

Important *Pronunciation* Matters Features and Principles

Teachers of English to speakers of other languages are acutely aware of the need for better methods and materials for improving their students' pronunciation. In response to this need, *Pronunciation Matters* provides a wealth of instructional activities and materials that are effective in improving students' pronunciation yet easy for students and teachers to use. These activities are also varied, flexible, and adaptable. Lessons can be focused and short, or they can fill an entire class hour without boring students. For these reasons, *Pronunciation Matters* units can form an entire pronunciation course for intermediate-advanced students focusing on microlevel skills, or they can fit into almost any ESL/EFL curriculum on an ad hoc basis when an emphasis on pronunciation is desired.

A few additional *Pronunciation Matters* features of special interest to you as a teacher are explained below.

Story-Based Contextualization with Visual Support

Each unit starts with an engaging story, not an academic linguistic point. This story not only gets students' attention but also serves as a contextual foundation for a variety of follow-up activities and makes them meaningful. Contextualization of practice activities, a pedagogical virtue that has been achieved only sporadically in ESL/EFL pronunciation-teaching materials, is at the heart of *Pronunciation Matters*. The book's units provide a rich resource of story contexts, each carefully engineered to focus on an important sound contrast in North American English. In addition, chalkboard-style pictures that you or your students can draw illustrate each context and make practice even more meaningful and interesting.

Diagnosis of Individual Learners' Difficulties

Learners should work with *Pronunciation Matters* units only after their individual pronunciation difficulties have been identified using the diagnostic materials provided. Ideally, this assessment will be a self-diagnosis, conducted by students with your help. Lasting improvement in pronunciation begins with the learners' acknowledgment and analysis of the problems they have and their desire to overcome them.

Use in Mixed-Language Classes

Unlike some pronunciation-teaching materials that do not work well when all students in a class do not speak the same native language or have the same pronunciation problems, *Pronunciation Matters* units and procedures are readily usable with mixed-language groups. In fact, a number of *Pronunciation Matters* instructional activities (such as the peer-tutoring cards that provide additional practice to support each unit) actually capitalize on such a situation and allow students with different pronunciation problems to help each other as they work together.

The "Bowen Technique"— Accurate Pronunciation as an Integral Part of Communication

A key characteristic of *Pronunciation Matters* is that its materials and activities are based on the "Bowen technique," a pronunciation-teaching procedure pioneered in the 1970s by J. Donald Bowen of the University of California, Los Angeles. Bowen's procedure is still recommended by today's experts in pronunciation teaching as an effective way of building ESL/EFL students' pronunciation skills (Morley 1991, 486; Celce-Murcia and Goodwin 1991; Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin 1996). Because Bowen's procedure emphasizes accurate pronunciation as an integral part of communication, it raises students' consciousness of their personal pronunciation errors and motivates them to overcome these difficulties. Since it involves learners in contextualized activities from the start, this procedure also makes pronunciation practice naturally meaningful. Perhaps most important of all, Bowen's procedure helps students continue to focus on form as their attention shifts to meaning. In this way, the procedure overcomes the classic (and often discouraging) challenge of pronunciation teaching—that learners may control a feature when they are focusing on form but lose that control once their focus shifts to the meaning of a message. To overcome this problem, the various activities employed in *Pronunciation Matters* lessons go beyond the imita-

tive practice mode, progress through rehearsed practice, and culminate with extemporaneous speech (cf. Morley 1991, 509–10)—all while maintaining a focus on communicatively correct pronunciation.

Development of Related Language Skills

As they work with the many stories and activities in *Pronunciation Matters*, learners typically develop a variety of language skills besides pronunciation. For instance, they usually expand their vocabulary. Most ESL students do not know the meaning of words like *mousy* (used in Unit C9m-A) or *mudder* (used in unit C10m-A), but they do after they have heard and worked with the story. In the same way, learners become familiar with expressions such as *practices what he preaches* (Unit WS4-F), *keeping up with the Joneses* (Unit I5-B), and *turning over a new leaf* (Unit SS2-A). Of course, *Pronunciation Matters* procedures ensure that learners' listening skills will develop along with their speaking skills. The reading of stories also strengthens many ESL students' reading abilities. Story-creation follow-up activities encourage the development of learners' writing skills, and the lists of example words in each unit often provide valuable material for learning about English spelling patterns and sound-symbol correspondences.

Masters for Pair-Practice Cards

The last section of this teacher's manual provides black-line masters for hundreds of pair-practice cards that accompany and extend the book's many instructional units. Years of experience and many trial users attest that these cards play a key part in the pronunciation practice that is crucial to real improvement. The cards can be used in a variety of ways, as explained in the "Recommended Instructional Procedures and Variations" section that follows, and are definitely worth the trouble it takes to make them.

Phonetic Transcriptions of Target Sounds

In order to represent the sounds of North American English (NAE) in a way that is most useful for teachers and learners, a slightly modified version of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA; originally developed by the International Phonetic Association over a century ago and typified in Jones's 1991 *English Pronouncing Dictionary*) is used in *Pronunciation Matters*. The consonant representations are true to IPA except for one—[y] is used in place of [j] to represent the initial sound in *yellow*. To indicate the diphthongization of certain NAE vowels, the following variations are employed: [iy] for IPA [i:] as

in *beat*, [ey] for IPA [eɪ] as in *rate*, [ow] for IPA [əʊ] as in *so*, [uw] for IPA [uː] as in *shoot*, and [ɔr] for IPA [ɜː] as in *bird*. Also, [ə] is used instead of [ʌ] for the neutral vowel or schwa, even in stressed syllables. These variations from IPA follow the usage of many other books that deal with the pronunciation of NAE, such as Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin's *Teaching Pronunciation* (1996), Prator and Robinett's *Manual of American English Pronunciation* (1985), and the *Oxford Student's Dictionary of American English* (1986).

The dialect represented in the transcriptions is generally western NAE (which, for example, does not distinguish [ɔ] and [ɑ] in pairs such as *caught* and *cot*) with variations noted whenever appropriate. If your dialect or your students' target dialect differs, you will want to make adjustments in the units accordingly.

Phonological Guidance

In Section 10, *Pronunciation Matters* provides clear, step-by-step, ESL learner-friendly phonological explanations and diagrams. In addition, it lists a number of pronunciation hints to guide you and your students through a variety of simple techniques that give learners feedback in different sensory modalities (usually visual or tactile). These indicators of proper pronunciation are extremely helpful for learners who struggle to hear the differences between similar sounds.

Teacher and Student Roles

The instructional procedures used in *Pronunciation Matters* lessons (explained in the following section) take you as a teacher beyond the traditional roles of pronunciation model and monitor to the more enjoyable and effective role of "coach." As a coach, your job includes helping students identify where they need to improve and then guiding, supporting, and encouraging them as they work to make those improvements. For their part, students should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own pronunciation improvement and engage in self-monitoring as much as they possibly can. When properly employed, *Pronunciation Matters* procedures will encourage this kind of behavior.

References and Suggested Additional Readings on Pronunciation Teaching

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