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Pronunciation Materials

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Abstract

Pronunciation is increasingly popular in professional conferences where sessions are often filled to overflowing. Similarly, pronunciation materials today show up in a wide variety of sources. Baker and Murphy (2011) tell us that “the past decade has witnessed an explosion in the number of ... classroom textbooks; teacher’s manuals; classroom-based research reports; teacher-training books; book chapters; journal articles; CD-ROMs; videos, computer software; Internet resources, most of which are geared directly toward ESL/ EFL teachers” (p. 37). This explosion means that research into pronunciation materials needs to be based on sound research and best practices. Grant (1995) provided an early look at pronunciation materials development, but little attention has been paid to this area until recently. This chapter presents principles that should underlie pronunciation materials and then examines how four skills books follow those principles.

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JOHN LEVIS AND SINEM SONSAAT

10. PRONUNCIATION MATERIALS

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is increasingly popular in professional conferences where sessions are often filled to overflowing. Similarly, pronunciation materials today show up in a wide variety of sources. Baker and Murphy (2011) tell us that “the past decade has witnessed an explosion in the number of ... classroom textbooks; teacher’s manuals; classroom-based research reports; teacher-training books; book chapters; journal articles; CD-ROMs; videos, computer software; Internet resources, most of which are geared directly toward ESL/EFL teachers” (p. 37). This explosion means that research into pronunciation materials needs to be based on sound research and best practices. Grant (1995) provided an early look at pronunciation materials development, but little attention has been paid to this area until recently. This chapter presents principles that should underlie pronunciation materials and then examines how four skills books follow those principles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Materials development, which covers not only the creation of all kinds of language learning materials but also their evaluation, modification, and investigation (Tomlinson, 2012) was not counted as a stand-alone field until the 1990s (Tomlinson, 2012). It had mostly been treated as a sub-branch of language teaching methods (Canniveng & Martinez, 2003) and “an essentially a theoretical activity” (Samuda, 2005, p. 232). However, materials development is central in how theory is put into practice and how it contributes to the training and experience of teachers (Canniveng & Martinez, 2003).

Materials development has many stakeholders including learners, teachers, materials writers, and researchers, making materials development a collaborative field. However, one stakeholder’s ignorance of others’ needs may result in materials that do not work well, a common complaint in classroom settings of different contexts. This problem may come from neglect of the steps identified for successful materials development: *contextual realization, identification, exploration, pedagogical realization, and physical production* (Jolly & Bolitho, 2011).

Contextual realization is the foundation of well-designed materials. Differences in ESL and EFL settings (Masuhara & Tomlinson, 2008) greatly affect materials design. For instance, the socio-cultural context (Holliday, 1994) or religious

ideas and stance (McDonough & Shaw, 2003) of a country will shape the choice of content. Some topics are often avoided in materials in many contexts: politics, alcohol, religion, sex, narcotics, -isms, and pork (Gray, 2002).

Another contextual issue is the function of English in a country (McDonough & Shaw, 2003) and the educational system (Masuhara & Tomlinson, 2008). For instance, learners may expect to find grammar exercises in one country, but speaking tasks in another one. These expectations also affect the decision-making processes of material designers in the *identification* and *exploration* steps of materials development.

MATERIALS AND TEACHERS

An important contextual factor is the needs of learners and teachers. Although the needs of learners have been widely studied, the needs of teachers have not captured the same attention (Masuhara, 2011). This is surprising because in school environments, teachers are the first users of materials and make decisions about what to cover and what to leave out.

However, not all teachers have the same amount of experience, training, or confidence. This may increase the influence of materials. Tomlinson (2005) even says that coursebooks often control what is actually done in the classroom especially for less experienced teachers that are more dependent on their coursebooks, while experienced teachers like being flexible and selective in their choices of what to teach (Tsui, 2003). Similarly, Gray (2010) finds that many teachers did not “have the confidences to challenge the authority of the coursebook” (p. 7). As a result, it should not be assumed that adapting or changing course materials is easy for all teachers (Samuda, 2005).

When it comes to teaching pronunciation, teachers’ use of, expectations of and dependency on the course materials may be stronger compared to their experience with general English books. There is evidence that all teachers are more reluctant to teach pronunciation since mostly they do not have sufficient training or confidence to teach it (Burgess & Spencer, 2000; Derwing & Munro, 2005; Macdonald, 2002). The lack of confidence might also be related to native speaker status. If native teachers show reluctance to teach pronunciation, nonnative teachers show even more. Spoken language and pronunciation are much more elusive than grammar and vocabulary, and more subject to uncertainty for teachers. If pronunciation materials are to be truly useful, they must be useful to nonnative teachers.

HOW SHOULD PRONUNCIATION MATERIALS BE DESIGNED?

