



BECOMING A PRONUNCIATION TEACHER

Radek Skarnitzl

Červinková Poesová, K. & Uličná, K. (2019). *Becoming a Pronunciation Teacher*. Praha: Charles University, Faculty of Education.

After decades of neglect during which pronunciation was described as an orphan or Cinderella of language teaching (see, e.g., Underhill, 2013), pronunciation teaching is currently experiencing a revival and has become an integral part of applied linguistics. However, although the “Cinderella-stigma” has disappeared from research into various aspects of second language (L2) pronunciation pedagogy (Levis, 2019), the same cannot be said for actual teaching practice at schools, not only in the Czech Republic but practically across the world (Levis & Wu, 2018). Achieving that is likely to take some time, and the key requirement is that pronunciation teaching becomes an integral part of teacher training at pedagogical faculties — ideally not as a content of two or three lessons within a language methodology course, but as an independent course. The electronic interactive book *Becoming a Pronunciation Teacher*¹ by Kristýna Červinková Poesová and Klára Uličná from the Faculty of Education, Charles University, can be considered one of the first steps in this direction in the Czech Republic.

The first chapter of the book briefly outlines the history of pronunciation teaching, from the end of the 19th century and the Reform Movement. The authors describe the Audiolingual Method and its introduction of minimal pair practice, as well as various alternative approaches such as the Silent Way in which, perhaps paradoxically given its name, pronunciation played an important role. The chapter then moves towards Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) with its initial rejection but subsequent endorsement of explicit pronunciation teaching. The section on CLT also presents a model of communicative competence according to Bachman. This model, with the accompanying two figures, seems somewhat disconnected from the rest of the chapter; I believe it would deserve a more detailed commentary, perhaps even a self-sufficient section. Finally, a separate section is dedicated to the modern era which the authors describe as a post-method and eclectic period. The research-based nature of this era is emphasized by presenting the most important books and the professional journal dedicated to L2 pronunciation; I would only recommend that the recent book by John Levis (2018) be added as well.

The second chapter covers various factors which affect learners’ attainment in learning the pronunciation of an L2. Most space is logically dedicated to the effects of age on phonetic learning, and the authors cover all the major explanations — neurological and the Critical Period Hypothesis, linguistic and cognitive. By discussing the effects of age, as well as those of a learner’s aptitude, motivation and personality traits, the chapter should be instrumental in moderating expectations of teachers: every learner represents a unique mix of many factors which have to be combined

1 The book is available at https://futurebooks.cz/books/pedfa_esf_7/.

in the right way for pronunciation learning to be successful. Having realistic expectations is important for keeping teachers' motivation. The second chapter also discusses the effect of the native language and the similarity of its sound patterns to those of the target L2. The last section is dedicated to the effectiveness of pronunciation instruction and presents a crucial piece of information: it has been repeatedly proven in a number of recent studies that the teaching of pronunciation does bring positive results. The last section of the second chapter concludes by providing several tips for effective instruction.

The third chapter is entitled *Insight into pronunciation teaching* and it is composed of three relatively independent sections. The first one deals with the selecting and structuring of the teaching content; as a general methodological section, it deviates slightly from the main topic of the book, although references and examples to pronunciation are made throughout. I feel that, from the perspective of an ordinary language teacher or a foreign reader, some concepts in this section are explained in an unnecessarily convoluted way which is not in line with modern academic writing. For example, the phrase “didactic transformation of content” gets merely 827 hits on Google, mostly from Czech (and sometimes also Russian) diploma theses and papers. If the authors have ambitions to reach a wider audience, I would recommend revising this section and connecting it more with the following two practical sections. The first of these introduces lexical stress from the linguistic-phonetic and didactic perspectives. Stress — as well as the closely related notion of vowel reduction — is described as a major factor contributing to intelligible pronunciation and as a proven teachable and learnable phenomenon. The phonetic description, in which stress in English is also compared with Czech, is followed by techniques which can be used to teach English word stress. The authors present awareness-raising activities, exercises focusing on the identification and comparison of stress patterns, attention is drawn to Czech-English cognates such as *kalamita-calamity*, or to vowel reduction in weak forms of grammatical words. The final section of the third chapter demonstrates the application of some of these techniques in actual lessons. Four English teachers, graduates of the English teaching programme at the Faculty of Education who recorded their lessons with a focus on word stress, are first introduced, along with the classes they chose for teaching and their reflection about the teaching. This is a very valuable part of the book and should not be skipped (although readers may tend to do that at first sight); the context and the posthoc feedback that the teachers provide is didactic in a number of ways, especially for teacher trainees. The material consists of 13 video clips, and readers are guided by the authors in a well-prepared set of tasks based on observation and reflection. While watching the videos, readers are encouraged to take notes on several aspects of the teaching process (e.g., teaching aids and visual materials used, the way learners' involvement was achieved, usage of transcription or terminology). In addition, readers are asked to compare the individual performances, to reflect on them by thinking about their own teaching style or by suggesting possible improvements. All these activities provide for an intensive, involved analysis of the videos and will be extremely useful to student learners — a crucial aspect is that the short lessons presented are not perfect, artificially designed demonstrations but real-life lessons. The chapter is concluded by a useful





list of questions which should help teachers or teacher trainees with the planning of the teaching process when dealing with pronunciation.

On top of the content of the three chapters, there are additional elements which deserve to be mentioned. Every chapter starts with a short introduction to the topic, a study guide and initial notes which provide a more general background and references to sources where readers may find more in-depth coverage. Every chapter is followed by a final test with interactive elements — for instance, upon evaluating the multiple choice and true-or-false tests, one receives an explanation of the correct option or a link to the relevant section; some questions are presented as double-sided cards with the question and the correct response on the other side revealed after a mouse-click. The chapters are complemented by discussion questions which ask readers to reflect not only on the contents of the chapters, but also on their own experience as teachers or students of languages.

Becoming a Pronunciation Teacher is a very useful source for anyone who teaches (or studies to teach) foreign languages. The theoretical anchoring of pronunciation teaching in the first two chapters is very well presented. I see the greatest benefit in section 3.2, which describes several innovative ways of practicing lexical stress, and in section 3.3, which provides very valuable examples of real-life teaching of word stress at multiple proficiency levels. Using the videos, readers are encouraged to reflect on and assess the teaching process, focusing on a number of perspectives which are important in teaching, as well as relate their own teaching style and experience.

Since this is an electronic book, I believe the authors will continue to make improvements to it; some suggestions have already been made above. In addition to those, it would be helpful to include a short introduction which would explain what the book aims and does not aim to do, and also who it is for. There are a number of issues in pronunciation teaching which are not addressed in the book or only hinted at, for instance the segmental vs. suprasegmental debate, types of pronunciation errors and their correction, or the use of technology to teach pronunciation (see, e.g., Derwing & Munro, 2015). This is not to imply that such topics are missing, only that a reader's expectations should be set straight from the beginning. Finally, it would be nice to fully exploit the interactive character of the book by turning references into links to the bibliographical information or to use the hover function to obtain it.

To conclude, *Becoming a Pronunciation Teacher* has a potential to become a major source in language methodology courses focused on teaching pronunciation. One can only hope that it will contribute to a gradual closing of the above-mentioned gap between research and teaching practice.

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Radek Skarnitzl | Fonetický ústav FF UK Praha
<radek.skarnitzl@ff.cuni.cz>

