

SHIP OR SHEEP?

Ann Baker

Cambridge University Press, 1977

STRESS TIME, LINK-UP, WEAK FORMS, CLUSTERS, CONTRACTIONS

Colin Mortimer

Cambridge University Press, 1977

Ship or Sheep? comprises forty three-concise units with accompanying cassettes to practice the sounds, stress and intonation of English.

Unlike many pronunciation books, this course offers a variety of practice exercises in each unit. First, there are simple diagrams of the position of the mouth and tongue with clear instructions on how to produce the sounds; the student cannot fail to understand them, and may at this point work on the sounds in isolation before proceeding to contextualised practice.

In the minimal pair drill, the student is meant to cover the words with the mask supplied at the end of the book, and look only at the illustrations while listening to the tape. The author rightly points out that the spelling of English words often misleads the learner in the pronunciation of them; and she has provided a mask to hide the written form in the initial contrasting pair practice. The mask, unfortunately, encroaches on significant areas of the drawings in a number of cases, creating an unnecessary problem for the user.

The third section has listening comprehension material for sound discrimination followed by a list of vocabulary items required for the subsequent dialogue where all three aspects; sounds, stress and intonation are practiced. Then following a mini-dialogue marking stress only, each unit ends with a creative transfer in the form of a group game or dialogue building to picture or word cues.

In addition to the units, we find a list of Likely Errors for twelve different language groups (including Spanish) to guide the teacher. If a teacher's particular group is not included, he or she can use the Diagnostic Test to determine which English sounds generally cause them trouble. Miss Baker has been very thorough in the preparation of her course.

An interesting feature of the book is the discreet use of symbols. So many pronunciation books are cluttered with phonetic transcription. Aware of the confusion that this can produce, not to mention the extra work for the student who must learn the system in order to decipher it, the author has wisely included only the symbol of the phoneme to be practiced at the beginning of each unit. She states that the course may be used with beginning students before completing book one of most basic courses; and though geared to a classroom setting, there is no reason why it should not be used by the individual in the language laboratory, a self-access unit or at home.

Teachers who believe that correct sounds, stress and intonation are important in communication - and are teaching British English - will find Ship or Sheep? particularly attractive. It is a comprehensive pronunciation course which could prove to be a valuable supplement at the basic level.

In an earlier book, Sound Right, Colin Mortimer provided limited pronunciation practice through connected speech using stress marks and specific sound symbols. In the Elements of Pronunciation series, he has concentrated on a different element in each book.

The combination of amusing dialogues and delightful illustrations, by Peter Kneebone in Stress Time and Daria Gan in the rest of the series, is designed to make pronunciation practice enjoyable for both teacher and student.

Stress Time and Link-up are recommended for "upper intermediate students", at which level they would appreciate the humour and enjoy acting out the dialogues. Selected material from all five books could be used at lower levels, but much of the humour would be lost.

The exercises, which also appear on cassette, consist of short illustrated dialogues. The material, albeit humorous, lacks however the variety of Ship or Sheep? It would be more exciting if there were an occasional change of activity involving the student in some kind of creative work; possibly a "problem-solving" task where the student was asked to underline the weak forms or insert the link lines in the appropriate places before (or after) listening to the dialogue on tape; for example:

- A Don't pour it there, idiot.
 B You said pour it here, Eric.
 A Here! Here in the glass! Not there on the floor!
- A Don't pour it there, idiot.
 B You said pour it here, Eric.
 A Here! Here in the glass! Not there on the floor!

Since the EFL student has few occasions to listen to spoken English, the teacher is usually anxious to provide good listening opportunities in the classroom. The native English offered on these cassettes, complemented by the practice exercises in the various elements of pronunciation, could not fail to be helpful at the intermediate and early advanced stage.

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