

### Pronunciation - why, what and how?

- Georgina** Gerald Kelly, author of How to Teach Pronunciation, joins Jeremy Harmer in the live chat session. To start, Gerald, your views on pronunciation teaching.
- Gerald\_Kelly** Well, pronunciation teaching is, I think, one of the most neglected aspects of language teaching, but one of the most interesting, too, from my point of view
- jeremy\_harmer** I'd be interested to know, Gerald (and I hope Susie and Jaio would too), how you got so interested in pron.
- Gerald\_Kelly** It was something I got interested in while doing my Diploma, back in 1990-1991
- jeremy\_harmer** And did the diploma change the way you thought of pronunciation teaching, Gerald, or was it just that you started looking at it more carefully?
- Gerald\_Kelly** I'd always steered clear of it until then...I covered it on my cert course, but didn't really understand it at that time. When it came to doing the dip, we had a good tutor for pronunciation, and I just got interested/obsessed with it

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### Using the Phonemic Chart

- Jaio** What are the basic first steps you need to take with learners?
- Gerald\_Kelly** I always try to see how much a class knows, when I start teaching them Say for example you take on a new intermediate class, who've had lots of different teachers up to that point. Some will know some of the phonemes, for example, others might not know any of them.
- Susie** Do you always start teaching pron from the beginning of a course?
- Gerald\_Kelly** Usually, yes, though it depends on the class
- Georgina** So how would you alter and to what sort of groups?
- Gerald\_Kelly** I try to find a starting point through whatever I am teaching in class. With some advanced groups (I teach students for IELTS preparation), I find that it might not be a priority
- jeremy\_harmer** Gerald, what do you mean exactly by 'know the phonemes'?
- Gerald\_Kelly** I meant that they may have been introduced to a phonemic chart by previous teachers.
- jeremy\_harmer** Gerald I'm very much in favour of students using the phonemic chart, but some teachers think that it's not necessary - or might confuse students in some way. I wondered what you would say to people like that.
- Jaio** What would you do with students not familiar with the chart?
- jeremy\_harmer** I think the moment you say something - well especially when you model something you give a view of the kind of pronunciation student should be able to understand and then when you encourage students to speak you encourage them to be intelligible at least and that may mean work on separate sounds or stress patterns, for, example. Right from the start!
- Gerald\_Kelly** Well, I have used the phonemic chart with classes from beginner to advanced level, and I think that most students find it useful. If anything, it tends to be teachers who are frightened of using it, especially if they themselves do not feel confident in using it
- Georgina** And what about Jaio's question - if you're teaching using the chart? Do most of you use the chart in your teaching?
- dances** unfortunately not much because like Gerald said I don't feel confident myself with it and therefore don't use it in class
- Susie** Yes, though I have taught some students who I gave up on it with.
- jeremy\_harmer** Why did you give up Susie?
- Susie** My students just didn't seem to want to relate to it and I felt there weren't enough activities around. What sort of activities do you use?
- Gerald\_Kelly** I introduce it gradually; for example, if a particular sound/sounds emerge(s) as a problem one when teaching a language point, then I'd introduce it at that point
- jeremy\_harmer** I wonder if Gerald would agree that an answer to Jaio's question is you introduce the chart sounds by sound, gradually - but not make too big a deal of it. It's a tool not an end in itself.
- Gerald\_Kelly** Certainly, Jeremy. There's not much point in teaching students all the sounds in one go without tying it in to language work. I think it works best when it is relevant to the language the students are working with

**Jaio** I do use it as all my students are quite familiar with it and find it does help, though I know native teachers who don't feel comfortable with it.

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### Training Teachers

**Gerald\_Kelly** I teach a lot on initial teacher training courses, usually intensive ones, and I think many trainees would like to become familiar with it, but don't have the time, in a short course, to absorb/learn all the sounds, or see how they are relevant in the classroom. But of course, in pronunciation teaching, we aren't just talking about the phonemes, but about stress and intonation too.

**Georgina** Do you think that we cover the teaching of pronunciation enough in training course? We have too teachers here who don't feel confident with it?

**Gerald\_Kelly** I think it is covered in all training courses, but trainees don't have long enough to absorb it. That was my own experience, too.

**jeremy\_harmer** Yes, Gerald that's absolutely right! But before leaving phonemes I'd be interested to hear about nice activities you like!

