

DIVERSE MODELS AND DIVERSE LEARNERS: PRONUNCIATION TEACHING AND TESTING

NATIONAAL CONGRES ENGELS, 22 MARCH 2024

Janine Berns & Sanne van Vuuren

CLS | Centre for Language Studies
Radboud University



TODAY'S CONTENT



- What makes the English-French comparison worthwhile?
- The process of pronunciation learning
- Developments over the past 150 years
- What does the CECR (2001+2020) say about TL pronunciation skills?
- Discussion & Classroom implications/applications

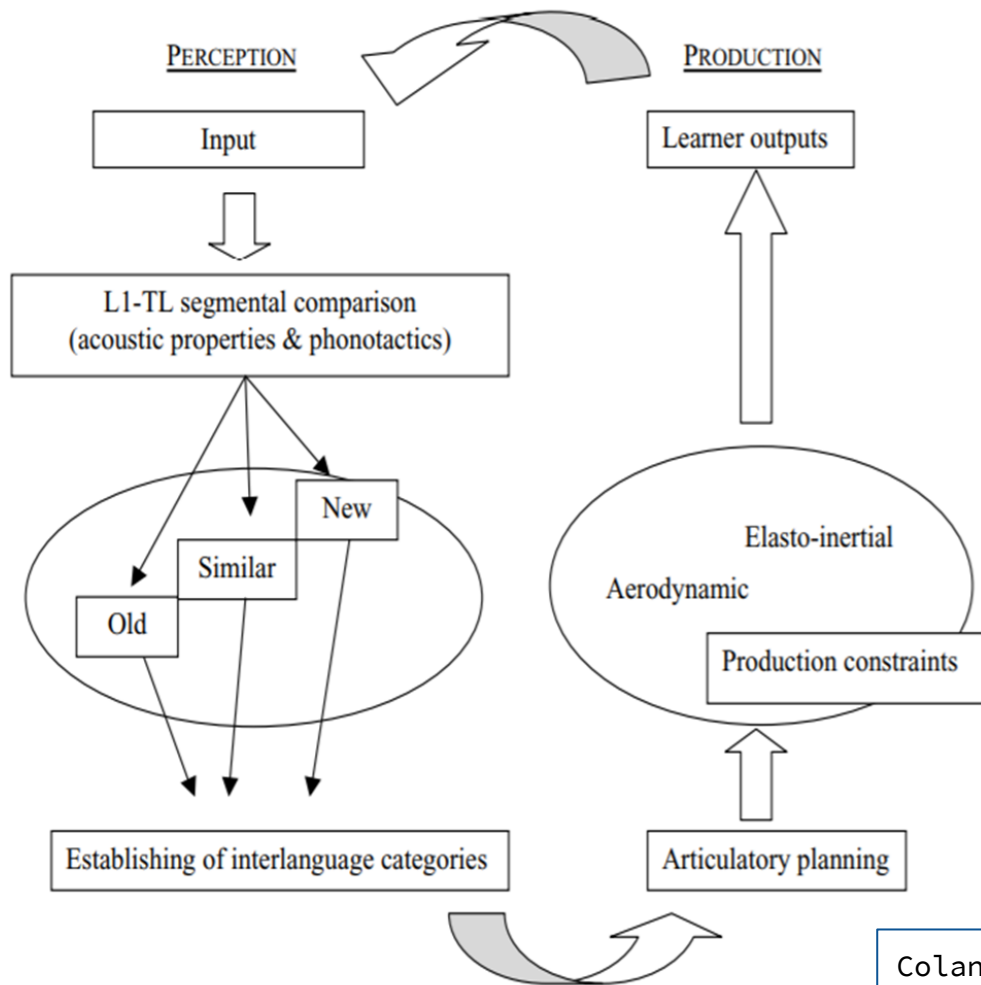
NORMATIVITY, FRENCH AND ENGLISH OVER THE PAST 150 YEARS

- Various changes in modern foreign language (MFL) **teaching practice**.
- The **rise of English** as the most important lingua franca, **gradually overtaking French** in status and prominence in Western-European educational curricula.
- About 100 years ago:
 - **setting “Standard French”** as the default learner norm was relatively **uncontroversial** (regardless of its use as a European lingua franca).
- Today:
 - the wide variety of Englishes around the world makes the adoption of **Received Pronunciation (RP) or General American (GA)** as the standard a **less obvious or neutral choice**.

LEARNING L2 PRONUNCIATION

- As such: similar to learning the sentence structure, vocabulary, morphology of the target language.
- You have to be made **aware** of (and **familiar** with) the TL inventory/patterns.





CLASSROOM & LANGUAGE ANXIETY

Learners experience:

- fear of **classmates' judgments**
- fear of **teachers' expectations**
- fear of having to do something they have **not prepared for**;
- fear of a **test situation**;
- fear of speaking **in front of a group**;
- fear of **not understanding** the TL;
- fear of having to **communicate with a NS**;
- fear of **being laughed at**;
- fear of **every mistake being highlighted**.

