

REVIEWS

English phonetics for Poles. By Włodzimierz Sobkowiak. Pp. 309.
Poznań: Bene Nati, 1996.

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It is with much pleasure and satisfaction that we can record the appearance of a new handbook of English phonetics in Poland. Włodzimierz Sobkowiak's *English Phonetics for Poles* is addressed to advanced learners of English, mainly students of English Departments and Teacher Training Colleges, and is geared specifically to their needs. It provides a wealth of theoretical as well as practical information required both in teaching and learning English articulatory phonetics, and constitutes an invaluable supplement to, if not a replacement of, the traditional manuals. I have no doubt that the book under review should be extensively used by all those Poles who strive to achieve the mastery of English.

There are many reasons why Sobkowiak's book can be recommended to Polish teachers and learners of English. First of all, *English Phonetics for Poles* differs considerably from such commonly used phonetics textbooks as Gimson's or Ladefoged's in that it is written with a specific addressee in mind; it is a Polish learner who, in his attempt to acquire English, is faced with numerous problems caused by phonetic interference from his native language. The book in question provides him not only with abundant information on English sounds and sound types, but also with essential knowledge of Polish phonetics and how the latter can influence his performance in English. In other words, the emphasis is on the comparison of the two sound systems and on its pedagogical implications.

Secondly – and this is, in my view, the most remarkable merit of the book under review – it manages to combine successfully both phonetic theory and practice. Thus, the reader will find here a theoretical description of various phonetic phenomena together with valuable practical advice how to overcome various pronunciation difficulties and errors typical of Polish, i.e. a type of Polish-to-English interlanguage used by the learners. Sobkowiak shows himself to be not only a competent theoretician, but also an experienced teacher, acutely aware of the most persistent learning problems and having at his disposal a whole clever bag of tricks how to approach and solve pronunciation difficulties of his students.

The emphasis on the practical approach to English phonetics manifests itself throughout the whole book. *English Phonetics for Poles* includes numerous lists of examples (112) which illustrate specific phonetic problems and can be treated as an excellent material for oral practice. The lists have been made – and this is a riveting novelty – on the basis of computer-readable dictionaries of English and frequency considerations. The book also contains several very useful appendices, these are lists, complete with phonetic transcription, of irregular verbs, common English homographs and homophones, quasi-homophones in Polish, sound frequency in English, French loanwords and English words commonly mispronounced by Polish learners. The book would be worth acquiring merely for these excellent lists. An interesting addition to purely phonetic considerations is an extensive discussion of the major spelling-to-sound correspondences in English as well as various orthographic inconsistencies. The author is well-aware of the fact that much of foreign language acquisition is based on the written sources and the influence of the written form of the language on the learners cannot be underestimated and ignored.

The book is definitely user-friendly. This is shown in the style adopted by the author, who writes in a readable, straightforward manner and who avoids, whenever possible, the temptation to overuse technical jargon. New and difficult concepts are introduced in an easily accessible manner and novel

terms are often provided with phonetic transcription. The system of transcription for both English and Polish employed in *English Phonetics for Poles* is also as simple as possible, without unnecessary complex conventions adopted in other sources. The book is complete with a useful bibliography and indices which allow the reader to find the sections particularly relevant to his own situation quickly and easily without ploughing through the whole book.

English Phonetics for Poles is organized into ten chapters. The first five chapters are very brief and introductory in character. The first of them clarifies the notion of phonetics and its main branches. It places phonetics within the whole linguistic system, particularly in relation to phonology. The second Chapter introduces the concept of Polglish (often referred to as Pnglish) and different types of phonetic errors. Chapter 3 deals with phonetic transcription and its various kinds. The author opts for the simplest, most commonly employed system of phonetic symbols for both languages, even if it is sometimes at odds with the IPA conventions. Clearly, this decision has been made with the user's convenience in mind.

Chapters 4 and 5 introduce the basic mechanisms of articulatory phonetics and the classification of speech sounds. A brief (perhaps too brief) presentation of the organs and physiology of speech is followed by a discussion of different places and manners of consonantal articulation, the division of sounds into consonants and vowels, as well as ways of classifying vowels and diphthongs.

