



ISSN 2313-7703

SPEAK OUT!

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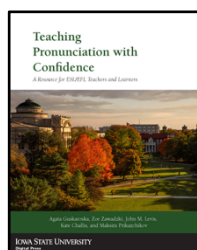
JOURNAL OF THE IATEFL PRONUNCIATION SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

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Teaching Pronunciation with Confidence: A Resource for ESL/EFL Teachers and Learners

Reviewed by Mahdi Duris



Guskaroska, A., Zawadzki, Z., Levis, J. M., Challis, K., & Prikazchikov, M. (2024). *Teaching pronunciation with confidence: A resource for ESL/EFL teachers and learners*. Iowa State University, Digital Press.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31274/isudp.2024.161>

Teaching Pronunciation with Confidence, authored by scholars at Iowa State University, is a comprehensive, evidence-based, and pedagogically sound resource for learning to teach pronunciation. The work is distinguished by its clear theoretical background and practical, structured approach to a complex subject. From the outset, the book rejects the outdated Nativeness Principle, which aims to eliminate a foreign accent, and instead builds its framework for teaching on the *Intelligibility Principle* (Levis, 2005). Citing research from Munro and Derwing (1995), the authors argue that communicative effectiveness, not native-like mimicry, is the most realistic, necessary, and empowering goal for learners. This open-access eBook's primary contribution is its connection of research-grounded priorities to a wealth of structured activities and clear audio examples, transforming a reference text into an accessible and indispensable training guide for English language teachers. The eBook is built on a logical four-part scaffold always accessible via the side menu, which includes *Introduction*, *Segmentals*, *Suprasegmentals*, and *Assessment*.

The book's first part lays the essential groundwork, equipping teachers with the core philosophy that informs every subsequent chapter. Chapter 1, *Basics of Teaching Pronunciation* articulates pronunciation instruction's *what*, *why*, and *how*. It begins by making a compelling case for the renewed focus on pronunciation, citing evidence that pronunciation, more than grammar or vocabulary, is the primary cause of intelligibility breakdowns. It also highlights research showing that explicit instruction improves learner performance, even after naturalistic gains have plateaued, and notes that many teachers seek principled guidance in this area. The chapter introduces the influential *Communicative Framework* from Celce-Murcia, Brinton,

and Goodwin (2010) as the book's pedagogical backbone, outlining the four stages, *Description and Analysis*, *Listening Discrimination*, *Controlled Production*, *Guided* and *Communicative Production*, which structure the activities throughout the text. This structure provides a straightforward, reliable lesson-planning heuristic for novice and experienced practitioners. Finally, the chapter inventories the 'what' of pronunciation, dividing it into *segmentals* (vowels and consonants) and *suprasegmentals* (word stress, rhythm, and intonation), and introduces the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) as an unambiguous tool for representing sounds given English's opaque orthography.

Chapter 2, ***Pronunciation in Language Teaching***, builds on these basics by providing concrete strategies for setting teaching priorities. It operationalizes the Intelligibility Principle with two powerful, evidence-based concepts. The first is *functional load*, a system for prioritizing which vowels and consonants to target by focusing on the sound contrasts that best distinguish words in the language. This system gives teachers a precise, data-driven method for deciding on targets for segmental instruction. The second priority is a strong focus on suprasegmentals, with the text citing research that instruction in word stress, prominence, and intonation leads to greater gains in comprehensibility in spontaneous speech than a focus on individual sounds alone. This chapter also tackles the real-world complexities of teaching, addressing the 'peril and promise' of *English orthography* and stressing the importance of understanding *pronunciation variation*. It guides teachers to distinguish between essential *positional variations* of sounds (allophones), which should be taught, and acceptable *dialectal variations*, which should be respected, using differences between American and Standard Southern British English as examples. These two chapters provide a robust theoretical and practical foundation for the book, empowering teachers to make informed decisions about what to teach and why.

The second section of the book, *Segmentals*, provides a systematic guide to the building blocks of English speech, which are its individual sounds, and some common morphophonological issues. It moves from the general principles of theory to the specific content of pronunciation lessons. Chapter 3, *Vowels*, and Chapter 4, *Consonants*, offer a detailed yet accessible guide to the segmental sounds of English. Each chapter begins by classifying sounds based on their core articulatory features (e.g., tongue position, lip rounding, and muscle tenseness for vowels; place, manner, and voicing for consonants), providing the necessary descriptive language for teachers. The primary pedagogical strategy presented is using *minimal pairs* (e.g., *ship/sheep*, *pat/bat*), effectively isolating contrasting sounds for learners within a controlled context. This approach is consistently guided by the functional load

principle, ensuring that the example activities focus on sound distinctions most critical for intelligibility. Both chapters recommend a multi-faceted approach, including explicit description, visual aids, extensive listening practice, and external perception and production feedback technology. The activities are systematically organized around high-functional-load contrasts and progress from listening discrimination tasks to communicative role-plays and discussions.

