



Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching

Department of English Studies, Faculty of Pedagogy and Fine Arts, Adam Mickiewicz University, Kalisz

SSLT 2 (1). 137-141

<http://www.sslt.amu.edu.pl>

Book review

Sally Meets Harry: Practical Primer to English Pronunciation and Spelling

Author:

Marta Nowacka, Piotr Cymbalista
and Grzegorz A. Kleparski

Publisher:

Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego

ISBN:

978-837-33867-3-0

Pages:

208

'How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck?' *English Pronunciation Practice Book*

Author:

Anna Mańkowska, Marta Nowacka
and Magdalena Kłoczowska

Publisher:

Konsorcjum Akademickie

ISBN:

978-839-28763-2-8

Pages:

200

A comparative review of two English pronunciation workbooks

The books under consideration in the present review were written by two teams of university researchers involved in teaching English phonetics. As practising phoneticians, all the authors have the intention of improving the teaching-learning process in the field of English pronunciation. Both workbooks are addressed to English philology students, who are relatively unfamiliar with the rudiments of English phonetics, and intermediate secondary school pupils, as well as to all those willing to learn English.

The specific arrangement of the material in *How Much Wood* . . . imposes some restrictions on potential readership: The intended students are Polish learners, since Polish commentary is used, and English-Polish glossary of phonetic terms is introduced. Emphasizing the areas of English phonetics which are of interest to Polish learners and removing from the book sounds considered to be either identical or almost identical with regard to the place of articulation in Polish and English determines its purpose even more narrowly. The sounds which were omitted for their similarity in *How Much Wood* . . . are: (a) fricatives: /f/, /v/, /h/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, (b) affricates: /tʃ/, /dʒ/, (c) nasals: /m/, /n/, and (d) semivowels: /w/, /j/. Taking into consideration the fact that common pronunciation difficulties will differ depending on the learner's native language, it has to be noted that Polish learners of English encounter different pronunciation problems than, for example, German or Spanish students. In this respect, *How Much Wood* . . . constitutes an excellent supplement to *English Phonetics for Poles* by Sobkowiak (1996). Depicting common English pronunciation problems for Poles, *English Phonetics for Poles* is a resource book which gives Polish learners of English a possibility to compare and practise sounds that entail articulation difficulties. It includes examples which emphasise the problems, for example: "confronted with such words as *food* and *foot*, Polish learners tend to pronounce them identically, with Polish /u/ and a completely devoiced /d/" (Sobkowiak, 1996, p. 123). In *How Much Wood* . . . the learners can practice /u/ and /u:/ in minimal pairs (p. 70), and /d/ as a partly devoiced /d̥/ (p. 138) or in minimal pairs to see the difference between a voiced /d/ and a voiceless /t/ (p. 141). Another English phonetic aspect which causes problems for Poles is connected speech. According to Sobkowiak (1996), "[a]ssimilations, deletions and simplifications of all kinds make natural connected speech blurred to the extent where it ceases to be readily decodable by nonnative listeners. . . . In confrontation with connected speech the model of pronunciation acquired in English lessons turns out to be hopelessly inadequate . . . it should be clear that no theoretical exposition can replace actual practice, both in listening and speaking" (p. 235). *How Much Wood* . . .

enables practice of this kind through exercises with selected speech processes, including, among others, assimilation and elision. *Sally Meets Harry* . . . can be used as a phonetic workbook by students of English of any nationality. Its main asset is the fact that it gives them the opportunity to practise all the English monophthongs. Additionally, the book is accompanied by a list of phonetic symbols and diacritics and a dictionary of phonetic terms explained in English.

Sally Meets Harry . . . and *How Much Wood* . . . contain a collection of English language phonetic exercises which are divided into three main parts: The first is devoted to vowels, the second to consonants, and the third to suprasegmental phonetics, within which the first of the practice books takes into account only the weak forms with the highest frequency of use, and the second is extended by stress shift, assimilation and elision. Both books contain eight units consisting of exercises practising English diphthongs: /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /aʊ/, /əʊ/, /ɪə/, /eə/ and /ʊə/, but only *How Much Wood* . . . additionally offers one unit tackling the triphthongs: /aɪə/, /eɪə/ and /aʊə/.