It is important to note that Sobkowiak's classification of sounds sometimes departs from the divisions found in the literature. For example, English coronal affricates and fricatives (found initially in *chair, just, ship, genre*), commonly described (e.g. by Gimson) as palato-alveolar, are treated here as post-alveolar, just like their Polish counterparts (found initially in *czy, dzdżysty, szata, zuk*). It is not clear why this interpretation has been proposed, particularly since it might lead to an erroneous conclusion that the consonants in question, having the same place and manner of articulation, are identical in both languages. My reservations also concern classifying nasals as unobstructed consonants, in spite of their stop-like articulation. Similarly, objections can be raised with respect to the treatment of /r/-sounds in both languages. English /r/ is described as retroflex, rather than a frictionless continuant, while Polish /r/, contrary to the majority of phonetic handbooks, as post-alveolar, rather than alveolar. Curiously enough, the initial sounds in *weather* and *yesterday* are referred to as glides, while a commonly employed term 'semi-vowel' fails to appear throughout the book (as seen from the Term Index). In *English Phonetics for Poles* vowels are divided into vowels and diphthongs, as if the latter were not vowels themselves; a division into monophthongs and diphthongs seems much more logical and clear. A more serious problem concerns the classification of Polish vowels in Figure 5 on page 46; some of them are located in the vowel chart differently than in other textbooks. For instance, Polish /a/ is usually regarded as a front centralized vowel rather than a fairly back vowel presented in the diagram. Moreover, there is a clear error in the symbols used for Polish high front vowels; /i/ is incorrectly represented as a long vowel, while the symbol /i/ is employed to denote the centralized vowel /y/. I find such departures from the established descriptions unjustified and confusing for the user of the book who is likely to consult other sources as well and who might find such discrepancies a serious obstacle in the learning process.

Chapter 6 is devoted to a fairly detailed description of the English consonantal system. The presentation of consonants centres around the major problems that a Polish learner is likely to encounter in his acquisition of the English sounds. Thus, we find here a detailed discussion of voicing in both languages and various types of language interference in this respect. Then the author proceeds to discuss the place of articulation of English consonants and its contextual modifications, followed by the presentation of various manners of articulation. The inclusion of several drawings, particularly those which illustrate the difference between English and Polish consonants, additionally enhances the value of this Chapter. In my view, however, the coverage of some issues, such as aspiration of English plosives and the lack of audible release in stop clusters (particularly in sequences of three plosives and plosives plus affricates) is too scanty and could have been treated in more detail.

Chapter 7 deals with English vowels and is, in my opinion one of the best sections of the book under review. The author discusses each vowel and diphthong individually pointing out the most persistent errors in their articulation made by Polish learners. Then he examines those aspects of vocalic segments which they all share, such as length, velarization, nasalization and reduction. He stresses the fact that in actual teaching practice frequently too much attention is given to practising English sounds which are radically different from the Polish ones, while these are similar segments which are a common source of a foreign accent in English. For instance, Sobkowiak argues (p. 133) that English diphthongs are more difficult to learn than vowels since many of them are often incorrectly viewed as straight-forward calques from Polish. That this is an entirely erroneous assumption is proved by several illuminating diagrams which demonstrate the difference between the sounds in question in a rather striking way. Thus, the book challenges many false stereotypes deeply rooted in the teaching of English phonetics.

The remaining three chapters depart from the previous ones in that they are concerned with phonetic and phonological issues that extend beyond the level of individual sounds and word-internal phonetics.

Chapter 8 is devoted to English syllables and is more phonological than phonetic in nature. It introduces the notions of the syllable, syllable constituents and the sonority hierarchy. Then it focuses on selected issues of English phonotactics and presents the major restrictions on syllable onsets and codas. My objection is that the discussion of well-formed and ill-formed English onsets and codas concerns, in fact, not these syllabic constituents, but permissible and impermissible word-initial and final clusters. As frequently argued in recent literature on syllables, syllable onsets and codas cannot be equated with the consonant sequences found initially and finally in words. Typically, at word edges heavier clusters are allowed than word-internally, and English is no exception in this respect. Chapter 8 contains also two interesting sections on vowel hiatus and syllabic sonorants.

In Chapter 9 an extremely complex problem of English word-stress is approached. The author first deals with suffixed words pointing to the existence of stress-neutral and stress-determining affixes. Then he proceeds to discuss the stress pattern of longer words (including trisyllables, quadrisyllables, quintisyllables, sexsyllables and septisyllables) and the issue of secondary stress. Finally, he analyses different types of compounds from the perspective of their stress properties. In view of the notorious irregularity of English stress it is doubtful whether this Chapter can teach the learner to stress all English words correctly. Nevertheless its attempt to present some generalizations of pedagogical significance is a step in the right direction.

