

TEACHING PRONUNCIATION: A TEXTBOOK REVIEW

Andrusiak Iryna

Uzhhorod National University

Statement of the Research Problem. One of the most urgent and important tasks Ukraine sets before its system of school and university education is raising the standards of foreign language study. Teaching a foreign language involves the integration of two aspects. First, a foreign language is viewed as a system of linguistic signs which are associated with different language levels: phonology, grammar (morphology and syntax) and lexis. Consequently, in terms of teaching we speak about teaching three aspects of language construction: pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. On the other hand, language is a universally accepted means of communication. This means that it is not enough for students to master grammar rules and structures, words and word combinations and rules of their pronunciation. To communicate in language they need to learn how to use phonetic, morphological and lexical means, i.e. to develop skills which are usually referred to as receptive skills (reading and listening) and productive skills (writing and speaking).

Of three aspects of language construction pronunciation seems to be the one which is most difficult to teach and learn, especially in a Ukrainian context where English is taught exclusively by non-native speakers. What is more, most EFL teachers do not have special training in teaching pronunciation especially with regard to different levels of schooling [9]. This often results in teacher's inability to identify the patterns of or reasons for learners' pronunciation problems. Neither do they have a systematic way to teach segmentals and suprasegmentals of English. Yet, in David F. Dalton's words [5] pronunciation seems to be 'the Cinderella of language teaching' never going 'to the ball'. In other words, pronunciation is the most neglected aspect of teaching in the English language classroom. In addition, most coursebooks do not treat pronunciation at all or allocate only very little activities to it in comparison with other skills and aspects [4]. Therefore, the research focusing on teaching EFL pronunciation to learners proves to be highly **TOPICAL**.

The present paper **aims** at reporting the findings of the review of EFL textbooks used in Ukrainian senior school with regard to addressing the teaching of pronunciation.

Applied linguists display a keen interest in the issues related to the following aspects of teaching pronunciation in the EFL/ESL classroom: an RP accent versus the intelligibility of pronunciation [1; 9; 10], language testing and assessing students' pronunciation performance, the interrelation of pronunciation with four types of skills [2; 15], pronunciation models [3; 7;]; phonological representations [11; 12], the issues of

interference of learners' mother tongue [16], the integrated model of teaching pronunciation [9; 10].

Findings and discussion. In order to study the way pronunciation is addressed in the EFL coursebooks employed in the senior secondary school in Ukraine, we undertook a review of EFL textbooks, focusing on the following questions:

- What pronunciation topics do the coursebooks cover?
- How are these topics addressed in terms of efficiency and thoroughness?
- What support do the textbooks offer teachers who may have little or no training in teaching pronunciation?

Method. To select books for inclusion in the study, we first decided to limit our focus to four EFL coursebooks which are currently used in teaching English in senior grades of secondary schools in Ukraine. These are two English editions: "Upstream: Intermediate" (Express Publishing) and "On Screen: Intermediate B1+/B2" (Express publishing) [17; 18; 19; 20; 21] and two Ukrainian editions "English" by A. Nesvit and "English" by O. Karpiuk [22; 23]. The textbooks were reviewed along with the corresponding teacher's books. Our textbook review is based on the research questions included in the template for textbook review developed by P. Watts [14, p. 278]. The textbooks and teacher's books were examined page by page.

Results. *What pronunciation topics do the coursebooks cover?*

In this section, we present the results related to the pronunciation topics covered in each of the two textbooks.

Topics were divided into two main sub-groups: segmentals and suprasegmentals according to the main pronunciation areas indicated in the professional literature on intelligibility and in the foreign language curricula for different levels of school education in Ukraine. The term 'segmental' refers to 'any discrete unit that can be identified, either physically or auditorily, in the stream of speech' [13, p. 367]. In other words, these are individual sounds or 'segments' of speech, i.e. vowels and consonants, which form a syllable. The term 'suprasegmental' implies units which are beyond the level of individual sounds [8, p. 2]. They embrace intonation, phrasing, stress, timing, rhythm (suprasegmental aspects) and how the voice is projected (voice quality) [6, p. 1].

Table 1 provides a summary of the topics found in each textbook. An 'X' in a column indicates that the topic was presented. However, the fact that a topic was covered does not show whether its coverage is explicit.

Table 1 provides a comparative analysis of the way pronunciation topics are addressed in English course books. Overall, the conclusion is made that both Ukrainian editions of English course books do not cover any pronunciation topics at all, whereas the two English editions deal with some of the elements of pronunciation. In addition, both English editions are mainly focused on the suprasegmental group of pronunciation features embracing all the indicated topics but rhythm. *On Screen* also addresses one of the topics from the segmental group, namely short and long vowels. Hence, in general, in terms of the correspondence to the foreign language curricula for the senior level both English editions seem to be appropriate.

Table 1

Pronunciation Topics Covered in the Textbooks

	Upstream	On Screen	English A. Nesvit	English O. Karpiuk
Segmental level				
C/V chart				
Phonetic symbols (transcription)				
Voiced vs Voiceless Cs				
Consonant Clusters				
Diphthongs				
Short vs Long Vowels		X		
Suprasegmental level				
Rhythm : linking				
Word Stress	X	X		
Sentence Stress	X	X		
Intonation of different functions (e.g. agreement)	X	X		
Intonation of different types of sentences	X	X		

Let us consider the pronunciation topics covered in both textbooks in more detail. The *Upstream* textbook covers the following pronunciation topics:

- intonation patterns expressing sympathy, regrets, exclamations, and excuses;
- intonation of short answers; general and special questions;
- stress: contrastive stress; key word stress; stress in lists of adjectives;
- pronunciation of words of Greek and Latin origins.