Greater interest in pronunciation means that materials for teaching speaking, listening frequently and other skills also include materials for pronunciation. Because pronunciation activities and descriptions of how to use them most effectively commonly occur in integrated skills, speaking and listening coursebooks (and

accompanying teacher's manuals), workbooks, and digital materials, pronunciation activities are most likely to be encountered by teachers in conjunction with other teaching goals. The most pronunciation-intensive materials are, of course, dedicated pronunciation books or digital materials focused on pronunciation skills (such as software), but these play a much smaller role in a typical classroom than do books focused on other skills. Instead, they may serve as resource books when they are available, reflecting Macdonald's (2002) finding that most teachers want pronunciation materials that are easy to use and require little extra work on the teacher's part.

To be widely useful, pronunciation materials should be based on three general principles: they should emphasize intelligibility, they should explicitly connect to other language skills, and they should provide sufficient and usable support for teachers.

The first principle for pronunciation materials is that they should emphasize intelligibility, focusing on features that make a difference. This means setting priorities for what we teach. Jenkins (2000) proposed a set of priorities she called the Lingua Franca Core (LFC) for NNS-NNS communication. Her priorities included most vowel and consonant sounds of English, and only one suprasegmental, that of nuclear stress. Derwing, Munro and Wiebe (1998) suggest a more balanced approach, with both suprasegmentals and segmentals being included for ESL contexts. Not all suprasegmentals or segmentals are equally important, however. Munro and Derwing (2006) found that consonant contrasts with many minimal pairs in English (for example, /l/-/n/) affected intelligibility more than consonant contrasts with few minimal pairs (for example, /θ/-/f/). Depending on the context in which the teaching is done, materials writers may justifiably have different priorities.

The second principle is that pronunciation should be fully integrated into the teaching of other language skills. While pronunciation may sometimes need to be taught in a decontextualized way, it must never be taught only in this way. Pronunciation is part of speaking and listening, and it must ultimately be used to speak and to listen. Hinkel (2006) confirms this in giving three principles for teaching pronunciation: it must be taught in context and connected to speaking, it must serve communicative purposes, and it must be based on realistic language. Most materials for pronunciation teaching today fall far short of these goals.

The third principle is that pronunciation materials, to be fully useable, should be designed to meet the wants and needs of teachers who differ in their L1 background, levels of experience, training, and confidence (Harwood, 2010). It is not enough to provide accurate descriptions and interesting activities. The materials also need to make clear why the pronunciation point is essential. This happens far less often than one might expect. Since research has shown that teachers are already uncertain about their ability to teach pronunciation, materials need to provide greater support so teachers understand why they should include pronunciation activities and how best to teach them. Additionally, teachers sometimes may need extra explanation of certain topics since they might lack content knowledge. For instance, a teacher

lacking sufficient pronunciation training may not know how to identify the main stress in a word, and in that case he/she may not feel confident in teaching it. Thus, rather than only providing the answers of pronunciation exercises, teacher's manuals (TMs) should give additional examples explaining the given feature in the exercise. However, according to recent research (Derwing, Diepenbroek, & Foote, 2012), TMs do not always provide teachers with sufficient assistance.

PRONUNCIATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING MATERIALS

To see whether current ELT materials meet our three principles, we looked at twelve intermediate level four-skills (integrated skills) books¹ (4SB) from three well-known publication houses: Cambridge University Press, Oxford, University Press and Pearson-Longman. All the books sell well in EFL contexts, specifically in the Middle Eastern countries such as Turkey, Iran, and Kuwait. Exploring how pronunciation is taught in Listening-Speaking and stand-alone pronunciation books also requires attention; however, our inquiry will only look at 4SBs because of space and time issues.

Principle 1: Make Intelligibility a Priority

Distribution of topics in the 4SBs showed that all of the books were aware of research regarding intelligibility. The most frequently presented topic in the books is intonation (included in 10 books), followed by word stress (9 books), sentence stress (8 books), linking, and rhythm (6 books each). Other topics are seen in smaller numbers (i.e., reductions, schwa, strong and weak forms), are actually complementary features of the more frequent topics. For instance, strong and weak forms (3 books) can be presented under 'rhythm', and 'schwa' in both word stress and rhythm. The number of topics focusing on suprasegmentals in all books was over 60, whereas the number of segmental topics was around 10–15.

While all of the books primarily focused on suprasegmentals, all included vowels, consonants, and diphthongs as well. It was not clear why some sounds were included except sounds such as /r/, /w/, /i/ vs. /i:/, /æ/, /ɒ/ were mostly difficult for learners of varied L1s. Particular sounds such as /θ/ and /ð/ are still emphasized but are not vital for intelligibility (Jenkins, 2000; Munro & Derwing, 2006). This might be partly because /θ/ and /ð/ are difficult for many L2 learners and are well-known problems.