The final Chapter of the book addresses the issue of English connected speech. It deals with a variety of assimilation, elision and coalescence phenomena, occurring both inside single words and in phrases, which are typical of natural and fast speech. I feel that the section on weak forms is perhaps a bit parsimonious and should be extended to cover this phenomenon more comprehensively.

As this brief summary of the contents of *English Phonetics for Poles* demonstrates, this 300-page volume offers a rich material for the teacher and student of English phonetics. Certain limitations of the book should also be pointed out. It is concerned with only one variety of English, known as *Received Pronunciation*, and does not discuss other accents. The reader interested in different types of English pronunciation should therefore consult other sources. Furthermore – and this is a more serious shortcoming – the book deals almost exclusively with segmental phonetics and does not cover such important phenomena as phrase and sentence stress, intonation and rhythm. Its value would be considerably enhanced if it covered these areas of phonetics as well.

There is no doubt, however, that in Sobkowiak's book teachers and learners of English phonetics in Poland have received an invaluable aid, which will significantly contribute to the improvement of both the teaching and learning process. If you belong to one of these groups, having *English Phonetics for Poles* on your shelf is a must.

A course in phonetics and phonology for Spanish learners of English. By Brian Mott. Pp. 500. Barcelona: EUB (second, corrected and enlarged edition), 1996.

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Mott's Course (CPPSLE) consists of a 500-page volume and two full-length (60 minutes each) audio cassettes with illustrations of some of the phonetic material. The volume is divided into the following chapters:

1. Phonetics and phonology (15 pages),
2. The organs of speech (15 pages),
3. The classification of speech sounds (32 pages),
4. Phonetic transcription (14 pages),
5. The English phonological system (47 pages),
6. Connected speech (19 pages),
7. Rhythm (15 pages),
8. Stress and pronunciation (6 pages),
9. Stress (32 pages),
10. Intonation (28 pages),
11. Length (6 pages),
12. Comparing sound systems (22 pages)
13. The phoneme (26 pages),
14. Sound change (49 pages),
15. Recent developments in phonetics and phonology (13 pages).

A battery of appendices and other material follows, counting 130 pages in all, and including passages for phonetic transcription (both spelled out and recorded, Appendix A), grammatical and lexical exercises in the area of phonetics and phonology (Appendix B), progress test and final exams applied in the English department of the University of Barcelona (Appendix C), some elementary spelling and pronunciation rules for English (Appendix D), some examples of implicational phonetic universals (Appendix E), comments on the (socio)linguistic status of standards versus dialects (Appendix F), some discussion of phonetic differences between British and American English (Appendix G), and the transcript of recorded materials (Appendix H). Finally, Mott appends a 237-item bibliography, a 12-page English-Spanish glossary of terminology, a key to exercises and an index to terms used throughout the book.

As can immediately be seen, it is rather difficult to review the CPPSLE thoroughly, if only because of the enormous wealth of material and frequent references to Spanish, Catalan, Rumanian and other Romance languages which remain deplorably alien to the present reviewer. On the other hand, to leave Mott's magnum opus unreviewed would not be right. In what follows I will explain my reasons for thinking so.

CPPSLE is a new member in the growing family of L1-sensitive introductions to English phonetics (see, for example, Arnold & Hansen, Davidsen-Nielsen and Sobkowiak). L1-sensitivity in this case means at least the following: (a) a serious treatment given to the native language of the learners of English phonetics, (b) a useful comparison of the two phonetic/phonological systems, (c) emphasis on areas of phonetic interference from L1. The classical treatments of English phonetics, say Jones's, Gimson's, Ladefoged's or Roach's, could not – as a matter of policy – account for the needs of learners of the given L1 because they were directed at the 'generic' reader, even though some of them may have contained short sections of advice for, say, Romance or Slavic learner. The advantages of this L1-sensitive approach to the teaching of English phonetics (and, indeed, also other components of the language) are rather obvious, so I will not elaborate the point further.

