

Thor Sigurd Nilsen & Kåre N. Rugesæter. 2015. *English Phonetics for Teachers* (third edition). Bergen: Fagbokforlaget. ISBN: 978-82-450-1857-8. Soft cover, 225 pages.

The recently published third edition of *English Phonetics for Teachers* (2015) contains eight chapters. The first chapter (“Introduction”) lays out the general context for the book. As reflected by the title, it is primarily intended for students training to become teachers. The authors argue that teachers need basic training in phonetics to be able to actively assist and support pupils when learning English pronunciation. They furthermore suggest that the exposure which pupils today receive to a wide range of English accents may be confusing during their learning process. Teachers thus need to acquire a “consistent” form of pronunciation which may serve as a model for pupils. Two pronunciation norms are used throughout the book, “a standard British English accent” (BE) and “American English” (AE) (p. 7), which correspond roughly to Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (Wells 1982). Previous editions of the book (1999, 2008) carried the slightly different title of *Basic English Phonetics for Teachers*. To the latest one has been added discussion of varieties of English, further exercises, and online exercises and examples.

Chapter 2, “Sound foundation”, presents some fundamental theoretical matters, concerning articulatory phonetics, basic phonology, and syllables. The chapter introduces phonetic “experiments”—practical exercises intended to help the reader appreciate aspects of articulatory phonetics.

Chapter 3 deals with English consonants (“Consonants”). The focus is on phonemic contrasts and aspects that are particularly challenging for speakers of Norwegian. The chapter outlines spelling-to-sound principles and introduces selected “teaching points”, presented in boxes.

Chapter 4 (“Vowels”) begins with an outline of the standard framework for describing vowels (tongue advancement, tongue height, and lip rounding). Vowels charts are used to illustrate and contrast English and Norwegian vowels. Some spelling-to-sound rules for vowels are presented. The chapter furthermore touches upon vowel reduction and weak vowels, and offers “teaching points” for vowels.

The book then proceeds to suprasegmental matters. Chapter 5 (“Stress, rhythm, and sounds in company”) introduces sentence stress, at

which point the authors return to the topic of vowel reduction and its relevance for Norwegian learners. The chapter moves on to word stress, covering stress levels (primary, secondary) and double stress (often discussed in relation to “stress shift”). Stress in regard to content vs. function words is also covered, as are weak forms of function words. Practical teaching methods for stress are mentioned. The chapter concludes with a look at assimilation and elision.

Chapter 6 (“Intonation”) emphasizes the communicative significance of intonation. A standard framework for describing intonation patterns, based on tone units and tones, is presented. The communicative meaning of the five tones postulated is then exemplified. A discussion of pedagogic aspects of intonation is also offered.

Turning the focus to teaching aspects, Chapter 7 (“Teaching pronunciation”) begins with a brief discussion of pronunciation skills in relation to communicative proficiency. The authors then outline their views on the teacher’s role, partly elaborating on matters brought up in Chapter 1. As touched upon previously, in their view “simple imitation” does not suffice in pronunciation learning but active intervention by a teacher is needed. Secondly, receiving such great exposure to different accents as is common today may cause confusion for pupils. The teacher, so the argument goes, needs to counterbalance this by functioning as a consistent pronunciation model to the pupils. As to other matters, the authors suggest that the teacher should aim to instil into pupils an awareness of the importance of pronunciation, and that pronunciation mistakes can in fact be used in a productive way for this purpose. The authors reemphasize the significance of phonemic contrast, adding that it is best practiced in context (e.g. a sentence). Finally, a collection of nursery rhymes and limericks is offered.

The eighth and final chapter (“Varieties of spoken English”) provides a brief overview of pronunciation variation in the UK, the USA, and Australia. Basic concepts are introduced, such as accent vs. dialect, pidgins and creoles, and sociolinguistic variation. The authors address the teacher’s role in this context: although s/he should aim to acquire a consistent form of pronunciation (to serve as a model for pupils), s/he naturally must be more lenient concerning variation in the pupils’ pronunciation.

