

Introduction

Who is this course for?

This course in pronunciation is intended for users of English who wish to feel more confident about their ability to speak it. It will be useful to those who have already achieved an advanced level of proficiency in the written language. It is not unusual for such students to feel uneasy about how their pronunciation might be perceived by others and to be specially concerned about how it might affect their ability to communicate, and it is with their particular concerns in mind that the course has been compiled.

It may be that, in your own learning experience, more stress has been laid upon the skills of reading and writing than upon those of speaking and listening. Or it may be that attention has been given to what are often referred to as 'communication skills' so that little time has been devoted to the details of pronunciation. This way of starting to learn a language can give you an encouraging sense of achievement in the early stages. It is good to find that you can say what you need to say in the situations you actually find yourself in. But you may by now have reached the stage where the kind of pronunciation you could once get by with no longer satisfies you. This book will provide you with a methodical programme to remove some of this feeling of inadequacy.

What shall you use spoken English for?

For many, the use of spoken English will be closely tied up with particular professional interests. You may, for instance, find yourself faced with the need to make oral reports in connection with your work, or to present seminar papers in English. You may have to participate in social conversation in English. If you are, or intend to become, a teacher of English, you may wish to be able to perform more confidently yourself, or to have greater awareness of the likely causes of difficulty for your students.

There are many ways of teaching – and of learning – English, and those who make use of this course will have come to their present state of competence in English, and of knowledge *about* English, by a variety of routes. They will consequently find themselves facing different kinds of problems. What they all have in common, however, will be the need to explore English pronunciation more methodically, *starting from where they are now*. Since their need will be primarily to communicate, this means that they need a course which takes as its starting point the fact that pronunciation is an essential part of the business of making yourself understood. One way in which this course differs from some others is that it is less concerned with learning the sounds of a particular 'accent'

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than with making yourself as helpful as you can to the person who is trying to understand you. Good pronunciation is taken to be pronunciation which does not put an unnecessary barrier between you and your listener.

Feeling in control of your English

The activities suggested in this book, and on the cassette that goes with it, provide you with pronunciation 'practice' as this is often understood: that is to say, practice in reproducing appropriate sounds and patterns of sound. But they also provide opportunities for exploring the principles that underlie the practice. Detailed technical descriptions are avoided wherever possible, but an essential aim of the course is to help you have sufficient understanding of the pronunciation system of the language to feel at home in using it. By understanding it you will be more likely to feel in control of it; and feeling in control will almost certainly reduce that anxiety that is so often felt when we find ourselves speaking a language that is not our own.

Hearing and speaking

Advice that is often given to language students when they get to a certain stage of proficiency is to expose themselves to the speech of competent speakers as much as possible. Ideally, this means spending long periods of time among people who speak it habitually. If this is not possible, the use of broadcast material, whether by television, radio or recorded speech, makes a good substitute. This excellent advice does, however, leave one important thing unsaid. The improvements that result simply from being in contact with competent speakers can be frustratingly slow in coming. It is not, in fact, enough simply to be 'exposed'. Without some experience in listening systematically to the sounds of speech, and without a consequent awareness of what to listen for, much of what you hear tends to wash over you and have little effect upon what you do yourself.

By the standards of ordinary language users, listening to sounds is a somewhat odd thing to be doing. Our normal interest is in what the other person *means*. Our natural interest in the message – in *what* is being said – usually leaves us with little spare attention for *how* it is being said. Generally, indeed, the less we allow ourselves to be distracted by the details of a speaker's pronunciation the better. To the extent that this is true, any pronunciation course must ask you to suspend what you normally do – that is, listen to what speakers mean – and attend to how they say it.

Starting with meaning

One way of concentrating upon sound instead of meaning is to begin with the pronunciation of single words. This is done in many pronunciation courses. But knowing how to pronounce single English words has limited value for people

who want to communicate in the language. The starting point of this course is the speech of people who are communicating; and this means what is sometimes referred to as 'connected speech'. Each unit begins with a recording of a sample of such speech. The tasks that follow are designed to sharpen your awareness of particular features of pronunciation and then to go on and practise them.

One difficulty in the way of such a procedure is a problem we mentioned above. You have to choose between the two ways of listening: listening to what is being said and listening to how it is being said. To make this easier the first task in each unit requires you to focus upon the message. That is to say, you are asked to listen to the material in the way you would usually listen to something you were interested in. The discussion which follows will require understanding of the meaning, but not yet of how that meaning is represented in sound. Only after you have made yourself familiar with the language in this 'normal' way will you be asked to attend to the pronunciation.