CPPSLE has another advantageous feature of modern introductory textbooks in English phonetics: it successfully attempts to combine theory with practice. Presentation of theoretical material (and this is, of necessity, rather abstract in phonetics) is accompanied by illustration (drawings, tables, diagrams)

and exercises. The L1-L2 comparative sections do not go too deep into the abyss of Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, and yet practical advice on avoiding negative transfer is not taken out of the blue as it has some grounding in the comparison of the respective phonological systems. The unavoidable role of spelling, both deterring and facilitative, in the learning and teaching of a foreign language phonetics is fully taken into account. Finally, exhaustive lists are given where possible, rather than a few illustrative examples, which transforms a theory-oriented textbook into a fully-fledged resource book to be flexibly adapted to the current needs of the given teacher and/or learner. In this connection the Appendices A through C of CPPSLE are especially to be commended.

Other pros of Mott's course include: (a) an extensive recording (about two hours) of illustrative examples of English segmental and suprasegmental phonetics, contrasted with Spanish and some other languages, (b) thorough treatment of suprasegmentals (more than a hundred pages in all; this again is not Mott's invention, of course, but rather a widely observed trend in the field), (c) some discussion of the historical development of English with its present-day grapho-phonetic repercussions (chapter 14), (d) a summary of the theoretical developments in phonetics and phonology in the course of the last twenty years or so, (e) a detailed key to the exercises in the book (33 pages), and (f) a detachable bookmark card with phonetic symbols and word-examples of all English phonemes.

Now for the flaws. While this is an admittedly unorthodox move, I will discuss the editorial side of the book first. The reason is that in its present shape it detracts from the appreciation of the content, which is perhaps especially damning in the case of a textbook. Considering that Mott's course is "2ª edición corregida y aumentada", it is difficult to understand why it is so scandalously messy. The first unpleasant surprise awaits the reader right up front on the first page of the Contents section which is ... missing, as well as all the other pages between one and six. The book starts with page seven of Contents, which lists at the top chapter 6.2 starting on page 150. Before we even reach the preface, we learn from the table of symbols and abbreviations on page 13 that /x/ is a voiced velar fricative, which is definitely against the accepted practice of IPA and other bodies legislating phonetic transcription (as well as the explicitly introduced 1993-updated chart of the IPA on page 98 of CPPSLE). From now on the reader will encounter editorial errors and mistakes of all kinds, from simple misprints which are subconsciously normalized in reading and not even noticed by a casual reader to those which, while editorial in nature, may have serious consequences for the proper understanding of the text. There are simply too many such cases to make an exhaustive list here (I have counted about 180, but considering the nature of the text I must have missed a few), so I will prove my point with a selection of the most serious errors.

– Many misprints appear in the phonetic transcription of examples provided by Mott. Some of these will be inconsequential because they are obvious errors to even beginning learners of English phonetics, but some are more complex. For example: German *vereisen* and *verreisen* are transcribed with /ei/ (p. 46), French *gras/grasse* are both transcribed in the same way: /gras/ (p. 361), French *jusque* is transcribed with the initial /z-/ (p. 165). It is claimed on page 244 that in an intonation unit "The nucleus always exists by defect" (presumably – "default"). The Sturtevant's Paradox is given as "sound change is regular but creates regularity, whereas analogy is irregular but creates regularity" (p. 345; paradox indeed!)

– Of the errors of word-choice, style or expression, probably the most serious are:
 (a) the claim that whole words are interchanged in *Qué pegorra te vidas → Qué vidorra te pegas* (p. 27), which completely misrepresents the nature of humorous spoonerisms,
 (b) the unfortunate formulation that "a glottal stop can be produced by suddenly opening" the vocal cords (p. 46; underlining mine – WS),
 (c) the equally unfortunate claim that "nasal consonants are a kind of plosive" (p. 55; my emphasis – WS), where stop might be acceptable, but plosive clearly is not,
 (d) the term *tamber*, which is a definitely non-standard way of referring to *timbre* (p. 56), to say the least (see Trask 1996:350),
 (e) the claim that /l/ is "vocoid if we consider the laterally exploded (? – WS) air" (p. 57),

(f) the fact that *private*, *manage* and *palace* are regarded as bimorphemic, with the underlined sections called suffixes (p. 104), and that *-sive* and *-sity* are likewise called suffixes in *evasive* and *university*, respectively (p. 130), and *-esce*, *-ique*, *-oon*, *-mental*, *-ain* in *coalesce*, *antique*, *saloon*, *detrimental*, *sustain* (p. 202; Mott's suffixal creativity is truly phenomenal!),

(g) the claim that "an alveolar /n/ usually velarizes only before /k/ and /g/ in stressed syllables: *donkey*, *conquer*, *sink*" (p. 133), which illegitimately presupposes the underlying alveolarity of the nasal here with no morphonological alternation to support it,

(h) the very confusing word spoonerism in "English vowel system has a series of lax (i.e. long) vowels alongside its tense (i.e. short) vowels" (p. 263).

