Teaching Pronunciation:

A handbook for teachers and trainers

Three Frameworks for an Integrated Approach

NEW SOUTH WALES
DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION
AND TRAINING

TAFE NSW

ACCESS DIVISION

Acknowledgments

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. ABOUT THE PROJECT

1.1.1. Background

This project funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs and managed by TAFE NSW - Access Division aims to help language teachers and workplace trainers working with adult migrant learners of English as a second language to increase their confidence in teaching pronunciation effectively.

It builds on several previous DETYA-funded projects, all stemming from

- ❖ the observation that pronunciation is one of the most problematic aspects of English language for both teachers and learners, and
- ❖ the belief that this need not be the case: pronunciation *can* be taught and learned effectively.

The first of these projects is a report entitled *Coordinating improvements in pronunciation teaching for adult learners of English as a second language* (Fraser 2000), which outlines some of the problems with pronunciation teaching, suggests some analyses of their causes, and puts forward recommendations for improving the situation.

One of the main problems found by this report is lack of confidence among teachers as to how to teach pronunciation, stemming from their own lack of training in this area. Yet many teachers really wish to be able to help learners with this crucial aspect of language.

These teachers are aware that currently adult migrants in Australia, even after several years of ESL classes, are often far less proficient in the spoken language than in grammar, vocabulary, and literacy. This is particularly unfortunate as it is oral communication that is most critical to migrants' achievement of their goals in employment, education and other areas of life. This is because English-speaking listeners find it much easier to understand someone whose pronunciation is basically OK but whose grammar remains weak than the reverse: excellent grammar can be completely masked by poor pronunciation. This means that learners who have better pronunciation will have more opportunities to communicate naturally with native speakers – and this in itself is one of the surest paths to improvement in all aspects of language.

As explained in the *Coordinating Improvements* report, while recent years have seen a significant improvement in the amount of pronunciation tuition given to migrants, the need is not just for *more* pronunciation tuition, but for *better* pronunciation tuition, based on methods and materials whose effectiveness has been properly demonstrated.

One of the main recommendations of the report was that more material should be made available to teachers who wished to learn the skills of effective pronunciation teaching. Two CD-ROMs were subsequently produced, one piloting interactive pronunciation materials (*Learn to Speak Clearly in English*), and one outlining basic concepts of pronunciation teaching for teachers (*Teaching Pronunciation*).

The present project follows on from these projects (the report and two CD-ROMs), and seeks to provide detailed frameworks for teachers to use in working on pronunciation with a range of different ESL learners in a range of different types of situation. Attention is focused on two main issues of current concern:

❖ the need to **integrate** work on pronunciation into other kinds of classes or training, as well as or instead of teaching pronunciation separately in dedicated classes

❖ the need to offer assistance to those who need to teach pronunciation in **workplace** as well as in classroom contexts, since, increasingly, language tuition is part of workplace training, where the situation and challenges are quite different from those of the traditional classroom context.

In both these contexts, teachers need to be equipped to deal with a wide range of different types of learners, who in turn have a wide range of different needs and constraints. The frameworks outlined here are intended to offer flexible but effective principles and practices that teachers can adapt to their own particular circumstances.

1.1.2. Aims

The project's aims were to develop, pilot and evaluate frameworks for an integrated approach to teaching pronunciation to adults of non-English-speaking background (NESB). Three different learner groups were identified

❖ learners with limited spoken English skills (in formal English classes)

❖ learners with more advanced English skills but still with pronunciation needs (in formal English classes)

❖ NESB learners in workplaces
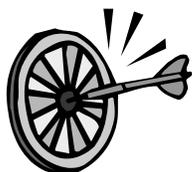
Some terminology

Pronunciation here includes all those aspects of speech which make for an easily intelligible flow of speech, including segmental articulation, rhythm, intonation and phrasing, and more peripherally even gesture, body language and eye contact. Pronunciation is an essential ingredient of ***oral communication***, which also includes grammar, vocabulary choice, cultural considerations and so on.

1.1.3. Participants

1.1.3.1. The teachers and trainers

A group of six teachers involved with ESL speakers in classroom teaching or in workplace language and literacy training in the Sydney metropolitan area took part in the project. They were rather typical of many other teachers (see Biosketches in Appendix). None of them had any particular background in pronunciation teaching. In fact, discussion in the first session revealed that most of them disliked pronunciation and found it difficult and frustrating to teach. Some of the methods they had used in the past included

❖ Breaking words into syllables and getting students to clap or beat the syllables

❖ Sometimes using material from published books or tapes, where this was relevant – but often feeling that there is too little material to cover the wide range of students' needs

❖ Attempting to give rules or principles to help students understand the structure of English pronunciation: 'The times I feel I really help the learners is when I can give them some rules or principles. To them, the English language is just chaos, and they appreciate anything that helps them to make sense of it – like when to pronounce the letter 'g' as 'hard' or 'soft'.'

❖ Sometimes using a chart with symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to help learners understand which sounds they had got wrong

❖ Sometimes writing a word on the board with the stressed syllable in capitals

❖ 'I usually just model the correct pronunciation for them. I didn't do well in phonetics in my teacher training so I don't like to use the symbols'

The teachers and trainers were also rather typical in their situation at work. They mostly taught classes of around fifteen students of mixed language background, for terms of 12-18 weeks. They all had fairly negative or limited expectations as to what was possible to achieve in pronunciation lessons, though they were willing to give the project a serious go.

By the end of the research phase, all participants had benefited greatly from the project (see messages in Appendix, and several excerpts in this section).

As well as the participants themselves, the final form of this handbook was also influenced by the comments of the national Steering Committee (see Acknowledgments), and two additional workplace trainers who read drafts of the handbook.

Message from Roslyn

Throughout my years teaching I have experimented with various approaches to teaching pronunciation and found them rather complex, daunting and time consuming to teach. […] Since being involved in the Pilot Pronunciation Project I have begun inserting up to 3 or more small pronunciation segments into lessons […] It has been surprising just how quickly and easily it is possible to obtain an improvement, while giving them the framework enables the students to begin to self monitor their speech.

(see Appendix for full messages from participants)

1.1.3.2.   The Project Officer

The meetings were led by Helen Fraser (see biosketch in Appendix), a university lecturer in phonetics, phonology and psycholinguistics, with no formal teaching qualification but a research interest in second language pronunciation and methods of effective pronunciation teaching.

The project thus represented a very fruitful collaboration between linguistic research and language linguistics practice, in a context where dialogue between theoretical linguists, applied linguists, and language teachers is both infrequent and sometimes at cross purposes.

1.1.4.   **The research phase of the project**

The main body of the project took place over two months. The teachers and trainers participated in one formal half-day workshop on pronunciation teaching with about 70 other teachers in mid May 2001, and then in eight weekly half-day meetings in their own small group of seven. At each meeting we discussed an aspect of pronunciation teaching, and made suggestions for activities they might try in their classes or workshops. During the week, participants tried these activities, and documented their experiences and reflections in a journal for discussion at the next meeting.

Each meeting was tape recorded, and notes written up by the Project Officer to circulate to all participants. The current document represents an attempt to capture the key content of the workshop and the weekly sessions for the benefit of other teachers and trainers.

Message from Ameetha

Although I did a bit of phonetics and linguistics in my degree, I was not very keen on teaching phonetics to my students […] However, after meeting with Helen things changed. I realised that I didn't need a Masters degree in phonetics to teach my students correct pronunciation. The strategies and methods that I have learnt with her have made me quite confident of teaching it to my students.

1.1.5. Outcomes

The intended outcomes of the project were:

- ❖ enhanced teacher expertise in teaching pronunciation effectively

- ❖ an evaluation of the pilots of the framework implemented at the two teaching sites

- ❖ a teacher resource accompanying the existing CD-ROMs, to document strategies and advice for teaching and learning pronunciation as communication in and out of the classroom. This resource will be distributed nationally by download from an appropriate DETYA or ANTA website.

The actual outcomes achieved have been:

- ❖ the participants themselves learned a great deal, and are able to pass on their knowledge and skills not only to their students but also to their colleagues

- ❖ the participants also contributed in a very valuable way to the development of the principles and practices of pronunciation teaching put forward in the frameworks, by operationalising them and developing them into teaching techniques

- ❖ the development of the Frameworks themselves

- ❖ the production of the current Handbook presenting the three frameworks, which can be used by teachers and trainers nationally.

Message from Belinda

On the whole, my feelings [used to be] fairly negative about teaching pronunciation.[…] This method of teaching pronunciation is teacher and student friendly. There is no need to know the phonetic alphabet or have a great deal of linguistic knowledge. Pronunciation work is integrated into the lessons in a natural way that is suitable for all levels. The emphasis is on students hearing their own mistakes and becoming aware of what the listener is hearing.

1.2.   ABOUT THE THREE FRAMEWORKS, AND THIS HANDBOOK

1.2.1.   Aims of the handbook

The aim of the present handbook is to present the three frameworks that were developed in the project. It includes a good deal more material than the frameworks themselves, providing as it does, a theoretical and research basis to support the practical strategies presented.

1.2.2.   Intended audience

The primary orientation of the handbook is towards English language and literacy teachers who

❖ are native or very fluent speakers of English (non-native teachers will also find it useful but their needs may be different in several respects to those of native speaker teachers)

❖ have qualifications in English as a second language,

❖ have little background in or confidence with pronunciation teaching,

❖ work with learners who are at rather early stages of learning English pronunciation (though they might be more advanced in other aspects of English language).

For this reason the material has been kept as straightforward and direct as possible, given that pronunciation is a very complex subject. Readers who wish to follow up background issues are referred to the list of references, including the author's own publications, and to her website, which contains a much larger bibliography and additional background material. Some additional remarks are also made in Section 1.2.4 below.

1.2.3.   About the communicative approach

The approach to pronunciation teaching taken in this project, and in this handbook, is a communicative one. It has been developed by the author over the last five years to fit in with general principles of communicative language teaching, and to take account of several factors which are known through empirical research around the world to be important in making pronunciation teaching effective. It is not a 'method' as such but a set of principles by which practices and materials can be devised to fit any particular pronunciation teaching context .

Of course, many existing methods and materials are effective, or at least have good aspects and components. The problem sometimes is assessing which of these are

useful for teaching a particular group in a particular situation. The communicative approach therefore presents criteria not just for devising teaching materials and curriculum, but also for judging the usefulness of existing materials for teaching pronunciation in a particular context.

The principles of the communicative approach are not intended to be a one-size-fits-all solution but to be basic enough and flexible enough to allow adaptation to any situation. Such adaptation requires the understanding, insight and expertise of the teacher, and it is this understanding which is the key to an ability to *integrate* pronunciation teaching into other areas of teaching and training. A good deal of emphasis is placed in this handbook on helping readers develop a deep understanding of the issues learners face with pronunciation, and how to tackle them.

Much more is said about the communicative approach throughout the handbook, but it may be useful to present the main points here.
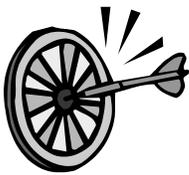
The communicative approach to teaching pronunciation: 'communicative' in four ways

1. teaches material which is useful for real communication outside classroom

2. order of teaching is based on what is most important to listeners in communication

3. learners are taught to think of speech as communication and pay attention to needs of listener

4. focus on good communication between teachers and learners about pronunciation itself

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The last principle is the most important and the one that, for most teachers, requires the greatest change in the way they think about pronunciation. A great deal of the material in this handbook is devoted to deepening teachers' and trainers' understanding of **metalinguistic communication** – communication between teacher and learner about language itself.

1.2.4. The broader context

It is important to emphasise, as was done in the *Coordinating Improvements* report, that the problems migrants face with oral communication are by no means all attributable to teachers' lack of training. Some other factors are particularly salient in relation to the current handbook.

1.2.4.1. Research issues

Academic research in the discipline of linguistics has until recently not paid much attention to the topic of second language phonology and the process of acquiring the pronunciation of a second language, and even less to the needs of teachers in understanding pronunciation and how to teach it.

This handbook is based on research that has aimed to redress this (see references), but it is clear that there is a need for much more work in this area, particularly for collaborative work between academics and teachers.

In carrying out this research one of the main aims and principles has been to adhere rigorously to the criterion that everything should be judged in relation to the ultimate criterion: **does this lead directly to observable improvements in learners' pronunciation?** Other criteria, such as *does this give teachers confidence?* Or *does this make learners happy in their classes?* Are also relevant but are kept strictly secondary to the ultimate criterion.

1.2.4.2. Teacher training issues

A large reason for teachers' lack of confidence with pronunciation is their own lack of training in this area, since until recently it was the norm (though with a number of very honourable exceptions) for teacher training institutions to offer extremely minimal guidance in this area – sometimes to the point of none at all.

In very recent years, this has started to change, and an increasing number of institutions are offering teacher training and professional development courses on pronunciation. This is good but it is essential to realise the teachers need not just more information about pronunciation, but a different kind of information from what they have traditionally been given.

In the few cases where academics have responded to requests from teachers for information on phonology and pronunciation, the tendency has been to 'keep things simple for the teachers'. Of course it is essential to tailor information for teachers who quite rightly have spent their education on learning to teach rather than learning linguistics. However in some cases this simplification has been of the wrong kind. Explanations have generally been limited to discussion of the phonemes of English, supplemented by a little basic English prosody, whereas what teachers most need to

know is how and why speakers of other languages find the phonology of English so difficult.

The present handbook is based on research and experience regarding how best to present the more essential kinds of information about pronunciation to teachers.

This means that it is challenging material, requiring teachers to rethink ideas they may have held for a long time. The fact that it is based on the program of sessions in which a group of teachers who are typical in many ways of most of the readers of the handbook is a great advantage, in that it has been possible to build on participants' own discussion and questions in a way which, it is hoped, makes the explanations appropriate for and interesting to other teachers and trainers.

1.2.4.3. Policy issues

It has been observed on numerous occasions (see references) that tuition and training specifically on pronunciation and oral communication for ESL migrants has been very limited, especially in relation to the major focus on literacy over the last decade or more. This itself has been a major factor in creating the poor outcomes for learners described above.

There are many reasons for this neglect of oral communication. One of the major reasons has been the difficulty of demonstrating that pronunciation tuition is effective in helping migrants improve their oral communication. The reason this has (often, not always) been difficult to demonstrate is quite simply that much pronunciation tuition has *not* been effective.

It is important to emphasise that this does not demonstrate that pronunciation tuition *cannot* be effective; simply that it has often been done by people who do not know how to make it effective, for reasons outlined above and in *Coordinating Improvements*.

This means that it is crucial for those who can teach pronunciation well to demonstrate the improvement in learners' pronunciation brought about by their lessons – and not just by asking learners whether they enjoyed the lessons, but by objective documentation of the improvement, and the effects of the improvement in workplace communication or other areas. Only with this kind of evidence will policy makers, institution administrators and employees be gradually persuaded to change their attitude to pronunciation tuition.

One last issue that should be raised briefly here is that problems in communication between English native speakers and English language learners are by no means all the 'fault' of the learners. This handbook is directed towards helping teachers and trainers help migrants with pronunciation, and that is a crucial part of improving intercultural communication.

However, programs which help native speakers improve the effectiveness of their oral communication with ESL migrants are also essential – and also require trainers with specific expertise in pronunciation issues.

1.2.5. Overview of the handbook

This handbook presents three frameworks which can be used by teachers to devise or adapt material for use with learners at different levels and in different situations. Before looking in detail at the frameworks, it sets out some background ideas which apply to all three frameworks.

Within each framework, there is a section applying the background ideas to the particular group, discussion of participants' own examples and anecdotes, and a Question and Answer section reflecting the actual questions raised by participants during the sessions, and the answers that were suggested.
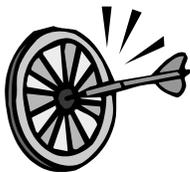
Some terminology

teacher includes anyone who is teaching pronunciation

learner includes anyone who is learning English as a second language, at any level

student means someone who is studying a formal course, whether that is a language course or some other course

1.2.6. How to use this handbook

Obviously most readers will want to turn to the parts of the handbook that are most relevant to their own situations.

However, there is a sequential flow to the ideas in the handbook, and it is advisable in the first instance to look through it from beginning to end, and then to dip into the sections that seem most relevant. Also it should be mentioned that the approach is in places somewhat different to what most teachers will be familiar with.

It should be emphasised again that this handbook does not provide a curriculum or a set of teaching materials but a set of ideas and principles organised into frameworks which teachers can use to develop their own curriculum and materials.

Some of the most important points in this handbook are difficult to fully grasp from a print based explanation, and are much better demonstrated with audio and visual examples. The CD *Teaching Pronunciation* has been created to allow teachers to work through audiovisual material at their own pace. It is strongly recommended that readers gain access to this CD if at all possible.

It is hoped that readers will be interested enough in the material presented in this handbook to want to pursue some issues in pronunciation further. Indeed pronunciation is a complex and fascinating topic involving insights from phonetics, phonology, psycholinguistics and other disciplines, as well as from education. This handbook can do

no more than scratch the surface, and hopefully whet some appetites. An annotated bibliography is provided to allow readers to choose material suitable to themselves.

Throughout, the most important points are highlighted in boxes with icons as shown below, and a detailed table of contents is included at the end. Both of these are intended to help readers find their way around the handbook, since it is expected that after an initial reading, most users will want to refer back and forth to material that is particularly relevant to their own interests. Thorough cross referencing has been added to facilitate this.

Important point
Definition
Memorable example
Special insight

Caution
Something a little unexpected

Discussion point
Extra idea
Thoughtful comment

1.2.7. Where to from here?

Readers who find themselves more interested in pronunciation after using the handbook have several options for following up their interest.

The reference list at the back of the handbook provides a basic list of references that may be useful as a starting point. Further references and links to websites with useful resources – as well as a range of other information – is available from the Project Officer's Pronunciation Website, accessible through
www-personal.une.edu.au/~hfraser

2. BACKGROUND TO THE FRAMEWORKS

2.1. INTRODUCTION

2.1.1. What's in this section

This section contains some essential background theory and concepts for understanding and using the frameworks presented below. It is organised into three main parts:

- ❖ **Fundamentals** gives some necessary background concepts which may be unfamiliar to most readers, at least in the context of phonology and pronunciation

- ❖ **Principles** draws from the fundamental concepts some very general principles which inform the Communicative Approach to pronunciation teaching

- ❖ **Practicalities** offers some practical ideas to exemplify the principles, and to show how the Communicative Approach plays out in real teaching situations.

Detailed practical advice and discussion is provided in the frameworks themselves, but the explanations do rely quite heavily on ideas and terminology presented in this background section.

2.1.2. How to use this section

Before starting this section it is worth reminding readers that this document works from theory to practice. This first part will seem quite abstract at first, but the more practical orientation of the following sections should balance this. Readers are particularly encouraged to read through this background before turning to the frameworks and then to return to the background after reading the frameworks, as it is the interleaving of theory and practice that develops deep understanding. Although some parts of the practical advice are valid even without the teacher/trainer having deep understanding of the principles of the communicative approach to teaching pronunciation, some parts can easily be misinterpreted.

DON'T SKIP THE BACKGROUND THEORY!

Please do read through the sections sequentially even if it seems heavy going at first. Later sections will give examples and demonstrations which will help make it more practical – but the background material really is important.

This may be different theory to what you have had before (see Section.2.2.3.1)

Finally it is also worth reiterating that this account does little more than scratch the surface of the topic of pronunciation and pronunciation teaching/learning. It is particularly limited in that it is print-based and non-interactive. Readers are strongly encouraged to work through the CD-ROM *Teaching Pronunciation* in order to gain better understanding through its interactive audio-visual examples, its glossary, and its downloadable articles.

2.2. FUNDAMENTALS

2.2.1. Introduction

There are many ways of teaching pronunciation, and many different opinions as to which ways are the best or most effective. However there has been to date relatively little serious comparative research on what really works in helping learners of a second language with pronunciation. This is an area which needs considerable improvement (see Section 1.2.4). Nevertheless, there are a few things which are becoming well established as key factors in effective pronunciation tuition.

In this section, the Project Officer outlines some of the pronunciation-teaching practices that have been shown to be effective, and then set out some concepts that are necessary in understanding *why* these particular practices are effective.

2.2.2. What works?

It is important to emphasise that pronunciation teaching is currently undergoing a revival after several decades of neglect. There are many questions requiring detailed research and empirical investigation. The account presented here represents a current 'best guess' for which there is considerable evidence but which is most certainly not the last word on the subject.

Here are some of the factors that have been shown to be most relevant in creating good outcomes in pronunciation teaching (see references under *Pronunciation Research* in Appendix). The first three are becoming more widely known and accepted. The last, though, is less well understood. It will be given more extensive discussion below.

- ❖ Pronunciation teaching works better if the focus is on larger chunks of speech, such as words, phrases and sentences, than if the focus is on individual sounds and syllables. This does not mean that individual sounds and syllables should never be referred to; it simply means that the general focus should be on the larger units.

- ❖ Pronunciation lessons work best if they involve the students in actually speaking, rather than in just learning facts or rules of pronunciation. Many students of course feel more comfortable learning the rules of the language, because it is less threatening than actually speaking. However, the transfer of explicit knowledge of rules into pronunciation practice is very limited. Teachers need to

devise activities which require learners to actually speak in their pronunciation classes.
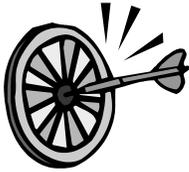
> **Some terminology**
>
> The word ***transfer*** is used in two ways in the literature on second language acquisition. It can mean either
>
> the transfer of sounds from the learner's native language into English
>
> or
>
> the transfer of skills learned in class into actual communication outside the classroom.
>
> We will use it in the second sense in this handbook.

❖ Learning pronunciation requires an enormous amount of practice, especially at early stages. It is not unreasonable for learners to repeat a particular phrase or sentence twenty or fifty times before being really comfortable with it. Unfortunately, 'drilling' has been out of favour in language classes for some time, due to association with several bad aspects of the behaviorist method of teaching. Indeed some forms of drilling are at best a waste of time, and can even be a hindrance to learning. However, drilling of real, useful phrases which can actually be used outside the classroom is highly advantageous to learners.

❖ Pronunciation teaching requires thorough preparation through work on the perception of English sounds and contrasts, and the formation of concepts of English phonology.

