

Judy Gilbert (2008). *Teaching Pronunciation Using the Prosody Pyramid*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. Available: <http://www.cambridge.org/us/ESL/academicsupport.htm>

Review by Colleen Meagher-Alkan, University of New Brunswick

Cambridge University Press has put together a research and methodology site that offers booklets as downloadable PDF files. These methodology booklets have been prepared by recognized names in the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages community and serve as resources for language teachers, teachers in training, administrators, curriculum developers, and others interested and involved in the study of teaching. I have chosen to review Judy Gilbert's *Teaching Pronunciation Using the Prosody Pyramid*.

This booklet is a resource to introduce the concept of prosody as a component of effective communication. The introduction includes a description of the prosodic features of the language combining rhythm and melody (intonation) as vital links in the teaching of pronunciation. The reader is taken into the subject slowly as rhythm and melody are first described as "road signs" that communicate the intentions of the speaker. In her introduction, the author also puts a unique focus on the listener as a guide for the speaker in the mastery of rhythmic and melodic signals essential to "listener friendly" communication. Most communication breakdown occurs when the speaker does not focus on these essential signals. Furthermore, she states quite emphatically that these rhythmic and melodic teachings are more important than any other effort in pronunciation teaching, which fuels the suprasegmental versus segmental instruction debate. Gilbert describes pronunciation as a deeply personal aspect of speaking, containing the elements of self and community from the speech and rhythms of L1. Therefore, the objective of this teaching is to learn core elements of spoken English so that one can be understood by others, but not necessarily to sound like a "native speaker."

Gilbert's introduction helps to set the stage for someone with little or no experience in pronunciation teaching. Specific definitions and functions of melody and rhythm follow, orienting the reader to the subject much as a learner orients him or herself to a new speaker. The relationship between speaking and intelligibility is described as useful for listening comprehension: "Prosodically-trained students have learned to understand how rhythmic and melodic cues are used to organize information and guide the listener" (p.6).

With the general concept presented, Chapter Two moves into the more technical aspects of this type of pronunciation teaching. The Prosody Pyramid shows the progression from the general to the specific. It begins with a thought group, a focus word, stress, and finally the peak. A detailed description with each portion of the pyramid helps the reader become a little more familiar with each focus area. The author helps to tune the reader into the process of identifying prosodic markers in thought groups (sentences or phrases), then in words (stressed syllable), and finally with the peak syllable or focus word, which is the emphasis of pronunciation in a sentence. The end of Chapter Two

moves on to more specific considerations regarding word syllables, vowel length, clarity, and pitch changes. For the novice, this is where the conceptual understanding of content becomes a little more complicated.

The third chapter is a more detailed description of the challenges of learning vowel pronunciation. The author explains mechanics, interference from L1 sounds, and phonemic awareness, as well as L1 rhythm. She explores issues with English spelling and how decoding the alphabet for print objectives and spelling aloud assist in the pronunciation process. Reinforcing practice with these components is essential and practical. Gilbert continues with a more complex appreciation of vowels and gives pedagogical suggestions for working with both low proficiency students and more advanced proficiency level student. She concludes this chapter with a brief description of consonant sounds (an area of less controversy) and grammar cues occurring at the end of words. Although I appreciated the definition of *alphabetic vowel sounds* versus *relative vowel sounds*, she was trying to cover a lot of territory in this chapter potentially making it somewhat confusing and overwhelming for the novice pronunciation teacher.

Chapter Four introduces the concept of implementing the Prosody Pyramid into curriculum. Gilbert notes that quality repetition is essential for success in this subject. Included is a figure with references to several researchers who support the reasons for repetition. Students are introduced to templates (reference thought groups) of production, but it is suggested that the students receive the necessary time and practice to become owners of the templates. Gilbert provides examples of exercises, ideas for different proficiency levels, and some suggestions of physical resources one could use to accentuate the focus word or syllable. In her words, to use as many visual, kinesthetic, and auditory tools as you can to make ones interaction with the Prosody Pyramid more realistic.

Judy Gilbert has brought forward once again a resource that continues to support pronunciation practice and teaching in the language learning curriculum. She focuses on helping to make a student's speech intelligible and "listener friendly" by breaking down the teaching of rhythm and intonation into a focused prosody pyramid.