The *On Screen* textbook embraces the following pronunciation topics:

- stress: stressed syllables in words; stress in questions and stress in exclamations;
- intonation in exclamations, in echo questions; in question tags;
- pronunciation of short and long vowel sounds; and homophones.

When the two lists of pronunciation topics covered in the textbooks are compared, it is clear that in general they cover almost the same areas. Both textbooks focus on different intonation patterns and deal with sentence stress. However, *On Screen* also addresses word stress. Some attention is paid to pronunciation of certain words in both textbooks.

How are pronunciation topics addressed in terms of efficiency and thoroughness?

It is clear that rating a certain pronunciation topic as being covered or not does not provide any detailed information about the way the textbook can be efficiently employed by both learners and teachers in addressing different pronunciation issues. Hence, the next stage of our analysis deals with the coverage of pronunciation topics in terms of their thoroughness and efficiency.

To start with, in terms of thoroughness the textbooks under consideration provided the following types of intonation exercises: listen and repeat; listen and underline; listen and say; listen and read out; listen, mark and repeat; and listen and check.

Secondly, the textbooks display a tendency to present all mentioned practice tasks without explaining a given topic in either students' sets of materials or those of the teacher. The presentation of the pronunciation feature is usually done in the form of instruction without any explicit explanation: e.g. "*Listen, then, read out the exchanges in pairs*" [17, p. 15].

In terms of efficiency, we noted that the textbooks provide only one pronunciation exercise in the *Listening Skills* section. The exercise usually consists of two subtasks (a and b) which serve as a means of presentation of the pronunciation feature and as a means of its practice. For example, the focus of the pronunciation topic in Unit 3 for Listening Skills section is the intonation of short answers. Rather than providing any explicit information on this topic the exercise states the following task:

"a) *Listen and repeat* (i.e. the pronunciation topic presentation and immediate practice) *and b) In pairs, act out similar dialogues. Mind the intonation*" [17, p. 47].

When considering the pronunciation topics covered by the textbooks under analysis, it becomes clear that there is no system in the coverage of topics. The textbooks fail to make explicit connection between the pronunciation topics covered. As a result, learners are not able to see pronunciation components as parts of the interconnected system. For example, both textbooks present the different features of intonation in isolated sections and no attempt is made to group related topics together as part of a systematic presentation of melody and intonation. Thus, we believe that if no explicit guidance is provided, learners will not be able to develop their awareness of pronunciation features as elements of one integrated system.

What support do the textbooks offer teachers who may have little or no training in teaching pronunciation?

In this section we present results related to whether textbooks provide additional resources or tips to aid inexperienced teachers. This question is important because teachers usually receive no stand-alone pronunciation training [14, p. 266].

In the Teacher's books the teacher is given the instructions to perform the task in two stages:

e.g. "1) *Play the cassette. Students listen and follow the lines.* 2) *Play the cassette again. Then, students read out the exchanges in pairs*" [18, p. 15]; and

"1) *Play the recording. Ss listen and repeat chorally or individually.* 2) *Elicit which syllables are stressed*" [21, p. 12].

The Teacher's book does not provide any additional information or support for the teacher in dealing with this issue in the classroom.

Hence, the textbooks under consideration received a rating of No, meaning they provided no other information to teachers beyond what is included in the student text.

As far as the rationale for the selection of pronunciation content is concerned it is not provided at all or is scarcely explained. *Nor do* the textbooks provide any guidelines or rubrics either for the teacher or for learners to evaluate/assess pronunciation performance.

Conclusion and research perspectives. The coursebooks used in the senior secondary school in Ukraine, both English and Ukrainian editions considerably differ in terms of the coverage of pronunciation topics. Unlike English editions, the Ukrainian ones fail to cover any of the pronunciation or intonation features completely. Both English editions display a tendency to cover mostly suprasegmental group of pronunciation features with a focus on intonation of different patterns and sentence stress. Segmentals are barely addressed with the exception for some isolated pronunciation features. Both textbooks provide pronunciation exercises and activities in the *Listening Skills* section. However, these exercises are isolated from the rest of listening and speaking activities. Hence, the conclusion is made that pronunciation focus is not integrated into listening and speaking assignments.

One of the topics for more in-depth research is the development of teaching materials in accordance with the current requirements to teaching foreign language pronunciation; designing new foreign language curricula, etc.

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Резюме

Стаття присвячена одній із проблем сучасної методики викладання іноземної мови в середній школі – навчанню вимові. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена тим, що в умовах навчання іноземної мови в середній школі вимова як один із елементів мовної структури залишається поза увагою вчителів. Стаття вміщує результати порівняльного аналізу сучасних підручників з англійської мови, що використовуються у старшій школі. Проведене дослідження було зосереджене на таких питаннях: які елементи вимови є предметом розгляду авторів підручників, наскільки повно та ефективно подається вимова як один із аспектів навчання іноземної мови у цих підручниках, та чи можуть ці підручники стати в пригоді недосвідченим вчителям.