Consequences for:

- language use
- language competence
- self-confidence
- participation

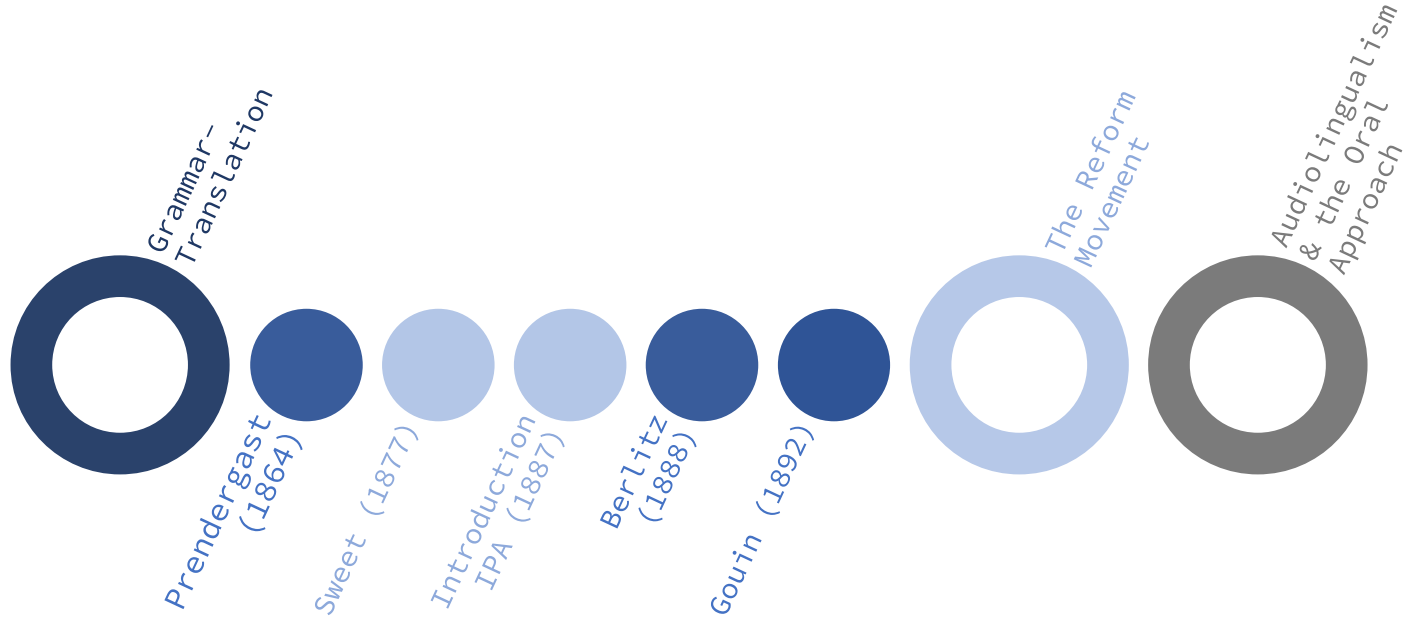
(Awan et al., 2010; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Lefkowitz & Hedgcock, 2002; Simons & Decoo, 2009)

WHAT DO TEACHER TRAINEES THINK?



- 3 st. EduMA English, 3 st. EduMA French
- Pronunciation teaching especially important in **final years**
 - when learners have a solid basis in grammar, vocabulary and communication skills
 - no oral exams in lower secondary school
- But: **difference between English and French**
 - *French*: few opportunities for implicit learning outside the classroom
 - important to integrate explicit and implicit attention to TL pronunciation from the early stages onwards
 - prevents pronunciation anxiety
 - *English*: opportunities for implicit learning outside the classroom
 - No particular need to work on pronunciation in lower years

LET'S TAKE A
CLOSER LOOK AT
THE HISTORY OF
PRONUNCIATION TEACHING



Up to the end of the 19th century:

- FL learning: intellectual stimulation for the elites, rather than practical or economic necessity
- Pronunciation: no priority
- When pronunciation did receive attention: mostly still reading-based and focused on educated, prestige varieties

e.g. Lenoir's (1799) French pronunciation guide for English children

GRAMMAR-TRANSLATION METHOD

“French pronunciation and reading made easy; or the Logographic-Emblematical French spelling-book. Being a method by which **any child, four or five years old, and of ever so slow an apprehension, although perfectly acquainted with his letters, will, in a few months, be enabled to read French fluently, and pronounce it as if he were Parisian born**”.

FRENCH
PRONUNCIATION AND READING
MADE EASY:

OR, THE

LOGOGRAPHIC-EMBLEMATICAL

FRENCH SPELLING-BOOK.

Being a Method by which any Child, Four or Five Years old, and of ever so slow an Apprehension, although perfectly unacquainted with his Letters, will, in a few Months, be enabled to read French fluently, and pronounce it as if he were a Parisian born.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED
INSTRUCTIONS to enable any Person to put this Method in Practice; as likewise Certificates and other Vouchers of the Efficacy of the same.

Published by M. LEROIS,
Author of the *Pratique de l'Orateur Francois*, de l'*Eloge Funebre de Louis XVI*, &c. and a Professor of the FRENCH LANGUAGE, ELOCUTION, and BELLES-LETTRES.