2.2.3. Theorising what works

2.2.3.1. The role of theory

It is common in 'applied' disciplines for people to take an abstract theory and try to 'apply' it to concrete situations. This is useful in many cases. However in some cases, the abstract theories have been developed with little regard for the concrete situations, and actually don't apply very well at all. In these cases, a different approach is needed – one of theorising what works in the situation.

Phonology is a perfect example of this. The theories and concepts of phonology have been developed over the decades with little regard to the reality of the pronunciation teaching situation. In fact they have been applied with greater regard to the needs of those scientists who want to build computers that can operate with voice. This makes them quite limited in their application to the needs of pronunciation teachers.

However, pronunciation teachers, like everyone else, need some kind of theoretical framework. Some people say they prefer to 'just be practical' and are 'not interested in

theory' – but being practical *requires* some kind of theory. Theory-free practice is just random. A good theory allows you to understand your successes and failures, and to expand and extend the scope of your successes to new situations.
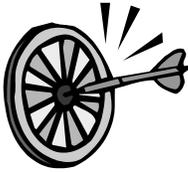
Quotable quote

As Einstein wisely said

There is nothing so practical as a good theory!

A few linguists around the world (including the author of this handbook) have been interested in taking a different approach to phonology – that of theorising what works in practical situations involving human, not computer, language. This makes for a theoretical framework that is much more relevant to the needs of practitioners, including but not limited to ESL teachers, and is much easier to apply to those situations.

This first section on 'Fundamentals' attempts to put forward some of the theoretical framework that has been developed in this way, hopefully in a way that is interesting and stimulating and useful – and not too intimidating for those who have had previous bad experiences that have led them to 'hate theory'.

2.2.3.2. The role of teachers

Any theory, however, no matter how good and how 'applied', remains just that, a theory. It is the practitioners, in this case the teachers, who have to use the theory to create successful outcomes in real situations. These successful outcomes then feed back into ongoing theory development and refinement.

Having a gulf, as we currently do, between teachers and other practitioners on the one hand, and theorists and academic researchers on the other, is far from ideal – not just for teachers (as many academics rather arrogantly think!) but for theory and research as well.

2.2.3.3. The importance of Conceptualisation

Many people, including both teachers and learners, believe that pronunciation problems are caused by difficulty with articulation: that the learner does not know how to articulate the sounds of the new language, or has lost the ability to learn the articulation of new sounds, or even that the learner does not have the right muscles to make those sounds. The focus then is on the need for learners to gain information about the articulation of sounds.

This is a reasonable interpretation of the experience of learning to pronounce a new language, and it certainly does have an element of truth to it – there are some sounds in each language that are physically difficult for learners who have never practised them. Some examples are: the uvular 'r' of French and German, the two English 'th' sounds, some of the fricatives of Chinese, the guttural sounds in Arabic.

However this is a minor element of pronunciation difficulties. Usually learners can learn to make an acceptable version of the sound they need, even if it does not sound completely authentic. And even where they can't, since the individual sounds in question are a minor part of any language, a person can be reasonably comprehensible even if those particular sounds are pronounced incorrectly. For example, there are many people who speak English perfectly intelligibly while substituting 's' and 'z' for the two 'th' sounds. For that matter, there are many native English speakers who have a lisp, or who say 'wabbit' for 'rabbit', yet are perfectly intelligible overall. Of course, it is not ideal to speak this way, but it is surely a very minor issue compared to the huge difficulties many learners have in making themselves understood at all.

By far the majority of pronunciation problems stem not from physical, articulatory causes, but from **cognitive** causes. In other words, the problem is *not* that the person can't physically make the individual sounds, but that they don't **conceptualise** the sounds appropriately – discriminate them, organise them in their minds, and manipulate them as required for the sound system of English. For example, nearly all learners who have trouble with the 's/sh' distinction actually use both sounds in their own languages and can produce each of them easily in certain contexts. The problem is that in their languages the sounds are *conceptualised* differently from the way they are in English. Learners need to 'unlearn' the concepts they have held since babyhood for these sounds, and replace them with the similar but different concepts needed to speak English.

The same goes for the classic 'r/l' problems of Asian learners – most can and do produce both sounds in certain contexts. The help they need is in keeping the sounds mentally distinct, and controlling which one is used when. Trying to teach them the articulation of sounds that they can actually make perfectly well merely confuses the issue.

Consider for example the two Australian friends, Alison and Bronwyn, traveling in Japan. They found themselves with new names: Arison and Blonwyn!

Clearly, then, the Japanese can make both sounds; their problem is in forming and using distinct concepts of 'r' and 'l' that allow them to manipulate the sounds in a way appropriate to English.

This type of *conceptual* difficulty is behind many more pronunciation problems than are caused by genuine articulatory difficulty. Almost all vowel problems are like this – there are few vowels that are in any objective sense 'more difficult to pronounce' than other vowels.

The same goes for almost all prosodic or suprasegmental issues (ie. Those to do with intonation and rhythm). Consider an English speaker learning a tone language such as Vietnamese. The tones will be one of the hardest problems they have to grapple with. The problem however is not one of *producing* the tones. All English speakers can easily produce syllables with different tonal patterns, and they do so every time they speak: consider the many meanings that can be given to a word like 'Oh' or 'Hello' in English by varying the tone or pitch. The problem is that in English, tone serves a completely different function to the one it serves in a tone language: it is used for intonation and

sentence-level meaning, rather than to distinguish word meanings, and is therefore conceptualised in a completely different way.

Stress is one of the main tools used in English to convey word and sentence meanings. It is essential for speakers to control the stress system if they are to speak English intelligibly, and indeed this is a major problem for many learners. But the problem is not that they can't physically *produce* stressed and unstressed syllables. All languages have some pattern of stress variation within their sound systems (even those that are commonly cited as 'not having stress' or 'stressing all syllables equally'). Most, though, use stress quite differently in their phonological systems from the English pattern, and speakers conceptualise it in different ways.

The errors that learners make are not caused by *not using stress at all* (whatever that would mean). They are caused by *not using stress appropriately for English*. In order to learn to use stress appropriately for English, they have to learn to conceptualise stress – in other words, to know what it means, to be able to recognise it and use it and manipulate it and play around with it. Learning this concept is just like learning any other kind of concept, requiring a combination of information, experience and time; people do not learn concepts instantly, just from being shown an example or being given information; they need to use them and experience them through trial and error before they really understand them.

Let's look a little more at this important concept of conceptualisation of speech, before coming back to see how we can use this understanding in teaching pronunciation.

2.2.3.4. What is Conceptualisation?

Concepts are mental structures which lie between external reality and our understanding of that reality. It is said that our concepts *mediate* our understanding of the world. Conceptualisation is quite different from perception. Perception is simply the ability to be aware of something through one of our senses. If we had only perception, we would have no understanding; we would be like a thermostat that senses temperature and responds to it in a pre-programmed way. In order to understand something, we have to know what it is; that 'knowing' involves applying a concept to it.

2.2.3.5. Conceptualisation and language

Many, but not all, of our concepts are embodied in the words of our language. Concepts can therefore be different for speakers of different languages. Some of the most famous linguists, especially Ferdinand de Saussure, Edward Sapir, and Benjamin Lee Whorf, have been particularly interested in exploring the relationship between our concepts and the reality they represent, and in how the language we speak influences the way we conceptualise reality. Let's look at a few examples of the way different languages can use different concepts to mediate our understanding of reality.

Consider kinship terms across languages. All humans have the same kinds of relatives, but different languages conceptualise those relatives in different ways. For example, in English we have different words for female and male siblings (*sister* and *brother*) but only one term for cousins of either sex. As you probably know, many other languages have separate terms for female and male cousins.

Another example is the word 'exit'. In English we use the same word whether it is an exit for a vehicle or a pedestrian; in many languages two separate words are used, and people have two separate concepts for our one – which can lead to misunderstandings, and even to someone trying to drive out of a carpark through a doorway instead of on the road!

Probably the most famous example comes from Ferdinand de Saussure, who pointed out that whereas in French there is just one word, *mouton*, for 'sheep', whether it is a live sheep grazing in a field or a grilled chop on your plate, in English two separate words are used, *sheep* and *mutton*.

These kinds of differences between languages, and the problems they cause for translation, are well known. In this project, it is proposed that conceptualisation is important not just in using language to understand the world, but in understanding and using language itself. Before we explore that idea, let's look a little at the difference between concepts we are conscious of, and those that we hold subconsciously.

2.2.3.6.   Subconscious vs conscious concepts

One thing that is particularly interesting about conceptualisation is that some of the concepts that are most important in helping us understand the world are *subconscious*. We have little conscious awareness that we hold those concepts. In fact sometimes our consciously held concepts can be quite different from the unconscious ones – and yet it is the *unconscious* concepts that direct our understanding and behaviour.

Some of the easiest examples come from personal insight. A person can be *consciously* aware, for example, of an emotion of 'anger', whereas a deeper emotion, and a better one to work with in order to overcome the anger, might be one of 'hurt' or 'betrayal'.

Advertisers know the difference between conscious and subconscious conceptualisation very well – and the fact that if they want to influence our spending behaviour they have to get to our subconscious concepts, not just our conscious concepts.

When an ad states that 'Coca Cola is the real thing', thousands of people go out and buy coke. This is not because coca cola *really is* the real thing, or even because the ads make people consciously *believe* that Coca Cola is the real thing, but because the ads encourage people to subconsciously conceptualise Coca Cola as something desirable, worth spending money on.

The concepts that are most important in influencing our actions and behaviour are often subconscious. They are also often 'masked' by conscious concepts which may be quite different from the subconscious concepts that are actually driving our behaviour

It is difficult to be aware of subconscious concepts, and even more difficult to change them through acquiring conscious information.

This is especially true of the phonological concepts that drive our pronunciation, as we will see many times throughout this handbook.

Again, the situation with speech is very similar. Have you ever wondered why it is that learners can consciously know the rules of English pronunciation but still break all the rules every time they speak? It is because the concepts relevant to English pronunciation have remained at the conscious level, and not filtered down to the subconscious level, where they can influence understanding and behaviour.

2.2.3.7.   Why does Conceptualisation matter to pronunciation?

You may also have wondered why it is that learners often can't even repeat back an English word you have just said to them? Imitation of speech is not a simple parroting exercise, in which the ear picks up the sounds and the tongue plays them back. Between the ear and the tongue comes conceptualisation. We subconsciously *think about* the sounds we have to produce, deconstructing them and reconstructing them according to our phonological concepts. We do this even when we imitate speakers of our own language. If I say something and ask you to repeat it – you don't reproduce it *precisely* as I said it. Rather you *recreate* it so that it is equivalent in meaning to what I said. There is some demonstration and discussion of this point on the CD *Teaching Pronunciation*.

Here is a simple analogy which might make the role of conceptualisation clearer.

Have you ever tried to draw? If you are like me, you can look at something, and understand it fully – but if you try to reproduce it on paper, it comes out looking all wrong. What is the problem? There is nothing wrong with my eyes, and there is nothing wrong with my hands or my ability to control the pencil and paper. What is wrong is my *conceptualisation* of the thing I am drawing. I am looking at it with everyday eyes, conceptualising it in terms of what it is and what I know about it. In order to reproduce it on paper, I need to look at it (ie. Understand it, conceptualise it) in a new way, in terms of lines, shades, planes and shapes.

I can learn to be better at drawing. But doing so requires me, in the first instance, to work on seeing and conceptualisation, not on holding a pencil or making marks. Once I have some basics I will need to go on to study brushwork, composition, and so on. But in order to make use of these skills I need the ability to reproduce a basic likeness.
Anyone can learn to create basic likenesses of objects on paper. Of course, to be a real artist is something over and above this, requiring talent, study and dedication. But again the analogy holds true for pronunciation. Anyone, with maybe a very few special exceptions, can learn functional pronunciation of a foreign language. To learn excellent native-like pronunciation requires hard work, similar to that required by an actor or professional voice artist.

This picture was drawn by a student on her first day of art class.
(Illustration adapted from Edwards, B. 1986. Drawing on the Artist Within. New York: Fireside Books)

This picture was drawn by the same student after just a few lessons in how to see objects in new ways and conceptualise them in a way appropriate to drawing
Similar improvements are possible in pronunciation through changes in conceptualisation.
(Illustration adapted from Edwards, B. 1986. Drawing on the Artist Within. New York: Fireside Books)

2.2.3.8.   Conceptualising speech

Students sometimes find, even when they are clear on the concept of conceptualisation, that it is difficult to understand what it means to conceptualise speech or language. We are used to thinking of language as a tool in conceptualising the rest of the world, but it takes a shift of perspective to realise that we also need to conceptualise language itself.
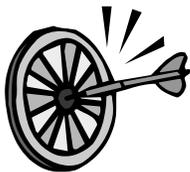
This is a ***metalinguistic*** use of language, ie. Using language to conceptualise language.

Knowing a language means understanding many words in that language. But to be able to use the language fully we must be able not just to use words as units, but to conceptualise words as being made up of smaller (***sublexical*** *or* ***phonological***) units. Conceptualising speech means thinking about it in terms of sublexical units such as phonemes, syllables, tones, long and short vowels, stressed and unstressed parts, hard and soft consonants, etc. These are phonological concepts. The phonological concepts

that we are most familiar with as English speakers are phonemes, but we are aware of the existence of others. The important thing is that these sublexical units are not 'reality'; they are concepts.

Speech in itself 'really is' a continuous stream of sound. Unlike writing, it doesn't have spaces between individual sounds, or even between words. It is only through the use of phonological concepts that we can break up this continuous flow of speech and understand the language.

When a person grows up speaking a particular language – any language – they learn to impose order on the continuous flow of speech in terms of the phonological concepts relevant to *that particular language*. These phonological concepts are different, sometimes radically different, from the phonological concepts of other languages. Even where two languages have phonologies based mainly on the same type of sublexical unit, such as phonemes, the particular phonemic concepts they use can be very different. And many languages have phonologies based around sublexical units that have little to do with phonemes as we know them.

> Just as different languages give their speakers different words to conceptualise the world, so different phonological systems give their speakers different ways to conceptualise the sounds of their language.
>
> Just as translating from one language to another can be difficult because it is not just the words that are different but the concepts too, so learning the pronunciation of a new language is difficult because it is not just the sounds that are different, but the phonological concepts.

Most importantly, our *conscious* concepts of the sublexical units of our language can be quite different from the *subconscious* concepts that actually underpin our ability to understand and use speech. For example, in English, the process of learning to read and write gives us a belief that our language is structured according to the letters of the alphabet. Later, if we study linguistics, we learn that the spelling of a word is a poor representation of its pronunciation, and we learn the concept of phoneme, and a new alphabet for writing phonemes consistently.

As we will see, however, the unconscious concepts that actually drive our pronunciation can be quite different from phonemes. If we want to really understand speech, we can't stop our study at the phoneme.

2.2.3.9.   Teaching concepts vs learning concepts

The subconscious concepts that actually drive our understanding and behaviour can only be learned or altered through experience and practice. A teacher can only ever be a facilitator in this process – the *learning* must be done by the learners themselves. Explicit teaching can only affect conscious concepts. This is often described in terms of a difference between **knowing that** and **knowing how**. For the conscious concepts of *knowing that* to actually affect our behaviour or *knowing how*, they need to filter down to the subconscious level.

Real changes in pronunciation require changes in unconscious concepts. This requires experience and practice, not just information. As most teachers know, their role is not primarily one of telling learners things, but one of encouraging learners in activities which facilitate deep, intuitive unconscious learning. This is why the communicative method emphasises **pronunciation lessons for pronunciation!** For learners to really improve, they must spend a good proportion of their time actually speaking.

Learning pronunciation involves *both* conscious and subconscious conceptualisation.

2.2.4. We all conceptualise speech (not just learners)

It is important to point out that it is not just learners who conceptualise speech differently from how it 'really is': we all do so, though we generally are not aware of this. An easy way to remember this point is through the slogan: **what we think we say can be quite different to what we actually say**.

We have seen that to be able to understand and use speech, we have to impose order on the continuous flow of sound, by dividing it up into words and sounds. As English speakers we tend to impose order in terms of phoneme-size sounds. This tendency towards phonemic interpretation is greatly reinforced by our learning to read a particular alphabetic script, and more and more heavily reinforced the more highly literate we become, to the point where we really can't conceive any other way of thinking about speech. Most English teachers of course are highly literate, and think about speech very much in terms of the letters that are used to represent it. Being highly literate is in itself a useful skill but it does have a drawback in the extent to which it locks in our perception of the sounds of English.

Of course most teachers are well aware of the limitations of the English spelling system as a representation of the actual sounds of English. Consider the familiar example of the many ways of representing the phoneme /i/ in 'field, dear, Caesar, seize, see, me'. Teachers are well aware of the concept of the phoneme, and the idea that we can represent phonemes more accurately with the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet than with standard orthography.

What teachers have often not had demonstrated to them in detail though is that phonemic transcription is really only an idealised form of English spelling. It is not a fundamentally different way of looking at speech but is very closely tied to English spelling – a set of conscious concepts whose use depends on a knowledge of English.
As ESL teachers we need some awareness that our students often *do* have fundamentally different ways of looking at speech – and of course do not have the intuitive knowledge of English that enables them to interpret phoneme concepts automatically and easily.

2.2.5. Phonemics is not phonetics

What all this means is that phonemes are abstract concepts, not real 'bits of words'.

> I remember being surprised, when as a phonologist I first started working with pronunciation teachers, at how much faith was put in the concept of the phoneme. Many teachers seemed to believe that phonemic transcription really represented what speech is actually like. In fact, phonemic transcription was almost universally referred to as 'phonetic transcription'.
>
> When we teach phonology to linguistics students, we teach phonemic transcription in the first few weeks, and then spend the next few years showing its limitations, and especially its difference from phonetic transcription.

The kind of transcription that appears in dictionaries, and uses the 44 sounds of English, is phonemic transcription. It is most certainly not phonetic transcription, though it is often wrongly called phonetic transcription to distinguish it from spelling.

In fact, each phoneme has two, three or more different pronunciations (*allophones*), depending on its context in the word. For example, the vowel in 'bad' is much longer than the vowel in 'bat'; the 'r' in 'rain' sounds quite different from the 'r' in train. There are many such examples. This is due to the operation of *coarticulation*. As we have seen, real speech is a continuous flow of sound, not a sequence of independent phonemes.

In phonetics we study speech in its continuous and highly variable (though also highly structured) nature, using special instruments designed to reduce the effect of our language-specific phonological concepts. One of these is the *spectrogram* – a 'picture' or visual representation of the acoustic structure of speech. Another is the *electropalatograph* – an instrument that allows us to register the movements of the tongue against the palate during speech.

When these instruments were developed (all rather recently, during the post-war period), phoneticians were surprised at how little real speech resembles our conscious conceptualisation of it – and this surprise is re-enacted every year as a new batch of students learns the use of these instruments. Much work had to be done to understand how the human mind imposes concepts such as phoneme concepts onto the continuous flow of speech. Indeed much work remains to be done to achieve a full account of these mysterious processes of speaking and listening.

One thing is for sure however. A phonemic transcription of speech is a very different thing from a phonetic transcription. A phonetic transcription of speech is one which aims to come close to what the sound is really like. A phonemic transcription *necessarily* represents speech according to the phonological concepts of a *particular language*. Some languages' phonological systems can't even be well approximated with *any* phonemic system (because their phonologies operate according to non-phonemic principles, which we won't go into here) and **no language except English can be well represented with the phoneme symbols of English**.

2.2.5.1. The illusion of the phoneme

You may be thinking – but phonemes *sound* so real! Indeed, once you have learned the concept of phonemic transcription it is hard to believe that they are not real bits of words – that when we hear words we are not 'really' hearing a string of phonemes. But there is a great deal of evidence that this is not the case.

One of the best kinds of evidence is just how *hard* it is to do phonemic transcription! Certainly it is easy to learn the *concept* of phonemic transcription – that one symbol represents one sound – and to transcribe a few isolated words. But have you ever tried to transcribe a passage of real continuous speech from the radio or a recording? It is amazingly difficult! It is tempting to ascribe the difficulty to the difficulty of remembering the symbols – but the real difficulty lies in understanding speech in terms of phoneme concepts.

Roslyn's experience

I thought I understood phonemes until we had to transcribe speech from the radio as an exercise in my Grad Dip. I was in tears it was so hard! And then after spending hours on my assignment, I just got the comment 'you don't understand schwa'.

I don't know how we can expect learners to use phonemic transcription when even the teachers find it so hard!

It has been shown in a number of studies that adults who have learned phonemic transcription to quite a high level are inconsistent and uncertain in the application of phoneme concepts to speech. It has also been shown in many studies, as well as being a common observation, that children learning to read have to be explicitly taught *phonemic awareness*. It doesn't come automatically.

What all this means is that, while phonemic conceptualisation is certainly an important *part* of speaking English, it is only part. Although it is our most powerful *conscious* sublexical concept is not the be-all and end-all of phonology and language use. (In fact, some phonological theories do not even recognise the phoneme as an essential unit of language!)

When it comes to the *subconscious* concepts that actually *drive* our use of language, other sublexical units, particularly the unit of the **syllable**, are also very important. Fortunately, however, it is not essential for language teachers to know all about these in order to teach well. It is essential for them to be aware that the phonemes of English, for all their seeming reality, are something of an illusion. Learners from other language backgrounds cannot be blamed if they do not immediately perceive this illusion!

2.2.5.2. Learners need to re-conceptualise speech to speak English
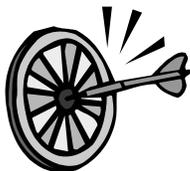
When learners make mistakes, they actually think, subconsciously, ***that they are simply imitating the English they hear*** – even if they know consciously that they are making mistakes. The differences between the model and their pronunciation that are so apparent to the English speaker are insignificant to the learner. For the learner to be able to improve, these differences must be made significant to them.

There are two possible kinds of misunderstanding open here. One is that 'if the phoneme is an illusion, we should teach from real phonetics'. To believe this would be a serious problem. We have seen that concepts are essential mediators between the world and our understanding of it. In order to speak or understand speech, we *need* phonological concepts; they are not a hindrance but an essential aid. Without them we would be like a 'speech thermostat', simply responding to acoustic stimuli without understanding.

Another potential misunderstanding is 'if the phoneme is an illusion, we should teach prosody (intonation) instead'. Yes, the phoneme is an illusion, but it is an illusion that is necessary to speaking English, and especially to using English writing. We do need to teach prosody, but we *also* need to teach phonemes.

