

REVIEWS

Bázlik, M., Miškovičová, J. (2012) *Pravidlá výslovnosti britskej a americkej angličtiny (Principles of Pronunciation of British and American English)*. Iura Edition, a member of the Wolters Kluwer Group. 199pp.

This is a very readable, well-written textbook designed for both practising and future teachers of English, as well as for those more serious general students of the subject, who are interested in both understanding its background and in improving their pronunciation. The book consists of fifteen chapters, the last three of which are in fact appendices, with an accompanying CD of recordings of some of the exercises. The text does not assume any previous linguistic training, so terms are explained as they occur. Unusually, it is written in the mother tongue of the intended Slovak audience, and is aimed at correcting mistakes that arise from transposing one's mother tongue onto English. Since Slovak and Czech are so closely related, it is accessible to and valid for Czech students also. The first five chapters lay the conceptual foundations of the language. The topic of pronunciation is developed over the next five chapters starting from basic sound formation through syllables to fluent speech. It uses as its reference models both the Received Pronunciation of British English (RP) (as its basis) and General American (GA) (by way of comparison). Those exercises marked with an ear symbol in the text are recorded on the CD either in RP or in GA, but seldom both for the same bit of exercise. The text ends with a pair of chapters on the range and scope of the various forms of spoken English available.

The first, introductory, chapter starts with the use of language as a means of communication in both spoken and written forms and the relationship between these. It describes the way different cultures represent speech, whether by ideograms representing concepts such as the Chinese use on the one hand, or the letters used to show individual sounds such as are used in European languages on the other. From this it leads on into the subjects of phonetics and phonology so that the reader becomes familiar with the concepts of phonemes in sound production. It ends with a discussion of spelling and pronunciation.

This foundational framework having been laid, the next chapter describes how human beings perceive sounds and their effect on each other, and the ways of representing these sounds in writing. So, among other things, it covers the principle of redundancy, where certain letters in themselves silent nevertheless affect how others are sounded – the 'w' in 'awful', for example, lengthens the

preceding ‘a’ – and it also emphasises the point that a small change in a sound can make a large difference in meaning, as in ‘sat’, ‘said’ and ‘sad’, for example. This is followed by a short chapter classifying sounds and relating these to phonemes – it ends with a section on how the voicing of final consonants in a word influences the length of the preceding vowel.

This naturally leads into the whole subject area of representing sounds as accurately as practicable – beginning with a discussion on the difference between transliteration (such as may be found in dialect speech in novels) and transcription (where the sounds are represented either by phonemic or phonetic symbols – these two methods are discussed in detail). There are helpful comments on the value of using Slovak diacritics – such as the hook – which may make reading the sounds easier, but which also has the drawback that the IPA transcriptions used by most dictionaries are not easily read. This whole area of sound production is developed in the next, short chapter which acts as a bridge to the chapters on pronunciation. It includes how sounds are actually produced by the vocal chords in the larynx (their use of word ‘pharynx’ here is one of the author’s rare mistakes), and how these are modified by the oral cavity and associated surfaces to create speech. Speech impediments are covered briefly.

The actual articulation of sounds is dealt with in the sixth and seventh chapters, which are divided conveniently into discussions of consonants followed by vowels, including both diphthongs and triphthongs. An unusual and felicitous feature is the inclusion of tables that show how the same sound may be spelt in both Slovak and English.

The formation of the individual sounds into syllables is then covered with particular reference to those collections of sounds especially difficult for Slovak speakers, followed by a lengthy section on assimilation. This leads into a specifically suprasegmental chapter which deals first with the topics of word and sentence stress, extending to how the placement of stress in the latter influences meaning; it also includes sections on the stressing of compound words such as ‘download’ (computing) and ‘greenroom’ (acting), and the uses of pauses. The other suprasegmental features discussed are elision; the English practice to reduce words such as ‘laboratory’ to ‘lab’; the linking of words (this section needs strengthening – there is no exercise and the five commonly recognised forms of linking are not covered); rhythm (with a good passage on ‘feet’ and a worthwhile suggestion on the value of ‘rap’); and finishes with an excellent section on intonation.

The tenth chapter takes the reader from the suprasegmental material discussed earlier via some comments on the interrelationship of grammar and phonetics to the pronunciation of plurals, the pronunciation of the same word used in different

ways such as ‘advice/advise’ (noun, verb) before discussing the correct use of weak forms (with an accompanying exercise, unfortunately without a key).

So far the book has concentrated on standard British English – RP – with reference to GA; but the next two chapters highlight the vast range of varieties that are covered by the term ‘English’, many of which are practically incomprehensible to the speakers of the others, though all these speakers will at least understand some RP/GA. These variations come from many sources, including but not limited to ethnicity, age, social grouping, and the nature of the interaction – so, for example, the country of England itself has many widely differing regional accents and dialects; or, again, a native speaker will try to be more distinct if they become aware that they are talking with a foreigner. The areas covered include topics such as Cockney rhyming slang, variations according to sex and age, and the fact that language is continuously developing.

The text is supplied with a variety of generally excellent, thought-provoking and imaginative exercises to enable the student to practise the various features being discussed. While the numbering scheme of these exercises matches that of the recordings on the CD, unusually it does not relate to the chapter numbering. In addition to these text-exercises, there are another 71 high quality exercises in the final three chapters of which only the last – a dictation – occurs on the CD. These chapters also contain a wealth of other useful material, such as a list of first names and how they should be pronounced. The recordings on the CD of each of those exercises marked with an ear symbol in the text are read by both native speakers – the male (GA) reading one line, the female (RP) the next; rarely do both read the same line. While the use of the different sexes is helpful in deciding which English standard is being listened to, it would assist the user if at least some of the exercises could be read in full by both native speakers, so the differences in the pronunciation of identical passages could be clearly heard.

So, in conclusion, the book is generally excellent. A very attractive feature of it is the authors’ practice of making suggestions for students to follow (such as that on ‘rap’ for rhythm) which are themselves valuable; another good suggestion is that the student should concentrate on one standard English, but be aware of its differences from the other – with which this reviewer cannot but agree, for if they do not, the result is confusion. Yet another fine aspect of the work is the way the book is structured. It begins with what a language is and does, and from this grounding it leads the student through the simple building blocks of individual sounds to linking these sounds to form syllables before combining these in turn to form fluent connected speech. Although it is based on the two major *de facto* world standards of English RP and GA, it then concludes by taking the student into a consideration of the vast range of English that is spoken throughout the

world, which range depends on the country, social class or context of the speaker, among other factors. The main criticism concerns the section on linking, which, as discussed above, needs amplification. That apart, the book succeeds in its stated aim of alerting students not to transfer mother-tongue elements into English. Because the languages are so similar, this is as true for Czech readers as it is for the Slovak readers, and so it will repay the extra effort the former may need to study it. Accordingly, one cannot but heartily recommend this book to both sets of readers for its comprehensiveness, clarity, and its invaluable selection of creative exercises.

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