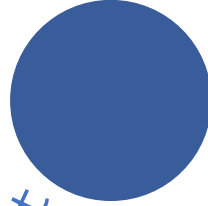
LONDON:

Sold for the Editor, by Messrs. DULAU & Co. No. 107, Wardour-Street; De BOFFE, No. 7, Gerrard-Street, Soho, and T. BOOSEY, Broad-Street, behind the Royal Exchange.

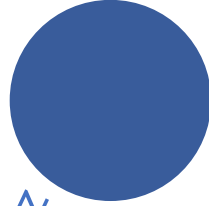
1799.



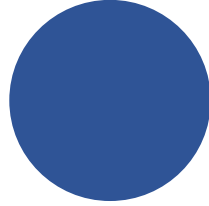
Grammar-
Translation



Prendergast
(1864)



Berlitz
(1888)



Gouin (1892)

*Sounds are the
substance; and
the letters, or
symbols, are
their shadows.*



*The student must at
first learn through
the ear, in order
to acquire a good
pronunciation.*



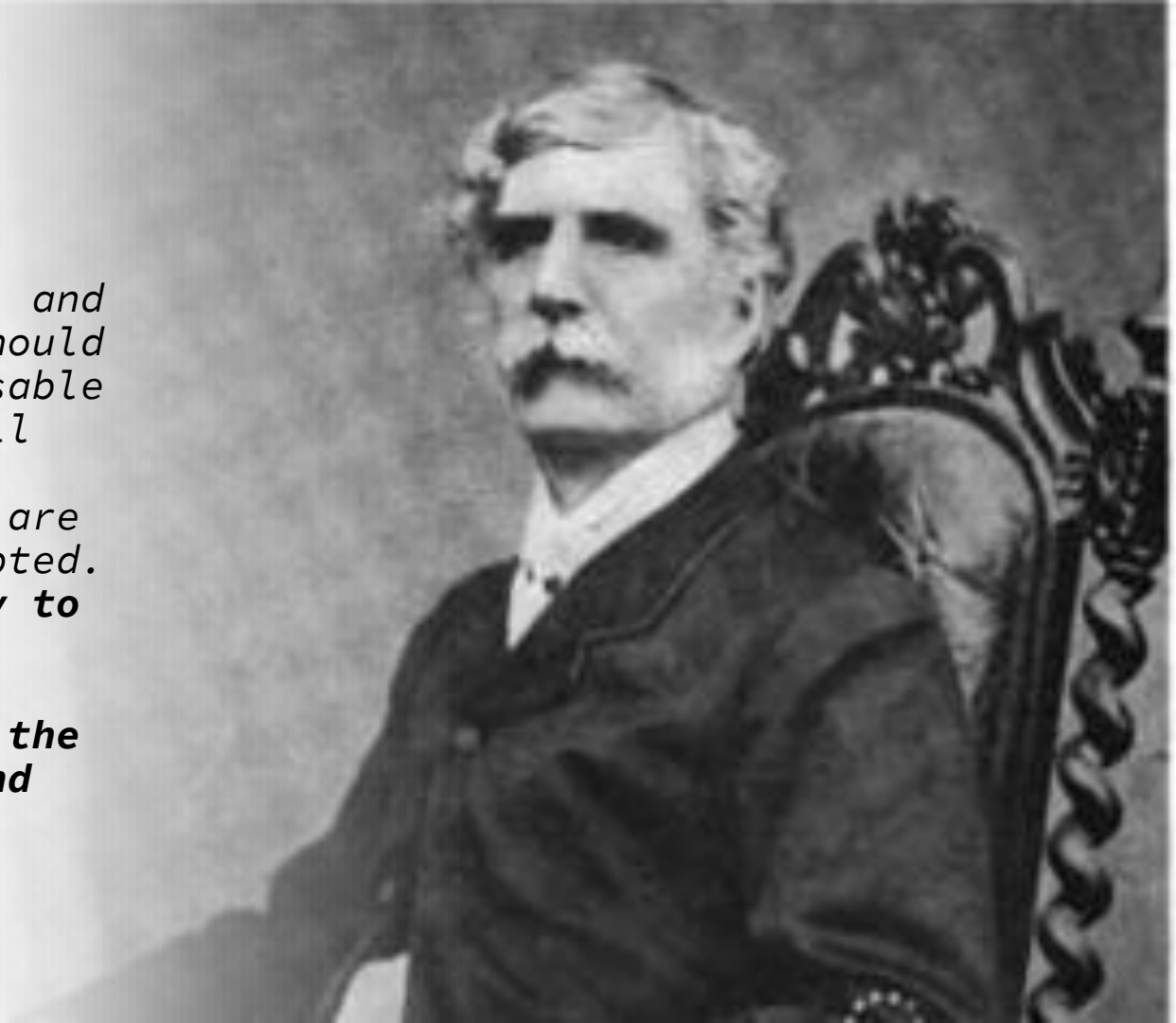
*The first cause
[...] of a false
accent and
pronunciation is the
study of languages
by means of reading.*