The message from the above discussion is not to throw out the phoneme – but to understand that learners do not automatically hear and understand the phonemes of English. We need to teach them about phonemes. And, very importantly, we need to do it in a way that influences their subconscious intuitive conceptualisation. Simply telling them about phonemes is, as most teachers are well aware, not enough. So rather than saying we need to teach learners about phonemes, it would be more accurate to say that we need to help them to learn about and use phonemes, and other sublexical concepts of English. We'll see more detail on how to do this throughout this handbook.

2.2.6. Phonemes and prosody

We have seen above that one possible misunderstanding of the idea that the phoneme is an illusion is to suggest we should abandon the phoneme and concentrate on prosody (rhythm and intonation) in teaching English. In fact a few people have made this suggestion, and indeed it is true that prosody is crucially important to pronunciation. However the consensus now seems to be the commonsense position that we need both. That is certainly the view of the communicative approach being put forward in this handbook.

The point needs to be made however that learning prosody also requires conceptualisation, just as does learning other phonological concepts. This means that many of same issues as we have just discussed in relation to phonemes also arise in relation to prosody – perhaps even more so.

❖ In prosody, as with phonemes, what we think we say (our conscious concepts) can be quite different to what we actually say (driven by our subconscious concepts)

❖ In prosody, as with phonemes, the subconscious influence of our first language is immense in shaping our perception and conception, so people from different language backgrounds hear prosody quite differently

However, in prosody we do not (yet) have a standard system of units equivalent to the phoneme symbols. University libraries have shelves and shelves of literature devoted to intonation and rhythm, with rather little consensus having been reached about even the basics. Frankly, many of the statements about prosody in books written for teachers are at best simplistic, if not plain wrong. For example, the idea that English is a 'stress-timed language' is much more problematic than is often suggested.

Fortunately, though, just as with the discovery that real speech is enormously more complex than suggested by phonemic transcription, the fact that prosody involves enormously complex conceptualisation doesn't stop us being able to teach it effectively.

The key comes from the realisation that people do not learn to speak a language only through being told facts about the language. Rather they learn through guided experience that helps them build up appropriate subconscious concepts.

For English, the appropriate subconscious concepts involve both the phoneme level and the prosodic level. So – yes, it is true that we should concentrate on prosody in teaching ESL, though not at the expense of phonemes. Learners certainly need both, and preferably not separately. That is one of the reasons the communicative approach concentrates on larger chunks of speech like words, phrases and sentences, which have both segmental and prosodic aspects.

Our task is to find good ways of guiding learners into understanding these concepts, through the use of good metalinguistic communication. We will be looking at this in detail throughout the handbook, but for now we can point out that the **syllable** is a wonderful unit which combines phonemic and prosodic aspects of language. In the communicative approach we concentrate heavily in the early stages of pronunciation teaching on helping learners understand how syllables function in English, and especially on how **stress** is used. This forms the basis of further work on phonemes and prosody.

2.2.7. Words and clues

In this last section a concept that can be useful in moving beyond the idea that words are made up of phonemes will be proposed. That is the idea that when we listen to speech we don't 'pick up' a series of phonemes and then put them together like beads on a string to make words. Rather we listen out for **clues** in the speech that tell us what the words are. Those clues need not relate directly to phonemes at all, but they help us understand the words and sentences.

The particular clues that are relevant depend on the language being spoken. For example, in English, the clues involve things like whether a syllable is stressed, whether there is a final consonant in a syllable, whether a vowel is long or short, whether a consonant is an 'r' or an 'l', and so on.

The clues that are relevant in other languages can be quite different (eg. Tone, nasalisation of vowels). When we learn a language in childhood we become enormously adept at **noticing** the clues that are relevant to our language, and in putting these clues into our own speech to help our listeners understand us. Part of acquiring this skill of noticing, however, involves **ignoring** other aspects of speech that happen not to be relevant to our language. The two skills – what to notice and what to ignore – go hand in hand. They are two sides of the same coin.

An analogy may be useful in making the ideas of the preceding discussion clearer.

Consider the story of a white man who lived with a group of traditional Aborigines, about fifty years ago. At first, of course, he could not cope with basic hunting and gathering, but gradually he learned to notice signs like possums' claw marks on tree trunks. He was forming concepts which enabled him to use the clues in the environment to help him find the information he needed.

He was pleased with his progress, especially one day when he thought he had noticed a possum's claw marks before his companions did, and pointed out a tree where they could expect to find a meal. However the Aborigines disappointed him by remarking that they had already seen those claw marks but had paid no attention. They had *also* noticed that the most recent marks were going *down*; there *had been* a possum up there, but it had left some time ago.

The Aborigines hadn't especially studied the claw marks. Because they were used to living in this environment they simply noticed and conceptualised things differently from the white man. The white man could easily *perceive* the marks, but had not learned which aspects to pay attention to as relevant clues to the information he needed. In other words, he had not formed *concepts* which he could apply to his perception.

Note the stages of this man's conceptualisation:

1. no special concept – the marks are just part of the tree
2. marks conceptualised as animals' claw marks
3. marks conceptualised as possum marks
4. marks conceptualised as possum marks in a particular direction
5. ?? perhaps there is more work still to be done!

Of course, it is not true that only people living traditional lives have these skills of noticing and conceptualising aspects of reality, and using them as clues to help us understand our world. Consider a western city dweller in a shopping mall. If you think about it, the amount of information that needs to be processed in order to find, say, the toilets, or the exit, is colossal. Yet we learn to do it without even noticing the skills and subconscious concepts we are bringing to bear.

In any perceptual event, there is always far far more information than is actually useful or relevant. We learn through experience which aspects to pay attention to, and other aspects we simply ignore, to the point of not even noticing they exist.

It is just the same with speech. Any one sentence in any language is full of an enormous amount of acoustic information. Only a small fraction of this acoustic information is relevant to the listener in determining which words the person said, and figuring out what their message is. We learn through experience in learning our first language which aspects are relevant, and notice these; and aspects which are irrelevant we simply ignore. **And knowing what to ignore is as important as knowing what to pay attention to and notice.**

Once we have learned to do this, it all seems so obvious that we can't imagine any other way of perceiving, and forget the long process we went through in order to gain these skills.

When we learn a new language, of course, we have the laborious task of unlearning those subconscious skills and concepts, and relearning a new way of conceptualising sound.

2.3. PRINCIPLES

2.3.1. Introduction

In this section, we attempt to pull some principles out of the fundamentals, and discuss in general terms how best to help learners with pronunciation. Most of these principles are based in familiar ideas about good teaching practice which teachers undoubtedly use in other aspects of their teaching, such as

- ❖ having a suitable curriculum
- ❖ being student-centred
- ❖ helping learners become self-reliant
- ❖ giving opportunities to practise
- ❖ knowing what's best

However knowing how to apply these familiar ideas to pronunciation requires a fair bit of background understanding of phonology and psycholinguistics.

2.3.2. Good teaching means: having a suitable curriculum

When we teach anything, we start by helping students acquire some basic concepts on which they can build more complex understanding. For example, when we teach science, we make sure students have a basic understanding of solids and liquids before we teach them about molecules, atoms and subatomic particles. Sometimes teaching the elementary concepts involves letting students believe some things that aren't strictly

accurate, but that help their understanding. Later they can go on to refine their concepts, and realise that what they first thought was a simplification.

It is exactly the same with teaching pronunciation. Although in many cases we do not have the opportunity to establish and follow a full curriculum course on pronunciation with learners, it is always important to offer learners help at a level appropriate to their needs. This means having a rough curriculum for pronunciation teaching in our minds so that we can access material relevant to particular situations.

There are many ways of developing a pronunciation curriculum. For example, some people like to work through the various classes of phonemes or contrasts in order; others like to tackle 'common problems', such as 'r' and 'l' or 'vowel length', one at a time; others like to have lessons on topics such as 'questions vs statements' or 'contrastive stress'.

In the communicative approach, the order in which pronunciation needs are addressed is based on the needs of the people who will be *listening* to the learners (ie. Ordinary native speakers of English), and the curriculum involves helping learners acquire the concepts most relevant to making themselves understood in English. In other words, the 'curriculum' for pronunciation is based on the relative importance of different aspects of pronunciation **in terms of how they affect listener comprehension**.

> Much psycholinguistic research (see references) shows that English listeners respond to stress patterns much more than to individual vowels and consonants.

If the stress pattern of a phrase is correct the phrase can be comprehended in context even though some other aspects are incorrect. However, even if the consonant pronunciation is perfect, the overall meaning of the message will be missed if the stress pattern and vowel characteristics are not given correctly. Since our goal is to help students to acquire functional oral communication, we start with aspects of pronunciation that most affect listener comprehension. Once they can manage functional oral communication, they can certainly go on to improve the details of their pronunciation. If we start with the details, they may never achieve functional oral communication.

What that means in practice is that pronunciation problems should be tackled roughly in the following order:

- ❖ word and sentence stress
- ❖ syllable structure (final consonants, consonant clusters)
- ❖ vowel length distinctions
- ❖ major consonant distinctions (those with a high functional load, eg. S/sh, f/p)
- ❖ vowel quality distinctions
- ❖ minor consonant distinctions (those with a low functional load, eg. Th, v/w)

This list need not be adhered to rigidly. If you feel you can help a student with a problem from further down the list, you should certainly do so. However, in general, there is little point in helping students with, say, consonant distinctions, if they have very poor control of word and sentence stress. This is simply because, even if you are able to help a learner perfect their consonant distinctions, unless they have also mastered the English stress system, they will still be very hard to understand. Note that this list implies that the most important thing to teach is stress, and indeed the key to teaching both prosody and phonemes is helping learners understand stress.

A trap for teachers is that aspects of pronunciation lower in the list are often easier to notice in a learner's speech, and to work on with the learner, than those higher up the list. We will look in other sections at how to diagnose what help a learner most needs.

A common misunderstanding

Some people have thought that I am suggesting we should be satisfied with second best pronunciation from learners. This is not true at all. We should go on helping learners to improve their pronunciation for as long as they are interested in doing this. The point is that to be effective, we must organise our pronunciation teaching curriculum in the most effective order.

2.3.3. Good teaching means: being student centred

2.3.3.1. Understanding the process learners are going through

It is not enough, in any subject, for teachers simply to give learners true information! The teacher has to understand the process whereby learners can come to understand and use the information. In relation to pronunciation, that means understanding that learners have to re-conceptualise speech, in the ways described in the previous sections.
If the teacher has this understanding, they will know, for example, that it is not enough for a learner simply to hear good English pronunciation modelled.
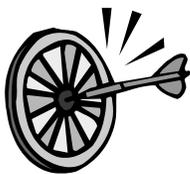
A perfect example of the inadequacy of simply modeling good pronunciation to learners was provided by a participant in our big workshop at the beginning of the project, when an audience member recounted the following dialogue he had once had with a Spanish learner of English.

Learner: Excuse me, in English do you say Espain or Espain?
Teacher: Neither. We say (*very clearly enunciated*) Spain.
Learner (turning away): Yes, thank you. Espain.

After all, learners who live in Australia hear good English all around them every day. However, unless they are specially gifted (equivalent to someone who naturally draws well) they don't pick it up by osmosis. The problem is they tend to conceptualise what they hear in terms of the phonological units of their own language. They need guidance in how to conceptualise English more appropriately.

Teachers also need to understand that conscious knowledge can only go so far. Ultimately learners have to learn through their own experience how to conceptualise English sounds.

2.3.3.2.   Giving information in a form learners can use and act upon

It has been said that the information in an encyclopaedia or dictionary is best measured not by *what the writers put into it* but by *what the users can get out of it*. Everyone is familiar with the stereotype of the highly erudite university professor who gives incomprehensible lectures, or the reference book packed full of information but with a bad indexing system. Of course teachers are well aware of the need to explain things clearly, taking account of different background and learning styles. However when it comes to pronunciation it can be difficult to know exactly what to tell learners to help them most. We must strive to communicate information about speech in a way learners can use effectively to improve their pronunciation. This is the key to good **metalinguistic communication**. It can take a good deal of trial and error, and requires an open mind.

> Metalinguistic communication is the communication that takes place between teachers and learners about pronunciation itself, for example, when a teacher points out learners' errors and suggests how they might improve their pronunciation.

In general it is not a good idea to communicate about pronunciation solely in words – at least until you have built up a deep understanding with learners about the metalinguistic vocabulary you use. It is very important to use audio and visual aids to help them understand what you mean. Simple visual representations of the words in ordinary spelling with a few well-chosen annotations are usually the best for students. More advice on exactly how to use these aids is given in Section 2.4.6.3 and elsewhere.

Another important concept for teachers is to test students often (informally only!) to be sure they really understand the terms and concepts you are using. Ask *them* to tell *you* about the stress pattern of words. Ask *them* to tell *you* whether the pronunciation of a word is right or wrong. If they have trouble with these tasks, take a step back and go over some key concepts.

2.3.3.3.   Starting from where learners are

It is really important to know as much as you can about how learners are conceptualising English speech *before* giving them information about English pronunciation. There is no point giving rules of stress placement if the student does not fully understand what stress is. There is no point telling them to 'remember the final consonants' unless you have done sufficient groundwork with them to be sure they understand what you mean and can use your advice in practice.

Knowing how learners conceptualise speech doesn't necessarily mean knowing all their native languages. A learner's pronunciation of English gives you a lot of clues as to how they are hearing and conceptualising English sounds. Remember the slogan **if a learner says it that way it means they think about it that way**.

If you find a learner is constantly leaving consonants off the end, they are not doing it 'on purpose'! They are not hearing a consonant and deciding to leave it off. They either don't hear the consonant at all, or, much more likely, they believe they *are* putting a consonant on the end. You telling them they are not will be quite confusing for them. It is better to work with them to help them hear the difference between a word English speakers hear as having a consonant on the end and one English speakers hear without a consonant, and to realise the significance of this for the meaning an English listener will ascribe to their speech.

It is actually quite understandable that learners think they are putting a consonant on the ends of words – because they are! The problem is that it is a consonant English speakers tend to ignore: the **glottal stop**.

Do you notice that every time you say a word that 'begins with a vowel' (eg. *Apple*), it really begins with a glottal stop? The reason you don't notice it is that it is not functionally relevant to the phonology of English. However, in many languages the glottal stop is a stop consonant just like 't' or 'k'.

What learners are usually doing is not 'leaving off the alveolar stop' but 'using a glottal stop instead of an alveolar stop'. It is more useful to them to be told 'If you say it that way English speakers won't hear the final consonant properly' than to tell them to 'put a consonant on the end'.

Always test learners' understanding of everything you say about English pronunciation by asking them questions and by observing whether they can actually use what you say to change their pronunciation. If they can't, you probably need to work more on discrimination and recognition. More detailed advice is given in the other sections.

2.3.3.4.   Using material that is relevant for your learners

An important basis of all communicative language teaching is that the material discussed in class should be as close as possible to the material found in natural communication outside the classroom, and this is no less true in pronunciation than in any other area of language. Right from the start, and throughout, pronunciation lessons should focus on, and be based around, words, phrases and sentences that learners can actually use outside the classroom.

It is extremely important to choose material that is *relevant* to your students, both in terms of its level of difficulty and in terms of its actual content. Ideally, ask your students to bring you sentences that they will be using outside class: this makes the best practice material of all. If you can't do this, use your knowledge of the types of situations your learners are involved in to choose or make up exercises that will be maximally useful to them.

Use the guidelines on diagnosing students' pronunciation needs (see Practicalities) to help you devise exercises that are at the right level for your students, and that let them practise a particular issue that is relevant to their needs. This will enable you to give positive reinforcement even if some pronunciation errors remain. No one functions well if they are overwhelmed by the enormous task they face, or if they feel they can't get anything right.

2.3.4. Good teaching means: helping learners become self-reliant

Many students have quite incorrect ideas about what is involved in learning pronunciation – or in learning a language in general, for that matter. For example, many students believe that learning vocabulary involves writing words on cards and storing them in a card file! Certainly doing this is useful but the learning only happens when the cards are actually used.

In regard to pronunciation it is useful to tell learners that pronunciation is a skill that involves both thinking and doing – just like learning a sport or a musical instrument.
It is also very useful to give learners a framework within which they can think about pronunciation, can understand and extend the information you give them, and even, as they become more experienced, use their own mistakes to learn from. (See more detail in Section 2.4.2 of Practicalities.)

Give learners themselves a simplified version of the idea that in communication it is not what you say that matters but what your listener understands. Help learners understand the importance of helping their listener by speaking loudly enough and slowly enough that the listener can process their speech, not just rushing to get their ordeal of speaking over and done with! You might even like, with some learners, to discuss their own experience of listening to a foreign learner speaking their own native language. Sometimes they find this interesting and are encouraged to realise that learners can be quite comprehensible even if they have an accent.

2.3.5. Good teaching means: giving opportunities to practise

Although I have emphasised the cognitive aspects of pronunciation, this has been purely to redress the balance in favour of an often neglected aspect. In reality, pronunciation is a skill, and practice is just as important as cognitive understanding.

One of the main values of a classroom situation is that it gives learners a safe place to try out and rehearse the speech they will need to use in 'the real world'. Don't let them wriggle out of practising by saying they are embarrassed! Encourage them by saying, if you are going to make a mistake it is better to make it here with me than out there where it really matters.

If you are working with an individual learner, don't be afraid to give them lots of practice of simply repeating a sentence after you: you say it, they say it, you say it, they say it.
A good method to use with a large group is to let the learners practise in chorus for several repetitions, then choose one student for individual rehearsal, go back to chorus rehearsal, then choose another student, go back to chorus, and so on. You might think

they would get bored with this, but as long as the material is useful and challenging, students generally love this kind of work.

> As long as the material being practiced is real words, phrases and sentences which the students can realistically expect to use soon in 'real life', it is almost impossible to do 'too much practice'. Time spent practicing one useful sentence is not 'wasted', as its effects spill over to many other sentences.

2.3.6. Good teaching means: knowing what's best

In relation to pronunciation, many students believe that they need *information*, eg. About articulation or grammar, in order to overcome their perceived inability to pronounce the sounds in question. Many students believe they need to master the 'phonetic alphabet' (really the phonemic alphabet) in order to learn pronunciation. Many students believe they have no right to speak unless they can sound like a native speaker. Many students believe that learning the rules of English phonology is the same thing as learning pronunciation.

As we have seen, all of these beliefs are at least partially false. Without going into a detailed explanation to learners, it is important not to just 'give them what they want'. I have often heard justification of the use of vocal tract animations with 'But that's what the students want'. This may be so, but the students' *greater* want is to learn pronunciation.
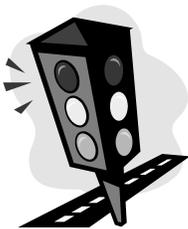
> When learners pester me for information about the articulation of sounds in cases where I think they could not use the information effectively (see Section 2.3.3.2), I tell them
>
> **Let your ears do the work!**
>
> And encourage them to listen and repeat, listen and repeat, without thinking too much about what is happening inside their mouths.

The same goes for practising real speech in class, or for getting learners to record their voices and listen to them critically. While you can't force adults to do things your way, you can certainly encourage them and give them confidence that your way will work. Indeed it is your responsibility to do this.

> With learners, it is our responsibility not just to 'give them what they want', but to 'make them want what we know they need'!

2.4. PRACTICALITIES

2.4.1. Introduction

In this section we give some general practical suggestions about teaching pronunciation, based on the principles outlined above. This is intended mainly to help readers deepen their understanding of the principles, so that they can be applied in a range of situations. As we have seen, it is the confidence and flexibility gained through understanding the principles that allows teachers and trainers not just to teach pronunciation effectively, but to integrate pronunciation work into other types of teaching and training.

More detail and specific advice related to teaching in particular situations will be found in the three Frameworks.

2.4.2. Building up a communicative framework

Just as teachers need a framework for thinking about and planning what is involved in teaching pronunciation, so learners need a framework for understanding what is involved in learning pronunciation.

One of the most valuable things we can give learners is the ability and confidence to go on learning pronunciation even when we are not there to guide them. A useful tool we can offer them is a framework for understanding communication. When we teach learners such a communicative framework, we give them a way of understanding the process of communication and interpreting what has gone wrong if any breakdown should occur.

Teaching the communicative framework means giving learners a very general overview about what communication is – transfer of a message from one person to another – and then giving advice or correction in terms of this overview. Doing this helps learners to:

- think about their pronunciation as communication, rather than as a classroom exercise

- focus on their listener's perception rather than on their own production

- think explicitly about what their listener needs in order to understand them

The communicative framework is very useful in helping learners to see communication as a whole, involving speaking loudly enough so that listeners can hear easily, looking at the listener, using rhythm and phrasing effectively. However it is also useful in helping learners understand segmental errors, since it helps them distinguish clearly between what the learner thinks they are saying (ie. Based on the phonological concepts of their native language) and what the listener thinks the learner is saying (ie. Based on the phonological concepts of English). It would be unusual to explain these concepts

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explicitly to learners, but if the *teacher* has a good understanding of the concepts, their explanations to the learner can help build up these ideas for the learner without them having to be explicitly taught.

For example, mistakes can be consistently explained in terms of 'If you say it that way, an English speaker will think you said X instead of Y'. This really helps learners to see a rationale behind English pronunciation, rather than it being a confusing set of arbitrary rules.

We will look in more detail in the Frameworks at how to help learners at different stages to build up a communicative framework.
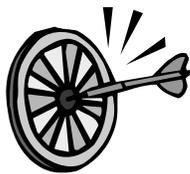
Some terminology

A **framework** is a set of principles, practices and processes which can be adapted flexibly to a wide range of actual situations, such as the frameworks suggested in this Handbook, or the communicative framework.

The **communicative approach** is the general philosophy, assumptions and methodology for teaching pronunciation put forward in this Handbook.

2.4.3. Integrating

This entire project was strongly focused on finding ways of integrating work on pronunciation into teaching and training, even when separate pronunciation classes were not possible. Many examples are found throughout the handbook of how to do this.