It is emphasised that the speakers you will hear will be participants involved in some communicative event, that is to say, they will be saying something that they think is of interest or importance to someone else. They will not be providing model sentences or lists of words for you to imitate. And your own aim will be to take part as effectively as you can in similar events in which you have your own ideas to communicate. You will not be satisfied with simply demonstrating that you have mastered an awkward vowel sound or a difficult sequence of consonant sounds. If the course is to be useful, at your level of competence, the emphasis must necessarily be upon communicative use rather than upon demonstration.

Intonation

It is for this last reason that the course differs in the way it is organised from most others that are concerned with pronunciation. It makes its first objective an increased awareness of how the intonation system of English is used. This can only be done if we assume that language is being used to communicate, for intonation is the means whereby we organise our language into patterns that fit the present communicative need.

Part 1 of the first unit is concerned, therefore, with how speech is presented by the speaker, not as separate words, but as tone units. Tone units are the building blocks out of which all spoken communication is constructed. Thereafter, work on intonation is introduced unit by unit alongside work on individual 'sounds' (the vowel and consonant 'segments' of traditional pronunciation practice).

There is one very straightforward reason for doing this: in the speech of advanced learners, departures from what we regard as desirable are said to be more often matters of intonation than matters of how particular sounds are made. There is more to it than this, however. If we want to focus upon the individual 'sounds' of a language, and to do so usefully, we must take account of what happens to them when the language is used to communicate. This really means being aware of how such sounds are affected by the intonational shape of the stretch of speech they

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occur in. And this in turn means focussing on the tone units that we find in any sample of used language.

Is intonation too difficult?

Intonation is not, on the whole, popular among language teachers or learners. By giving it so central a place in the course, we may seem to be making things harder rather than easier. Intonation has a reputation for being difficult and 'slippery'. It is true that people tend easily to lose confidence in their ability to get to grips with it. The truth may well be, however, that this is precisely because it has not been given a very prominent place in most teaching procedures. Through being left out, it has acquired the kind of mystery that so often surrounds things that we think are beyond our understanding. And mystification about something so fundamental to spoken communication as intonation is clearly not a good thing! Being aware that there is a whole area of the language you know next to nothing about hardly makes for self-confidence. This is particularly true when you are told – as you probably have been told at some time – that intonation is immensely important! And building self-confidence is central to the aims of this course.

Difficult sounds

There is something else that can easily undermine self-confidence, and that is those particular speech sounds – few or many in number – that remain difficult for many learners, even at an advanced stage. What these are, and how many they are, will depend partly upon the learner's native language. Vowel sounds or consonant sounds, or certain combinations of either or both of these, that are not used in that language can present continuing problems; they will almost certainly be counted among the things that intended users of this course will want to give their attention to.

The framework that intonation provides is important for this aspect of pronunciation as well. For here, too, you will want to keep in mind the way your speech can best serve your communicative ends. And this in turn requires that you see how the sound you want to concentrate on fits, not into a word, but into that larger building block, the tone unit.

Identifying your problems

Part 2 of each unit, which deals specifically with individual speech sounds, is organised in a different way from Part 1. Here, you are concerned with recognising and remedying things that are peculiar to you. Confidence building here takes the form of making clear to yourself just which sounds you need to work on and which you can safely take to be not a problem. Most of the tasks, therefore, are aimed at enabling you to identify your problems.

Most advanced learners who carry out this kind of self-diagnosis find that there are far fewer problems than they thought. The job confronting them is correspondingly more manageable than they thought. Intensive work on a few sounds, selected for the difficulty they represent to *you*, is evidently a more economical use of effort than giving indiscriminate attention to everything.

The tasks that are incorporated into Part 2 of the units should be treated, therefore, as an opportunity to make a systematic survey of part of the field. Directions are then given to enable you to find exercises in the Appendix for practising the sound you, personally, need to practise.

The use of the course

There are two further things that should be kept in mind in using this book.

The first is that the instructions to carry out many of the tasks in pairs or in groups should be followed wherever this is possible. Work on pronunciation must necessarily be active – you don't improve your pronunciation by being told what to do, but by doing it. The kind of discussion that will arise if you do the tasks cooperatively will itself give practice in speaking which may well be more valuable to you than the formal exercises. The most 'real' communication that the course can stimulate is communication about the material.

The second point is that the course is intended to be worked through one unit at a time and in the given order. This is because each unit provides information that you will need in later units. By working your way through the units, you will be gaining experience of making use of a background of understanding that has come to be shared between the book and the user, a concrete illustration of the way communication works.

