



English Pronunciation: Issues and Practices (EPIP)

Proceedings of the First
International Conference



Alice Henderson (ed.)

**ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION:
ISSUES AND PRACTICES
(EPIP)**

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE FIRST
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

ALICE HENDERSON (ED.)



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SOMMAIRE

Introduction to EPIP publication

Alice HENDERSON7

Pronunciation Preferences..... 11

A corpus-based study of phonological free variation in English

Jose A. MOMPEÁN 13

*English pronunciation preferences:
Research by 'indirect' questionnaire*

Mohamed BENRABAH..... 37

Native & Non-native Speakers 55

*The perception of word stress in English and French:
Which cues for native English and French speakers?*

Dan FROST 57

*The effect of task on the pronunciation of English.
High front vowels by Japanese learners*

Rika AOKI 75

*An empirical study of individual differences in L2 oral proficiency:
What makes native-like speakers special?*

Tanja ANGELOVSKA 95

Teaching Issues..... 117

*Speaking of speech: Developing metalanguage for effective communication
about pronunciation between English language teachers and learners*

Helen FRASER..... 119

*Phonology and Moodle:
Enhancing pronunciation through learning platform-based training?*

Angela HAHN 139

<i>Temporal parameters in the implementation of the voicing contrast in English spoken by Poles: A pedagogical perspective</i> Arkadiusz ROJCZYK	159
<i>The pedagogical implications of variability in transcription: The case of [i] and [u]</i> Sophie HERMENT.....	177
<i>Pronunciation teaching materials in finnish EFL textbooks</i> Elina TERGUJEFF.....	189
Future Developments	207
<i>How could English truly become a new Latin?</i> Sylwia SCHEUER.....	209
<i>The PhonBank initiative and second language phonological development: Innovative tools for research and data sharing</i> Yvan ROSE.....	223
Author contact details	243

INTRODUCTION TO EPIP PUBLICATION

ALICE HENDERSON

UNIVERSITY OF SAVOIE

The First International Conference on English Pronunciation: Issues and Practices (EPIP) was held at the Université of Savoie in Chambéry, France from June 3 to 5, 2009. Generously funded by the Langages, Littératures & Sociétés research group, the Université de Savoie and the Conseil Régional de Rhône-Alpes, it was able to attract over 70 participants from 16 countries. Thirty-four presentations were given in two parallel sessions and three plenaries were delivered by **Helen Fraser** (University of New England, Australia), **Yvan Rose** (Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada) and **John Wells** (University College, London). My sincere gratitude goes not only to the colleagues in Chambéry who helped to make the conference a success, but also to the international team of reviewers who took time to carefully read the submissions and provide authors with constructive feedback.

The present volume contains a selection of 12 papers, including two of the plenary talks, and reflects a variety of theoretical and applied perspectives. They have been grouped together into four categories: papers dealing with pronunciation preferences, with native and non-native speakers, with teaching issues, and with future developments.

The first chapter exposes an area where corpora and survey methods can be fruitfully combined: the study of pronunciation preferences. Both papers draw heavily on Wells' Longman Pronunciation Dictionary and its pronunciation polls: how were main pronunciation forms selected and how «less common» are the variants? **José Mompéan** (University of Murcia, Spain) created a corpus of RP English from freely available on-line sound files in order to study phonological free variation, a largely neglected phenomenon. By comparing his findings with Wells' survey data, he validates a majority of the survey findings. At the same time, he argues for more such empirical, corpus-based studies. Another empirical approach is advocated by **Mohamed Benrabah** (Université Stendhal-Grenoble III, France), who questions the validity of pronunciation research by written questionnaire. He suggests that a different methodology could provide more valid results:

if informants were not linguistically trained and if they listened to two possible pronunciations in a matched-guise technique, the results would be more valid. Benrabah discusses the results of his study of fifty-two variable stress placement items, as listened to by over 400 native speaker informants.