In general this handbook can only give principles and examples since the essence of integrating is to be able to respond to problems and issues as they come up. This emphasises the importance of teachers and trainers

- ❖ **either** thoroughly understanding the background and principles of effective pronunciation teaching
- ❖ **or** being clear on the limits of their own knowledge and expertise

Even with limited knowledge, teachers can offer genuine help to learners. The ineffectiveness of pronunciation teaching often comes about from people thinking they know more than they do and unintentionally giving misleading information or advice to learners.
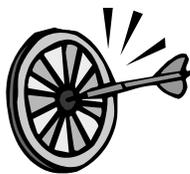
Effective integration of pronunciation work also involves teachers building up a rapport with learners, and an ongoing relationship so that consistent use of terms, notations, and frameworks can be built up and allow good metalinguistic communication. This is worth emphasising to managers, principals or funding bodies.

2.4.4. Homework and self reliance

It is very important for learners to go on working on their pronunciation even outside the classroom. If possible, give them something concrete to take away with them to practise during the time till you next meet with them. This could be as simple as a written list of the words or sentences you have been working on with them, preferably with notations (eg. Underlining, arrows – see Section 2.4.6.2) to point out the areas they need to concentrate on. At a more sophisticated level, they could be given a tape or computer disk to enable them to hear and practise the material they have been working on. If this is not possible – or even if it is – you might consider suggesting to learners that they ask a native or fluent English speaker to judge whether they are pronouncing their homework correctly.

Another kind of homework is also extremely useful, for those learners who interact with native speakers, in building confidence and understanding of the communicative framework. Ask them to note any situations in which communication breaks down: either the learner fails to understand a native speaker or a native speaker fails to understand the learner. Rather than letting these lie as negative experiences, they can be brought to class and workshopped, both with discussion and guidance regarding what went wrong, and with role plays to re-enact the situation in a more satisfactory way.

The teacher can take the opportunity to give learners general guidelines in how to figure out what has gone wrong if they are not understood. For example, teachers can encourage learners to ask themselves

- ❖ 'Did I make an error in the stress pattern?'
- ❖ 'Perhaps I spoke too quickly or too quietly'
- ❖ 'Did I pronounce all the final consonants so that the listener could understand the words properly?'.

This type of homework also offers opportunities for the teacher to give guidance and encouragement to learners in how to increase the amount of communication they have with native speakers. Of course this has to be done sensitively so as not to expose learners to embarrassment or even worse. But, while allowing learners always to make their own judgments as to when they want to practise, it can be useful to discuss general issues such as how to prolong a conversation after a query or purchase, or how to open up communication with neighbours or work mates.

2.4.5. Motivating and encouraging

Sometimes learners feel that learning pronunciation is a hopeless task because there is so much to learn, or because of previous teachers' avoidance of the issue, or inability to teach pronunciation effectively. It is important to give learners a feeling of confidence and optimism. This of course depends upon the teacher really believing that it is possible to learn pronunciation, and having confidence in the approach they are taking. Ultimately this comes only through experiencing success, but it is also a frame of mind.

Try to notice and point out to learners the positive aspects of their pronunciation, and praise any improvement, even if you feel there is still a long way to go. Try to show confidence in the process that learners are going through, and to build up a sense of what works and what doesn't. See also section 2.3.6.

On the other hand, don't tell learners they are perfect if they are not! Give praise in relation to any improvement you do notice, and encouragement that you are sure they will get it eventually.

2.4.6. Helping learners conceptualise speech

2.4.6.1. Focus on words and phrases

We have seen that it is essential to teach learners about sublexical units such as phonemes and syllables, and to discuss concepts like word and sentence stress, vowel length, consonant contrasts, and so on. We have also emphasised that it is not enough to simply model whole words; it is necessary to help learners gain an appropriate understanding of the phonological system of English.

However, is best to do this *in the context of* words and phrases in which these units are relevant. In the communicative approach it is considered advisable to base a lesson around some useful phrases or sentences that might be useful in a particular communicative context, rather than around a particular consonant contrast or stress shift. In doing this, it is often necessary to refer to sublexical units, and to practise a series of related words – but always to come back to the words and phrases as a whole, so that learners can hear and understand how the sublexical units fit in to the larger picture.

In doing this, it is most important to remember that learners will not necessarily hear English words in the same way as you do, and to pay constant attention to your metalinguistic communication with learners. While ultimate decisions and judgments about metalinguistic communication have to be made by the teacher 'at the chalkface', some guidelines can be useful.

Did you know?

You probably know that the English letter names, such as 'ess' or 'bee' are not universal.

But did you know that even when we refer to a phoneme 'by its sound' rather than by its letter name, we are still doing something quite language specific. For example, when we say 'suh, tuh, buh' and so on, we are adding a little vowel to 'carry' the phoneme. In other languages, the particular vowel that is used for this purpose is different. In some languages, the carrier vowel is found before rather than after the phoneme. So be careful of using these expressions with learners. They may understand you, but it will probably take them a fair bit of mental processing to do so – and the energy could usefully be spent elsewhere.

Whenever you are discussing sublexical units such as phonemes or syllables, try to make sure the learners hear them in the context of real words that they occur in. For example if you are discussing vowel length, make sure the learners hear not just the vowels but words that they occur in, and that you explicitly point out the long and short vowels within the words. This helps them to draw the connection between the sound in isolation and the sound in context.

> To English speakers it is very obvious that the name for the phoneme /i/, ie. 'ee', is the same sound as the middle part of 'beat', but this is frequently quite obscure to learners. This is indeed quite understandable when you consider that when we say the sound /i/ in isolation we add a huge glottal stop, which in many languages counts as a separate, and very noticeable, phoneme!
>
> See also Section 2.4.6.1.

Make sure, as well, that you ask learners to say the words, sounds or phrases you are talking about, and **that they are able to explain back to you the information you are giving them**. As teachers know well, learners will often nod and smile, and even believe themselves that they understand, but a little probing can reveal their understanding is incomplete.

2.4.6.2.   Focus on auditory properties not articulation

In general, it is not effective metalinguistic communication to explain pronunciation in terms of the articulation of sounds, even if the explanation is very accurate.

This is partly because learners can't really conceptualise information about the movements that go on inside their mouths in a way that helps them modify their pronunciation.

Another important reason is that teachers have virtually no insight into what really is happening inside their mouths, in order to convey this information to learners. No professional phonetician would ever think of describing articulation based on the subjective feeling of what is happening inside their mouths! That is because the unreliability of this type of 'introspection' has been demonstrated again and again.

2.4.6.3.   Using visual cues

The importance of visual cues for learners trying to grapple with English pronunciation is well accepted. What is more difficult is to decide exactly what visual cues most help learners.

It is common to think that the best visual cue would be some way of letting learners 'see speech', especially by letting them see the soundwaves produced when we talk. In fact, this is the basis of many 'multimedia' programs. However, this type of visual cue must be used with great caution. Speech waves can be valuable in certain cases, if prepared by someone who understands phonetics and psycholinguistics, but in general are far less useful than might be expected, especially when learners are asked to match their own speech wave to that of a native speaker model. This is because

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❖ speech waves actually don't correlate visually with speech; for that to work you need a spectrogram which is more complicated to produce and to read

❖ speech waves give visual cues to the *acoustic* structure of speech; what learners need more is visual cues to the *linguistic* structure of speech.

Consider the speech waves below. Two are of the same word, and the others are of words with different vowel phonemes. Can you pick which two are the same? If you do, it is sheer luck! The best phonetician in the world could not do this – because speech waves are not designed to allow vowels to be differentiated.
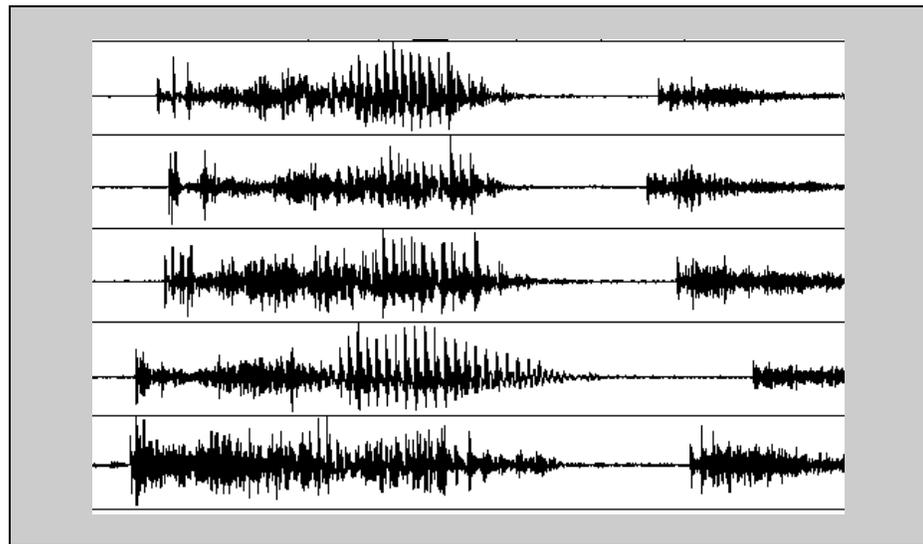
One of the best visual cues to the linguistic structure of speech is also, fortuitously, one of the easiest to use, for both teachers and learners: the **ordinary spelling of words**. It is very useful indeed for learners to see words written in their ordinary spelling as they are hearing them or saying them. It is also very useful to refer to parts of words (eg. If you want to tell a learner they have made a mistake in the second syllable) by **_pointing it out_** in the written word.

Of course in many cases the actual spelling of a word can be misleading in relation to its pronunciation. It is still good for learners to see the proper spelling but you might want to augment this with either IPA symbols or 'respelling'.

It is also very useful to build up with your learners a system of visual cues to use with spelling (see Section 5.3.3). This can take a wide range of forms, as long as it is consistently used, and as long as you take the responsibility to check constantly that learners can understand the notation and use it to improve their pronunciation.
Within the project, participants developed different approaches to notation. For example, Ameetha become known as the 'colour lady' because she liked to use colour to point out significant aspects of pronunciation; Sharen had a range of finger gestures from her background as a teacher of the deaf. On the other hand, some participants gradually changed to the suggested notations because they found them more effective *for helping*

learners' understanding. This of course is the ultimate test, and needs to be monitored constantly (see Section 1.2.4.1).

Some Suggested Notations

mis<u>take</u> = *stress should be on this syllable*

<u>mar</u>ch = *make this part longer*

it's not hot yet = *pay attention to these sounds*

~~d~~large = *don't let this sound be heard*

Give **comparisons** wherever possible, for example

<u>mis</u>take   mis<u>take</u>

match   <u>mar</u>ch

2.4.6.4. Using audio and multimedia

'Multimedia' sounds very high-tech, but it needn't be – it just means integrating audio and visual information. This can be done with 'chalk and talk' as well as computer programs. Indeed, if the former is used in a way that really helps learners' understanding and conceptualisation of English phonology, for example, if the visual cues above are used sensitively, with the teacher repeating the word or sentence while pointing out significant parts on the board, it can be at least as effective as the latter.

Nevertheless there are many advantages to using technology. Although computer-based audio and multimedia material is becoming more common, many teachers are restricted to the use of tape recorders. However there is still a great deal that can be done even with a tape recorder, and they are often not used to their full potential.

Speech, especially one's own, is so fleeting, it is almost impossible to really pay attention to it as it is in progress. One of the most useful things for a learner is to be able to listen several times to the same phrase or sentence. This is especially useful if learners can compare and contrast incorrect pronunciation with correct pronunciation, and best of all if it is their very own voice they are listening to. In the communicative approach this is called **critical listening**. There is a good deal of information about it on the two CDs *Learn to Speak Clearly in English* and *Teaching Pronunciation*.

2.4.7. **The problem of transfer**

We have already mentioned (Section 2.2.2) the problem of transfer: that learners can spend a lot of time in class 'getting' a particular pronunciation – only to 'lose' it when they walk out the door into the real world.

This is an inevitable part of all language teaching, and not in itself a major cause for concern – as long as there *is* a gradual improvement in pronunciation outside the classroom.

Some steps that can be taken to minimise the problem of transfer include the following.

❖ Use materials in class that are as close as possible to the speech learners will really be using outside the teaching situation. While chants, recitations and dialogues certainly have their place, the risk of using them is that it can be difficult for learners to see the connection (even if it is clear to the teacher) between the language practised in class and the language used outside.

❖ Make sure you continue to correct learners' pronunciation even when you are speaking to them informally. Of course this must be done sensitively, and in an encouraging, rather than silencing, manner! This is possible however if you have built up a rapport and a system of metalinguistic communication with learners, so that any corrections can be brief and light hearted, so as not to interrupt the flow of the conversation.

❖ It is useful to discuss the problems of nervousness explicitly with learners. Often their pronunciation deteriorates outside the classroom because they are under more stress. Learners can benefit from role playing situations that make them nervous (eg. Finally coming to the head of a long queue and having to request their ticket) and discussing strategies for remaining calm and focused, such as

- relaxing the shoulders,

- taking a deep breath,

- reminding themselves of their right to be heard, and

- realising that taking a moment to think through what they need to say and how they will say it really does take only a moment, and does not hold things up nearly as much as they might fear.

2.5. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

2.5.1. Introduction

These are some of the questions that were asked at the half day workshop that took place during this project, and which are often asked when the communicative approach is presented.

2.5.2. Do you really believe pronunciation can be taught?

Teachers have often found the attempt to teach pronunciation to be a frustrating exercise not just for themselves but for their students. Part of the reason many teachers give up on pronunciation is to avoid pain and disappointment for their students.

It is important then to emphasise from the outset that pronunciation *can* be taught effectively, and can be learned to a level that allows functional communication in a wide variety of contexts.

Of course, the vast majority of people who learn English in adulthood will always speak it with a foreign accent. However a foreign accent in itself is not a bad thing – provided it is functionally comprehensible to native speakers of moderate good will in understanding (see Section 1.2.4).

Also of course, there will be particular students who are very difficult to teach, for one reason or another. For example, they might need the motivation and application which are an essential part of learning pronunciation; or they might have some psychological or physiological learning difficulty of their own. Obviously it is part of a teacher's job to help them overcome such barriers. But it is also essential for teachers to realise that such cases are exceptions, and not to let them cause a general feeling of despair about pronunciation. In general, the vast majority of ESL learners can improve their pronunciation through lessons, and can attain a level of proficiency that allows them to partake of opportunities in all aspects of life.

Ameetha

'Something very nice happened to me in class today.

'Before I never used to correct the students' pronunciation because I didn't know how to help them, but now I do.

'One lady came in and said 'good-u morning teacher'. I said 'beg your pardon'. Then I wrote 'good-u morning' on the board. The whole class helped her, and soon she saw her mistake.'

We kept track on this lady through Ameetha. Her pronunciation of 'good morning' soon stabilised and she did not revert to the extra syllable

2.5.3. Often learners can't even hear the sounds we are asking them to produce – how can we expect them to pronounce them?

Teachers often make this comment, with a certain amount of despair, in discussing the difficulties of teaching pronunciation in traditional ways. Often they are sensitive teachers, who realise that learners' experience of English phonology really is different to that of native speakers.

Their observation is quite accurate, but it is not a cause for despair. It simply emphasises the need for pronunciation lessons to include considerable work, especially at early stages, on the perception and conceptualisation of aspects of English pronunciation, as explained in Fundamentals, above.

In fact, it is not quite true that learners cannot *hear* the differences between English sounds, or the difference between their own pronunciation and that of the native speaker model. They are not deaf. The problem is more one of conception than perception. It is simply that learners are not used to paying attention to the aspects of sounds that are significant in English.

Most (not all) pronunciation difficulties, especially the really serious ones, are caused by cognitive (conceptual) rather than physiological factors (eg. Inability to produce a particular sound), and need to be addressed on that level (see Fundamentals).
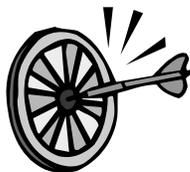
Recall the slogan about why learners make the mistakes they do is: **IF THEY SAY IT THAT WAY, IT'S BECAUSE THEY THINK OF IT THAT WAY!**

In order to change the way a learner pronounces something, you have to change the way they think about what they are saying.

2.5.4. Are you really saying it is not necessary to know the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols?

Many teachers express relief when they discover that with the communicative approach they don't need to know their phoneme symbols (see teachers' messages). On the other hand some have criticised the communicative approach for apparently belittling the IPA.

IPA symbols are an extremely useful tool but they are not the be-all and end-all of pronunciation, and they certainly have limitations in teaching pronunciation which need to be clearly understood if they are to be used effectively. I'd rather have a good teacher who couldn't remember symbols than a poor one who could, but best of all would be a good teacher who does understand phoneme symbols, their purpose and their limitations.

2.5.5. How can we know which methods and materials are best?

Some teachers have methods and materials that they like using; others feel overwhelmed by the problem of deciding which methods and materials to use.

The decision of course ultimately rests with teachers but some guidelines are available to assist with this question. The most important of these is the challenge to teachers to think squarely about what helps their students, really observing whether the students' pronunciation is actually improving. Note that this question has a slightly different emphasis from the question of what helps the teacher. Sometimes it is tempting to a teacher to choose methods or materials that they themselves feel comfortable with. This is of course an important consideration but the real test of pronunciation teaching is whether learners actually improve their pronunciation.

You should be able to observe at least short term improvement in pronunciation after every lesson, even a short workplace session. Of course, learners may revert to old habits several times before improvement becomes more permanent. However, if learners can't make their there-and-then pronunciation better, it suggests they are not fully understanding you and that you might need to try another tack.

It is not enough just to say 'it takes a long time to learn pronunciation' and lower expectations about what can be achieved in the short term.

It is also important to distinguish between 'happy' students and 'learning' students. Certainly students who are really learning are likely to be happy. However, the reverse is not necessarily true: students can be having fun in class and not really improving. Students are very likely to express satisfaction with lessons. The teacher's own satisfaction should depend not on what learners say but on how their pronunciation improves.

These considerations reinforce the value of the discipline of documenting lessons and outcomes, and of recording (preferably on tape, but certainly in writing) students' pronunciation before and after a pronunciation course, so that progress can be monitored objectively.

It is noteworthy that all the participants of this project cited as one of the main benefits of the sessions the value of the discipline of simply taking note of what they were doing and reflecting on the outcomes. The success or otherwise of the pronunciation teaching strategies they used were important in directing future pronunciation work with their learners.

Rae organized an afternoon tea for her students, and did a huge amount of very successful pronunciation work with them in the process. I asked her if she had done this before.

She said 'I've done the afternoon tea before but never with so much focus on pronunciation. I was pleased with how it was going. It's scary because things can easily get outside the planned lesson – but I survived!

3. FRAMEWORK 1: TEACHING BEGINNERS

3.1. INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 Introduction

Recall that the frameworks presented here are sets of principles and practices which can be adapted flexibly to a wide range of actual situations (see Section 1.2).

This first framework presents some ideas on how to teach pronunciation to ESL beginners in a structured language course. It presents some background, applying the ideas of the previous section to beginners, then a selection of the contributions made by teachers to the weekly sessions, and finally a series of questions and answers that were discussed in the sessions.

In this Framework, we first discuss some background ideas, then give some examples of the experiences of teachers who participated in the project in using those ideas, and finally go through a Question and Answer section with issues that were raised during the project sessions.

3.1.2 Defining beginners

'Beginners' here are defined as adults in the early stages of learning English as a second language. They have elementary grammar and vocabulary, and their English literacy skills and their oral communication skills are usually at about the same level.
Of course it is well known that pronunciation skills often correlate poorly with general language skills, so that learners can be beginners in pronunciation but have much more advanced grammar, vocabulary and literacy skills. However, since language classes are usually made up of learners with similar *overall* language ability, we will deal with the issues in relation to overall beginners in this framework and overall more advanced learners in the next framework (where we will also deal with the problem of mismatch of pronunciation and general language skills).

3.1.3 Importance of pronunciation for beginners

It is particularly important to include effective pronunciation tuition in beginners' language lessons, as this gets them off to a very good start in their general language acquisition, and minimises the risk of 'fossilisation', or stabilisation of pronunciation habits, that make ESL speakers difficult for native speakers to understand.

It is well known that a learner with fairly good pronunciation, even if only at the word level, can be quite comprehensible to English speakers even with a fairly high level of grammatical errors, while someone with excellent grammar can be incomprehensible if key words are pronounced incorrectly (see Section 1.1.1). Giving learners a good basis

in pronunciation as a normal part of their tuition in speaking and listening therefore opens up many more opportunities to them for conversation outside the classroom, which is the key to ongoing learning of all aspects of language, including grammar and pronunciation.

A good grounding in basic pronunciation is a valuable gift that *any* ESL teacher can give to any learner.

3.1.4   Advantages and disadvantages of teaching beginners

Teaching beginners has some particular difficulties associated with it:

❖ it is more difficult for teachers to communicate with beginners in English about pronunciation, due to their low English language skills

❖ beginners often have limited opportunities to interact with native speakers outside class.

On the other hand, it has some important advantages, as we will discuss further when we deal with more advanced learners:

❖ in classroom teaching, the group of learners is usually at roughly the same level (whereas more advanced learners can be very variable in the degree to which they have mastered pronunciation)

❖ there is less 'unlearning' for them to do, both in terms of the way they pronounce English, and in terms of negative expectations about their inability to learn pronunciation

❖ beginners are generally expecting, and expected, to have specific times devoted to pronunciation, which means that time can be scheduled for more intensive work to be done with them.

3.2. BACKGROUND TO FRAMEWORK 1

3.2.1   Introduction

In this section, we expand on the 'Practicalities' in Section 2.4, with the focus on the ideas that can help in teaching beginners. The section is based around participants' experiences (see Section 1.1.4) in understanding the principles of the communicative approach, and using them in with their own learners.

3.2.2   Integrating pronunciation into other activities

A major focus of the sessions was to help the participants not just design and run a pronunciation teaching program, but to integrate work on pronunciation into their overall language lessons (see Section 1.1.2). This involves teachers acquiring the knowledge

and confidence to respond spontaneously to situations that arise in class, as well as being able to follow a particular text or pre-planned lesson format.

The ability to use what learners actually say, there and then, to create a mini-lesson on pronunciation in the midst of other work certainly requires a great deal of confidence and flexibility on the part of teachers, but is extremely effective – sometimes more so than spending a whole hour on pronunciation alone.

> 'I'm not spending more time on pronunciation, but it is much more focused.'
>
> Belinda, in the third session

3.2.3   Starting with words and phrases

We have seen the importance (Section 2.4.6) of basing lessons around words, phrases and sentences, rather than phonemes.

