
Book Reviews

Teaching the Pronunciation of English as a Lingua Franca

Robin Walker

Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010, 223 pages

Robin Walker's *Teaching the Pronunciation of English as a Lingua Franca* offers a straightforward and accessible introduction to the concept and practice of teaching pronunciation from an English-as-a-Lingua-Franca (ELF) perspective. When using the term ELF, Walker is referring "fundamentally to interaction between non-native speakers" (p. 6). He contrasts this with terms such as English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL), which "assume that all learners are seeking competence in English in order to communicate with its native speakers" (p. 5). This book outlines reasons for adopting ELF when teaching pronunciation, describes what the foci of ELF pronunciation instruction should be, and offers suggestions for how to teach and assess pronunciation in an ELF classroom. The book is divided into six chapters and includes an audio CD with 20 recordings of various ELF-speakers having short conversations and 10 recordings of ELF-speakers reading an elicitation paragraph.

Walker begins the book by discussing the changing role of English in the world. He argues that for the vast number of non-native speakers (NNS) of English who use English primarily with other NNSs, a native-speaker (NS) pronunciation model should be abandoned. Instead, only linguistic features that are likely to impede communication between NNSs should receive attention in the classroom. This set of pronunciation features make up the Lingua Franca Core (LFC). In the second chapter, Walker describes the LFC and discusses the reasons for including and excluding various features of pronunciation that are typically found in ESL/EFL classrooms. The LFC includes most consonant sounds (with the exception of /θ/ and /ð/as in *think* and *them*), consonant clusters, and vowels. However, when teaching vowels, instructors and learners are encouraged "to focus their attention on the long-short differences between vowels rather than achieving any exact, native-speaker quality" (p. 34). In terms of suprasegmentals, only one, nuclear stress placement, is included. Although some non-core pronunciation features are considered neutral or even slightly useful to ELF intelligibility, other features such as weak forms and connected speech are considered detrimental to intelligibility between NNSs, and readers are encouraged actively to avoid working on these features. Given the dramatic departure from current practice on the teaching of suprasegmentals, a stronger empirical ar-

gument for the exclusion of these features should have been included. However, in fairness, Walker's goal with this chapter is less about defending the features of the LFC and more about presenting and explaining these features.

Chapter 3 addresses various concerns that people may have with adopting an ELF approach and also highlights some of the benefits of using ELF. Some of his reasons for adopting the LFC include the relative ease with which it can be taught, the flexibility it offers in allowing learners to maintain their first-language accents, and the improved role of NNS instructors as pronunciation experts in the classroom. Chapters 4 and 5 offer teaching techniques and pronunciation suggestions for learners from specific first-language backgrounds. Although some of the pronunciation activities included are new or modified for the LFC, much of the information, although useful, does not differ significantly from standard pronunciation techniques offered in other more traditional pronunciation guides. For example, activities featuring minimal pairs and dictation are both included. The final chapter deals with issues around planning and assessment, giving suggestions for how to integrate the LFC into regular ELF classes and how to create a syllabus using the LFC. Finally, Walker discusses the role of proficiency tests in pronunciation assessment and offers suggestions for in-class testing.

Using an ELF approach to pronunciation instruction may not be the most appropriate choice for many Canadian ESL classrooms, where most learners will speak regularly with native speakers and would probably benefit from a heavier focus on suprasegmental instruction. However, Walker does not claim that the LFC is ideal for all pronunciation teaching. A minor issue with the book is its slightly unbalanced view of traditional ESL/EFL pronunciation instruction. Walker states, "The long term aim of most pronunciation teaching has been to eliminate all traces of 'foreign' accent" (p. 100). Although this may be the case in some language programs, intelligibility is the goal of most informed pronunciation instructors. Nonetheless, overall this book is successful as an Oxford Handbook. It is clear, concise, instructor-friendly, and would be of interest to anyone interested in learning more about ELF and the LFC.

Jennifer A. Foote

The Reviewer

Jennifer A. Foote (MEd TESL) is a doctoral student at Concordia University in Montreal. She has also taught English in Canada, Japan, the Czech Republic, and South Korea. She is interested in issues related to teaching pronunciation.