The remaining 50 pages of the book include appendices with further exercises for BE and AM, and a reading text for the comparison of

accents. After a bibliography, the book ends with a glossary of concepts, translated into and explained in Norwegian, and an index.

This book offers a decent introduction to English phonetics. Along with that, it provides a generous amount of exercises, including ones based on sound material. Some aspects of the book, however, merit further comment. To begin with, considering that it is referred to as a “course” (e.g. p. 133, 135), its breadth of coverage is arguably a little ambitious. Some of the topics dealt with may also be somewhat challenging. For instance, the average student will probably find it quite time-consuming to acquire a sufficiently good command of the intonational framework to be able to apply it in their own teaching in the manner envisioned by the authors. For courses that used earlier editions of this book, it is not clear how long they generally were, how much classroom time was involved, and how much teacher input was provided. Claims regarding the book’s suitability for self-study and distance-courses (back cover) may seem less convincing.

The final chapter on “Varieties of spoken English” is a little problematic. Although it undoubtedly concerns important matters, it constitutes further addition to a (course) book which already covers a fairly wide range of topics. Many of the topics brought up are dealt with very briefly. While it is natural that the chapter has a greater focus on British English, this becomes somewhat striking when descriptions of pronunciation variants in American English on occasion are phrased in relation to BE (p. 170); lesser interest in transatlantic matters is apparent from the account of “Southern accents” (p. 171).

The approach of identifying and focusing on certain pronunciation features is sound. On occasion, however, the reasoning behind the selection is not clear. Glottal replacement and reinforcement are both included for student practice, but advice is given against the adoption of intrusive /r/; and in chapter 6 little discussion is provided of the (salient) rising intonation which many Norwegian speakers transfer into English. For some of the selected features, one may disagree on the specific challenges they present. In regard to the common v/w confusion among Scandinavians, the book includes articulatory instructions for producing /w/. The main issue, however, is probably not the ability to produce (or even perceive) this contrast, but to use the respective phonemes consistently in the correct lexical items, avoiding the overuse of /w/ (“wiking”, “wodka”).

The presentation of content is generally clear throughout the book. Nevertheless, explanation of important matters should not appear in, or extend into, footnotes, as is the case for bracketing conventions for phonemes vs. allophones (p. 25) and syllabic consonants (p. 26). In a few cases, important terms are used without previous explanation or further reference, including “realizational” and “distributional” differences (p. 31); and “distribution” and “systemic difference” (p. 70).

A few matters concerning phonetic/phonological technicalities may be mentioned. The use of slanting vs. square brackets is occasionally incorrect. In the final chapter, the glottal stop is used frequently within slanting brackets, to illustrate both glottal replacement and reinforcement (p. 168). The term “force of articulation” is used, primarily in an effort to avoid some of the problems associated with the terms “voiced” and “voiceless”. However, the terminology “lenis/fortis” has its own complications; and when “force of articulation” is applied to sounds without a voicing (or fortis/lenis) contrast in English (e.g. nasals), the term seems to offer little advantage in a book of this type. Syllabic r in American English (*butter*) is represented without a diacritic for syllabicity or a preceding schwa. In the vowel charts on p. 81, (BE, AE) /u/ is somewhat too far back and (BE) /ɒ/ too open to illustrate modern accents. A few unorthodox terms are used (e.g. “vibrant” for “trill” p. 55).

As to formatting errors, typos etc., the bibliography displays various inconsistencies. For phonetics, /ʒ/ is missing from the table on p. 30; /ʃ/ should be /tʃ/ on line 6, p. 36; transcriptions are sometimes split over separate lines (e.g. /eɪ/ on p. 93). The Abercrombie quote on p. 159 lacks page numbers.

Despite these points, this is a respectable introductory textbook to English phonetics. As it is in its third edition, it has presumably also been used successfully in the educational context from which it derives.

Peter Sundkvist
Stockholm University

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References

Wells, John C. 1982. *Accents of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.