In doing this it is particularly useful if material can be used that is closely relevant to learners' own lives and concerns, so that they can practise words and sentences they will actually use in 'real life'. This can be done either by asking learners to provide examples of sentences they would like to practice, or by simply observing the kinds of speech that they need to use in their everyday encounters.

3.2.4   Teaching stress

We've seen (Section 2.2.6) that an understanding of **stress** is fundamental to both segmental and prosodic aspects of pronunciation. We have also seen that for speakers from many language backgrounds it is difficult to produce English stress – because they cannot hear and conceptualise it appropriately.

In this section, we go into a little more detail on the practicalities of teaching stress. These points will be suitable either for beginners or for learners whose overall knowledge of English is more advanced, but whose pronunciation still remains very weak (see Frameworks 2 and 3).

It is necessary to teach both word stress and sentence stress, but there are no hard and fast rules as to which comes first. Depending on the needs of learners, you may have to work on either or both.

As for *when* to teach stress, it is likely that most learners will need some work on it, so it is worth starting with stress for all learners. Those who have an aptitude for it, or whose native language uses stress in a way similar to English, will move through the sessions quite quickly. Others may need more intensive work. As a rule of thumb, if you have a learner whose English you find generally difficult to understand, even if you can't

diagnose precisely the errors they are making, it is likely they will benefit from general work on stress (see Section 2.3.2).

3.2.4.1   Teaching word stress

Let's look now in some detail at a possible 'recipe' you might use for teaching word stress.

- ❖ Start with two syllable words, and try to choose words with simple phonemes that are not likely to distract learners' attention or undermine their confidence.

- ❖ Ask learners to identify the stressed syllable from your pronunciation of the word. Make sure they are not using higher level knowledge based on the spelling of the word. If you think this is happening, as it may with learners who have had previous book-learning of English, try using some nonsense words.

- ❖ Write the words on the board, and ask learners to copy them into their books. Then say the word several times and ask them to underline the stressed syllable.

- ❖ Underline the stressed syllable on the board and check their answers.

- ❖ Discuss any errors, then ask the learners, all together then one at a time, to repeat the words back to you. In judging their production, focus on stress pattern rather than phonemes, but do correct any glaring phoneme errors.

- ❖ Comment throughout on the fact that one of the syllables of each word is **louder** than the other. It is true that stressed syllables are also usually longer and at higher pitch than other syllables, but getting into that can confuse learners, because we also talk about length in relation to vowel length, and about pitch in relation to intonation. So use these concepts with caution.

- ❖ When you find they are doing well, try giving some more tricky exercises, such as saying some words with stress on the wrong syllable and asking them to judge if you have said them correctly or incorrectly. If you feel they are up to it, try getting them to say the stress on the wrong syllable.

- ❖ When all this is mastered well, move on to words of three syllable and more. When learners are performing well with these, give more complex exercises such as asking them to group words into stress pattern families.

- ❖ In general, you shouldn't worry too much about the unstressed vowel *schwa* at this stage, though you may want to point it out if it comes up and you feel they can understand the idea. Be wary though in case it confuses or distracts learners. The most important thing at this stage is that they understand and use stress. Lack of stress, which needs to be understood for schwa, is by definition a later concept that requires understanding of stress.

3.2.4.2. What if you (the teacher) aren't sure which syllable is stressed?!

Don't be ashamed! It can often be difficult to figure it out, especially in multi-syllable words. Of course you can check in a dictionary as part of your class prep – but here is a useful on-the-spot check you can do. Students don't mind at all waiting for a minute while you figure out the answer to a question about stress, especially if it means they can get instant help rather than having to stick with a pre-prepared lesson. (This tip relies on you knowing what 'sounds right' in English, so it is not a good one to pass on to learners.)

Let's say you are teaching the word *consultation*, and you are not sure which syllable to underline for your learners. Just say the word several times (to yourself) in an exaggerated way. For example, put it in a simple sentence like 'You want a consultation???!!!' – as if you were absolutely amazed. Notice that the stressed syllable becomes much louder than the others. This can make it easier for you to pick out to give accurate instruction to your students.

3.2.4.3 Sentence stress

Sentence stress and word stress are closely linked, in the sense that

- ❖ they are both about one syllable being louder than others, and
- ❖ they both depend on learners being able to hear and conceptualise that relative loudness before they can use it appropriately.

Sentence stress is quite different, though, in the role it plays in language:

- ❖ word stress is fixed, as an essential part of the word it attaches to
- ❖ sentence stress is variable, and controlled by the speaker as part of the meaning of the sentence. There are no hard and fast rules about sentence stress to match rules like 'The word *monster* is stressed on the first syllable'.

Therefore it is useful to teach sentence stress in terms of the **important** word(s) in a sentence receiving the stress, rather than in terms of words in particular grammatical categories (content words, for example) receiving the stress. It is true that the word 'important' is subjective, but stress *is* subjective – you stress the words you want your listener, on that occasion, to think are important in your message. For example, it is quite possible to stress a function word like 'to' if it is important on that occasion (eg. 'I'm going *to* the shops').

Also the concept of 'importance' is easy for learners to understand: they don't have to think, 'Is this word a content word or a function word?'; they just have to think, 'Is this word important to my message?'.

3.2.5   Helping beginners with individual sounds

We have emphasised (see Section 2.2.6) that it is not enough just to stay on the level of words and prosody with learners. We need to give them guidance with individual sounds as well. However we have to be very careful in doing this, and sensitive to the needs of the learner in re-conceptualising sounds in a way that is literally very foreign to them.

It is not enough to simply refer to letters or phonemes and expect learners to understand what we mean – at least not until we have helped them build up and grow confident with concepts of English phonology and spelling. How can we do this? Paradoxically it means putting much less focus than you probably do now on individual sounds, and instead focusing heavily on whole words. Individual sounds are pointed out *within* those whole words (see Section 2.4.6).

It also means spending much more time than you probably currently do on letting learners group (written) words together according to aspects of their pronunciation (eg. First sound, long and short vowels, rhyming). When they do this you will see clearly any mistakes they make (eg. Putting *oven* and *onion* with *of* and *on*), and can explain their mistakes in terms they will understand and you can test (eg. '*oven* belongs with *love* not *of*').

Doing it this way is a hundred times more useful than simply giving learners the phoneme symbol for the vowel in *oven* – because it involves learners making a mistake and learning from it directly.

What if students consistently have trouble with the pronunciation of a certain sound or sounds? Of course you will want to help them with this, by drilling them on a set of words or contrasts that use the relevant sound. Again, though, this must be done in a way that enables learners to really benefit from it. Here are some key points.

❖ Keep focusing on the problem sounds *within whole words*. You may need to isolate the sounds occasionally but keep this to a minimum (see Section 3.3.2) and bring the focus back quickly to the useful words, phrases and sentences within which the problem sound occurred in the first place (see Section 5.3.6 for a very useful example on why this is so important).

❖ Keep articulatory explanations to a minimum (see box below); if learners pester you for information about what muscles to move inside their mouths, tell them **Let your ears do the work!**, (see Section 2.3.6) and *reassure* them that your methods work well.

❖ **Never tell learners 'you can't make that sound'** especially not with an explanation that this is 'because of the language you speak', which will be immensely negative and discouraging to the learner.

❖ Always listen to learners' speech to see if you can find some word or phrase in which the sound is easier for them than in the phrase that is giving them problems now. There almost always is one, and you can build on this (see Section 3.3.6).

Although in general it is best to avoid a focus on articulation, there are some cases where it is useful to give articulatory instructions. This should always be done with meticulous attention to metalinguistic communication.

Here are a few examples to give a flavour of the style of explanation recommended by the communicative approach.

For 'f' – get the learner to smile and blow gently through the smile

for 'th' – show the tongue between the teeth (remembering that there may be cultural reasons for a learner feeling awkward about this) and again ask them to blow gently past the tongue

for 'w' – suggest that the learner 'think about *oo*' while saying this sound

3.2.6   Using IPA symbols, and alternatives to IPA

We have seen (Section 2.2.5.1) that, though the idea of what a phoneme *is* is relatively simple for native speakers of English to understand, actually transcribing stretches of speech in phonemic symbols can be extremely difficult for them. How much more difficult will it be then for learners of ESL!

Certainly it is useful to introduce the phoneme symbols gradually to beginners, and to use them to highlight particular pronunciation issues. For example, the vowel symbols will be useful to you in distinguishing the vowels of 'bet, bat, but' and helping learners conceptualise these appropriately. But never let a learner's (or even a teacher's!) uncertainty about the symbols as such interfere with a lesson.

A technique that can often work well as an adjunct to using IPA symbols is called 'respelling'. Some people are against this, but I have done, and published (see references), a number of studies which show that most people can use information from respelling far more effectively than IPA to help their pronunciation.

Respelling is simply the use of the ordinary spelling rules of English to 're-spell' part of a word in a way that shows its pronunciation more clearly. For example if a learner is having trouble with *station* you would write 'sh' above the word, near the 'ti'. Or if a learner is having trouble with the pronunciation of *Australia* you would write 'stray' above the relevant syllable to clarify that the vowel should not be as in 'stra'.

It is usually sufficient to just respell one part of a word, but sometimes it can be useful to respell one or more words in their entirety, so as to show the relationship between their pronunciation more clearly.

It is true that this can also be done with phonemic transcription. The advantage of respelling is that it is much more direct for the learner, and requires far less mental processing. The energy that is saved in not having to interpret the phonemic symbols can be used for learning to say the words!

3.2.7   Using critical listening

Critical listening is an important part of the communicative approach. It involves learners' listening to learners' pronunciation, as opposed to native speakers', and learning to judge whether the pronunciation is 'acceptable' (by whatever standards are appropriate in that particular class) or not.

It is ideal if learners can listen to recordings of their own voices, and especially if they can be recorded saying similar things several times, and then listen back to see if they can pick the versions that are correct or incorrect. If this is difficult to arrange, it is also very useful to play pre-recorded tapes of other non-native speakers and let your learners analyse their pronunciation. The CD *Learn to speak clearly in English* contains a whole module of critical listening exercises for students.

Critical listening is also very useful to teachers, in throwing into sharp relief the differences between learners' conception of speech and their own. Use critical listening, and in fact all your interactions with learners, as an opportunity to learn about phonology and phonological concepts!

3.2.8   Building up a communicative framework for learners

Learners often have misconceptions about what is needed to learn pronunciation – so they need a framework for understanding what communication is all about (see Section 2.4.2). With beginners, you can't discuss this in depth all at once due to their limited language skills. However, you can make sure your explanations and suggestions are consistent and build up to an overall picture.

It is usually better to build up this framework gradually by discussing a range of examples, rather than by giving a 'lecture' on the topic (see Section 3.3.3). This was one problem found with the CD *Learn to Speak Clearly in English*. The material in Module 1 is too dense and abstract for learners, and works much better when brought in bit by bit in teachers' explanations of a range of different aspects of English pronunciation (as was found by the participants in this project). Nevertheless it is important for the teacher to have a consistent and comprehensive understanding of the communicative framework as presented on that CD and in Fundamentals above.

3.2.9   Make sure you are working on pronunciation

Pronunciation lessons should involve the learners spending most of their time speaking, or listening to the teacher speaking directly about their pronunciation. It is very common for teachers to think they are teaching pronunciation when in fact they are discussing spelling-to-sound rules, how to look up a dictionary, the rhythm of poems and limericks, or the rules of English phonology, such as stress shift rules. All these are valuable kinds of information to give learners, but they do not constitute a pronunciation lesson.
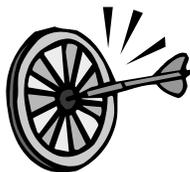
In our very first session, I called for teachers' examples of pronunciation work they had done in the previous week. Roslyn discussed a case where a learner had asked about the pronunciation of the word *margarine* – she had heard it said with a soft 'g' but felt that because it occurred before the letter 'a' it should be a hard 'g'. Roslyn had usefully explained this spelling-rule exception to the learners.

However, when I asked her 'could your learners pronounce both hard a soft 'g' quite well?', it turned out they could. So really this was a lesson in spelling-to-sound rules, not a lesson in pronunciation.

3.3. TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES

3.3.1 Rae's first recount

The first exercise the teachers were set was to find an opportunity to work on a pronunciation issue that arose spontaneously in their classes, record their experience in their journals, and report back on it to the class. Rae took her opportunity in a reading lesson. She simply isolated one sentence, which a learner read rather badly, from the reading passage and used it for intensive pronunciation practice over ten minutes or so. The sentence was:

I arrived in Melbourne on 17th May 1994

Rae wrote the sentence on the board so as to be able to refer to its parts by pointing. She elicited the words which should be stressed (ie. the 'most important words') from the class, and underlined the stressed syllables on the board. Then she said the sentence several times, and asked the class to chorus it back to her. After considerable choral practice, she picked out individual learners to repeat the sentence on their own, indicating whether they had made any mistakes.

She found this very successful. The learners did not get bored, and their pronunciation improved quite a lot. She thought she might follow up briefly in her next class with the same sentence and then some variations to the place and the date.

3.3.2 Ameetha 'glass' and 'large'

By week three, Ameetha was coping well with a range of pronunciation issues her students had raised, but then found herself stumped when a Vietnamese learner was trying to say 'large' and it came out as 'glass'! She asked the group what she could have done for this student.

We discussed how it was important to emphasise for the student the difference between what *she* was saying and what *Ameetha* was hearing:

You said 'large' (write it on the board) but I heard 'glass' (write it on the board).
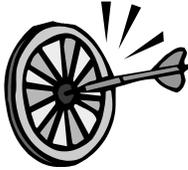
Remember that, from the student's point of view, she is simply repeating what she has heard! Hard as it is to believe, she is actually literally unaware of the difference between her version and your version.

You'd probably work first on the s/j issue in the last consonant, as this is something she has likely encountered before. Circle the 'ss' of glass, and the 'ge' of large (or do as Ameetha does, and write them in different colours for emphasis).

CAUTION!

Resist the temptation to refer to the phonemes verbally as 'suh' and 'juh' and 'guh'. This will confuse the student, as she will have difficulty relating these syllables to the sounds in 'glass' and 'large'.

It is much better to simply point at the part of the word you are referring to. (See section 2.4.6.1)

Then say the two words together several times, pointing at the last sound in the written version on the board. Ask if she notices the difference. Then ask her to repeat the two words and concentrate on her pronunciation of the last consonant (let any other errors slip by at this stage). If she still mixes them up, give her a short quiz. Try asking 'which one am I saying now?' as you say one of the words and let her point to the written word she thinks she hears. If she is still having trouble, try a few more pairs of words with this sound contrast ('fuss/fudge', 'bass/badge'). Leave it at that for now. Give her some homework, and come back to this example in the next few days.

If she does start to hear and control the difference in the final consonant in these exercises, you will have time to work a little on the beginning of the word. Again, start with visual notation. Write a 'g' at the beginning of 'large' and cross it out. Say the two words a few times and see if she can hear the difference; ask her to repeat the words. If she goes well, leave it at that; if not, add a few similar examples ('land/gland', 'loo/glue'). Choose the right moment to call it a day – don't overtire or frustrate the student. Reassure her she will get it soon.

It was interesting that we discussed this 'glass/large' case immediately after Eileen's example of a Vietnamese learner who said 'jam' instead of 'sam'. Although it was a different student in each case, the fact that they were both Vietnamese suggests that they might both have made similar errors – 'glass' for 'large' and 'jam' for 'sam'. What does this show? They can make both sounds! Their problem is not one of articulation, but one of conceptualisation (see Section 2.2.3.3). They do not have clear separate concepts for the sounds in these two words and easily confuse them. Pointing out to them that they say the sound correctly in another context can help them a lot – not least

by giving them confidence that it is not a lack of physical ability that causes their problem.

3.3.3   Ros and Ameetha work on the communicative framework

One week when Sharen was talking about her workplace sessions, she commented how hard it was for them that Australians often didn't understand them – even when their pronunciation really wasn't too bad at all. She told us how one of the workers seemed to really enjoy talking to her, and one day had told her this was because 'You understand me!'

The teachers all agreed that their experience with learners meant that they could understand them much better than most people could, and how good it would be if Australians in general could gain this useful skill. They also pointed out that learners often say they can understand their teachers much better than they can understand a lot of Australians they meet out in the world, and that again this was simply teachers' experience in speaking with sensitivity for the learners' difficulties.

Ros took a lead from this and during the following week, she decided to explore this idea with her students. Rather than just sympathising with them, she asked them '*Why* is it that you find me easier to understand than other people?' 'What can you learn from that about how to speak clearly yourself?'

This led to an extremely valuable discussion (see Section 2.4.2), in which she was able to pull together a number of threads of her previous weeks' lessons – and one that Ros could refer back to frequently in helping her learners develop their pronunciation skills. The next week Ameetha tried the same thing, and again it worked very well.

3.3.4   Eileen uses multimedia

I was often encouraging the participants to use tape recorders in their lessons. A few times they did this with good success (see Section 5.3.4). One week Eileen had been going to tape her students but then found the tape recorder she had found had no microphone. Since that day she was taking her students to the computer lab she decided to work on pronunciation with them there.

She asked them to work with the Interactive Picture Dictionary, on the section on fruit, a topic they had been working on previously. With this equipment users are able to click to listen to words repeatedly, and to answer questions about how many syllables there are in each word.

Afterwards she took them back to the class, wrote the words on the board, and asked them to say the fruit words in chorus and individually. She was pleased with their improvement, though some problems remained. With these, she pointed out the areas of difficulty in the written words on the board. For example, when one said 'apples' with the wrong vowel in the first syllable, she wrote 'ape' near the 'ap' of apples, and then drew a cross through 'ape', explaining that she was hearing 'ape-els', but she should hear 'apples'. This helped the student. (Incidentally, notice how easy it was for this learner,

even after having worked all that time on listening, to still think 'apple' was pronounced 'ape-el' – see Section 2.2.3.7).

Eileen suggested that this lesson was evidence that counting syllables is more effective than locating stressed syllables. We had previously debated this point a bit (see Section 3.4.3). Maybe she is right, and indeed counting syllables can be useful with some types of words (eg. Past tense problems). However, I still stand by my general advice to work on locating stressed syllables first. I think the picture dictionary work was effective *mainly* because it gave learners the opportunity to listen repeatedly to words at the right level for them, and to concentrate on their pronunciation rather than their grammar or meaning, not because of the syllable counting as such.

Eileen's own lesson afterwards consolidated what the learners had gained from the multimedia work.

3.3.5   Rae's housing example

Rae was looking for ways of incorporating work on pronunciation into the general syllabus for her beginner class. Here's one strategy she tried with great success.

The students were working on a theme on housing, writing descriptions of houses and apartments, learning relevant vocabulary, and discussing how to rent accommodation that suited them. She had previously used a dictation exercise to help students learn spelling and grammar, but this time decided to expand it to give them more work on pronunciation. Instead of dictating the sentences herself, she asked the students to do it for her.

She didn't just let them tackle it alone, however; she called for a volunteer, took him outside the classroom to practise the sentence with her, and then when he was confident, brought him back in and asked him to dictate to the class. The students wrote down the sentence, then marked their own work, and the class discussed any errors that had been made – were they due to the dictating student's pronunciation, or their own hearing? The class then practised the whole sentence in chorus, with Rae calling on individuals to say it occasionally, and then the next volunteer was called for.

Rae found this lesson very successful. The students really enjoyed it and she was impressed with how well each one dictated their sentence. The students who were left alone while Rae worked with each volunteer, far from being bored, spontaneously began practising the previous sentence, giving each other feedback, and raising questions for Rae's return. They stopped talking and listened with interest as soon as the 'dictator' walked in. After the first couple of hard-to-get volunteers, the students were clamouring for a turn and were disappointed there wasn't time for everyone to dictate a sentence. Students' pronunciation of the sentences to the class really was good after their practice with Rae. Most dictation errors were listener-induced (eg. 'live' for 'leave') – again emphasising the importance of conceptualisation in pronunciation.

Also, the exercise led into useful discussion of the importance of 'speaking for a listener' (ie. having your listener in mind when you speak), and of strategies for achieving good communication outside the classroom.

Rae said that at first she had been dubious about this exercise, because she felt it might put students 'on the spot' and make them uncomfortable. We agreed that this is awkward – but that out in the 'real world', learners really are 'on the spot'. They appreciate being able to practise and build confidence in a supportive environment.

(See Section 2.3.6)

3.3.6   Belinda: 'walk, work, word, world'

Belinda wanted to know how she could respond to a learner who had asked for help with these notorious words. Here's how the discussion went.

We agreed that the main problem in cases like this is one of discrimination and conceptualisation, and that a major focus of work should be on helping learners distinguish these sounds confidently. You can do this without need of any technology by simply giving the learners exercises on 'which one am I saying now?', sometimes with words, sometimes with sentences.

Make sure you correct them after every attempt (don't give ten examples and then score them – that would be too discouraging). Also make sure you get them to say the word each time, whether they have got the discrimination right or wrong.

When you feel learners are starting to get a glimmer of the idea, ask them to say one of the words (either alone or in a sentence) and then tell them which one you hear. They will be surprised at how often you hear 'something different from what they said' (as they will see it) and this will help them to conceptualise the difference.

We noted that it was always going to be a long slow process, and that you should take care to encourage the learners, and to exude your own confidence that the process was going to work eventually. It will!

At one point, Belinda said she had been puzzling over *why* these words were so difficult for learners. She mused 'It can't be the 'w' that causes the problem, because they can say *were*'. I pounced on this! **'Did you point that out to *the learners*?', I asked. 'That would have helped them a lot.'**

The participants looked puzzled, but it is a principle we had talked about a lot – using something learners *can* do to help them with something that is causing them difficulty. It not only encourages them to hear about something they can do right, but it also gives them something concrete from which to build up an appropriate concept of this English sound.

During the discussion, Eileen said she usually tells her students that for 'work' the mouth is smiling, but for 'walk' the corners turn down a little. The other teachers were interested in this idea, and Eileen drew some diagrams, leading to considerable debate among the group (with many grimaces and grunts!) as to the exact mouth shape for these vowels.

I was glad Eileen had raised this idea, but I had to put a stop to the discussion and explain why I thought it was a good example of a bad idea. Here's why:

First, as a phonetician I know that the shape of the visible part of the mouth is not relevant to distinguishing the vowels of *work* and *walk*. It is actually the location and shape of the tongue that matters, but you can't feel or see the relevant difference. (Compare vowel contrasts like 'part/port' where lip shape really is important, and visible.)