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### Pronunciation Activities

**Frankie** How do you deal with pron in mixed nationality groups with different needs?

**Gerald\_Kelly** To answer Frankie's question, I try to find out/work out what difficulties the students have. If some are held in common, it makes the job easier, but I don't tend to make a special point of dealing with pron (apart from the odd class concentrating on a specific area), I tend instead to deal with things as they arise. This gives you the opportunity to cater for whatever difficulties students have, whatever their nationality.

**jeremy\_harmer** Well, from a course writing point of view I introduce/practice sounds at various stages (and of course stress and int) and then have little almost optional exs in workbooks where they have to transcribe words from phonemes in ordinary orthography easy at first. Gradually students pick up the script. Osmosis works!

**Gerald\_Kelly** Favourite phoneme activities...playing around with minimal pairs...getting students to make up their own.

**Susie** I used to put huge phonemes around the wall and the students used to have to go to the right ones from words that were spoken.

**Gerald\_Kelly** That's a nice idea, Susie. Phoneme hangman...

**Susie** Thanks Gerald - I thought that if they were big enough it might sink in ;-)

**Gerald\_Kelly** True!

**jeremy\_harmer** Do you use the fabulous chart in your own pronunciation book in any special ways, Gerald?

**Gerald\_Kelly** So far I've used it mainly on teacher training courses, but I have used it to help individual students work on their particular difficulties. In fact, the idea for the chart came from doing just that.

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### Intonation

**Jaio** As a non-native speaker, I have the biggest problem with intonation. How would you advise a learner that just doesn't seem to hear? Or a teacher that doesn't have it correct?

**Gerald\_Kelly** I think that undoubtedly, some ears are more sensitive to it than others. There's only so much you can do to help a student along the way. But it's really only a problem if it leads to misunderstandings/misinterpretations.

**Georgina** Do you think as teachers we worry too much about 'correct' pronunciation?

**jeremy\_harmer** Georgina, I think we probably do - but it's often the students who think they want 'perfect' pron and we have to try and get the balance right. Intelligibility must be the watchword, I think.

**Gerald\_Kelly** However, if you're looking for practical advice, and aren't happy with ""it doesn't matter"" type comments, Jaio, I think some intensive work on intonation is a good idea.

**Jaio** What sort of work would you suggest?

**Gerald\_Kelly** For example, taping yourself/students and listening very closely to work out what is happening. compared to what should be happening with the intonation.

**Dave** Hi, everyone. Maybe stress and intonation are so closely interconnected that they're

inseparable and one way into intonation is through approaching the main stresses in any piece of connected speech?

**Gerald\_Kelly** That's a good point, Dave. My usual way into it with a class is to get them to find the first and last stressed syllable in an utterance. Then we concentrate on the last one, and work out what happens to the voice around that point

**Ang\_K** Hi Dave, do you mean isolating parts of speech?

**Dave** Not really, Ang K - more by identifying the rhythm and beat underlying a sentence, for example.

**Georgina** And how would you demonstrate that to students who haven't caught it?

**Gerald\_Kelly** To demonstrate, you can use any number of practical ideas, like drawing lines on the board, showing the movement with your hands, drilling, and so on.

**jeremy\_harmer** Continuing on from this do you do the kind of listening exercise where students have to identify different meanings of individual words like 'yes' and 'well' depending on their intonation patterns?

**Gerald\_Kelly** Very much so, Jeremy. I think students find them quite revealing

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### Language Labs - the way forward?

**Frankie** Ok, what about language labs? Should we get rid of them? How can they be used effectively?

**jeremy\_harmer** Gosh, Frankie, the latest labs are just \*wonderful\* Everyone should have one!

**Gerald\_Kelly** Language labs have, I think, had their day. But they can (still) be used in helping students to practise their pronunciation. But as the technology is there, I think eventually we'll all be doing it on PCs and Macs

**Georgina** And excuse the plug, but the new online courses that are being launched at EnglishSuccess.com have a fantastic way of dealing with pron.

**Gerald\_Kelly** I meant 'old style' lab like we had when I was at school, with big hulking desks and teachers covered in chalk dust.

**jeremy\_harmer** Gerald, by modern labs I mean the ones with PCs and all manner of computer wizardry.

**Gerald\_Kelly** Okey dokey

**Frankie** But what happens, if like me you have one of those old labs and you are scheduled into it one hour a week with your class?

**Gerald\_Kelly** Use it to your advantage, Frankie. What do you currently do in there?

**Frankie** Ship and sheep! Plus some other things that I find more interesting - songs etc.

**Gerald\_Kelly** Minimal pairs... absolutely fine (though I don't think you necessarily need machinery for them! Do students get the chance to record their voices, and compare them to an 'ideal' model?