O Canada: Integrated Skills Through Canadian Music

Mohammad Hashemi

Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011, 184 pages

Have you ever wanted ready-to-go lessons that use songs to teach English? What about a textbook for ESL students in Canada that incorporates some of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's engaging content with the four skills? As a teacher and musician, I have often endeavored to design lessons based on songs and listening activities from CBC radio, but have never found a useful textbook that incorporates music and culture. Recently, I discovered that Oxford University Press had embraced both music and culture in the second of a new three-part series entitled *Culture Link*. The second text, *O Canada*, boasts "integrated skills through Canadian music" for the upper intermediate ESL learner. The Canadian author has chosen "ten of the greatest Canadian songs of all time," written by artists representing five generations of Canadian music and has explored culture and language through the song lyrics. What follows is my perspective of the strengths and limitations of the *O Canada* materials.

The *O Canada* resources touch on all four skills, grammar, and culture, and will surely engage learners in LINC, EAP, or other ESL programs. The cultural *notes* section in each chapter offers important information for learners about subjective Canadian culture such as apologizing, talking about your home, renting an apartment, and conservation of the environment. *O Canada's speaking* section provides communicative practice of some of the speech acts critical to success in building social relationships with Canadians (e.g., complaining, negotiating, apologizing). In the *writing* sections of the course book, ESL learners benefit from creative writing activities (e.g., short stories and poetry) in addition to learning how to write various types of letters. There are also suitable writing activities for EAP learners: three chapters target a variety of essay types (narrative, comparison and contrast, and classification and division). Additional practice activities focus on editing and expanding paragraphs. The *O Canada* listening material is clear and at a suitable rate for upper intermediate language-learners. Not only does each unit include the culturally and linguistically rich content of a song, but it also offers interesting tidbits from CBC interviews and programs. The activities that link the songs and the interviews consist of comprehension questions, and in many cases provide visuals that allow learners to practice a variety of skills (e.g., ordering and sorting, listing, matching).

Although the *Culture Link* series appears to be organized so that each course book could serve as the core text for a course, the inherent limitations of music as a content area may be an issue for instructors when considering this text. In my opinion, these materials would be most effective as a supplementary resource. For future editions of this text, the author

might consider referencing the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) or making connections in the materials to performance indicators critical to the CLB framework.

The song lyrics and the unit themes also have some limitations. For example, in the unit on Leonard Cohen, the content of the song does not relate to the example grammar sentences, which refer to Jessica in Vancouver. The sections on vocabulary in each chapter are also somewhat disconnected. Although the matching, fill-in-the-blanks, and dictionary exploration activities are pedagogically sound ways of engaging new vocabulary, little attention is paid to the spiraling of these new words in other parts of the unit or in the accompanying workbook to reinforce their acquisition. In addition, stress and intonation markings for new lexical items are not indicated in the text; in fact no attention is given to pronunciation in any of the *O Canada* materials. Last, I was surprised to find that the author did not provide basic guidelines for the autonomous learner seeking to discover more about Canadian music and culture. Given the power of music as a medium of communicating cultural values, activities for the exploratory research of the values that unify Canadians would be a worthwhile contribution to the thematic content of future editions.

As a musician and ESL teacher, I find the *O Canada* materials make a significant contribution to building a teaching library of practical materials with sufficient Canadian cultural content for ESL learners. I recommend that teachers and ESL program directors purchase the textbook and the accompanying workbook. My students are always engaged when the topics center on Canadian culture, music, and CBC programming.

Erin Waugh

The Reviewer

Erin Waugh is an English-in-the-workplace instructor at NorQuest College in Edmonton. He designs and delivers training programs for the development of both pragmatic and intercultural competence. He recently coauthored a guide for the implementation of pragmatics into the Canadian Language Benchmarks. Erin has been teaching ESL/EFL for 10 years.

