

CHARLA I - *Assessing English pronunciation: Facing the challenges*

This talk examines a range of questions which arise in assessing English learners' speech and listening. We first need an objective basis for deciding what counts as good/right or bad/wrong pronunciation. Among objective criteria, the two best-known are intelligibility and nativeness. But both of these raise further questions. If nativeness is the goal, which of the native accents should the student aim at? And should a student with native-like pronunciation be penalized for having an accent different from the one being taught? Intelligibility is not straightforward either, involving both context and the language background of the listener – itself a complex matter in a world where English is a lingua franca. The assessment of speech (and listening) can be rooted in the phoneme contrasts of standard English/es (e.g. 'minimal pairs'), but we also have to understand L1 phonetics so that we can tackle interference from it. Further difficulty comes from articulatory gradience, as a sound may be 'half right'. Various approaches to these questions are considered, including the role of technology in pronunciation assessment.

CHARLA II - *IPA in English Pronunciation Teaching: Dangers and how to avoid them*

It is widely taken for granted that English pronunciation teaching must include teaching of IPA symbols. The obvious advantage is that transcription lacks the inconsistencies and exceptions of English spelling, clarifying in particular the large English vowel system; and IPA pronouncing dictionaries allow the pronunciation of most English words to be looked up. But transcription carries a number of disadvantages and dangers. Learning it is a major burden for the learner, and many important pronunciation features are not shown in standard transcription. Many of the symbols are actually misleading and out of date. Above all, visual symbols are too often a distraction from learning the actual sounds of the language. This talk explains the benefits and the pitfalls of IPA, and makes recommendations on how to use it in a manageable way and how to supplement it with other, practical material.

CHARLA III - *The Process of Learning Pronunciation: Challenges and how to tackle them*

Learning a foreign language involves learning new vocabulary, new paradigms and new grammar rules. From these, students can assemble sentences, with gradually increasing complexity. However, learning the foreign language's pronunciation is a very different matter. Even if students are taught the 'sounds' of the foreign language with phonetic symbols, they tend to speak it instinctively and habitually with the pronunciation system of their mother tongue – which was 'hardwired' into them in infancy. Truly learning foreign pronunciation means learning new ways of listening and using the body, and crucially involves blocking the habitual instinct to use mother tongue pronunciation. Emotional obstacles often arise, including discomfort, frustration, and embarrassment. Drawing on years of experience, this talk examines in depth the complex process involved in true pronunciation change, the obstacles and resistances, and shows how to overcome them.