**Frankie** Yes, they can. We sometimes share machines so they record conversations, but the equipment is past it's best.

**Jaio** My students love the language lab and quite happily sit in there for hours if allowed to!

**Gerald\_Kelly** Are you sure they're working, Jaio ;)

**Jaio** I do not know Gerald - I will ask!

**jeremy\_harmer** Even in old labs there are all sorts of listening activities, Frankie's songs, audio-active comparisons getting students to 'talk along with' the voice on the tape so they get the stress and intonation feel that I think Dave was talking about etc

**jeremy\_harmer** How does Englishsuccess.com deal with pron Georgina?

**Georgina** Jeremy, English Success courses deal with it differently. The general English course has pronunciation in each unit where the students are asked to do a variety of tasks. Some is for production and others receptive Some people may say that it's very similar to what may be offered through the language labs, but it's incorporated into the course so the students progress with their pron as their knowledge expands - and the management system makes it really easy for the teachers to monitor their students even if they are not in a classroom environment

**Gerald\_Kelly** That sounds like it's a good integrated course.

**Georgina** Jaio - perhaps it would be good if you're not sure what your sts are doing! ;-)

**Gerald\_Kelly** Gerald - I thin that goes back to what you said earlier about integrating pronunciation and not seeing it in isolation... what does everyone else think?

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### Pronunciation in Coursebooks

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- Ang\_K** Yes, I think we must integrate more. Coursebooks have pronunciation sections, but they should be tied in more than stand-alone.
- Gerald\_Kelly** Absolutely, I think that's the key to working successfully on pronunciation. Sometimes I do isolate it, but generally I like to see it as a part of whatever is going on in the classroom. Making a big 'separate' deal of it is the kind of thing that makes students (and teachers) perceive pron as an area of difficulty
- Gerald\_Kelly** Ang K; that's my main criticism of the way pron is dealt with in some coursebooks...it isn't tied in closely enough with the language on the rest of the page
- Ang\_K** Yes Gerald - can we pass this on to the publishers!
- jeremy\_harmer** Perhaps the reason for that Ang K is that coursebook writers sort of assume that they'll have Gerald using their books, and he (or teachers like him) will automatically integrate pron when they introduce new items of language for example or are doing other kinds of work. So they put in extra pron 'nuggets' just to remind people about different items??

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### Pronunciation Problems

- Ang\_K** Which nationality do you think have the most difficulties with English Pronunciation?
- Gerald\_Kelly** I don't think you could identify a nationality...there are all sorts of different problems
- Gerald\_Kelly** Also, it depends on the listener, and how accustomed they are to a particular accent The average Brit., for example, might find it easier to understand a German speaker speaking English than, say, a Japanese speaker. It depends on the exposure that the listener has had to the accent in question, and their own skill in decoding the message.
- Dave** I find Chinese speakers have very deep difficulties. How can we help them to pronounce words more fully?
- Gerald\_Kelly** Dave...are their difficulties any deeper than other nationalities? Or are they just of a different nature? I teach classes at the moment with up to 80% Chinese students, and I don't find their difficulties any more entrenched than those of other students
- Dave-** I find that some of my ""intermediate"" Chinese students are in fact quite unintelligible, largely because they only pronounce the beginnings of the words, but however much work we do on this, it doesn't seem to improve.
- Dave** I find that some of my ""intermediate"" Chinese students are in fact quite unintelligible, largely because they only pronounce the beginnings of the words, but however much work we do on this, it doesn't seem to improve.
- Gerald\_Kelly** Dave; I'd suggest taping them, and playing them back. If necessary, point out exactly the things you've told us, and say that it makes it difficult to understand them. Can they understand each other in English, also? That might be worth asking
- Dave** Thanks for your suggestion, Gerald. Must go now, bye.
- jeremy\_harmer** I'd really like to hear what Gerald and all of you think a teacher's pronunciation goals should be what do we want students to achieve?
- Gerald\_Kelly** I think language teachers are more skilled (usually) than the general public in decoding student speech; we have to prepare students for the 'real world' by being honest and realistic about intelligibility
- Georgina** Thank you everyone, another great session. If there is anything else you would like to add, you can go to the Message Board on the site. For details of the next live chat session, go to [www.ELTForum.com/forum.html](http://www.ELTForum.com/forum.html)

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