Second, it is much better to work with students on the auditory and linguistic conceptualisation of the sounds than letting them focus on the shape of their mouths. Exercises such as the ones above, or such as those discussed elsewhere, in which learners are asked to group words according to whether they rhyme etc, are much more effective.

3.4. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

3.4.1 Isn't it better to teach classes where the students all come from the same language background?

Among beginners, there is often huge variability as to general education background, literacy levels in languages other than English, and personal circumstances, as well as to mother tongue. It is rare that teachers are able to control the make-up of their classes, but to the extent that this is possible, it would really be more important to control for learners' cultural and educational background than for their language background as such.

It can actually be useful to have a range of different language backgrounds in one class, because learners can see that their fellow students can hear distinctions that they themselves are unaware of.

3.4.2 But won't we teach learners bad habits if they see incorrect spelling?

This is an issue that has been raised many times in the context of spelling based pronunciation guides, whether for ESL learners or for native speakers. I think it is a bit of a furphy.

Learners will certainly make mistakes in both spelling and pronunciation, no matter what method you use! The point is to help them *understand* their mistakes and learn from them.

Roslyn

I used to think that when my students made spelling mistakes like 'lookt' it was because I had confused them by showing them that '-ed' is pronounced as 't' in some cases and 'd' in other cases. So last term, I was **really careful** I **never** wrote 't' anywhere near 'looked' or other similar words. I only ever wrote the words with the correct spelling, and to help them with pronunciation, I just said the words aloud, and grouped them on the board into sets that take 't' in pronunciation (baked, tapped, etc). So I was very disappointed when three of my brightest students wrote 'lookt' in their assessment task! Not just ordinary students, but really bright ones.

It's not surprising that it is the bright students who use the incorrect 't' spelling. The bright students are the ones who can generalise best. And after all, when we teach people to read we do explicitly tell them that letters represent sounds and that sounds can be represented with letters – no wonder they are confused when this turns out to be a very partial truth.

I have found over years of experience that letting students experiment with different ways of spelling English words deepens their understanding of how the system works. Though it is debated by others, I really think it is better to let learners explore and get to grips with the confusing relationship of spelling to pronunciation than to try to shield them from the ugly truth.

3.4.3 Shouldn't we make sure learners can *count* syllables before making them pick out the stressed syllable?

Certainly many textbooks do emphasise counting syllables before picking out the stressed syllable, and in a way this is the 'obvious' thing to do. However, counting syllables in English words can be quite a problematic task for learners. Often the exact number of syllables can vary, as optional deletion of syllables is allowed in words such as *history* (two or three syllable pronunciation allowed).

Worse, even in cases where a native English speaker is not in doubt about the number of syllables, a learner might be. For example, sometimes a nasal consonant or an /s/ phoneme can be pronounced loud enough on its own to be perceived as a separate syllable by someone who is not 'prejudiced' by knowledge of English spelling.
As well, the ability to say a word with exactly the right number of syllables is not nearly so critical in terms of ease of understanding by English listeners as the ability to say a word with the right syllable stressed.
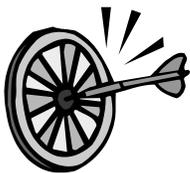
Certainly it is useful for learners to practise counting syllables, but this should come after, not before, they have gained complete confidence with stressed syllables.

3.4.4   I use capital letters to indicate stress instead of underlining. Is that OK?

There are many kinds of notation that have been used to show stress: an apostrophe before or after the syllable, capital letters, italic, bolding, accent marks above the vowel, circles of various sizes below the syllable, or dots and dashes, for example.

Over the years I have come to prefer underlining (for handwriting) or bolding (for typing). Here are my reasons:

- ❖ It interferes less with the overall shape of the word (important for visual recognition)

- ❖ It is iconic (ie. it looks a bit like what it represents – makes the syllable seem 'heavier' which goes well with it being 'louder')

- ❖ It is easy to see and attaches closely to the word itself (apostrophes are barely visible, circles sometimes look like another letter on the line below, dashes sometimes look like accent marks)

- ❖ It gives you a bit of useful leeway as to where you indicate the boundary of the syllable (eg. in a word like 'butter' you don't want to distract the students by confusion as whether the syllable boundary comes before, after or between the t's).

However, many kinds of notation can be useful as long as they are used clearly and consistently, and as long as the teacher is constantly monitoring learners' understanding. The participants in this project used a range of different notations and, while some switched to underlining, others stuck with what they had been doing before so as to remain consistent.

3.4.5   Maybe we shouldn't teach linking too early?

Eileen noticed that after she had taught her students about linking in sentences like 'What's the matter?', they continued to pronounce 'what' as 'what's' even where this was not appropriate, eg. 'What's did you do?' She wondered if maybe she had taught linking too early and asked whether it would be better to leave this till more advanced lessons.

Learners do need to learn basic linking in early lessons, so as to be able to produce sentences like 'What's the matter' in a natural way. They also need to be taught to distinguish the contexts in which this type of linking should and should not be used.

In fact, this particular problem might not be caused by over-generalisation from the 'What is' contraction. Learners from many language backgrounds naturally pronounce /t/ with a rather s-like quality (called affrication). It is possible they do this with all their /t/s, not just in 'what'.

Again, learners need to be taught to control this – by showing them that English listeners interpret the affricated /t/ as a sequence of two sounds (/t/ + /s/) and that it can cause

confusion. So once again, learners' mistakes, rather than being something to be avoided, are a springboard for useful lessons on English phonological concepts.

3.4.6   Isn't it better if you know the learner's language?

Eileen, as a non-native speaker of English, asked this question, telling us 'I always explain the differences between Chinese and English to learners'.

It is useful to know something about the native languages of your learners, but the knowledge must be used carefully. It is possible spend more time explaining to students why they ***can't*** pronounce a particular word or sound than teaching them to pronounce it! There are two issues here:

❖ Explaining why people can't do things is a rather negative way to teach at the best of times. I have often heard learners say 'I can't say that sound because we don't have it in my language'. The fact that a sound does not occur in a learner's language only means it is a new sound to learn, not that they can't say it.

❖ Quite often it is not even true that the learner's language 'doesn't have that sound'. It may not have the sound as a distinct phoneme, but it may well have it, or a very similar sound, as a variant (allophone) of another phoneme.

The real advantage that teachers who share a language with their learners have, is their ability to emphasise unexpected similarities between the learner's native language and English.

If you need to teach students new sounds, whether you know their native language or not:

❖ listen carefully to their speech when they use English (easier if you have a recording) to see if they use a similar sound anywhere at all, even if not in the word you are working on (see Section 3.3.6)

❖ if so, call their attention to it and help them form a concept for that sound (see Fundamentals)

❖ if not, repeat words with the sound in it for them, highlighting the sound with visual cues on the board; ask them to repeat the words after you several (5-10) times rapidly ('let your ears do the work').

❖ give feedback and encouragement; leave it for several hours or days, and repeat the process.

It is neither necessary nor sufficient to know a learner's native language. What matters is the sensitivity and skill with which the teachers can help learners through the difficult process of learning to re-conceptualise speech. (See also Section 2.2.5.2).

3.4.7 What exactly do you mean by 'communicative framework and how do we teach it to students?

The communicative framework is the set of concepts about communication that both teachers and learners need to focus on to improve pronunciation (see Section 2.4.2). The main concepts are that:

- ❖ pronunciation is communication (not a barrier to communication!)
- ❖ focus on the listener as receiver of a message
- ❖ the speaker as sending clues to help the listener understand what the message is.

Of course, with beginners, you can't give learners a lecture on this topic and expect them to take it all in! But you can gradually build up this understanding of pronunciation as communication for them by using explanations like these:

- ❖ when you say that, English speakers think you are saying X not Y
- ❖ if you say it this way (eg. with good sentence stress), English speakers will understand you better (compare: speak this way because it is 'the rules'!)
- ❖ if you have a problem with one sound, don't worry too much; just concentrate on getting the other sounds right (as opposed to communicating despair to the student about their inability to say that sound well!)
- ❖ the importance of sentence stress, word stress, vowel length, and individual vowels and consonants as clues to English listeners.

3.4.8 How can I give attention to one individual's needs when the rest of the class also need to get help?

Integrating pronunciation into language classes means taking opportunities to help students with the pronunciation of words and sentences that come up in the course of other work. Most of the teachers in the group were initially concerned about focusing on one student in this way, but all of them tried it and found ways of doing it successfully. Here are some of their tips:

- ❖ don't spend *too* long on any one issue; five minutes should be more than enough
- ❖ although you are working with one student's pronunciation, involve the other students too. Always give the person speaking the opportunity to detect and correct their own mistakes first – but if they are having trouble, ask the class if anyone can help. Sometimes it can be really useful to a student to find that not just the teacher but the fellow students can hear the distinctions they are missing.

❖ write up the word or sentence on the board and use the notation to show the corrections that need to be made as they are suggested by the whole group, and make any general points relating to the communicative framework, the importance of stress, or any issues you have been discussing with them recently

❖ then get the whole group to say the sentence in chorus several times, and ask a few individuals as well as the one who had the problem in the first place to say it alone and receive feedback

❖ even if the original student still has not got it perfect, leave it at that for now – you can pick it up again for a quick practice later in the lesson or on another day.

The teachers in the group all tried short sessions like this and all reported that the learners 'loved it' – far from being bored or left out – and really improved. The teachers were also pleased with their own ability to handle this kind of unscripted 'aside' and found that their confidence increased rapidly, especially in conjunction with their growing sense of knowing how to help with particular types of pronunciation errors.

They also found it helped to build up learners' sense of the communicative framework, and that the time needed for these little sessions became shorter and shorter as the students became more expert at spotting and correcting their own errors.

3.4.9   I was a bit worried about mixing reading and pronunciation: does reading aloud help students' pronunciation or hinder it?

Rae wondered whether a 'running dictation' exercise (Section 3.3.4) mixed spelling (in the dictation) with pronunciation too much. Previously she had generally tried to keep spelling and pronunciation separate for her students, as they were so prone to become confused about pronunciation when they saw the spelling of words.

In discussion we agreed that it was quite helpful to mix up spelling and pronunciation. Though spelling can be very confusing, it is 'good' confusion, in the sense that the problems are real ones that students really will have to address and get to grips with. This is the type of problem that should be addressed in class, when students have a chance to ask questions and gain clarification.

In general it is better to get learners to use spontaneous speech in pronunciation lessons, but reading aloud can be useful in small doses. It frees learners from having to worry about grammar and vocab (temporarily) and lets them concentrate on pronunciation. However it must be used with great caution.

If the corrections you give are to be useful, it is essential to:

❖ give very specific advice, with examples

❖ check the student's understanding, and

❖ give the student an opportunity there and then to practise an improved version.

Some cautions about using reading aloud in pronunciation lessons

1. The text being read must be natural conversational language, and for beginners should be limited to short segments

2. *Never* let a learner read past two or three mistakes before correcting them!

I have heard teachers let learners read a whole paragraph and then tell them something like 'Quite good, but pay more attention to sentence stress. Next!'. This type of lesson shows very poor attention to metalinguistic communication. *How* can a learner understand the advice and act upon it?

4. FRAMEWORK 2: TEACHING MORE ADVANCED LEARNERS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

4.1.1 Defining pronunciation levels

Intermediate to advanced learners are those with higher overall language skills, in grammar, vocabulary and literacy. As is well known, these learners can still have very considerable difficulties with pronunciation, and it is important to address their needs at the appropriate level. Since class levels are determined by a general assessment score, rather than by pronunciation as such, it is quite likely a teacher will have a range of pronunciation needs within one intermediate or advanced class. In this section we look at how to diagnose the *pronunciation* needs of learners at more advanced levels, and how to work with learners' pronunciation at a level suitable for their needs.

In this Framework, we first discuss some background ideas, then give some examples of the experiences of teachers who participated in the project in using those ideas, and finally go through a Question and Answer section with issues that were raised during the project sessions.

4.1.2 Advantages and disadvantages of teaching this level

As with all levels, there are advantages and disadvantages in giving pronunciation assistance to students at more advanced levels.

❖ An advantage is that their overall language skills are sufficient to allow general discussion of issues in oral communication, and explanations of useful information about pronunciation. The very same factor however also constitutes a major disadvantage, or at least pitfall. It is essential that these students do not simply learn to parrot back facts about English phonology, but really practise their pronunciation skills. In some cases students initially resist this, and the teacher must find ways to move them out of their comfort zone. In virtually all cases however, students are ultimately grateful for this, as we will see.

❖ Another disadvantage to teaching more advanced learners is that their pronunciation has sometimes become 'fossilised' – ie. they have become used to speaking in a particular way – and changing their habits can initially involve a certain amount of 'unlearning'. Unlearning is also sometimes necessary in relation to learners' conception of what it is they need to do in order to improve their

English pronunciation. Some have experienced lessons which involve rote-learning or information learning, and may need help to understand that learning pronunciation involves mainly practical work.

❖ An advantage is the high motivation many learners have due to having experienced the difficulties caused by poor pronunciation. Once they get basic concepts they often move very quickly.

❖ A disadvantage is that classes can often include learners with a wide range of pronunciation needs, making it difficult to find work that is appropriate to the whole class. On the other hand, in an advanced class it can be relatively easy to give one group some quiet work while the teacher spends ten minutes on pronunciation with another group.

Overall, the rewards for working with intermediate and advanced learners are high. Because they have the general language skills, any improvement in pronunciation can immediately be put to good use, and students can become quite elated at their newfound ability to communicate effectively.

4.2. BACKGROUND TO FRAMEWORK 2

4.2.1 Assessing learners' pronunciation needs

In order to assess the needs of more advanced learners you have to engage them in a little general conversation. It is not enough just to look at their assessment scores, or to give them a word-based diagnostic test. Choose a simple conversation topic that will not overly stretch learners' grammar and vocabulary, and try to make it as natural as possible. It is best if you can record this conversation on tape to do a fuller diagnostic analysis, and also to maintain a record of the student's ability at the beginning of the class, but if this is too difficult to arrange, simply listen to the student while talking and make some notes immediately afterwards.

While you are engaging in the conversation, do not be too concerned with trying to diagnose the learner's pronunciation problems in great detail (eg. Deciding whether their main problems is linking, vowel length, or whatever). It is really too difficult to be objective enough to do this accurately while in the process of having a conversation. In fact, no phonetician would attempt to make a serious statement about an accent or voice pattern on one 'live' hearing; they would certainly make a recording and listen objectively.

A better strategy is simply to notice the effect the student's speech has on you. Put yourself in the position of an ordinary native-speaker listener – someone with no special training or experience in listening to foreign accents, but with goodwill and an interest in understanding what is being said. Would such a person find the learner's speech:

❖ easy to understand, though with a noticeable foreign accent, and the occasional mispronounced word?

❖ comprehensible, but only with some effort; a strain to listen to for more than a few minutes?

❖ difficult to understand, requiring a lot of reliance on context and gesture?

Make sure that in diagnosing learners' problems you are neither too hard nor too soft on them. Being too hard on them means picking up on a series of intermittent errors, or on a constant problem that is very noticeable but does not in fact impede communication too much. Being too soft is understanding them through already knowing what they mean, or through long experience of listening to learners. Try to put yourself in the position of say a bank teller or a neighbour or workmate – someone with good will but no special experience or knowledge. How would they cope with your learner's speech?

Regardless of their level of grammar, vocabulary and literacy, we will label learners who fall into these categories as, respectively, 'pronunciation advanced', 'pronunciation intermediate' and 'pronunciation elementary'.
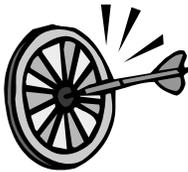
> **beginner**: a learner in early stages of learning the language, whose pronunciation and general language skills are both still rather low
>
> **pronunciation elementary**: a learner at intermediate to advanced level in general language skill, but whose pronunciation is difficult for an untrained person of moderate goodwill to understand, requiring a lot of reliance on context and gesture
>
> **pronunciation intermediate**: intermediate or advanced learner whose pronunciation is comprehensible to an untrained person of moderate goodwill, but only with some effort; a strain to listen to for more than a few minutes
>
> **pronunciation advanced**: intermediate or advanced learner whose pronunciation is easy for a person with moderate goodwill but no special training to understand, though with a noticeable foreign accent, and the occasional mispronounced word

You will need to work with learners on pronunciation with methods that are appropriate to their level. Let's look in a bit more detail at exactly what it is that characterises learners at these levels.

4.2.1.1   Pronunciation Elementary

The most likely cause of problems at this level, as with beginners, is poor use of stress. The most likely cause of poor use of stress is inability to hear the difference between stressed and unstressed syllables, and lack of conceptual understanding of the role stressed syllables play for English listeners. You'll want to work on discrimination and production of stress with them in much the same ways as you do with beginners, as we will see in a moment.

Sometimes you get a learner whose stress is not too bad, but who is still very difficult to understand. You may have to listen carefully, preferably with a tape recorder, to figure out the causes of their problems – it could be constantly leaving consonants off the ends of words; it could be not distinguishing vowel length so there is constant confusion about

which vowel is intended; or it could be a mixture of different problems; or it could be 'higher level' issues such a speaking very quickly, having very poor phrasing, or using inappropriate intonation.

4.2.1.2   Pronunciation Intermediate

It's likely learners at this level understand, at least intuitively, about word stress, though they may still use incorrect stress on a number of words. They may have more problems with sentence stress. They may have problems of speaking too fast or too slow, or of adding lots of 'aahh' or 'eerrrr' noises in inappropriate places. They may still leave off a significant number of consonants, or mix up a lot of vowel distinctions.

4.2.1.3   Pronunciation Advanced

We won't be talking too much about pronunciation advanced learners here, but for completeness, these are the ones who are easy to understand at the sentence level but may need help with extended speech, such as reporting at meetings, giving instructions, or delivering a speech. Or they may be more concerned with conversational speech – how to get the colloquialisms and contractions right. Or they may want to 'reduce their accent' – try to gain a more native-like way of speaking.

4.2.2   Using the pronunciation assessment

The most important reason to assess what level learners are at is to give them work that is at the right level for them. In this Framework we will look at how you can help learners with intermediate pronunciation. First however, in this section, we will say a few words about elementary students. We will not have a great deal to say about really advanced learners.

If you have a learner whose English generally is at a fairly high level, but whose pronunciation is at elementary level, you will need to find ways of taking them back over the work suggested in Framework 1 for beginners, since they have obviously missed out on the basics in their previous tuition.

This can be difficult to do if you have only one or two learners who need this work in a class of more advanced students – though check carefully: it might be that quite a number of other learners in the class would appreciate some 'back to basics' work on pronunciation. Perhaps you will need to find a way of taking a small group out of the class for work on pronunciation. This must, as you know, be done with sensitivity, both for the sake of saving the 'face' of the elementary learners, and so as to keep the remainder of the class happily and fruitfully occupied.

If the learner can barely get out a whole sentence that is comprehensible, don't give them work on 'bit bet bat', or on 'th', or even on 'r' and 'l' (see Section 2.4.6). Work with them on everyday phrases and sentences that they really have to use in their everyday life outside class (eg. Greetings, place names, phone numbers, encounters in shops or public transport) even if their general grammar is way ahead of this. Your aim is to get a pronunciation of the phrase as a whole that is comprehensible to an ordinary native speaker.

Try to set it up so you get some success for the learners. Let them learn just three or four phrases till they have them right. If one or other phrase is proving very difficult, leave it for now and work on something more attainable. Try to find something that is right in each of their attempts. Make sure they understand your instructions. If they don't, try to change your explanation so that they do. Remember that the aim of pronunciation lessons is for you to give the learners ***information and guidance that they can act upon to change the way they speak***. This is a challenging task of metalinguistic communication between you and your learners. It is important to set it up so that it has the best possible chance of success.

Another aspect that might require some sensitivity is making sure the material you work with for the special class is suitable to their more advanced English proficiency. Probably you will want to work with them on sentences that are within their level in terms of grammar and vocabulary. This should happen naturally if you use material that is relevant to their communication needs outside the classroom.

At higher levels, you will be working with longer stretches of speech, either in conversation or in monologue. Don't move up to these levels if you have a student who still has problems with individual words and short sentences.

4.2.3   Stress and intonation

It is very likely you will want to work on prosody with intermediate learners, since this is one of the most important aspects of English pronunciation, especially for students who have progressed beyond the level of words and short sentences, and need to produce more continuous discourse.

There are a number of ways of teaching prosody, and there are successful pronunciation curricula that focus mainly on intonation. However the communicative approach favours teaching prosody through a focus on stress, rather than directly on intonation (see Section 2.2.6). This is not because intonation is considered unimportant, or even that it is considered less important than stress. It is due to considerations of Metalinguistics communication.

If you use plenty of audio and visual demonstrations of English (see Section 2.4.6) learners will hear and experience prosody *as a whole* in a way that will help them build up appropriate subconscious phonological concepts (see Section 2.2.3.9). In speaking to learners about what they are experiencing it is important to keep things simple, and in the communicative approach this is done through focusing mainly on stress. This does not preclude you from mentioning other aspects of speech if this seems relevant and helpful.

If you do this, try to test the effectiveness of what you do as objectively as possible in terms of real improvement in learners' pronunciation, and try also to record your successes so that these can be generalised and extended (see Section 2.2.3).
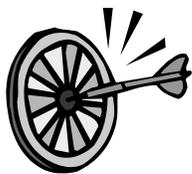
Remember always to be attuned to how well learners are able to use the information you give them to improve their pronunciation.

4.2.4   Rhythm and phrasing

One advantage of a focus on stress is that it helps unite not just word pronunciation with sentence pronunciation, but intonation with rhythm and phrasing. It is often useful to start with work on phrasing rather than rhythm.

Good phrasing can be taught by drawing students' attention to how words 'go together in groups' and the idea that *pauses* should be left between these groups to allow the listener to understand what is being said. It is usually necessary to go slowly here, explaining the meaning of 'pause', and giving experiences which help learners think about the whole communicative event from the perspective of the listener (there are some useful videos to help with this in Module 1 of the CD *Learn to speak clearly in English*). Once this groundwork is done, you have some useful shortcuts in your Metalinguistics communication repertoire.

