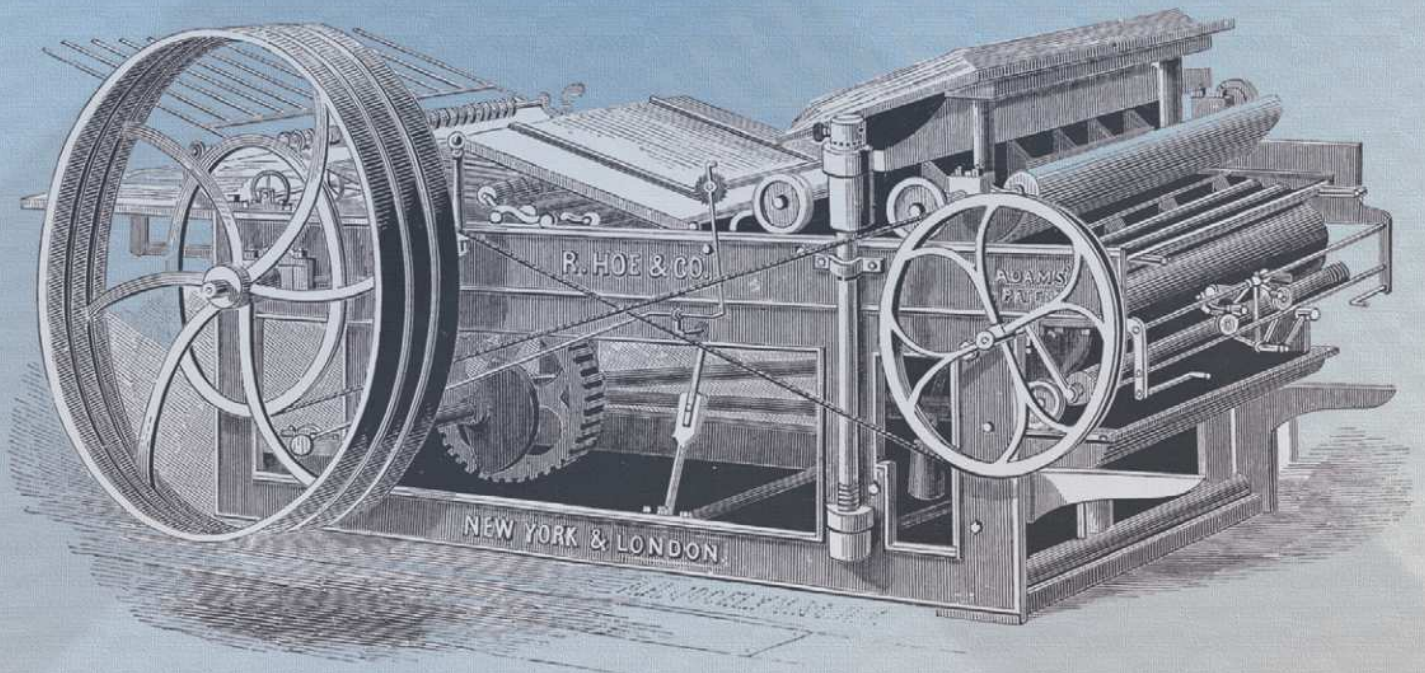


**Advances in English
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EDITORS:

Pilar Guerrero Medina
Macarena Palma Gutiérrez
María Valero Redondo

A Concise Analysis on How ELT Course Books Promote Teaching Pronunciation in Portuguese Public Schools

CARLOS LINDADE

Universidad de Vigo
clindade@uvigo.es

ABSTRACT

Pronunciation teaching has not always been popular with teachers and theorists, and there's very little research on this matter in the Portuguese context. This paper aims to briefly discuss the relation between the role of pronunciation teaching in the 3rd cycle EFL classroom and course books used in Portuguese public schools, in hopes of understanding how course books support teaching English pronunciation in Portugal.

Keywords: Applied Linguistics, Teaching English as a Foreign Language, course books, pronunciation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of pronunciation in ELT has changed numerous times throughout the past two centuries. From being completely ignored in the grammar translation and cognitivist methods (19th–early 20th century), to later being at the forefront of instruction during the audiolingual/oral method (1940's–1950's), to being considered almost meaningless during the cognitive approach and the silent way (1960's–1970's) and later moderately relevant throughout the communicative approach (1980's to the present-day). Thus, its importance is strongly connected with teaching methods and approaches (Brown 2007, Celce-Murcia 1996).

Nowadays, research in this field has highlighted that pronunciation teaching has not always been popular with teachers and theorists. On the one hand, teachers often feel under-prepared to teach pronunciation and, on the other hand, lexical and grammatical language functions are more convenient to present to learners as well as easier to prepare within a learning unit. Another argument on teaching pronunciation comes from Brown (2007), who points out that children often outperform older learners when learning pronuncia-

tion, promoting an idea that pronunciation is extremely difficult to teach to teenagers and adults. Nevertheless, variables such as those proposed by Jones (2002) still prove a valid rebottle as learners of different ages react differently to teaching approaches and task types, hence the importance of designing pronunciation lessons around motivational factors.

