basis of many types of activity, such as when, in the case of homophones, students listen to a sentence and have to choose which from a printed list of words in front of them is the word with the correct spelling for a particular word they heard in the sentence. Classroom work can also be done which concentrates on the properties or effects of particular letters when they appear in words. For example, in a discovery type exercise, students can study pairs of words, like the ones below, and work out a rule for how the vowel sound changes when the letter *e* is added:

hat hate kit kite cut cute

In each instance, the answer is something like: adding the *e* makes the vowel (e.g. /æ/) sound like the name of that vowel in the alphabet (e.g. *A*).

Tendencies like these above can be used in discrimination exercises, dictated, introduced in listening or reading exercises, elicited and drilled, dealt with through crosswords, board games, etc. Teachers need to decide what is relevant to their class at a particular time.

Taping students' English

Taping learners' spoken English from time to time can pay dividends. Tapes can be made while students are engaged in language practice activities, and used for all manner of language difficulties, but especially those concerned with pronunciation. If the teacher is sufficiently prepared, tapes of the completion of whole tasks can be contrasted with, for example, a group of native speakers or a higher level group of students tackling an identical task. Alternatively, students might tackle the same task on two occasions, the tape of the first 'attempt' providing the basis for pronunciation work; the subsequent performance of the task will (hopefully) be more successful, and the two attempts can then be contrasted.

Individual students can also be taped, particularly if they have a 'lingering' pronunciation difficulty which proves difficult to shake off. Sounds, stress and intonation can be contrasted with those of a native speaker, other students, or a fellow L1 speaker who doesn't have the same difficulty.

Listening activities

The anticipated outcome of language teaching is for students to be more able to understand and use the language outside the classroom. Many classroom activities therefore aim to reproduce, as far as possible, the authenticity of day-to-day communication. While authentic materials (i.e. printed, broadcast or taped material not produced with the classroom in mind) are valuable, it is impractical for teachers to use such material all the time, as one not only has to find suitable materials, but also design tasks to go with them.

Listening comprehension exercises in coursebooks are often designed to sound as realistic as possible, with the participants talking at a normal speed and using natural language. These can play a key role in helping students to notice the existence of a pronunciation feature.

For example, prior to doing a listening task, students can have the meaning and the pronunciation of a particular aspect of language brought to their attention, and practise it in very controlled ways. The particular issue may be the structural and pronunciation characteristics of the third person present simple or, at a higher level, of the third conditional (*I'd've gone if I'd known*). The listening exercise can then require students to listen out for this area of language and listen out for how it is used and pronounced in the context of a narrative or, say, a conversation.

Alternatively, an extended listening stage can precede an eliciting and drilling stage. Indeed it can be argued that putting the listening exercise first might even make the pronunciation elements of the lesson more of an issue with regard to comprehension, and more likely to be noticed by the students. Students would initially have to listen out for and interpret the use of the language and related pronunciation areas selected for study, in order to complete a set of tasks; work on the pronunciation and use of the language area in question could then follow on from the listening exercise.

Either way, a teacher's choice here would be informed by his or her

knowledge of the students, their language skills, and how well he or she feels they would be able to perform the various tasks. Whatever order is chosen, the combination of pronunciation study with listening activities involves getting students to notice things about the language and its use. The concept of **noticing** is important in pronunciation work. A language item needs to be relevant to the student at a particular time in order for there to be conscious intake and before the student can use it consistently. The same applies to features of pronunciation. Language teaching attempts to help students to notice language, by making particular aspects or items of language relevant. Noticing is not only of relevance to the initial presentation of an item but is also of use in the recycling of items. Language always needs to be revised and recycled, as there is no guarantee that the features dealt with in a first presentation will be successfully remembered and used.

Reading activities

In reading activities, although the medium is the written word, work on pronunciation can be successfully integrated here too. Like listening, reading is a receptive activity (i.e. students receive the language rather than produce it), and so it provides a suitable means of bringing language features to students' attention.

Many teachers stage reading activities either by having an initial exercise to allow students to get the gist of the text they are reading, or by establishing the type of text being used, followed by some more detailed work to focus on specific details when the text is read again. At some stage, when a text is read aloud either by the teacher or the students, pronunciation work can be integrated. Such texts as poems, rhymes, extracts from plays, song lyrics etc. can be used creatively in the classroom and can offer plenty of scope for pronunciation work. Depending on preference, anything from Shakespeare to Dr Seuss, from Longfellow to limericks can be used to good advantage.

Reading aloud is a classroom activity which has fallen in and out of favour with teachers at various times. The main argument against it is that it can interfere with successful pronunciation; spellings can clearly affect pronunciation performance adversely. But reading aloud offers opportunities for the study of the links between spelling and pronunciation, of stress and intonation, and of the linking of sounds between words in connected speech; all of these can be highlighted and investigated further in fun and interesting ways through reading aloud.

Teachers need, however, to be clear as to the appropriacy of a text for pronunciation work. Reading aloud encyclopaedia texts, for example, might lead to a rather mechanical and monotone recitation of the words.

A final thought on pronunciation activities is that it is important to make sure that some are light-hearted. A fun way of practising the production of difficult sounds is through the use of tongue-twisters and rhymes. Most readers will be familiar with things like *Around the rugged rock the ragged rascal ran* (the problem sound here is fairly easy to ascertain!), and *She sells sea shells on the seashore...*

Sample lessons

Here are three sample lessons, using a range of activities and techniques, and exemplifying the three types of pronunciation lesson discussed earlier: Integrated, Remedial, and Practice. The word 'lesson' is used here not necessarily to indicate a complete lesson period, though it probably does in the case of an Integrated or Practice lesson, but also to include a 'mini-lesson' or lessons within a classroom period as is likely to be the case with a Remedial lesson.

As we have discussed, pronunciation issues need to be made integral to lesson planning. The following explanation and lesson plan show an example of an Integrated lesson, which revises simple past tense verbs, and covers the activities of Alice on a night out in town. The first part of the plan gives an overview of the lesson, and the next part gives procedural detail.

Lesson 1: 'Alice': Planning an Integrated lesson (Intermediate)

Lesson type: Integrated

Materials: Taped listening, map, pictures for eliciting, picture story

In the pronunciation of regular past tense endings, the words *walked*, *lived* and *started* all have *-ed* at the end, but all have different pronunciations (/t/, /d/ and /ɪd/ respectively). Problems which students may have with these will often become apparent when the teacher is dealing with regular past tenses or past participles. There are some 'rules' here which can be given to students in order to help them generate further examples:

-ed is pronounced as /t/ after most unvoiced consonants like /k/, as /d/ after most voiced consonants like /v/, and as /ɪd/ after /t/ or /d/. Also, if a verb ends in *-y* (as in *hurry*, *worry* or *marry*), the simple past form will end in *-ied*, and the pronunciation can be /i:ɪd/ or /ɪd/, according to personal preference or habit.

In practice, the physical difficulty of pronouncing *-ed* as /d/ after an unvoiced consonant means that the incorrect use of /d/ instead of /t/ is seldom a pronunciation problem. What does tend to happen is that many students are tempted to insert the vowel sound /e/, taking a cue from the spelling, and so they say /'wɔ:ked/, /'stɒped/, /'mæriəd/ and so on, amongst other possible variations. Work needs to be done here to eliminate the unnecessary vowel sound. Perhaps the most important factor to bear in mind is that such work arises out of the study of a larger grammatical area. As well as the learning of verbs and the formation of past tenses, an essential part of the analysis is the pronunciation difficulties students might have with verb endings. If these are not dealt with, then the language is not being investigated thoroughly.