

DOUGLAS, E. S. y M<sup>a</sup> R. GARCÍA-DONCEL HERNÁNDEZ  
(2000), *Practising English Consonants*, Cádiz, Servicio de  
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The terms *phonetics* and *phonology*, like so many “-ics” and “-ologies” can often be off-putting. They sound *so* complicated and it is probably fair to say that the work of Daniel Jones, A.C. Gimson and Peter Ladefoged is, for most, not exactly bedtime reading. However, like most things, accessibility often depends on purpose, context and approach. Once we have pruned the subject down to its root, we find a somewhat friendlier word: *pronunciation*. Of course *pronunciation* and *phonetics* are not synonyms, but they are closely linked.

*Phonetics* and *pronunciation*, like *linguistics* and *language*, tend to be viewed and treated differently. Phonetics publications are classified in one section, while books on pronunciation are compartmentalized in another - or at least they are placed at different ends of the shelf. One is usually considered theoretical and academic while the other is more practical and ELT related. In *Practising English Consonants* we have a book that stands somewhere in the middle, effectively leading the reader from one end of the shelf to the other.

*Practising English Consonants* is one of those books clearly born out of direct hands-on experience. After years of teaching Phonetics at the University of Cádiz, the authors, Elisabeth S. Douglas and M<sup>a</sup> del Rosario García-Doncel Hernández have jointly produced a text ultimately designed to aid effective pronunciation and fluency through phonetics. By placing a firm didactic structure onto a solid phonetic framework, the book achieves the difficult feat of successfully bridging the gap between the theoretical and the practical without compromising academic integrity or losing sight of the needs of the students.

Most of the established texts on English phonetics, albeit with some notable exceptions, are written *by* and *for* those whose mother tongue is English. But of course there is a subtle difference between phonetics for native speakers and phonetics for second language learners; the subject is the same, but its functions and purpose may vary. Whereas for the former, phonetics generally serves as a way of explaining *how* and *why* speech is produced, in the

case of the latter it has an additional practical function, serving as a means of improving oral production and skills. A tool through which the student learns *how to* as well as *how*.

Perhaps in a not too distant future, as exposure to English increases and if more emphasis is placed on oral skills and pronunciation at school level, the level of students studying English at Spanish universities may be such that the *how to* can be taken for granted, and phonetics teachers can concentrate more on the *how*. However, at present, phonetics generally tends to serve this dual function. *Practising English Consonants* is written specifically for Spanish students studying English philology by authors well aware of the particular difficulties they have to overcome.

Various texts have attempted to cater for the specific phonetic needs of the Spanish speaker studying English, Mott's *A Course in Phonetics and Phonology for Spanish Learners of English* and Sánchez Benedito's *Manual de Pronunciación inglesa comparada con la española* being amongst the best known. Indeed, Peter Roach's classic manual *English Phonetics and Phonology* was actually conceived while lecturing at the University of Seville, although the final published book is clearly aimed at a wider readership. Douglas and García-Doncel's work takes a different line and aims to fill a specialized need. By their own admission, the authors do not attempt to explain the different theories of coarticulatory effects. This isn't their purpose. The fundamental aim is to set out and build up phonetic and phonological knowledge about English consonant sounds progressively and in a practical context. There are no frills and no padding - and the didactic approach is simple yet effective, following a tried and tested pattern throughout:

- explanation → example → practice.
- advice/reminder → practice
- revision and consolidation..

In line with the scientific approach of the book, the writing style employed is always direct and to the point with potentially complicated or confusing phonetic *jargon* explained clearly and succinctly at source.

The book is divided into three sections. The first of these, occupying by far the greater part of the work (some 163 pages), is dedicated to a step by step analysis of the English consonant sounds. Following a logical order, each of the six chapters is devoted to one of the traditionally established manners of articulation (plosives, fricatives, affricates, nasals, laterals and approximants). Each consonant sound is studied thoroughly and in an incremental fashion, first in isolation and then in connected speech showing allophonic and phonemic coarticulatory effects. The explanations are clear and backed up by relevant examples and then followed by practice exercises. *Articulation guidelines*, a constant and useful feature which runs throughout this section, offers useful tips in the form of *dos* and *don'ts* for the Spanish speaker. Using a comparative phonetic approach, problematic sounds are identified, analysed and advice is given as to how potential problems can be overcome and how these sounds might be realised effectively. Each chapter finishes with revision questions which serve to remind, revise and reinforce the material learnt during the chapter.