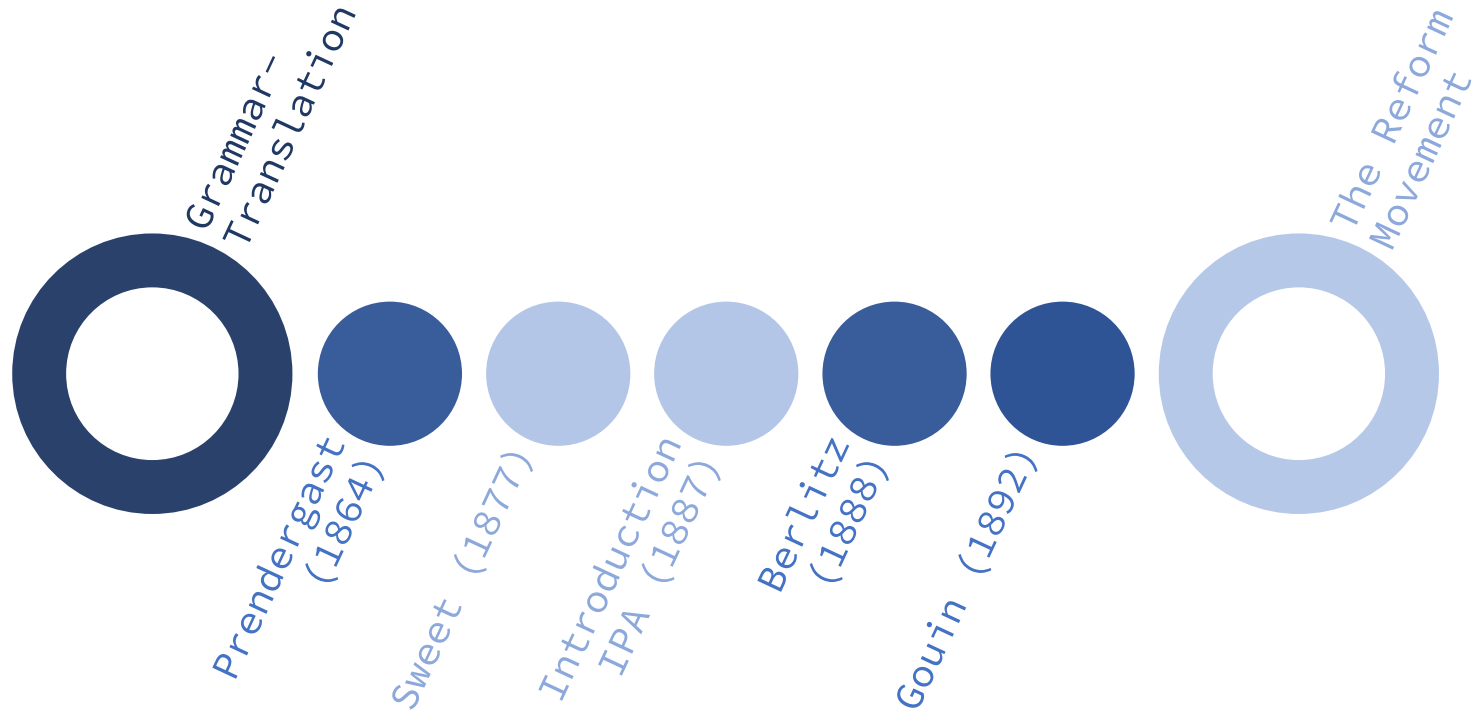


THOMAS PRENDERGAST

*A clear, soft, refined, and deliberate utterance should be considered indispensable in teachers; because all their tones, accents, emphases, and cadences are to be imitated and adopted. **It is quite unnecessary to employ a professor. A foreign friend with a pleasant voice will do the work as effectually, and much more agreeably.***

(Prendergast 1864, 146)





HENRY SWEET

*If our present
wretched system of
studying modern
languages is ever to
be reformed, it must
be on the basis of
preliminary training
in general phonetics.*

Sweet (1877, v-vi)