Native and non-native speakers are the focus of chapter two. The variety of methodologies and research questions in these three papers is proof of the continued productiveness of such comparative studies. In the first paper, **Dan Frost** (Université Pierre Mendès France-IUT2, Grenoble, France) analyses the perception of word stress by native English and French speakers. His study of four acoustic cues and their perceptual correlates shows that French and native English speakers listen differently for stress. **Rika Aoki**'s paper (University of Tokyo, Japan) presents results from a series of production experiments of varying complexity. These were designed to reveal the effect of task complexity on Japanese learners' pronunciation of English high front vowels. **Tanja Angelovska** (Ludwigs-Maximilians-Universität, Munich, Germany) explores individual psychological and linguistic differences in order to better understand what makes native-like speakers special. Her work importantly includes very advanced adult foreign learners of English whose native language is German or Macedonian. She argues that individual learners' paths are a determining factor in why some learners manage to attain higher spoken proficiency than others.

Teaching issues were at the heart of many of the conference papers, which explains why the largest chapter, the third, includes five papers. In her plenary talk, **Helen Fraser** urges teachers to reflect on the language they use to speak about speech. If the goal is for learners to improve their speaking, what type (and what amount) of terminology is most useful for them? **Angela Hahn**'s paper (Ludwigs-Maximilians-Universität Munich, Germany) discusses initial results from her ongoing work on how electronic learning platforms might best be used as both teaching and research tools. Her experience with a variety of English learners in Germany raises important questions about how to use technology more appropriately to enhance phonological processes, foster the development of phonological concepts and improve pronunciation skills. The next paper by **Arkadiusz Royczyk** (University of Silesia, Poland), looks at learners in Poland and their difficulties with the voicing contrast, which is different in English and Polish. The author clearly explains the influence of the implementation of Voice Onset Time and vowel duration. Using pedagogical observations to support the theoretical discussion, he explains some of the teaching strategies used at his university's language lab to remedy these difficulties. **Sophie Herment**'s paper (Université de Provence, Laboratoire Parole et Langage, CNRS UMR6057, France) starts from a problem encountered when teaching phonetics courses in a French university. She deciphers variability in the transcription of two vowels: when dictionaries cannot agree and the literature does not provide useful

rules concerning the apparition of certain sounds, what can teachers do? In reply, she carefully analyses the distribution of two vowels in two reference pronunciation dictionaries and arrives at rules explaining different variants. Finally, the paper by **Elina Tergujeff** (University of Jyväskylä, Finland) on pronunciation teaching materials in Finnish EFL textbooks provides food for thought for teachers who want to critically analyse textbooks and their teaching context. Finland may be held up as a model to emulate on many fronts and yet her analysis shows that transcription still has a strong foothold in teaching materials at primary and secondary school level, despite the widespread influence of the communicative approach.

The last chapter, Future Developments, establishes bridges across time and across professional communities. **Sylwia Scheuer** (University of Paris 3, France) explores the Latin-English analogy to consider whether the codification of English as an International Language represents the ultimate victory or the beginning of the end for English language teaching as we know it. To close the volume, **Yvan Rose** calls for more sharing of data by all who are interested in second language phonological development and provides the tools to facilitate this. Developed in collaboration with Brian MacWhinney and an international research consortium associated with the CHILDES project, the PhonBank initiative is a valuable tool available to researchers. Quality research ideally leads to improved teaching applications, thus the importance of PhonBank for both the research and teaching communities.

The variety of the selected papers in this volume goes some way to recalling the good-humoured, sharing spirit of the conference. For a few days we tried to bridge the gap between researchers and teachers and the enduring connections which were created are proof of our success (e.g. new exchange agreements between universities, new research foci, joint projects and publications).

Whereas no print medium could ever hope to capture the real-life experience of sharing ideas and laughter over a cup of coffee and a tasty pastry, hopefully these papers will inspire people to continue the conversation. We have so much to offer to one another and to our students.

September 25, 2010
Chambéry, France