It is not necessary to give strict rules for phrasing or pausing. There are usually several acceptable ways of phrasing a sentence or passage, and it is more important that the learner avoids incorrect ones than that they stick to one and only one correct one. This they can do naturally, if they have the basic concept that the listener needs the pauses to help understand the group of words that has just been said.

This approach to rhythm is particularly useful with the common problems of learners who speak painfully slowly or impossibly quickly: in both cases you can help the student by pointing out that it is not the absolute rate of speech that matters to the listener, but the sensitive use of phrases and pauses. This sensitivity can be developed through encouraging learners to think about their listeners' needs when they speak.

Once the learners understand the value of phrasing and pausing, you can move on to some work on rhythm, explaining again that for English listeners, a steady ongoing rhythm is a great aid to comprehension.

In teaching rhythm the communicative approach, as usual, puts considerable emphasis on the use of natural speech.

It is common for teachers to use exaggerated singsong rhythm to highlight the importance of regular stress and especially of so-called stress timing of English (cf. Section 2.2.6). This is often accompanied by finger tapping, clapping, or some other way of 'keeping the rhythm'.

In fact the rhythm of natural spoken English is not much like that of limericks or sonnets. Learners will quickly become aware of this, and it can then be quite difficult for them to transfer what they learn in class into what they need in real speech (see Section 2.4.7). Remember that although to a native English speaker the glide between the rhythm of a

naturally spoken sentence, and the rhythm of a poem is easy and seamless, this depends on linguistic, literary and cultural conceptualisation that may be quite alien to a learner (see Section 2.2.3). This is because many languages not only have a different natural rhythm to that of English, but have quite different cultural and literary traditions for poetry.

Although rhythm is very important to comprehension, it is not a strict rhythm like that of a poem. Rather in natural speech we are constantly updating or recalculating the rhythm. I believe the best way to teach rhythm is to play natural speech, help learners pick out the stressed syllables or words within it, and then let them repeat it closely in small chunks till they can say it fluently and naturally.

The benefits of practice of just a few sentences like this will spill over into learners' other speech.

4.2.5   Dictionaries and the IPA at more advanced levels

Many teachers I have worked with have expressed gratitude that the communicative approach does not require a lot of use of IPA symbols (see Section 2.5.4). Of course I have not developed these methods just to let teachers off the IPA hook! I don't advocate intensive use of IPA symbols with beginners because I think it can detract from the real issue, which is pronunciation, and because the concept of 'phoneme' is quite an advanced one for many ESL learners (see Fundamentals).

With more advanced students, it can be useful to start introducing the IPA symbols for English phonemes, and certainly if students have already learned them in the past it is good to let them use this knowledge, and teachers should be able to keep up with them.

What is important though is that phoneme symbols should be used as an adjunct and aid in pronunciation lessons, to help call attention to a particular contrast the student is missing, or to show how one word is different from another. Unless there is some special reason to do so I would not ask learners to actually transcribe words or sentences.

If you believe it is useful for students to be able to look up the pronunciation of words in a dictionary on their own (and I do), by all means give them lessons on how to do this, but don't call this a 'pronunciation lesson'! In pronunciation classes students should be speaking, and learning concepts that direct affect their pronunciation of the words and phrases they are saying then and there. Copying IPA symbols, or transcribing words into IPA, or looking up dictionaries, are lessons in phonology or dictionary use – not pronunciation.

4.3. TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES

4.3.1 Ros's experiment on metalinguistic communication

A member of the audience in the large lecture in May 2001 (not a participant in the project) mentioned that she teaches rhythm and intonation by telling her students that English 'flows like a river', and that the stressed syllables are the 'rocks'. A number of participants were intrigued by this suggestion, and Ros, without prompting, decided to try an experiment with her advanced students. She is to be congratulated on this investigative initiative!

Ros gave learners a questionnaire, seeking their subjective impressions of the sound of English in relation to the sound of their own language. The questionnaire asked learners to state, of both English and their native language, whether it sounded like

- ❖ a river with rocks in it
- ❖ a sharp graph moving up and down dramatically
- ❖ a machine gun
- ❖ a flat plain
- ❖ other (responses included 'a soft breeze', 'waves').

She found that the results were very varied, and concluded that she would not use similes like these with her students as they are too subjective.

People of *all* language backgrounds (including English) believe their own language 'flows' and that foreign learners make it too 'jerky' or 'disjointed'.

What is really interesting is that the very features that in one language make it 'flow' might in another language make it 'jerky'. For example in some languages, a glottal stop serves to *join* rather than *divide* words.

In discussion I suggested that the problem with the simile is not so much that it is too subjective, as that it is too inexplicit (some subjective concepts can be useful to learners, if they help them see an important point).

I well remember my frustration when I was learning to speak Tamil and my teacher responded to my questions about the language by saying 'just listen very carefully, and you will find that it just sounds better when you say it this way rather than this way'. Of course to her as a native speaker of Tamil the correct sentences did 'sound better' than the incorrect ones, but as a learner I had no way to use this 'sound'. I needed to do much more than just 'listen carefully'!

To tell someone to 'speak like a river' can be interpreted in a range of different ways, especially by people from different language backgrounds. It is much better to give specific advice such as 'make the important words louder than the others' (see Section 3.2.4) and to help students explore and understand this concept.

For example, in discussing stress you might need to clarify for learners that it is not that we want English words to be louder than words in their own language (a common misunderstanding) but that the important words should be louder than their own neighbours in the English sentence.

4.3.2   Ameetha brings pronunciation to a grammar lesson

One week Ameetha had had her students working on tense endings a grammar lesson, and rather than getting them to write their answers on the board, she asked them to read the sentences out loud.

A problem arose when one of the students read out her sentence, but Ameetha couldn't understand a word she said. When she investigated, she found the student had been trying to say

> *The accident looked serious but fortunately no one was injured.*

She had actually written the tense endings correctly, but Ameetha thought she had better do some work on pronunciation. The problem was: where to start?

This student is a good example of the common problem of mismatch between general language level and pronunciation level. It's probably not a good idea to try to work on pronunciation of the whole sentence there and then. She probably would need to work on each word individually, and then build up to the whole sentence, and this could take half an hour or more.

If Ameetha had wanted to do something then and there, she could have chosen one of the more useful words to work with ('fortunately', 'accident'), writing it up, underlining the stressed syllable, and asking the student to listen and repeat. In general, though, a student like this is probably a good candidate for some remedial pronunciation work outside her regular class, if this can be arranged.

4.3.3   Ros on fluency and speed

One week Roslyn had been working with her class on health and doctors' appointments. In one of the dialogues, a student had to say 'I'll just have a look at your throat'. Although the words were pronounced acceptably, the sentence overall was not good. The student was rushing through it and paying no attention to the communicative content of what he was saying. Roslyn took the opportunity to work on the difference between fluency and speed with the class.

She had talked previously about the importance of pausing, and told the students they should pause during this sentence, perhaps after 'just' and/or after 'look'.

She was surprised to find that the students didn't like that at all! They felt it was important that the sentence should all come out in one hit.

This led to a really useful discussion with the learners in which they revealed their belief that the quicker you say a sentence the more native-like you will sound, and Ros was able to explain and demonstrate the inaccuracy of this belief.

Then it was further revealed that some students thought that if they spoke very quickly (or very quietly) the listener would not hear the mistakes! This sounds amazing but it is an idea I have often uncovered when talking to learners about pronunciation. Again Ros was able to discuss this idea with the learners and give them a better way of thinking about pronunciation and communication.
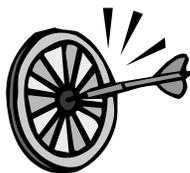
> This example demonstrated the great value of building up a rapport and communicative framework with learners. In Ros's class, the students felt free to express their dislike of the pausing advice. The subsequent discussion helped them because it made use of concepts and notation that Ros had used consistently before.
>
> ***Best of all, the entire discussion got them using English in a real spontaneous conversation to express ideas that they were really interested in and concerned about.***

4.3.4   Belinda's special pronunciation group

Belinda worked with two Vietnamese English for Further Study (EFS) students in a series of three special weekly sessions. These students had good vocabulary and a good conceptual understanding of English pronunciation, and they were highly educated in their subjects. However their pronunciation was poor and they were very difficult to understand, especially when they were involved in what they were saying (eg. when making comments in class). Belinda wasn't sure how much insight they had into their own problem, and whether they realised how difficult they were to understand. She was pleased when they agreed to join her for special classes. Here's what Belinda did with them, and our discussion of it.

Belinda knew the students needed work on stress, and she knew that this was the first thing they should concentrate on. But she asked the students what *they* thought they needed most work on. They said 'sounds': they wanted to learn how to say those difficult sounds of English.

This is common. Like most people, learners have little insight into the mechanics of language, and often misdiagnose problems (see Fundamentals). It is best for the teacher to make the decisions about the content and style of the lessons.

To give learners choice in what they work on, ask them to suggest words or sentences that sometimes cause them problems. It is interesting that learners often need a bit of coaching in how to do this, but once they get the hang of it, they find it great (see Section 2.4.4).

Belinda promised to give them some help with sounds, but said 'let's start with stress'. She wrote on the board 'word stress' and 'sentence stress'. She told them that for word stress, they could work on their own by looking in the dictionary to find which syllable was stressed, so she was going to help them with sentence stress. She started to explain about sentence stress but soon found that they already knew all about it, so she moved on to some listening practice, reading sentences from their text and asking them to mark the stressed words. They were very good at this, though she wondered whether they were doing it from the sound of the sentences or from their knowledge of grammar.

Next she moved on to speaking and asked them to repeat the sentences themselves, which, again, they could do quite well. Belinda felt their performance was not at all reflective of their poor pronunciation when they were 'just talking'. She said 'I know it sounds silly but my main problem was they were too good!'. The other teachers nodded in sympathy.

Finally she elicited from one of them a sentence that he had said and which had not been understood. The sentence was

Are there any other charges?

He said it quite well. The main problems were with the affricates in 'charges', and with the long vowels. She used the IPA chart to help clarify the problem for them, but this seemed to scare them and they seemed not to understand what she was saying. Things were not going well: the learners were nervous, communication was not flowing, and most importantly the learners were not speaking and learning about pronunciation.

I think Belinda was a little frustrated because she had 'done all the right things' (stress first, then listening, then production) but the result had not been very rewarding.

This is related to another issue we discussed in regard to Belinda's experience – the question of theory versus practice. Belinda did with her students something that I myself have done hundreds of times, but am gradually learning to revise. She started by giving them a little theory lesson (about stress) and then let them apply it. This is a very natural and sensible way to approach things. However, when teaching a skill (recall that pronunciation is very much a skill, a 'knowing-how', rather than a 'knowing-that' – see Section 2.2.3.9) it is important to work mainly on the practicals, and bring theory in only as and when needed to improve practice. So in this instance, Belinda might have done better to simply engage the two learners in conversation, and work on whatever pronunciation issues came up there and then.

It is worth pointing out that the learners in this little group fell into one of the 'difficult' categories. They were young men who were quite proficient in their studies, perhaps slightly defensive about having to start 'school' all over again, perhaps a little ambivalent about their commitment to working on pronunciation, perhaps just busy with many other pressures in their lives. It takes time to build up a working relationship with learners like this. Belinda made a good start!

4.3.5　Belinda's special group – intonation and affect

In another week, Belinda came with an interesting observation. She had wanted to work with her students on intonation and affect. She brought tape with a recording of the same sentence ('I can't find it anywhere') repeated with a range of different intonation patterns and very clear meaning distinctions. She wanted to work with the students to help them reproduce these patterns in their own pronunciation.

However she was surprised to find that the students couldn't really distinguish the sentences well, and found it very difficult to attach an emotional meaning (eg. happy, sad, worried) to the various intonation patterns.

This led on to a very useful discussion of the language-specific nature of intonation: intonation is no more universal than other aspects of language. Intonation, like all the other aspects we have seen, requires conceptualisation – it is not just 'picked up' from the acoustics of the speech (see Section 2.2.3.8).

When Belinda commented on one intonation pattern, 'It seemed very foreign to him' – this was literally true! If you were learning Vietnamese and you wanted to sound happy, frustrated or annoyed, you would have to learn how to do it in the Vietnamese way. Just using English prosody would not produce the right effect, which is of course the corollary of the fact that some Germans (for example) can sound 'bossy' in English even when they don't intend to.

The problem is the difficulty of pinpointing the exact detail of intonation that makes the difference in each language (recall the possum marks on trees, Section 2.2.7)

4.4.　QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

4.4.1　I often tell students to listen to TV or radio to help their pronunciation – is this useful?

Although experienced pronunciation teachers place a lot of emphasis on auditory discrimination as a basis for learning pronunciation, it is also essential to distinguish clearly between speaking practice and listening practice. Learners do need a lot of listening practice to come to terms with the demands of understanding the language of native speakers in everyday communication. Exercises such as listening for meaning to the radio, or working on colloquialisms are extremely important. However they are not pronunciation exercises.

The type of listening exercises that are important for pronunciation are quite different. They do not aim to have the learner imitate a native speaker. In fact imitating a native speaker is not only nearly impossible, but also unnecessary. What is important is for learners to understand what aspects of pronunciation are critical in helping native speakers understand them. To achieve this they need not just to *listen* to native speakers but to listen to and compare native pronunciation with their own (or that of other learners), and get guidance about which of the many differences are crucial, and which are unimportant. (See Section 2.3).

4.4.2   Is there a better way to encourage transfer from lessons to everyday speech?

Rae had been managing the integration of short 'bursts' of pronunciation into her lessons very well indeed. She found the intensive practice on one sentence from their real lives really helped her students improve their pronunciation. But several times she expressed her disappointment at finding that when students repeated the sentence some time later, they had regressed quite a bit.

Rae

'I feel awful when I hear that they can't say things well outside class, when we have worked on it so hard. I tell them not to worry, it's in there and one day it will come out'.

But I'm sick of saying that! I don't even believe it myself! What can I tell them that would be more useful?'.

We discussed the importance of role-playing situations as close as possible to the real situation they would be in 'out in the world'.

We also discussed the value of talking with them explicitly about nervousness and how to deal with it. Sometimes the transfer problem comes about just from lack of concentration, but very often it comes about from nervousness, from 'being on the spot'. It is worth letting students talk about how they feel in these situations, when they are pressured to speak, for example when they get to the head of a long queue for tickets. (See Section 2.4.7).

5. FRAMEWORK 3: TEACHING PRONUNCIATION IN THE WORKPLACE

5.1. INTRODUCTION

In this section we make a shift of orientation out of the language classroom and into the 'real world' of the workplace. This is a very different language teaching situation, requiring very different strategies, and yet there are important commonalities in the ways teachers can interact with and help learners at different levels with pronunciation. The basic framework and approach taken are very similar to those already discussed, and workplace language and literacy teachers are greatly encouraged to read not just the background section but also the two other frameworks.

Workplace pronunciation teaching is often much more constrained, in terms of the amount of time that can be spent with students, and, often, in that there is an externally imposed curriculum (eg. if the manager has requested employees work on company policy, or on material related to another training program). In this case the challenge for the teacher can be in finding ways to use this material as a springboard to allow learners to acquire more general pronunciation skills. In doing this, a deep understanding of a framework within which work can be undertaken is of great value to a teacher.

In this Framework, we first discuss some background ideas, then give some examples of the experiences of teachers who participated in the project in using those ideas, and finally go through a Question and Answer section with issues that were raised during the project sessions.

5.1.1 The importance of pronunciation in the workplace

Unfortunately, many migrants, for whatever reason, end their language tuition while they still have rather poor oral communication skills in English. Others of course have to seek employment while they are still at early stages of their language learning. Research shows that low proficiency in oral communication is a major disadvantage, in terms of levels of employment, workplace advancement, and workplace training outcomes.

Many people are aware of issues in oral communication with ESL speakers employed in a wide variety of occupations in a wide variety of industries. It is important to stress the importance of good oral communication at work in fostering efficient workplace communication, health and safety concerns, good workplace relations, and the ability to benefit from other forms of training.

For all these reasons it is especially important for workplace trainers to be able to integrate assistance with pronunciation into other types of workplace training.

5.1.2   Challenges of workplace pronunciation tuition

The task of workplace trainers interested in helping with pronunciation is particularly challenging:

❖ language lessons usually have to be fitted into or around work commitments, leaving the overall time not just short but fragmented;

❖ the agenda for lessons may be set by external events, such as the need to prepare workers for a special training day;

❖ there may be little continuity in the physical location of lessons;

❖ learners may be at a range of different levels and need different kinds of help;

❖ to an even greater extent than is true of classrooms, the specifics of each workplace context are unique, and it can be very difficult to generalise about either teaching methods or materials

❖ to an even greater extent than is true of classroom teachers, workplace trainers have very varied backgrounds and differ widely in their experience of ESL teaching or of language and linguistics.

On the other hand there can be advantages in dealing with this group of learners:

❖ many lessons take place in a one-to-one setting

❖ learners are often quite highly motivated

❖ lessons can be highly practical and based around real language situations

❖ teachers have considerable autonomy and flexibility in how they structure their curriculum and lessons.

5.1.3   The place of pronunciation tuition in workplace training

In the past it has been true in some areas of the VET sector that oral communication has been a 'poor cousin' to literacy training (see references), but this is gradually changing, and many workplaces do have a commitment to improving the oral communication of their employees.

It is important to be clear that it really is possible to help NESB employees significantly, despite the challenges, and doing so brings great rewards not just for the employees but also for the workplace as a whole.

Ongoing VET research (see references) aims to demonstrate return on investment for managers who invest in workplace training – and this should also be a focus of trainers working on oral communication. Being able to ***demonstrate*** benefits of spoken language tuition, in terms of workplace efficiency, compliance with OHS regulations, workplace harmony especially in team-based work, is really important in creating more opportunities for ESL speakers to benefit from training in oral communication.

5.2. BACKGROUND TO FRAMEWORK 3

5.2.1 Introduction

In this section we look at how the communicative approach can be used in the workplace context. Let's recall the four fundamental principles of the communicative approach (see Background).
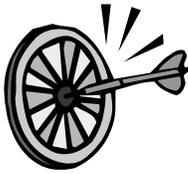
> **The communicative approach of teaching pronunciation**
>
> 1. practise meaningful speech
>
> 2. work on important things first
>
> 3. help learners think of speech as communication
>
> 4. use effective metalinguistic communication (ie. talk about speech in a way learners can understand and act upon)

5.2.2 Using very short sessions effectively

In the workplaces we worked in for this project, lessons were typically one on one with the trainer and an individual worker, usually lasting only 15 minutes. Lessons were also timed irregularly and infrequently, with any one worker seeing the trainer sometimes only once every two or three weeks. In such cases it is very important to try to maintain as much continuity as possible for the trainees. This means that the trainer needs to keep a detailed file for each trainee, and add notes about what was covered in each session.

Since it is unlikely the training will take place in a dedicated area, it is difficult to leave notes on a board or public place. If each trainee can keep a notebook in a pigeon hole and bring it to sessions, this will at least allow the teacher to revise any work from previous weeks, and also allows the trainee to refer to the notes between sessions, and even to jot down any specific questions or issues that arise outside training sessions.

The workplace trainers in our project were pleased with how readily employees were able to take advantage of this system, and how much use they made of the notebooks. Of course to use notebooks or any written materials effectively for pronunciation, it is essential to build up a consistent repertoire of annotations with which to represent the pronunciation issues addressed in the training session (see Section 2.4.6.2).

5.2.3   Choosing material to work on

With all pronunciation work, it is important to work on material that is genuinely useful to learners, and reflects the language they will have to use in the real world outside the classroom (see Section 2.4.7). With workplace trainees this is even more essential, as the sessions are very short, and the pressure for achievement is high.

It is important for the trainer to observe the practices of the workplace, and note phrases and words which can cause miscommunication to work on in language sessions. This is not only useful in providing good communicative material for sessions, but can also provide insights into communication practices which could be improved – and which can, if appropriate, be brought to the attention of supervisors or managers.

Of course in workplace situations there is less choice regarding what to work on. One of our participants found that she had to do a lot of work with NESB employees working through company and training materials. However, by using these as a starting point, trainers may be surprised at the wealth of opportunity these workplace materials may offer in terms of identifying pronunciation issues that need to be addressed.

5.2.4   Giving homework

Since we have so little contact time with learners in a workplace environment, one of the best things we can give them is the tools to go on learning independently (see Section 2.3.4). It is really valuable to help learners develop their powers of observation.

It is also very valuable to develop in learners the habit of noticing problems they have with pronunciation or listening and bringing these to the teacher for discussion. This is valuable not only for the direct help learners gain through their questions, but also because many of the questions are ones that could be answered at least partially by any native speaker such as 'how should I pronounce this word', so that help can be obtained without having to wait for a teacher to be available.

In the workplaces involved in the current project, the trainees quickly got into the habit of bringing their own examples and questions to sessions for discussion. This is very valuable as it ensures that they are working on material that is directly relevant to their needs and concerns. Responding to questions in this way was found not to be as daunting as might at first have been anticipated (see Section 3.2.2).

5.2.5   Working with managers

If a manager has agreed to a workplace language or literacy program, he or she is supportive of the concept of improving employees' oral communication skills. However, many managers retain a degree of scepticism about the real value to be gained and are keen that the work will translate into real value for their enterprise. Sometimes managers are at a certain remove from the 'action' in the workplace, and may be unaware of the inefficiencies that are created by poor communication between ESL speakers and native speakers. The language trainer can sometimes play an important role in bringing issues

to their attention – though of course this has to be done with a certain amount of tact and discretion.

For example, it is clearly inefficient if workers do not understand a supervisor's instructions properly. It is clearly inefficient if a worker's spoken report or explanation is difficult to understand. Less clearly, but equally importantly, it is inefficient to have a workplace where workers are divided into groups who communicate little, or who are actively or passively hostile to one another. Anything that can be done to reduce the incidence of these kinds of situations is likely to be of interest to managers. Sometimes the first step is to demonstrate the incidents in the first place, since the manager may be unaware of them, or may think they are 'just the way things are', not realising that there is another way.

5.2.6   Working with supervisors

Supervisors are often the ones with the most direct contact with ESL workers. Often they are themselves overworked or stressed, and they can become impatient with the communication difficulties involved in having ESL speakers in a team, both in terms of supervisors' difficulty in understanding the workers, and in terms of the workers sometimes failing to understand instructions.