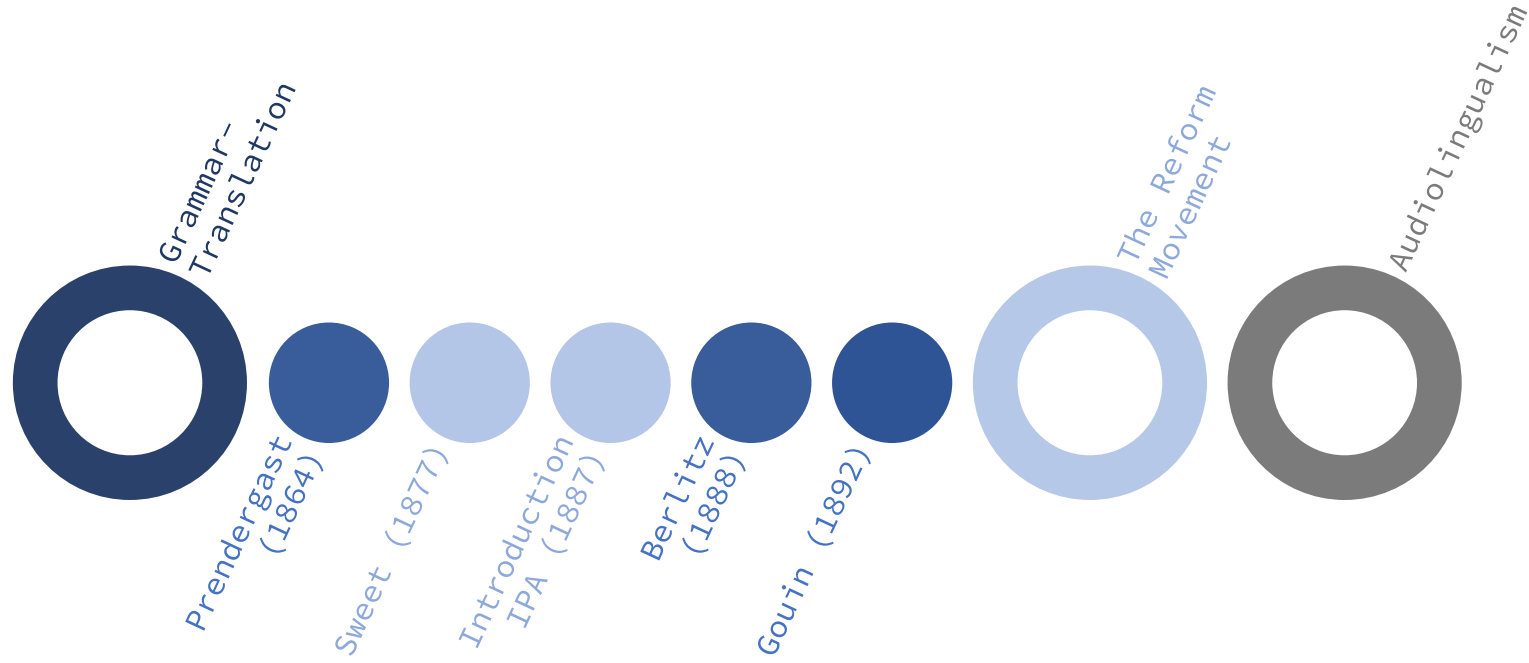


“the educated speech of
London and the district
round it”

(Sweet, 1890)

the pronunciation “most
usually heard in everyday
speech in the families of
Southern English persons
whose menfolk have been
educated at the great
public boarding schools”

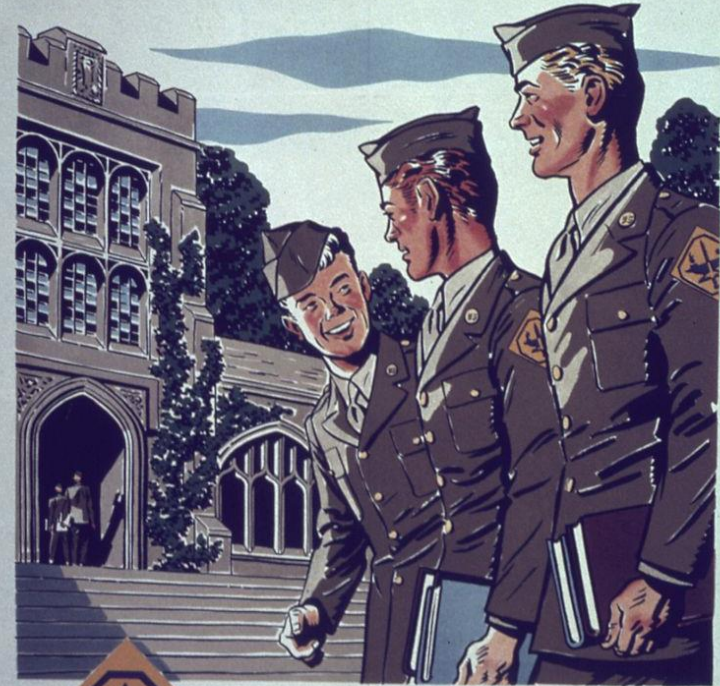
(Jones, 1917)



[T]his command includes the ability to speak the language fluently, accurately, and with **an acceptable approximation to a native pronunciation**. It also implies that the student will have a practically **perfect auditory comprehension** of the language as spoken by natives (Schueler 1944, 183).

- focus on **habit formation**
- imitative **drill exercises**
- automization of **chunks**

Boy! What a break!