Chapter 5, *-ed and -s/-'s Endings*, applies these phonological principles to crucial grammatical suffixes. It argues that while these endings have multiple functions and three traditional pronunciations each, a simplified *two-way pedagogical approach* is more effective. This approach focuses on teaching the distinction between the 'long' ending, which adds a syllable (e.g., *waited*, *buses*), and the 'short' ending, which adds only a consonant sound (e.g., *walked*, *dogs*). Mastering these distinctions helps learners signal grammatical meaning and avoid common challenges. The chapter provides the specific phonological rules for when to use each form and offers numerous activities—from discovery exercises to communicative practice—to reinforce the patterns.

The third section, *Suprasegmentals*, is an extensive five-chapter section and arguably the heart of the book, reflecting the authors' emphasis on the rhythmic and melodic features of English that are paramount for achieving naturalness and intelligibility. The chapters are sequenced to build learner understanding from the word level up to the complexities of connected discourse. The section begins with *word stress* (Chapter 6), which is presented as the foundation of English prosody. The authors explain how syllable emphasis (realized as a combination of length, loudness, and pitch) is essential for intelligibility and directly impacts vowel quality, often causing unstressed vowels to reduce to a schwa. To make this complex topic accessible, it presents a simplified, four-rule prediction system as a practical alternative to memorizing endless affix-based rules.

From there, Chapter 7, *Rhythm*, broadens the focus to the phrase level, presenting English as a *stress-timed language* where the 'beat' is created by alternating stressed and unstressed syllables. It details how this rhythm is built on the difference between stressed *content* and reduced *function words*, introducing the critical concept of *weak forms*, the standard, unstressed pronunciations of words like *can*, *for*, and *but*.

Chapter 8 on *prominence* moves to the use of melody, explaining how speakers use sentence-level stress to highlight *new*, *important*, or *contrasting information* within a phrase, thereby guiding the listener's attention. It introduces the 'default setting' for

prominence (typically the last content word) before exploring its more nuanced communicative functions. Following this, Chapter 9 on *intonation* covers pitch melodies at the end of phrases to signal a speaker's attitude and grammatical intent. The chapter argues that errors in intonation are often misinterpreted not as pronunciation mistakes, but as social failings, such as rudeness or impatience, making this a critical area for instruction. The chapter provides practical advice for teaching the core tunes (rising, falling, etc.) using simple dialogues and tools like kazoos to isolate the melodic contour. The section culminates with Chapter 10, *Connected Speech*, which provides a clear overview of sound modifications, such as *linking*, *deletion*, *assimilation*, and *flapping*, naturally occurring when words are joined together in fluent, everyday conversation. By explaining these phenomena, the chapter demystifies what learners often perceive as 'fast' or 'sloppy' speech, empowering them to understand better and produce more natural-sounding English.

The last section, *Assessment*, transitions from theory and instruction to diagnosis, closing the pedagogical loop. Chapter 11, *Diagnostic Tasks*, equips teachers with a flexible activity toolkit designed to identify individual students' specific pronunciation errors. The chapter offers a comprehensive approach to diagnosis, assessing a wide range of skills from receptive listening abilities to productive speech, and covering discrete phonological features and a student's global performance in conversation. The chapter emphasizes that these tasks allow an instructor to select the most relevant diagnostics for a particular student or teaching context. The specific tasks are designed to isolate different aspects of pronunciation. For a broad assessment of a student's abilities, the chapter includes an 'Overall' interview and 'Free Speech' activities, which are evaluated on the core metrics of intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness. For more targeted analysis, a series of focused tasks is provided. A *Dictation* task assesses listening perception; a *Reading* passage diagnoses issues with consonants, word stress, and intonation; a section using *Words* in minimal pairs pinpoints vowel errors; *Phrases* test linking; *Sentences* examine rhythm, and *Dialogues* evaluate the use of prominence.

Teaching Pronunciation with Confidence is an open-access eBook that serves as an important resource for pronunciation instruction. Unlike traditional print materials, this book integrates contemporary research focused on intelligibility with an interactive format. Its free availability for ESL/EFL educators helps bridge the existing gap between research and practice by eliminating financial obstacles to accessing high-quality professional development resources. This practical guide supports English language teachers by providing them with a valuable tool for their teaching needs.

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