In some cases supervisors can unconsciously be contributing rather directly to these difficulties. For example, they might be unaware of the fact that they are using technical or colloquial expressions which the workers simply don't understand, or that they are speaking in a very unclear way. Although great sensitivity is required from a workplace trainer who wishes to call attention to issues like these, it is certainly useful for the trainer to make note of relevant incidents or examples. There may be some opportunity at some time to bring up these issues in a non-threatening and non-confrontational way, and if so, it is a great advantage to have a collection of examples with which to illustrate the points being discussed.

In the context of a particularly open or cooperative workplace, supervisors or managers may already be interested in steps that can be taken by the native-speaking staff to improve communication, and a good corpus of examples can be very useful in helping them to do this. Remember that even those who are genuinely committed to doing what they can to improve cross cultural communication often lack detailed knowledge to help them achieve this aim. This is where teachers and trainers with greater understanding of linguistic issues can really make a contribution.

5.2.7   Working with native speaker co-workers

Employees working in the many Australian workplaces which include speakers of different languages are in an excellent position to reap the benefits of the linguistic, social and cultural diversity that their workplace represents. Even small improvements in communication among co-workers can have a very positive effect on workplace morale, which in turn may have a positive effect on productivity and efficiency.

Some strategies for improving communication between employees using English as their first language and employees using English as a second or additional language might include

- ❖ acknowledging that native speakers themselves are often rather awkward or shy to speak with ESL speakers, being perhaps aware of their own ignorance of the others' culture or country background;

- ❖ suggesting ways the native speakers might help the ESL speakers through speaking clearly, using simpler words, speaking more slowly;

- ❖ talking about the issue of 'correcting mistakes' – do learners prefer to have mistakes corrected or politely ignored (interestingly, almost all learners prefer tactful correction, but almost all native speakers prefer to politely ignore);

- ❖ asking if any native speakers would be willing to answer simple questions about English.

There may in some cases be scope to actually run a training session for native speakers to help them gain confidence in understanding foreign accents, and skill in speaking so that non-native speakers can understand easily (see Section 1.2.4.3). This is outside the scope of the current frameworks however – though only marginally, since small improvements in these basic cross cultural oral communication skills can have huge effects on learners' opportunities to improve their spoken English – perhaps in some cases arguably even a bigger effect than working directly with a teacher.

5.2.8   Working with clients and customers

It is interesting that large employers whose native-speaker staff need to interact with ESL clients and customers (eg. in the tourism industry) are often happy to invest in training for those staff in good cross cultural oral communication.

In some cases it may be worthwhile to work with ESL employees, not only on how to improve their own pronunciation and oral communication, but on how to understand and cope with clients and customers who may have quite negative reactions to the way they speak.

5.3.   TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES

5.3.1   The 'plower lady'

One week, Sharen told us her learners had been to a four hour training session. Unfortunately, Sharen had not been given notice, as she usually is, to prepare them for the vocabulary and grammar that they would be encountering. So her session had focused on some of the phrases and sentences that they *had* found difficult in the training (rather than *might* find difficult). However, Sharen felt that some of the most useful work involved examples that were brought up from the students' experiences during the week. Here is her example.

One of the Vietnamese workers, at intermediate language level, also works sometimes at the flower market. She had noticed that her customers often seemed confused when she used the word 'flower', and asked Sharen for advice. When Sharen heard the word, she wasn't surprised that listeners were sometimes puzzled. The lady said 'plowers'!

Sharen wrote up the two words 'flower' and 'plower' and told the lady, 'you are saying this one, but we are hearing this one'. She told her how to pronounce 'f' (teeth on lip) but noticed that the lady became rather tense and was unable to follow the instruction – like the centipede trying to walk while thinking about where he put his feet! Sharen told her she needed to relax enough to let the air pass through, that if she used too much tension the word sounded like 'plower'.

5.3.2   Notebooks

Sharen quickly saw the advantage of maintaining continuity for her students, and thoughtfully bought each of them a small spiral-bound notebook which would fit into the pockets of their workshirts. The other teachers were surprised that Sharon was willing to make this purchase, but she said, 'They were only sixty cents each, and it saved all the rigmarole of applying for funds through the manager'.

She found that the notebooks were a great benefit for the learners, as she often saw them refer to the notebooks, or jot something down in them to bring to her at their next session. The notebooks also helped Sharen herself, as she could easily recall what they had been working on in the last few sessions, and could remind students about previous examples.

5.3.3 Building up a system of notation, and a communicative framework

We have seen the need to build up a communicative framework with learners, and nowhere is this more important than in workplace training where contact between teacher and learner can be so infrequent and brief.

Sharen was pleased at how quickly some of the workers were able to make use of the system of notation she developed with them. Within a few sessions she could write down a word that had been pronounced incorrectly, and simply underline the relevant syllables, and found that the learner could act on this effectively.

She was particularly pleased to note how encouraging this was for the learners themselves. It made it worthwhile for learners to bring examples to Sharen if they had confidence that they could understand and act upon her suggestions.

5.3.4 Sharen's recording session

Sharen tried using a tape recorder in one of her very short sessions, though previously she had thought the time would be too short to be effective.

This was very effective. The learner spontaneously commented, in his own words, that the value of it was that, normally, when he was talking, he couldn't hear himself well and couldn't change, but with the recording he could understand well what Sharen had been telling him about stress. This of course is the basis of the use of Critical Listening (see Section 2.4.6.4)

5.3.5 'Where's the fuel tag?'

It was in a very early session that Sharen brought us the example of a worker at her company who had mispronounced the term 'fuel tag' (a particular tag used at that workplace to get fuel for cars). Sharen had overheard an NESB worker using this term and being completely misunderstood by his supervisor. She decided to work on this word with the worker in their next session.

She told us she had started by working on the 'y' glide between the 'f' and the vowel, explaining to the worker that the word was just like 'you' but with 'f' and 'l' added.

This was very good metalinguistic communication, and if the worker had said something that sounded like 'fool tag' it would have been a perfect explanation. However, from what Sharen told us about the way the worker had said 'fuel tag', it seemed this wasn't the main problem the worker had with this phrase.

Because this was a very early session, it took quite a bit of persuasion for me to get the participants to see that actually the key problem with the worker's pronunciation was the stress pattern of the phrase. He had said it with much more stress on the first syllable

than the second – and also with the vowel of the first syllable much too short. The participants finally started to see my point when one of them said 'It almost sounds like 'filter'. Yes! It did. Though Sharen's work did help him, the effect might have been even greater if she had worked *first* on the stress pattern and the vowel length and *then* on the glide insertion.

5.3.6   'Safe and save'

Near the end of the sessions, one of the learners at Sharen's workplace brought her a question:

> What is the difference between '*Is your suburb <u>safe</u>*' and '<u>*save*</u> *on disk'?*

Sharen could see why this was a problem for the learner, as both words came out as 'suf'.

She wrote up the two words, circled the 'f' and the 'v', and drew an arrow to show that the vowels needed to be longer in both words: when he said 'suf' people would not hear the /ei/ vowel. She was pleased he seemed to follow all that very well. Then she explained that the main difference between the words is that 'save' has 'a bit of resonance in the last sound', and demonstrated this, indicating her throat.

The problem was that he then put an additional vowel on the end of 'save'! All the participants sympathised as they had had the same problem themselves.

This led into a very fruitful discussion with the teachers about what *is* actually the main difference between 'safe' and 'save', and how to indicate this to learners.

> I am putting this explanation here, right at the end, because for the participants it came after many weeks of discussion of the fundamental issues.
>
> However this explanation will make little sense unless you have read the material in 2 and followed the discussion in 2.4.6 and 3.2.5.
>
> If you have, this example might help you 'put it all together' as it did for some of the participants.

I explained that in English our 'voiced' consonants are hardly voiced at all, and at the end of a word they generally sound identical to their voiceless counterpart. In fact, using heavily voiced consonants is a major contributor to a 'foreign accent' for speakers of many backgrounds (eg. Indian, Russian, Arabic).

In fact, the *only* difference (not just the main difference) between 'safe' and 'save' is the length of the vowel, which is much longer before 'v' than before 'f'. (If you find this difficult to believe, please see the audio demonstration on the CD *Teaching Pronunciation*.)

The fact that teachers so often believe that 'v' is voiced, and teach this to learners with exaggerated voicing, often *themselves* inevitably adding a tiny vowel sound at the end to 'carry' the voicing, is an excellent demonstration of some of the points that were made in Fundamentals above:

- ❖ The phonemic representation of words does not always give a reliable guide to the actual pronunciation of words, but rather shows *English speakers'* conceptualisation of words; this is not so much 'spelling to sound interference' as 'phoneme to sound interference'.

- ❖ The relationship between a natural pronunciation and an exaggerated pronunciation (such as emphasising voicing or schwa, or 'chanting' rhythm), though it might be quite clear to teachers, can be very confusing for learners.

So what should Sharen have done? Certainly she should not have told the learner that 'f' and 'v' are identical! That would be counterproductive, because the learner needs to know that when he sees a word with 'v' he must say it differently from a word with 'f'. The information in the spelling that tells us that *safe* and *save* are different words is given in the 'f' and 'v': If you tell him 'f' and 'v' are the same, you rob him of the value of this information.

With these cases it is best to let the learner hear that the vowel must be longer before 'v'. You can do this very effectively simply by writing the two words on the board, and them both naturally several times, pointing at the relevant word each time. This would actually work better for the learner than demonstrating the 'v' in an exaggerated way. However if you are confident about the vowel length difference, it can be useful to learners to point out that the vowel is longer. If he thinks he is already making a long vowel in 'safe', tell him the vowel in 'save' must be 'even longer', 'very long'. Let him hear you saying both words and point out how long the vowel is, by drawing a very long arrow under the vowel in 'save', or using any device you can to make him hear and produce this length.

Once your students have grasped this, and as other similar cases come up, you can give them the general rule that vowels are always longer before voiced consonants (though you'll probably want to give a list of the consonants rather than using this technical term).

One last point: there is some confusion in ESL about 'long' and 'short' as descriptors for vowels. For example, teachers sometimes say:

- ❖ when an 'e' is added the vowel becomes long. However this is a *spelling* rule not a pronunciation rule, and a little misleading since the main change is not the *length* of the vowel but the *quality* of the vowel

- ❖ when a syllable is stressed the vowel becomes long. This is true but involves using the same term for a *segmental* issue as a *prosodic* issue so I prefer to say that stressed vowels are 'loud' and leave myself free to point out the length of vowels even if they are unstressed.

5.4.   QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

5.4.1   I don't have an ESL background but I have to work with employees whose spoken English is pretty poor. What can I do to help?

It is actually quite important to understand a bit about pronunciation if you are going to get into the nitty gritty of teaching and *explaining* pronunciation issues. It *is* possible to do more harm than good!

But some things can be very useful even though they require little linguistic background. Some suggested strategies are:

- ❖ sensitively pointing out mistakes and giving the correct pronunciation
- ❖ making clear you are open to being asked whether something is being said correctly or not
- ❖ letting a learner repeat a word or phrase after you several times (even up to ten times!)
- ❖ simply writing words that are easy for the learner to confuse, and saying them several times, pointing to each one as you are saying it – to help learners conceptualise for themselves the differences they hear between the words.

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7. APPENDIX

7.1. MESSAGES FROM PARTICIPANTS

7.1.1 Roslyn

By using the simple five emphases of this metalinguistic approach (listener focus, stress, vowel length & quality, consonant correction and pausing) a teacher quickly gains confidence in tackling students' errors as they occur throughout normal lessons. Students, too, can learn to monitor their own speech for intelligibility inside and outside the classroom and self-correct. There is no need to grapple with the phonetic alphabet, articulation diagrams, linking and stress rules, the schwa or the subtleties of intonation patterns to achieve a noticeable improvement in a student's pronunciation at beginner and intermediate levels.

Throughout my years teaching I have experimented with various approaches to teaching pronunciation and found them rather complex, daunting and time consuming to teach. Furthermore, the results were rather uninspiring for the effort expended. Consequently, my pronunciation teaching became a haphazard, hit and miss affair that reflected my muddled thinking in this area. I tended to stick with areas I felt I could cope with such as the silent 'e' rule and regular double vowel sounds versus the short vowels which was probably more effective for teaching spelling and reading than pronunciation. As I didn't know where to begin to really sort out a student's oracy problems, I tended to leave correction of the problem until the next lesson to give myself time to think it over and work out a strategy for the next lesson. However, given the time constraints of the syllabus/programme/assessment events there never seemed enough time to develop a comprehensive programme based on either a phonemic or a prosodic approach, let alone both!

Since being involved in the Pilot Pronunciation Project I have begun inserting up to 3 or more small pronunciation segments into lessons when I fail to understand students' speech. Using the important aspects of listener focus, stress, vowel length and quality, consonant correction and pausing, I now know what I am trying to achieve and have a step by step approach to analysing student errors. It has been surprising just how quickly and easily it is possible to obtain an improvement, while giving them the framework enables the students to begin to self monitor their speech and watch for listener confusion. I look forward to a longer period of implementing these ideas to see the degree of improvement overall. The techniques of a consistent notation system, colour highlighting and non-verbal clues are very helpful and, in future, I plan to trial small pronunciation notebooks for each student as used by other teachers in this pilot project. Being part of the project has been a very helpful discipline focusing my attention again on what I am doing and what it achieves.

7.1.2   Ameetha

Although I did a bit of phonetics and linguistics in my degree, I was not very keen on teaching phonetics to my students, mainly because I didn't know how to begin to teach them. The methods I had learnt at the university seemed very daunting and I wasn't too keen on imparting that to my migrant students.

However, after meeting with Helen things changed. I realised that I didn't need a Masters degree in phonetics to teach my students correct pronunciation. The strategies and methods that I have learnt with her have made me quite confident in teaching it to my students.

7.1.3   Belinda

This method of teaching pronunciation is teacher and student friendly. There is no need to know the phonetic alphabet or have a great deal of linguistic knowledge. Pronunciation work is integrated into the lessons in a natural way that is suitable for all levels. The emphasis is on students hearing their own mistakes and becoming aware of what the listener is hearing.

On the whole, my feelings had been fairly negative about teaching pronunciation. I persisted, because I've always considered it so important, but never felt I had the key. I've used different methods and different textbooks and found them unwieldy and generally not student friendly. I've felt frustrated because despite my best intentions and the efforts of the students, the outcomes have always been patchy.

During the last couple of years I have tried to cover <u>all</u> aspects of pronunciation and hoped that something would sink in. I probably spent more time on individual sounds and syllable structure, as I was most comfortable with this, but I knew it wasn't enough. I used a limited repertoire of notations on the board, but not consistently.

I'm hopeful that the students and I will achieve more with these techniques. I feel confident about being able to work on stress pattern and vowel length in a way that will make sense to the students.
I am very pleased that I have been involved with the project and look forward to working on pronunciation this term.

7.1.4   Sharen

In the past, teaching pronunciation as part of my workplace language and literacy program has played a very minor part indeed. My main focus, I thought, was to develop and rewrite in Plain English, language-based materials that related to the Training Package or workplace situation.

Being involved in the pronunciation project has helped me re-focus and learn simple and effective skills that really improve intelligibility and communication for my students.

'Workplace Communication', spoken and written, is so important, and workers using English as an additional language really value and appreciate help in their English pronunciation. It can make a *real difference* in their lives.

7.1.5   Rae

I really like the idea of integrating pronunciation into my ESOL lessons and being able to focus on practising the pronunciation of real life language, language that students themselves can suggest. This has really added a depth and completeness to my lessons and has lifted the confidence of my beginner students.

You don't have to become an expert in phonetic symbols, counting syllables, etc. You can learn to use straightforward and effective techniques. For example, I was really impressed at how effective it was to say, 'When you say that, this is what I hear' to students who have mispronounced a word.

This approach gives students and teachers hope that pronunciation can be improved.

7.2   BIOSKETCHES OF PARTICIPANTS

7.2.1   Helen Fraser

I am a Senior Lecturer at the University of New England in Armidale. I did my BA(Hons) at Macquarie University in the late 1970's, majoring in linguistics and specialising in phonetics. I worked for some time on the Macquarie Dictionary, and then went to Scotland in 1983 to work on a PhD in phonetics. I stayed in the British Isles for seven years, studying and teaching at Edinburgh, Trinity College Dublin and the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London). In 1990 I returned to Australia and took a position for three months at UNE – and I am still there many years later!

In 1996 I started to become interested in pronunciation teaching – in the question of how to apply knowledge of phonetics and especially psycholinguistics to the teaching of pronunciation. Soon this became my major interest, and from mid 1999-mid 2001 I took leave without pay from UNE so as to concentrate fully on this area. I engaged in a number of projects and consultancies, some of which are mentioned in the text of this Handbook.

7.2.2   Eileen Zhang

My teaching career started right after graduating with a BA degree in English Language and Literature from a university in China. I began to teach ESL, upon completion of a Master's in TESOL at the University of Sydney in 1995. I have taught ESL courses at all levels since then. I learnt English in adulthood and I always believed from my learning experience that teaching pronunciation was as difficult as learning it. After several

frustrating pronunciation teaching experiences, I even thought it was impossible to teach ESL pronunciation until I met Dr. Helen Fraser whose ideas and research findings have convinced me and changed my attitude. I have trialed her ideas and approaches and they worked really well with my students. Now I'd like to say teaching ESL pronunciation is possible and we can make a difference. How? By using the 'tricks' from the Frameworks.

7.2.3   Roslyn Cartwright

After completing my B.A. (Hons) Dip Ed at Macquarie University in 1973 I taught history and social science for 3 years at Blacktown Boys' High School in Sydney where I became interested in the innovative remedial reading programme within the English Department there. Following an extended holiday in Europe, I returned to 4 years relief teaching before leaving the workforce for 13 years to raise my children. In 1996 I completed my Graduate Diploma in TESOL via distance education at UNE having done some volunteer English home-tutoring during the process. Initially, I began ESOL relief teaching at AMES for 2 years and also taught community English classes in 4 centres in the Fairfield district for 18 months before commencing work at TAFE. I have been teaching at TAFE for 4 years on a range of classes from Certificate I in English for Speakers of Other Languages to Certificate III in English for Further Study and Certificate III in English for Employment. At present I am also tackling the challenge of improving the fluency of students in two Interpreting Diploma courses through weekly tutorial support classes in pronunciation.

7.2.4   Ameetha Venkatraman

After a degree in English, Economics and Psychology I worked for the Indian tourism for while. I then decided that it was not something which I really wanted to do.....so in 1986 I took up a year's study in teaching and got myself a degree in education. I found myself in a school teaching high school and primary kids in Bangalore, a big city in southern India. It was an English medium school and I enjoyed my new job very much. Our migration to Australia in 1990 changed things a bit. I was not very keen on teaching kids here, and since my son was soon born I was a mother for a while. In 1995 I did my TESOL training and started teaching at the Granville TAFE in 1996 and have been there ever since. I greatly enjoy teaching migrant adults and find my job extremely gratifying and fulfilling.

7.2.5   Belinda Bourke

I have been teaching for about 30 years. I had no intention of teaching but after completing a BA at ANU I found myself living in Denmark and was offered a job teaching English as a Foreign Language to adults at the Refugee School in Copenhagen.

Back in Australia in 1978 I started working for AMES with some of the first Vietnamese refugees in Cabramatta. Later I began working for TAFE in Newcastle. TAFE was responsible for on-arrival English and I continued to enjoy being involved with migrants

at that critical time of settlement in Australia. While in Newcastle I completed a Dip. Ed and later a Grad. Dip. TESOL from the University of South Australia.

I moved to Wetherill Park TAFE in 1994 where I teach all levels of English. I still find my job satisfying, especially the contact with people from other cultures and the feeling that I am able to help people overcome some of the barriers they face in Australia.

7.2.6   Sharen Fifer

I trained as a Primary School teacher at Wollongong University, and then did a year of Special Education at Sydney Teachers College to become a teacher of the deaf. I mainly worked with very young hearing impaired children and their parents to encourage and teach speech and language.

I later on started working with adult deaf students at TAFE, teaching, supporting, note taking and tutoring them. I really enjoyed working with adults, and occasionally I was asked to teach some Adult Literacy classes in the Adult Basic Education section.

A few years ago I decided to do a Graduate Diploma at University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) in Adult Basic Education. Many of the people I worked with were from Language Backgrounds Other Than English and there appeared to be such a close link between the kind of teaching needed for people with poor speech and language skills because of their hearing impairment and those who were struggling to learn English as a second language, I decided to also do a Graduate Certificate in TESOL.

This has given me marvellous opportunities to teach in all three sections, and I love teaching literacy and language skills. Recently I became involved in teaching in the workplace, at a large factory, at two Nursing Homes and now at Avis Rent-a-Car. They have all been different, but have all been part of the WELL Program because the employers realised the need to upgrade and teach work-related English.

The variety of opportunities I have had in implementing my skills has been very rewarding and has "stretched" me as a teacher.

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8. DETAILED CONTENTS

9. FEEDBACK SHEET

Your feedback is very useful to us. Please photocopy and fax this sheet to Ursula Nowicki, Program Manager, English Language and Literacy, TAFE NSW – Access Division, fax 02 9846 8288 or cut and paste and email it to ursula.nowicki@tafensw.edu.au.

Your name (optional)..

Your email address (optional) ....

Your native language ....

Your qualifications in ESL, especially pronunciation...

....

Your experience in teaching ESL, especially pronunciation ....

....

Do you enjoy teaching pronunciation? ....

How did you find this Handbook?

Circle 1 for 'very useful', 3 for 'intermediate', 5 for 'totally useless', etc

	1	2	3	4	5	
Useful	1	2	3	4	5	Totally useless
Interesting	1	2	3	4	5	Boring
Inspiring	1	2	3	4	5	Depressing
Novel	1	2	3	4	5	Old hat
Practical	1	2	3	4	5	Far too abstract
I'd recommend it	1	2	3	4	5	I'd warn against it

You may wish to comment specifically on the following:

Usefulness...

Originality ....

Clarity ....

Short-term vs long-term effects ....

Practicality ....

Useability..

Effect on your teaching...

Effect on your students' pronunciation ....

How did you use the Handbook? (eg. read straight through, dipped in, studied in detail).........

....

Have you used any of the CD-ROM materials by Helen Fraser? ....

Which other print-based materials do you use for pronunciation teaching? ....

....

Which other electronic materials do you use for pronunciation teaching? ....

....

Thank you for your comments.