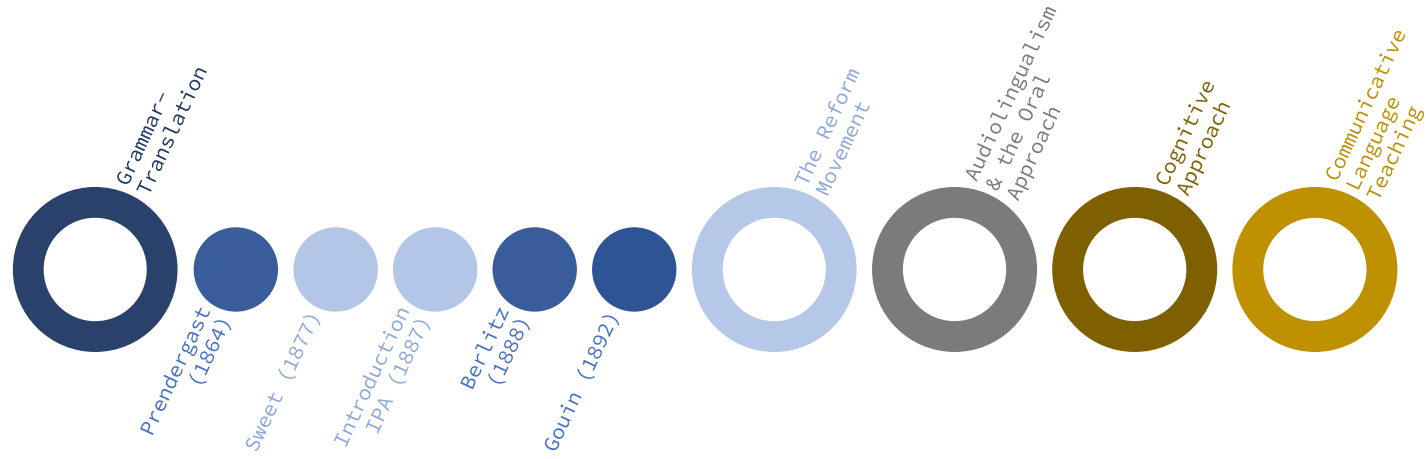
The Army Specialized Training Reserve Program offers high school graduates who are 17 but not yet 17 years and 9 months of age free college training. For information apply at any U. S. Army Recruiting Station or consult your high school principal.

ARMY SPECIALIZED TRAINING RESERVE PROGRAM

“While publications of textbooks in a wide variety of other ESL/EFL areas mushroomed, very few new pronunciation books appeared on the market, and those most widely circulated can be counted on the fingers of one hand”

Pimsleur (1963, 199)

1960S AND ONWARDS

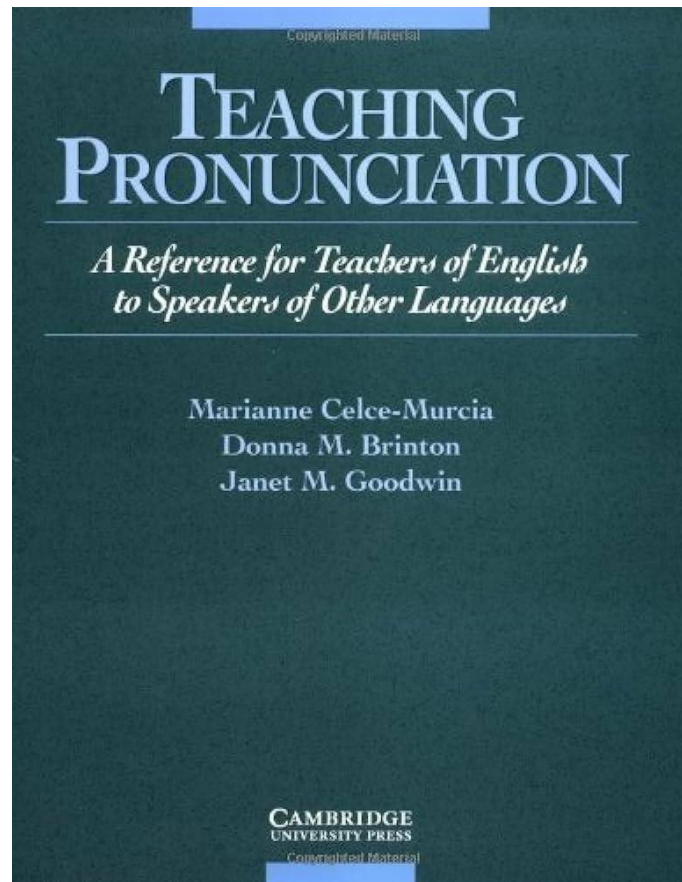


COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

- “there is a **threshold level** of pronunciation in English such that if a given non-native speaker’s pronunciation falls below this level, he will **not be able to communicate orally no matter how good his control of English grammar and vocabulary might be**”

(Celce-Murcia, 1983 – citing Hinofotis & Bailey, 1980)

- **Communicative competence** ≠ native-like competence
 - Position of pronunciation teaching in the curriculum
 - Features that were taught



- learners' "right" to retain their accent as a marker of identity (Smith 1992; Jenkins 2000; Sung 2014; Pennington 2021)
- "a strong foreign accent does not necessarily cause L2 speech to be low in comprehensibility or intelligibility" (Munro & Derwing's, 1995, p. 92)
- Research into which features contribute most to intelligibility

ACCENTEDNESS, COMPREHENSIBILITY & INTELLIGIBILITY

INTELLIGIBLE TO WHOM?

