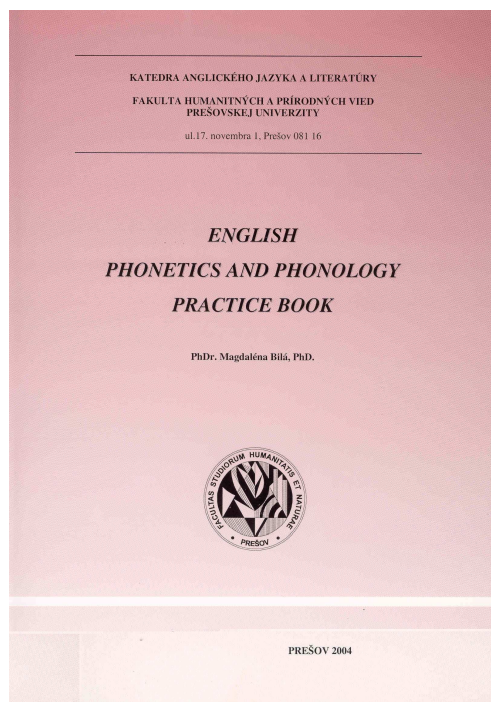


Magdaléna BILÁ: **ENGLISH PHONETICS AND PHONOLOGY PRACTICE BOOK**,
Prešov: FHPV PU 2004, 100 s., ISBN 80-8068-266-6



Teachers many times try to solve the great dilemma – what is more important teaching grammar or teaching vocabulary. Somehow, we tend to forget about the considerable importance of pronunciation in communication. Frequently we can hear about the cases when two people have problem to understand each other although they both speak English fluently and grammatically correctly. They even use the same register. The problem is pronunciation. Correct pronunciation of the target language is a skill that should be mastered by all speakers of the language although it was relegated to the background when the emphasis was shifted from controlled to more communicative in EFL. But teachers should help their students to master it.

This is also why English Phonetics and Phonology is one of the compulsory subjects at most institutions preparing the pre-service teachers for their pedagogical career. Up to now, there was no an

English Phonetics and Phonology textbook written in English and considering the relation of two languages – the English and the Slovak ones¹. The textbook written by Magdaléna Bilá provides the reader with the “theoretical background concerning the production and the perception of speech sounds and the essential knowledge of the system of the segmental phonemes of the English language compared to that of the Slovak language” (Bilá, 2004, p.5).

Speech sounds are studied from three different points of view, what corresponds with three main branches of phonetics – articulatory, acoustic, and auditory. For teacher it is important to understand all three aspects and this is why I really appreciate that the book mentioned considers all of them.

The book itself is divided into three parts – *Production of speech sounds, Consonants, Vowels*. What can be highly appreciated is the structure and approach the author used. Starting almost every section with the *Discovery activity* she not only challenges the students or readers to think about the issue but she also gives them a chance to “experience sounds, stress, rhythm, intonation, to experience phonetics”. *Commentary* that is introduced right after the *Discovery activity* gives an answer and explanation to the activity.

The first chapter *Production of speech sounds* is focused on the articulatory phonetics and describes the organs of articulation, phonation (the production of the sound of voice by means of vibrating the vocal folds inside the larynx).

¹ There have been several books published about English phonetics and phonology, but none of them is written in English and comparative (Slovak – English languages) at the same time. We mention some of them:
Katreňáková, Z., Bohušová, Z. *Kapitoly z porovnávacej fonetiky*. Banská Bystrica : UMB, 2002 (89 pages)
Pavlík, R. *Exercises in English Phonetics and Phonology*. Bratislava : Retas, 2002 (140 pages)
Pavlík, R. *Phonetics and Phonology of English: a practical course*. Bratislava : PF UK, 2000. (138 pages)
Urbanová, L. *Introduction to English Phonetics and Phonology*. Košice : FF UPJŠ, 1989 (107 pages)

The second chapter *Consonants* is subdivided into smaller sections or subchapters according to the manner of articulation (Plosives, Fricatives, Spirants, Nasals, Approximants, Laterals). In this chapter the reader finds the detailed description of how all consonants are pronounced describing the place of articulation, manner of articulation, acoustic impression and position of the soft palate. If it is possible, the author compares the sound productions to the Slovak sounds and so makes it easier for the Slovak students to understand it. The figures added also enable the students to fully understand the position of the organs when producing the particular sounds.

The practice that follows the theoretical part of every section allow students to produce the sounds themselves and to perceive it from the articulatory point of view and as there are many pair work activities it also allows them to perceive the sounds from the auditory point of view. After the second chapter we can find the Progress tests to check our knowledge.

The third part *Vowels*, similarly as the second chapter, provides the reader with detailed description of the pure vowels, diphthongs, triphthongs and semivowels. These are described from various aspects as the number of active resonators, the shape of oral cavity and the size of the oral cavity. As there are twelve vowels that are represented by only five letters of the Roman alphabet. The author deals with all twelve vowels individually. The activities and exercises are ordered to Discrimination practice, Controlled practice, Guided practice and Communicative practice and thus guiding the students from the controlled practice to free production. Two progress tests at the end of the chapter give the students the opportunity to check how they mastered the material presented in the chapter.

Icons on the margin help the reader to get oriented quickly in the text and the same can be said about using the different kinds of font, size, and letter attributes that also help the reader to decide what is more important and what is written to give an extra information that is relevant but not fundamental or essential.

I believe that as students as teachers would appreciate accompanying CD-ROM and/or cassette with the recording of the exercises.

Pronunciation is, and if it is not, it should become, an integral part of language learning. And this is not the only reason why this textbook is valuable and highly appreciated by the students who used or have been using it. I highly recommend the book to the teachers as well as to the students who are looking for the text that would be readable, understandable, professional and still interesting and amusing.

We hope that the author, PhDr. Magdaléna Bilá, PhD. has already started or is to start writing The English Phonetics and Phonology Practice Book II dealing with the suprasegmental features that would be again written in comparison with the Slovak suprasegmental feature as such publications are missed by not only the students but teachers who continue working on their professional development as well.

Ivana Cimermanová