Principle 2: Integrate Pronunciation with Other Skills

A quick glance at the table of contents (TOCs) (see Appendix) of the 4SBs shows that pronunciation is a sub-skill that most books include. English Unlimited, Touchstone, New Headway, and New Cutting Edge grouped pronunciation with grammar and vocabulary under the category of language input, while they grouped listening,

speaking, reading and writing under language skills. Others such as *face2face*, *New Total English*, and *English in Common* put pronunciation under speaking skills, while *Interchange* and *Top Notch* grouped pronunciation with listening. Only three books, *English File*, *English Result* and *Speak Out* placed pronunciation in a separate category.

Almost all the books' brochures or webpages claimed that they integrated pronunciation into their materials. By looking at the TOCs (see Appendix) and unit layouts, it is clear that they include pronunciation without isolating it from the other skills. For instance, some books create connections between grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation topics whenever possible (Table 1). Surprisingly, pronunciation tasks were not necessarily linked to the speaking tasks in 4SBs.

Table 1. Connection between grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation topics

English In Common (PL)	Unit 1 Gr: Present Perfect / Pr: Present Perfect: have/ haven't Unit 2 Gr: Simple past and past continuous; Pr: past tense -ed endings Unit 7 Gr: used to, would; Pr: used to/didn't use to
English Result (OUP)	Unit 4 Gr & V: -ed and -ing adjectives; Pr: -ed endings Unit 4 Gr: Comparatives and superlatives; Pr: comparative -er Unit 5 Gr: the or no article in names of institutions; Pr: the Unit 6 Gr: so and such; Pr: high intonation Unit 10 V: Agreeing and disagreeing; Pr: Agreeing and disagreeing intonation
Interchange 4th Ed. (CUP)	Unit 11 Gr: expressing regret with should (not) have + past participle; Pr: reduction of have and been; listening to regrets and explanations Unit 13 Gr: Past modals for degrees of certainty; Pr: reduction in past modals
Speak Out (PL)	Unit 2 Gr: Present perfect vs. past simple; Pr: Strong and weak forms of the present perfect; Unit 3 Gr: the future: going to, will, might; Pr: going to in fast speech Unit 5 Gr: question tags; Pr: falling/rising intonation in question tags Unit 6 V: Life events, phrases to describe good, bad events; Pr: exaggerated intonation to show emotion
Touchstone 2nd Ed. (CUP)	Unit 11 Gr: Modal verbs must, may, might, can't or could for speculating; Pr: Linking and deletion with must

Gr: Grammar, V: Vocabulary, Pr: Pronunciation

Even though pronunciation was included in each book we analysed, and some books advertised their focus on pronunciation, the space devoted to pronunciation was often too little to command attention by teachers and students. In most books, pronunciation-related tasks appeared once or twice throughout many units (i.e., English in Common, English Unlimited, Interchange, New Headway, Speak Out). Additionally, pronunciation tasks were sometimes integrated with vocabulary or grammar. In those cases, pronunciation tasks were usually minor compared to the grammar or vocabulary tasks and titles of pronunciation tasks were printed in a less salient style (i.e., face2face, Speak Out).

Thus, an issue to be considered in the presentation of pronunciation is visual representation. Jolly and Bolitho (2011) include '*physical production*' as an important step of materials development. They note "physical appearance and production of materials is important both for motivation and for classroom effectiveness" (p. 110). This indicates that although it is good to integrate skills, presentation might lead teachers and students to think that some skills are less important. Visual features help the mind place things into an invisible hierarchy, meaning that the way pronunciation is presented affects how stakeholders evaluate its importance. To use an analogy with food, pronunciation can be fully integrated into the language teaching meal, or it can be a side dish, or it can be presented as a garnish that provides colour but is not expected to be eaten. In some books we looked at, pronunciation was presented like garnish. In some books, it is even difficult to find the pronunciation task while flipping through the pages. Unfortunately, it is also common in many 4SBs that pronunciation is mostly left out in the 'revision' parts (Derwing, Diepenbroek, & Foote, 2012), which means that pronunciation is less likely to be recycled.

Principle 3: Provide Adequate Support for Teachers

Of the books that we explored, we had access to eight TMs. Their level of support differed dramatically. English File, face2face, and Touchstone provided all answers of each task, explained core concepts, and referred back to the units which included a concept. For instance, Unit 9 of Touchstone has a pronunciation task related to linking; the TM provides additional conceptual information about linking. This would help teachers who need to better understand and explain linking. Touchstone, which has a separate language notes section, also provides teachers with introductory sentences that teachers can use before they move on to the real task. Similarly, face2face's TM tells teachers to remind students that weak forms of words are pronounced with 'schwa', and by doing so helps teachers to refresh their knowledge on 'weak forms'.