To a Third Country

Barbara Penner

Word Alive Press, 2011, 302 pages

Barbara Penner's *To a Third Country* tells the separate stories of six Cambodian women, all of whom survived the time of the Khmer Rouge, eventually arriving in Canada as refugees in the late 1980s. The book begins with a brief overview of the situation in Cambodia before and during the Pol Pot regime, when an estimated 1.7 million Cambodians died. This is the context in which Chhorn, Nareth, sisters Siem and Kimsonn, Chantha, and Sareen lived through separation, humiliation, torture, loss, and less frequently, reunification and moments of joy. Because the events described in the book all took place a generation ago and far away from Canada, in her preface Penner asks the legitimate question: Can the stories of these six women "speak across cultural and linguistic divides, to other pilgrims, on other journeys?" (p.xi).

Each woman's story is divided into five common sections: "West, meet East: Prelude to Pol Pot," which describes the childhoods of six young Khmer girls, each innocently unaware that her life is about to change irrevocably; "West, meet East: Pol Pot time," which tells of the years from 1975 to 1979 when Cambodians were forced en masse from the city to the country in fruitless pursuit of a Communist agrarian society; "East, meet West: To a second country," where we read about the escape from Cambodia into neighboring Thailand; "Not yet west: Dreaming of a third country," which talks about each woman's life in refugee camps; and finally, "Westward: The name-to-go," where we read about the final weeks before each woman leaves Cambodia on her way to Canada, the "third country" referred to in the title.

This prescribed structure counterbalances the necessarily episodic nature of the memoirs of the six women. Penner writes in a conversational style, with frequent narrative gaps and deliberately incomplete sentences. Although this writing style has the effect of immediacy, it also requires that readers work hard to listen to the voice of each storyteller; on turning a page, suddenly a husband or a new baby has unexpectedly joined the story. Penner writes with sensitivity about the seminal events in the lives of her six subjects. We read about death, loss of innocence, and even the torture of 10-year-old Nareth, but although Penner does not flinch from the truth, neither does she dwell on the atrocities experienced by her six storytellers. On every page is respect for the courage and strength of these women. The book often reads more like fiction than fact, but the studio portraits at the beginning of each woman's story are concrete reminders that these are indeed the life experiences of real women.

Through subterfuge, danger, and sometimes fate, all the women eventually found their way to refugee camps, where they waited for the chance to begin a new life in a new country. Penner gives vivid descriptions of life in

the refugee camps: the crowded conditions; poor or nonexistent sanitation; food rationing; the challenges of doing laundry when owning only one set of clothes. There is ample evidence of the truth in the Buddhist teaching that all life is suffering.

But there is also happiness and humor in the stories of the women; all of them married and had families before leaving Cambodia. Despite the privations experienced in the refugee camps, weddings were always a cause for celebration and an opportunity for mustering finery and feasts. At the Canada School for Cultural Orientation, Chhorn and Chantha are incredulous to learn about porcelain toilets, washing machines, supermarkets, and snow.

To a Third Country will be of interest to both ESL instructors and those working in settlement agencies. Although Penner's book tells the stories of six particular individuals from a long-past war, its universal themes of displacement and diaspora are still relevant today. Waves of refugees have come from other places since the Khmer people arrived seeking a new life, and Canada continues to welcome refugees who are fleeing persecution. *To a Third Country* is a compelling reminder of the experiences of the refugees with whom we are privileged to work.

We see the atrocities of war on the evening news, but we can choose to turn off the television when the images become too unpleasant. We can turn our minds to other things, other news. For Chhorn, Nareth, Siem, Kimsonn, Chantha, and Sareen, the horror could not be turned off. They faced with courage the reality that was their lot and have now shared their memories with Penner, who set herself the task of capturing the voices of these six remarkable women: voices that can indeed be heard clearly, in spite of cultural and linguistic differences.

Bonnie Nicholas

The Reviewer

Bonnie Nicholas has an MEd in TESL from the University of Alberta. Her research for her master's degree focused on how story can be used in the ESL classroom. She teaches in the LINC program at NorQuest College, where she and her students share stories every day.