UNIT 1 Step by step

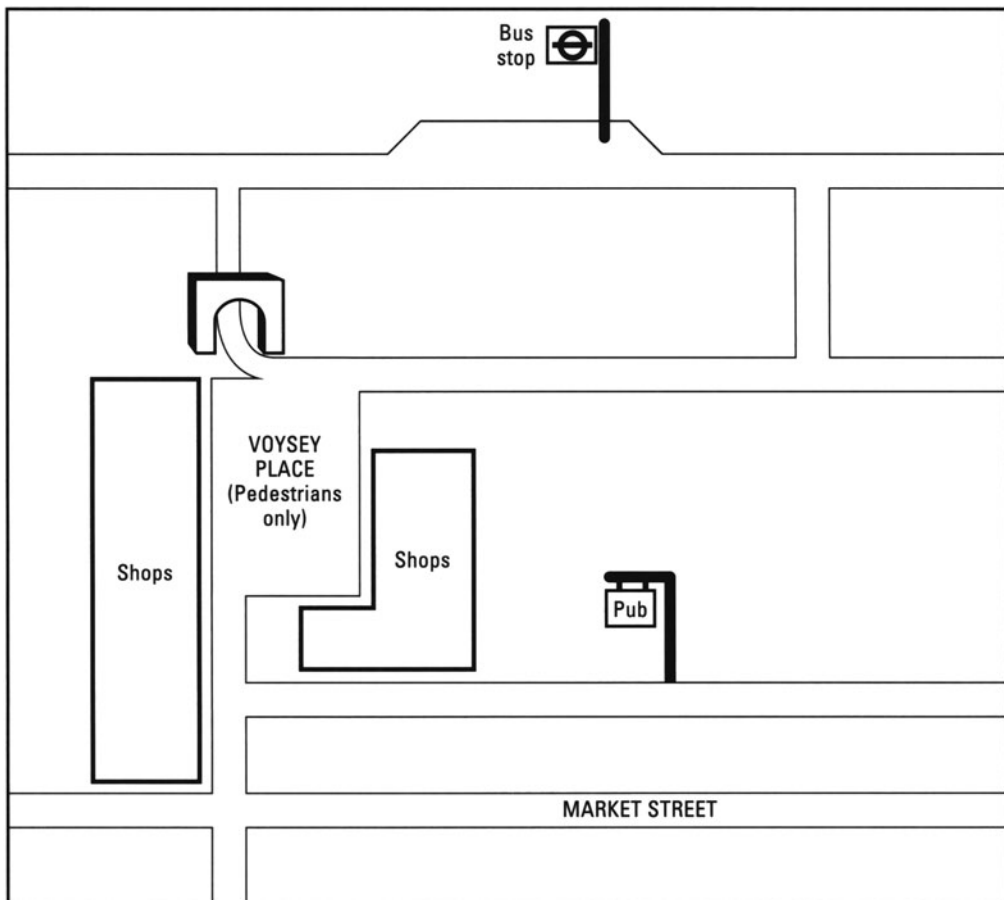
Part 1

Listening for meaning



You have probably had the experience, at some time or other, of finding your way about in a strange town. On the cassette you will hear Elizabeth describing a time when she had to do this. Listen carefully, paying attention to the meaning of what you hear, rather than to the pronunciation.

Now take the part of Elizabeth and retell the story to a partner. Use the map to help you remember the details.



Listening to intonation

I.1

- ⊙ Now that you are familiar with what the recording is about, listen to someone repeating a short extract from it.

1 the bus stopped we'd got to the terminus and everyone got out

Notice the way the speech is divided up into short pieces:

// the bus stopped // we'd got to the terminus // and everyone got out //

- ⊙ Listen to each of these short sections and try to mark the breaks for yourself.

2 but it was too late they'd gone the street was empty even the bus driver had gone

3 I hurried across and turned into an alleyway and started to walk

4 it was one of those pedestrian precincts no cars admitted with concrete benches to sit on and concrete tubs for plants

- ⊙ **Key** Check your answers by listening again.

Try to read out (2)–(4) above, allowing yourself a pause wherever you have marked a break. Be sure that you do not pause anywhere else.

What you have just done is to break up a stretch of speech into pieces. We shall call these pieces **tone units**, and use the symbol // to show where there is a tone unit boundary. In this course you should think of the tone unit as the basic building block of spoken English. When language is written or printed, it appears to the eye as divided up into 'words'. When it is spoken it is heard by the ear as divided up into tone units. Notice that the sounds that make up a tone unit are usually run together in the way we are accustomed to thinking of the separate sounds of single words as being run together.