- “[o]ur speech [...] in English needs to be intelligible only to those with whom we wish to communicate in English” (Smith 1992)
- *World Englishes speaker-listener intelligibility matrix* (Levis, 2005)

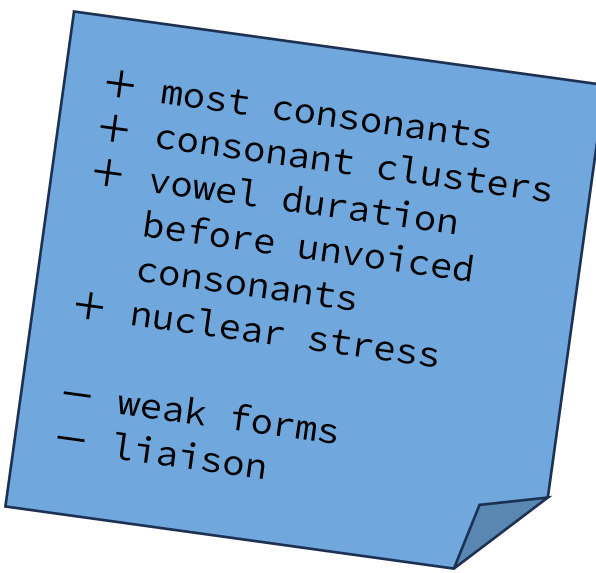
		LISTENER		
		Inner Circle (IC)	Outer Circle (OC)	Expanding Circle (EC)
SPEAKER	Inner-Circle	<i>IC-IC</i> (<i>NS-NS</i>)	1. IC-OC	<i>IC-EC</i> (<i>NS-NNS</i>)
	Outer Circle	2. OC-IC	3. OC-OC	4. OC-EC
	Expanding Circle	<i>IC-IC</i> (<i>NNS-NS</i>)	5. EC-OC	<i>EC-EC</i> (<i>NNS-NNS</i>)

LINGUA FRANCA CORE (LFC)

“a universal, realistically teachable and learnable core” of features that affect intelligibility in lingua franca contexts”

(Jenkins, 2000)

- LFC features account for only 5 to 33 percent of pronunciation syllabi in coursebooks (Kiczkowiak 2021)
- “more for marketing than for pedagogy”
- accents “restricted [...] [to] mostly young educated southern UK types”



- + most consonants
- + consonant clusters
- + vowel duration before unvoiced consonants
- + nuclear stress
- weak forms
- liaison

ACCENT REDUCTION

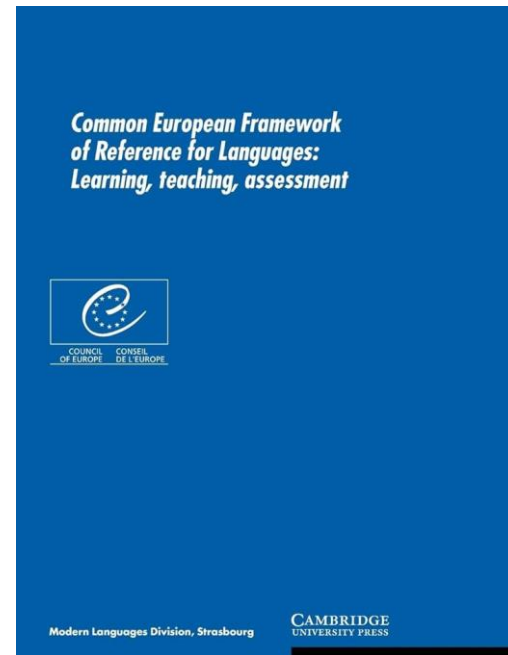
- Perception of pronunciation instruction as synonymous with accent reduction often cited as a reason not to devote class time to pronunciation at all (Huensch, 2019)



PRONUNCIATION SKILLS IN THE CEFR

PRONUNCIATION IN THE CEFR (2001)

- The CEFR formalised the wish to approach language learning from a **communicative** and **plurilingual** perspective
 - >> a change in approach which **inevitably led to divergence from the NS model.**
- “From this perspective, the aim of language education is profoundly modified. **It is no longer seen as simply to achieve ‘mastery’ of one or two, or even three languages, each taken in isolation, with the ‘ideal native speaker’ as the ultimate model. Instead, the aim is to develop a linguistic repertory, in which all linguistic abilities have a place”.** (Council of Europe 2001, 5)



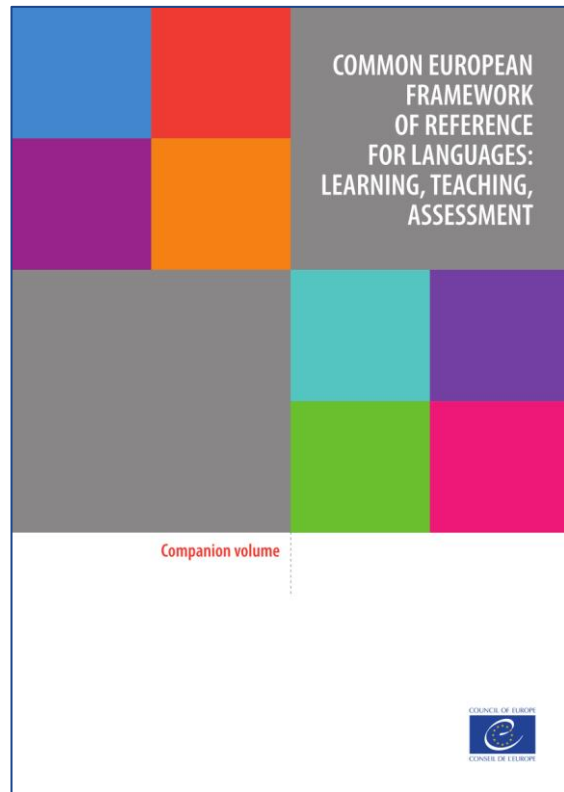
- “[t]he full implications of such a paradigm shift have yet to be worked out and translated into action” (p. 5)
 - >> for pronunciation as well as other skills.
- **Phonological competence/pronunciation:** referred to in several places in the document.
- Chapter 1: pronunciation, together with inflexional morphology:.
 - A comparison is made with learning to drive a car:
 - controlling certain basic skills gives the driver self-confidence and makes them feel at ease (p. 11).
- Chapter 5, “The user/learner’s competences”: **Phonological competence** is defined as:
 - “**knowledge of, and skill in the perception and production**” of various **segmental** and **suprasegmental** characteristics” (2001, 116-117).