I especially liked the methodological approach adopted by the authors. In any subject where a lot of information has to be taken in, continuous practice is essential. As well as introducing new information, Douglas and García-Doncel, *remind* students and require

them to reflect on what they have learnt in previous chapters, thereby considerably increasing the possibility that the information will be permanently assimilated rather than merely temporarily acquired.

The final two sections contain a series of English texts which offer scope for extensive transcription practice. The first set is made up of fourteen newspaper, magazine and book extracts, usually of a light-hearted or anecdotal tone. Each of these has been especially chosen to highlight and focus on a particular group of sounds and is followed by questions designed, once again, to increase phonetic and phonological awareness. The ungraded texts contain wide-ranging vocabulary, designed to stretch students - having to transcribe "anthropomorphism" would stretch the best of us...but fortunately accurately transcribed solutions are given! The texts in the final section are of a more literary style, with extracts by writers such as Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, James Joyce and Peter Carey chosen to reflect English in its wider context (Irish, American, Australian...), although the solutions follow the RP model, as they do throughout the book.

Although clearly of general interest to the English philology student and reflective of the texts the students have seen or will be seeing in the literature subjects of their degree, I personally would have preferred fewer literary extracts and more snippets of authentic discourse to provide a more natural source for coarticulatory study and practice.

Overall, *Practising English Consonants* is one of the most complete, compact and informative manuals on the subject. For reference purposes, the book is highly effective, clearly indexed and laid out, making it user-friendly and easy to dip into. The chapters in the first section deal with the consonant sounds thoroughly and the reader has the sense that the information he or she is receiving is definitive. In terms of presentation however, I felt that the book would have benefitted from the use of images and diagrams. As well as breaking up the text and making it more visually appealing to the learner, labelled profile diagrams might have helped them locate the speech organs and clarify the places and manners of articulation referred to. Also, in the modern multi-media world, an accompanying demonstrative recording would obviously have been helpful for students, although I am well aware of the limited resources and restrictions of university publishing, and these observations do not in anyway detract from the content quality of the book.

Although fundamentally intended as a first and second-year student self-study manual, it is arguably more effective as a reference and resource aid for teachers. *Practising English Phonetics* is not for the phonetically uninitiated, assuming a degree of prior knowledge of the whole English phonemic system. In order to be completely effective as a free-standing first-year course manual, the book perhaps lacks an introductory chapter which would give an overall vision of the phonemic system and basic concepts and so familiarize students with the sounds which will be subsequently dealt with in depth. Once students have acquired this general overview, the book comes into its own, serving as an effective source of revision, practice and consolidation. The exercises are wide-ranging offering words, sentences and texts of varying phonetic difficulty, this variety in pitch and level being particularly useful for mixed-ability groups both in and outside the classroom.

Conscious that every foreign learner has their own particular problems when speaking the English language, Douglas and García-Doncel show a complete understanding of those

Spanish speaker of English and the interference that one phonetic system has on the other. Through a comparative analysis of the two respective phonetic systems they have produced a highly recommendable book for those learning and teaching English phonetics. Although the focus remains practical, the authors do not compromise or simplify academic content. This is not a pronunciation book in the EFL sense but a practical manual for the English phonetics student.

*Practising English Consonants* is the fruit of many years hard work, not only in terms of writing and editing but also in study, observation and experience. Carefully researched and clearly structured, the book is founded on solid phonetic ground and adapted and applied to the needs of university students. It does not pretend to theorise or innovate but chooses fundamentally to provide the English philology student with a comprehensive and practical source of information about the complex workings of the English consonant system. The book is dedicated "to the years we worked together" ....and it shows. As the present Phonetics lecturer at the University of Cádiz, I am grateful for their efforts.