Apart from the exclusion of the sounds mentioned above, there are some differences in the organization of the units. For example, in *Sally Meets Harry* . . . short and long vowels are dealt with in two separate subunits, while in *How Much Wood* . . . they appear alternately, which actually does not interfere with the convenience of use in either case. However, the tasks within the units are organized in a very similar way in both books. Each subsection starts with a short description of the sound practised in it. The description consists of information concerning the articulation of the sound. In the case of vowels, the information in *Sally Meets Harry* . . . relates to their height, backness, roundness and length. A subsection connected with /u:/, for example, is provided with the following description: close, back, round, long vowel. In *How Much Wood* . . . the description of the sound is devoid of the category of length, and roundness is expressed in a more descriptive way; instead of the term *round* there is a description of how to shape one's mouth: "lips rounded". Consonantal features are characterized in the same way in both books, containing the following information: the place of articulation, voicing value and the manner of articulation. For example, the subsection including /g/ has the following description: velar, voiced, plosive. The features of diphthongs are characterized with regard to the process of articulation; for example, a subsection practising /ʊə/ has the following description: centring diphthong.

Although the tasks are organized in a very similar way in both workbooks, they differ in number and regularity. In *Sally Meets Harry* . . . each chapter includes systematic exercises focusing on each sound according to a sequenced arrangement of tasks. The first exercise consists of isolated words grouped in the alphabetical order according to the way they are spelt. In the

second, the target sound appears in utterances, and in the third the target sound can be found in short poems and limericks, on both primary and secondary level, composed in such a way that the sound occurs with higher frequency. In *How Much Wood* . . . each unit providing a separate sound consists of 5 to 11 exercises of various sorts: alternation between isolated words, proverbs, sentences, rhymes and limericks selected according to the frequency of occurrence of the target sound.

The distinct graphical representations add extra clarity to the exercises in *Sally* . . . Interesting is the authors' idea of giving the subsections the titles in the form of names in which the sound practised in a given subsection occurs. For example, Cindy & Philip /,sɪndi,ən'fɪlɪp/ (p. 11) is the title of a section in which the sound /ɪ/ is practised. These distinctions do not appear in the other book, but for a change, the animal names represent the practised sounds and become the unit names (accompanied by funny illustrations of these animals); for example, /ɪ/ squirrel /'skwɪrəl/ (p. 31).

In both cases, a lot of importance is attached to diversifying the tasks. The variety of tasks, including minimal pairs, correcting mistakes and the selection of poems and limericks in *Sally Meets Harry* . . . and proper names, proverbs, sentences, rhymes and limericks for repetitions, minimal pairs, deceptive spelling, clipping and tongue twisters in *How Much Wood* . . . prevents monotony. In *How Much Wood* . . . the vast majority of exercises contain phonetic transcription of words and sentences for practice, while in *Sally Meets Harry* . . . exercises involving matching the transcribed sequences to their graphical records or matching the sounds (phonetic symbols) to the letters highlighted in the words appear only in the revision and self-test units. In this book there are five revision chapters and seven self-tests with answer keys, which facilitates self-guided control of the acquired knowledge. It should be pointed out that *How Much Wood* . . . does not possess such sections at all.

Out of concern for satisfying the learners' needs, the authors prepared CD recordings of the exercises. A CD is attached to *Sally Meets Harry* . . . which contains 207 MP3 files comprising the sound and revision units exercises and most exercises from the self-test units (apart from those requiring reading the sentences and poems from phonetic transcription and writing them) as well as phonic realization of the phonetic symbols. The recordings are made by native speakers and they last 8 hours and 19 minutes including the time needed for repetitions of particular words and phrases. Thanks to its design, the CD can be used both during classroom activities and for the purpose of self-practice. *How Much Wood* . . . is accompanied by 4 CDs, which contain 311 MP3 recordings of exercises included in the book. However, what deserves special attention is the fact that, although it comprises 104 more recordings than the other workbook

reviewed here, the length of the CDs' soundtrack is significantly shorter in *How Much Wood . . .*: It is only 3 hours long (CD A consists of 94 elements and lasts 56 minutes, CD B 93 elements lasting 56 minutes, CD C 62 elements of 26 minutes recording, and CD D with 67 elements lasting 42 minutes). This results from the method used to record the exercises on the CDs. The authors decided not to leave time for repetitions, even where needed, after words and utterances for practice. To be used in the classroom, the activities will thus require additional manipulations involving pausing after each word or pair of words, or sentences, which diminishes the convenience of their use.

The two workbooks are remarkable primers. Apart from a short description of sounds at the beginning of each subsection and the glossary of the phonetic terms, they are devoid of theoretical explanations, which makes them useful for pronunciation practice at different levels of EFL proficiency. The critical remark connected with the recording of the CDs is not meant to undermine the great value of *How Much Wood . . .* as it is still a valuable resource book of English phonetic exercises.

References:

Sobkowiak, W. (1996). *English Phonetics for Poles*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Bene Nati.

Reviewed by
Agnieszka Szefer
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland
agnieszka-szefer@wp.pl