FROM A1 TO C2

A1+A2	<p>>> The learner is able to pronounce basic phrases clearly enough to be understood.</p> <p>>> Interlocutors have to listen through a “noticeable foreign accent” (2001, 117) and repetition may be required for clarification.</p>
B1	<p>Pronunciation is required to be “clearly intelligible, even if a foreign accent is sometimes evident and occasional mispronunciations occur” (2001, 117).</p>
B2	<p>The learner has acquired a “clear, natural pronunciation and intonation” (2001, 117).</p>
C1+C2	<p>>> The learner is supposed to have achieved their pronunciation goals when reaching C1.</p> <p>>> “vary intonation and place sentence stress correctly in order to express finer shades of meaning” (2001, 117).</p>

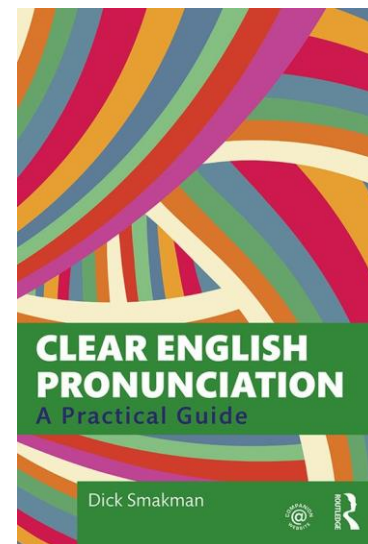
ABOUT TWO DECADES LATER...

- “[...] the progression **appeared unrealistic**, particularly in moving from B1 [...] to B2 [...]”.
 - “In fact, **the phonology scale was the least successful of those calibrated in the original research behind the descriptors published in 2001**”.
 - (Council of Europe 2020, 133)
- The 2001 scales were **too much in line with traditional normative views** on accent reduction, at the cost of “consideration for context, sociolinguistic aspects and learners’ needs” (2020, 133).



	2001	2020
B1	Pronunciation is required to be “ clearly intelligible, even if a foreign accent is sometimes evident and occasional mispronunciations occur” (2001, 117).	Pronunciation has to be “ generally intelligible”, although clear traces of an L1 accent remain.
B2	The learner has acquired a “ clear, natural pronunciation and intonation ” (2001, 117).	The suprasegmentals also come into play.
C1	<p>>> The learner is supposed to have achieved their pronunciation goals when reaching C1.</p> <p>>> “vary intonation and place sentence stress correctly in order to express finer shades of meaning” (2001, 117).</p>	All phonological features used have to be mastered in such a way that there is no breakdown in intelligibility , while a foreign accent may still transpire .
C2		<p>>> The learner can use a variety of phonological (segmental and suprasegmental) features of the TL in an automated way, and these can be used “to convey finer shades of meaning” (2020, 134).</p> <p>>> No reference is made to accentedness at this level</p> <p>>> Not clear to what extent learners are expected to have eliminated any traces of an L1 accent.</p>

- perception among pupils that "if you sound British, you are very good at English"
- Second- and third-year BA language students (14 French, 27 English):
 - 76.92% of English students and 84.62% of French students wanted to approximate native speaker accent, as a sign of "study success".
- Teacher trainees' own preference for a NS standard: not essential but helps them to feel confident
- variation according to
 - level of the learners
 - social context



TIPS & TRICKS FOR LINKING TASKS ON PRONUNCIATION (RECEPTIVE AND PRODUCTIVE)

- Context that puts students **sufficiently at ease** but also **challenges them**
- Mix of exercises covering **attention to sound(s)** **implicitly** and **explicitly**
- **Repetition (difficulties, production/perception)**
- **Linking skills** (speaking and listening, but also with vocabulary and grammar)
- Using **authentic materials**: language varieties, types of recordings
- **Sensitization** towards varieties, reduction of **anxiety**
- Authentic materials also combine well with attention for **linguistic awareness/cultural awareness** (curriculum reform)



QUESTIONS, OTHER EXPERIENCES TO SHARE?



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

janine.berns@ru.nl

sanne.vanvuuren@ru.nl