I.2

- ⊙ Listen to each of these tone units and repeat them, trying to reproduce exactly what you hear, running the sounds together as if you were saying a single word.

1 they'd gone	5 it was winter
2 it was dark	6 she was a student
3 to sit on	7 where market street was
4 for plants	

Unit 1: Step by step

In each of the tone units you have just practised, you should have made one syllable more noticeable than the others. We shall call this a **prominent** syllable, and shall indicate it with upper-case letters. You said:

they'd GONE it was DARK to Sit on for PLANTS it was WINter
 she was a STUdent where MARket street was.

I.3



Listen to some more tone units and try to repeat them as single blocks, just as you hear them.

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 the bus stopped | 4 i hurried across |
| 2 we'd got to the terminus | 5 with concrete benches |
| 3 the street was empty | 6 looking at the windows |

Can you say how these differ from the examples in Task 1.2?

In each of the tone units above *two* syllables are made prominent. You said:

the BUS STOPPED we'd GOT to the TERminus the STREET was EMpty
 i HURried aCROSS with CONcrete BENches LOOKing at the WINdows.

I.4

Read aloud each of these short pieces. The transcripts show you where to make tone unit breaks and where to put prominent syllables. Remember that you can pause as long as you need to between tone units, but not inside tone units.

- 1 // but the BENches were WET // it was WINter // and there WASn't a PLANT // to be SEEN //
- 2 // the LAST of the SHOp assistants // was just CLOsing the DOORS // COULD she TELL me please // where MARket street was //
- 3 // she'd NO iDEA // she was a STUdent // doing a HOLIDay job //



Compare your versions with those on the cassette.

When there are two prominent syllables in a tone unit, they are not made noticeable in quite the same way. In the *last* prominent syllable in each of these tone units (but not in the first) there is a fall in pitch. We shall call the syllable where this fall occurs the **tonic** syllable. Syllables which are tonic, as well as prominent, will be underlined:

// the LAST of the SHOp assistants // was just CLOsing the DOORS //

When there is only one prominent syllable in a tone unit, that one is always a tonic syllable:

// she was a STUdent // doing a HQliday job //

1.5



Listen to the pieces below and read the transcripts. Add all the tone unit boundaries, circle the prominent syllables and underline syllables that are tonic as well as prominent. Remember: some tone units will have one prominent syllable and others will have two. The tonic syllable will always be the last prominent syllable. Stop the cassette whenever you need to.



- 1 i passed some shops bright lights and bargains and fashionable dresses on plastic figures videos and fridges and hundreds of shoes at giveaway prices leftover gift wrapping and holly and snowmen
- 2 she thought there was a pub in the first street on the left perhaps they'd know there
- 3 there was just nobody about i walked on and took the left turning where she'd said and found the pub

HOW DOES IT HELP?

Breaking up the stream of speech into tone units helps a listener in two ways:

- 1 the language is handed out in small parcels which can be interpreted one at a time;
- 2 the grouping of words within a message into longer or shorter sections helps the listener to understand the message as a whole.

1.6



Listen to a description of some of the things Elizabeth saw in the shop windows.



Listen to another, slightly different, way of describing the same things and see if you can spot the difference. Rewind and listen again to both versions if you need to, before reading the explanation that follows.

Unit 1: Step by step

In the first version 'videos' and 'fridges' are mentioned as two separate parcels of information:

1 // FAshionable DREsses // Videos // and FRidges //

In the second they are mentioned as one parcel: they are treated as things that go together in a single category of merchandise.

2 // FAshionable DREsses // Videos and FRidges //

⊙ Listen again to these different versions and repeat each of them in turn, so that you get used to the difference.

3 // Videos // and FRidges //
// Videos and FRidges //

⊙ In each of the examples that follow, you will hear something resembling what Elizabeth said, followed by another version. The second version parcels up the information in a slightly different way. Listen to both versions and repeat them, keeping in mind the difference. Then mark the tone unit boundaries on the transcriptions.



4 holly and snowmen

holly and snowmen

5 there wasn't a plant to be seen

there wasn't a plant to be seen

6 i walked along looking at the windows

i walked along looking at the windows

You may have found that these examples got more difficult to repeat as you went along. Can you say why?

To speak a tone unit without any breaks in the continuity, you need to have planned it completely before you begin it. The longer the tone unit, the more you have to plan ahead. If you found the one-tone unit versions of some of the examples difficult to say, practise them until you can manage them without any internal breaks or slips of the tongue.