– Some errors of fact. Mott claims that:

(a) ejectives "are made by drawing air in" (p.41),

(b) in *influence*, just like in *fewer*, *bluer*, "the diphthong /ɪw/ may result from levelling of /i:/+/w/" (p. 126),

(c) *Sunday*, *yesterday*, *guinea*, *coffee*, *ballet*, *berret*, *journey*, *Macauley* and *honey* all contain /i:/ (exercise 1 on p. 138),

(d) in each case "in final position, /J/ can be alternatively pronounced as /dʒ/" (p. 261), while in *collage*, *entourage*, *mirage* it cannot (according to Wells's pronunciation dictionary),

(e) "the actual term phoneme is attributed to Kruszewski" (p. 285; Trask (1996:266) and most other sources I know claim that "the term phoneme was coined by the French phonetician A. Dutriche-Desgenettes in a lecture in 1873"),

(f) "the 'psychological' view of the phoneme has recently been revived and brought back into favour by generative phonology" (p. 286), while generative phonology has always in reality been opposed to mentalistic linguistics (sometimes paying lip-service to it).

Chapter 15 is especially disappointing for it promises recent developments, and then discusses at some length forensic phonetics, sociolinguistic variation, Chomsky's LAD, natural generative phonology, phonological rule ordering, finally autosegmental, metrical, lexical and natural phonology, all of them areas opened and/or most hotly debated ... in the seventies.

– Other deficiencies in this introductory textbook for foreign learners of English are:

(a) using difficult terms not previously defined or otherwise introduced (e.g. *homophone* vs *homonym* on pp. 33 and 34, *hiatus* on p. 46, *csecs* on p. 102, *vulgarism* (e.g. use of schwa instead of /Wu/ in *tomorrow*) on p. 116, *inorganic* and *syncopated* *ibidem*, *post-lexical* on p. 206, *chordophones* on p. 224, etc.,

(b) using the commonly reduced function words like *and*, *are*, *of*, *for* to illustrate tense vowels and diphthongs in the essential table on pp. 94-5 (which is replicated in the bookmark),

(c) too much emphasis on poetic metrics and sound change, both of them with only tentative relevance to the main theme of the book (notice that the *Sound change* chapter is the longest in the book!),

(d) superfluous advice to English learners of Spanish and even Spanish speakers of Catalan (!), especially in Chapter 12.

– Finally, some other points which are simply too important to ignore: (a) some drawings, for example on p. 59, 61 and 77 are unmistakably taken from Ladefoged's *Course* without acknowledgement, (b) pages 239-240, 257-258 and 489-490 are duplicated, while 241-242 and 255-256 are missing, (c) there are many annoying word-processing errors having to do with spaces, italics, alignment, tabulation, bolding, etc.

– The recorded cassettes are relatively error-free, but some words from the recording are missing in the transcript, e.g. *tree*, *isle* and *four* (p. 94), and vice versa: *wretched*, *dogged*, and *blessed* (p. 155), *masked man* (p. 156), *prima donna-ish* (p. 157); some lines are reversed compared to the transcript (e.g. those for liquids and glides on page 95), and the massive echo present in some recordings should be done away with in future editions.

With all these deficiencies, errors and problems Mott's course is a valuable book. Except for some lacunae, which I mentioned above, it is very thorough, comprehensive and detailed. At times Mott positively impresses the reader with the extent and depth of his knowledge. I am certain that the book meets the needs of Spanish students of English for whom it was first written and published in 1991. Most of the material, of course, has general validity and relevance for learners of other L1's, including Polish. Authors of introductory courses in English phonetics for Poles would do good to get acquainted with CPPSLE as in many respects it can serve as a model of a thorough L1-sensitive resource book.

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