In the end, pronunciation teaching has been considerably neglected for the last 80 years and we have all lost through this. Integrating pronunciation tasks with other skills such as lexical and grammatical language functions might be one of many solutions, as it will not only reinforce learning goals but increase intelligibility and uphold L2 learner' expectation to communicate as efficiently as possible. But is it enough? For the purpose of this paper another question remains to be answered: do Portuguese ELT course books integrate pronunciation activities?

2. PORTUGUESE ELT COURSE BOOKS, MATERIAL DEVELOPMENT AND PRONUNCIATION

Discussing Portuguese ELT course books is not an easy task. Firstly, there is a huge deficit of academic contributions regarding material development (MD) for ELT course books made and/or used in Portugal. Secondly, contributions regarding Applied Linguistics in ELT are abundant and diverse but to this point there is, to my knowledge, no evidence of a single contribution that ties pronunciation, ELT course books and MD in Portugal. Perhaps the lack of contributions regarding MD and pronunciation in Portugal is heavily related to the fact that MD is not always perceived as a field of academic study.

Brian Tomlinson, one of the foremost authors in this field, considers that materials nowadays are not fully exploiting the potential of facilitating learning of the resources available to them. They are not fully exploiting:

The capacity of the brain to learn from experience and, in particular, the role that affect can play in this process;

The knowledge, awareness and experience which learners bring to the process of language learning;

The interests, skills and personality of the learners;

The knowledge, awareness and experience which teachers bring to the process of language learning;

The interests, skills and personality of the teachers;
 The visual, auditory and kinaesthetic aids available to materials developers.
 The potential of literature and, in particular, of storytelling for engaging the learner. (2013: 251)

In light of this, and in spite of all their flaws and limitations, course books have not lost their central role in the classroom, in particular among those professionals with very little experience in teaching or those who are insecure, heavily influencing the teaching method/approach and serving as a reference on what to teach (Bragger & Rice 2000). According to Bragger & Rice (2000), teachers do not only rely on course books for teaching purposes, but they also use them as a reference for curriculum design, lesson planning and assessment. Considering that researchers have studied how various aspects of language (skills, cultural content, grammar content, among others) are integrated in ELT course books, very little has been published on how pronunciation is treated (Derwing, Diepenbroek & Foote 2012), raising new questions on the state of pronunciation teaching today.

Experience with EFL course books used in Portugal has provided a unique empirical perspective regarding the presence and frequency in which certain skills are featured. Although there is no published research in this field based on the Portuguese setting, it is believed that pronunciation tasks have been drastically reduced to the point of having almost disappeared from course books used within Portuguese public schools in the 3rd cycle. According to Tomlinson (2013), it seems that what we are doing is not matching what we know about language acquisition, empowering the need to combine what universities research and publishers know about language teaching.

3. RESULTS

Having analyzed the 29 different coursebooks used between grades 7 and 9, from eight different publishers, the course books made in Portugal by Portuguese publishers (Porto Editora, Texto Editores, Asa Editores and Areal Editores) do not present activities that focus on pronunciation. Nevertheless, one exception must be mentioned, since one exercise was found in a 7th grade A2 level book, which focused on the various pronunciations of the –ed morpheme, as an extension exercise of the grammar section of the unit dedicated to the Past Simple.

Regarding the books from foreign publishers (Oxford University Press, Express Publishing, Pearson Longman and Santillana) in the 7th and 8th grade, one of the course books does not present pronunciation activities in the student's book, but in one of the supplemental components of the project. In the 9th grade course books the situation is slightly different, because only one project presents pronunciation tasks in the student's book, even though they are compiled in a single page at the very end of the book.

Research might suggest that the unpopularity of pronunciation is not only a reality in Portugal, but it has been generalized among course books made in Portugal by Portuguese publishing houses. It is also interesting to consider the decrease of pronunciation tasks as learners progress from level A2 to level B1, considering the fact that the current 9th grade course books are designed around B1 level (CEFR), while 7th and 8th year books are aimed for an A2 level. If this is the case, will pronunciation focused teaching be evident and abundant at lower levels, specifically those grades 3 to 6 where it's compulsory to learn English?

4. FINAL REMARKS

In conclusion, regardless of the number of course books printed in Portugal in the last decade alone, the relation between pronunciation and language teaching is frail. How does one overcome this and promote a stronger bond? This is undoubtedly an issue for a follow-up paper. More research must be done regarding pronunciation in 1st, and 2nd cycle course books and data must be collected regarding in-service teacher's views on this topic. Hopefully, future contributions on this matter will help bring pronunciation back to the Portuguese English classroom.

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