


Perfecting Your English Pronunciation

November 2013 – Volume 17, Number 3

Santillana Spotlight on English Reader's Theater Level K		
Author:	Susan Cameron (2012)	
Publisher:	New York: McGraw Hill	
Pages	ISBN	Price
235 pages	978-0-07-175017-2 (includes book, 2 CDs, and a DVD)	\$25.00 USD



It is no secret that many English learners strive to sound more like native speakers, and classroom pronunciation exercises in the past reflected this ideal. However, these exercises relied upon minimal pair exercises and were linked to the Audiolingual Method, which the English language teaching (ELT) community has now moved away from—at least as a primary method of instruction. As researchers continue to uncover the complex nature of pronunciation, this area is constantly receiving more attention in the field of language teaching. In Susan Cameron’s *Perfecting Your English Pronunciation*, readers will see a more modern take on pronunciation teaching. Specifically, Cameron brings her theatre background to issues surrounding accent reduction. The result is a self-study text for advanced students working to improve their accent for the purpose of business communication.

Perfecting Your English Pronunciation is divided into four major units ranging from individual sounds and rhythms to application. These four units are broken down into nineteen chapters. The major units teach learners to understand their muscular system, practice segmental and suprasegmental aspects of English, and learn how to work with their own texts in order to reduce accentedness. The biggest unit is “Part Two: The Difficult Sounds in English,” which contains fourteen subsections and focuses on specific sounds, such as [r] and [l]. Within each section, learners are taught the anatomy of the mouth, including the placement, manner, and voicedness of each sound. The textbook concludes

with three appendices. In addition to the textbook, there are also two CDs and a DVD that are used to target visual understanding and aural skills.

One exemplary chapter is “The Consonant *r*”, which guides the reader through the difficulties of this particular sound. The section begins by introducing the difficulties that learners may have with the sound [r]. Then, the author, supplemented by the DVD, describes the placement of [r] to show the movement of the mouth and tongue. The next chapter includes a list of several words beginning with [l] and several words beginning with [r]. This list is designed to help the reader hear the difference between these sounds while using the provided CD. Readers are then instructed to practice a thorough list of common words containing the [r] sound. The final part of this section has the readers use the CD again to practice complete sentences that contain [r] and finally asks them to practice sentences with both [r] and [l] sounds. The organization of such chapters is well-presented, as the author follows the pattern of describing and analyzing the sound, distinguishing between this sound and similar ones, and then moves on to controlled, then guided, and finally communicative practice.

The third unit of the text is especially useful, as Cameron asks her readers to practice the rhythms of English and then practice with their own speech. For instance, she discusses both lexical and sentence-level stress patterns within English, emphasizing the idea that unstressed syllables become reduced and that only operative, or lexical words, become stressed within sentences. As such, Cameron is up-to-date on her pronunciation research, considering the recent emphasis on the effects suprasegmentals aspects of English have on intelligibility.

The final section of this book is less scaffolded. It requires learners to not only be knowledgeable about the technicalities of sound production, but also apply this knowledge to their own writing using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Thus, the final section requires the use of additional resources, such as a dictionary, to decipher pronunciation patterns. Because this book is geared toward self-study, this step encourages learners to become familiar with these helpful skills.

In regards to the text as a whole, though, there are a few drawbacks. Although this book is designed for advanced learners and is scaffolded, it expects readers to learn highly technical terms about the anatomy and placement of each sound, which can intimidate learners and requires advanced knowledge and additional motivation. However, these skills are again helpful for those determined to excel with a self-study program. Readers should also note that though Cameron discusses a plethora of problem areas for English language learners (ELLs), she does not compare [p] and [b], which is a common problem area for some learners. Finally, the title of this book, *Perfecting Your Pronunciation*, could send the wrong message to some readers. As many linguists have argued, intelligibility should be the goal of pronunciation study.

Regardless, there is much to like about this product. The addition of the visual and audio elements contextualize the sounds for learners, and by employing several strategies for training one’s muscles, Cameron uses different learning styles in order to best reach a variety of learners. Moreover, her emphasis on muscle control places pronunciation

practice within the realm of a muscular activity, which is, again, in alignment with modern pedagogy. The carefully scaffolded activities, along with the wide variety of sounds and sound patterns, are very useful to students. Lastly, the book, CDs, and DVD are very affordable and widely available by international retailers Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Half.com, among others.

Having worked with even the former Japanese Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa, Cameron brings a great deal of personal experience to the table. As such, this guide is a well thought out text geared towards advanced learners who are struggling with common problematic sounds and rhythmic patterns in American English. *Perfecting Your English Pronunciation* is aimed at a specific audience—advanced users of business English— and yet the exercises are well designed, based on modern research and pedagogy, and useful for learners of English, even outside the realm of business. There are several topics covered, especially in regard to specific problem sounds, and it is also useful that the rhythms of English are covered extensively. Taking the last section of the text into consideration, it is likely that advanced learners would use this book independently in self-study. However, it could very easily be adapted for classroom use, especially when working with specific pronunciation problems for individual students. That being said, despite its minor drawbacks, we would recommend this text.

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