New Headway and English in Common also provided answers and provided rules for some concepts, but they assumed more about what teachers could explain. For instance, the pronunciation of -ed and weak forms of *was/were* in Unit 3 of New Headway (NH) gave rules and explanations about how and why -ed endings are pronounced differently, but it did not explain how and why *was/were* are produced in weak forms. The TM seemed to assume that all teachers know how rhythm functions

in English and can explain that the vowel sounds in *was/were* are pronounced with schwasound. It would be helpful to explain these concepts more fully or direct teachers to resources that help explain them.

A similar example comes from English in Common (EiC). In Unit 4 students are asked to find the main stressed syllable in a word. The answers for this task are given in the TM; however, there is no explanation for how the main stressed syllable is identified. Teaching word stress can be quite challenging, and non-native English speaking teachers (NNEST) may avoid teaching it unless they know ‘exactly what to say’. Having the answers in a TM, and knowing where the main stress is in a word might not be enough for NNESTs to feel confident in teaching it without greater support.

CONCLUSION

The increasing interest in second language pronunciation and the growing number of pronunciation instruction materials motivated us to investigate the pronunciation teaching practices in twelve intermediate level 4SBs. We examined them in regard to three materials development principles. First, pronunciation materials should prioritize intelligibility; second, pronunciation should be integrated into the teaching of other skills; and third, pronunciation materials should provide sufficient support for teachers, specifically for NNESTs, untrained or inexperienced teachers.

Our analysis revealed that all 4SBs focus on pronunciation features thought to contribute to speakers’ intelligibility. Integration of pronunciation into 4SBs is partially achieved but it is mostly integrated into grammar and vocabulary tasks but not strongly into speaking and listening. Additionally, the time (in terms of activities) and space (in terms of visual appearance) devoted to pronunciation in the 4SBs make it seem expendable. Thus, materials developers should also integrate pronunciation into skills other than grammar and vocabulary, and should visually present pronunciation tasks as being essential rather than optional.

Last but not least, our analysis showed that many TMs assume that all teachers are well-trained, experienced, or confident in pronunciation teaching, and they do not usually need anything other than the answers to the activities. However, research shows it’s opposite; thus TMs should be more informative, taking the role of being a resource book for pronunciation teaching and teaching the teachers. To conclude, pronunciation is reasonably well-integrated into 4SBs. However, there is still a need for careful design to meet the criteria that will make pronunciation an essential part of language teaching materials.

NOTE

¹ **Cambridge:** face2face 2nd Ed., English Unlimited, Touchstone 2nd Ed., Interchange 3 4th Ed.; **Oxford:** New Headway 4th Ed., English File 3rd Ed., English Result; **Pearson-Longman/Pearson:** New Cutting Edge 2nd Ed., Top Notch 3 2nd Ed., English in Common 4, Speak Out, New Total English.

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APPENDIX

Table 2. Pronunciation in the TOCs of four-skill books

Face2face (Cambridge)	Vocabulary	Grammar	Real World	Speaking Help with Pronunciation	Listening & Video	Reading	Writing
English Unlimited (Cambridge)	Goals	Language: Vocabulary / Grammar / Pronunciation		Skills: Listening / Reading / Writing & Speaking		Explore: Writing Spelling & Sounds	
Touchstone 2nd Ed. (Cambridge)	Learning Outcomes	Language: Vocabulary / Grammar / Pronunciation		Interaction: Conversation Strategies	Skills: Listening / Reading / Writing / Free Talk		Self-Study: Vocabulary Notebook
Interchange 4th Ed. (Cambridge)	Titles/ Topics	Speaking		Grammar	Pronunciation & Listening	Writing/ Reading	Interchange Activity
New Headway 4th Ed. (Oxford)	Language Input: Grammar/ Vocabulary/ Everyday English (Music Of English)				Skills: Reading/ Listening (Spoken English)/ Speaking/ Writing		
English File 3rd Ed. (Oxford)	Grammar	Vocabulary				Pronunciation	

Table 2. (Continued)

English Result (Oxford)	'Can Do' Focus: Writing	Grammar	Vocabulary	Pronunciation	Skills Focus: Reading/ Listening/ Interaction
New Cutting Edge 2nd Ed. (Pearson-Longman)	Language Focus	Vocabulary (Pronunciation in some units)	Reading/ Listening Task	Task	Study Practice Remember
Top Notch 3 2nd Ed. (Pearson-Longman)	Communication Goals	Vocabulary Grammar	Conversation Strategies	Listening/ Pronunciation	Writing
English In Common 4 (Pearson-Longman)	Can Do Objectives	Grammar Vocabulary/ Expressions	Reading/ Writing	Listening	Communication/ Pronunciation
Speak Out (Pearson)	Grammar/ Function	Vocabulary Pronunciation	Reading	Listening & DVD	Writing
New Total English (Pearson)	Can Do	Grammar Vocabulary	Speaking and Pronunciation	Listening & Reading	