
Venturing into under-explored crossover territories

Mark Hancock, *Connected Speech for Listeners*. Hancock McDonald ELT, Chestser, UK 2022

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Mark Hancock's latest book, *Connected Speech for Listeners*, the seventh in the critically acclaimed PronPack series, provides a vital survival kit for those who want to venture into the 'jungle' of English. If the previous six books focused on different aspects of pronunciation for speaking, the volume under the microscope moves into new territories – those of spontaneous spoken English and the link between pronunciation and listening, working on the premises that raising awareness of authentic spoken English is essential for improving listening skills.

Spoken English is not simply the sum of its parts, individual spoken words put together or written English read aloud. While you have some control over the pronunciation you produce, you have no control whatsoever on the pronunciation of the language that you hear. Spontaneous spoken English is unscripted, fast and messy.

Richard Cauldwell² uses a tripartite metaphorical distinction when referring to spoken English: the 'greenhouse', 'garden' and 'jungle' metaphors. *Greenhouse English* is characterized by words in their citation, dictionary form. The words are like plants in a greenhouse, artificially kept apart from the natural environment. In *garden English* words blend together in a controlled way in connected speech – we have weak forms, assimilations, linking and elision; the kind of language we typically hear in scripted audio materials or in coursebooks. *Jungle English* is speech in action; the kind of language produced spontaneously, in unplanned real-time interactions, bringing forth surprising revelations. Under the pressure of spontaneous communication, speakers take shortcuts and words are radically modified in ways that textbooks will never 'allow'. Being used to greenhouse English, or at its best to garden English, students might feel demoralized when they get out there into the 'jungle' only to find out that they have trouble understanding anything at all.

Hancock's book sets out on a journey through the jungle of English, providing its readers with clear, well-organized information and effective practice activities, vital for understanding English as it is, not as it should be.

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² Cauldwell, R. (2018). *A Syllabus for Listening – Decoding. Speech in Action*.

The main focus of the book is pronunciation for listening. If the previous books in the series focused on pronunciation for speaking, *Connected Speech for Listeners* deals with those features of pronunciation that you don't necessarily want to use in your own speech, but which are vital for understanding spontaneous spoken English.

The book is organized in three sections: section A contains 18 practical tips about how to teach pronunciation for speaking, section B provides practical materials for the main features of connected speech, while section C suggests ways in which pronunciation for listening might be integrated with other areas in the teaching syllabus.

In the context of a globalized world, where the goal in learning/teaching English is no longer native-likeness but international intelligibility, Mark Hancock's book does not promote a specific accent, but can be adapted or adjusted as needed. While the reference recordings are in an accent - it is simply impossible to speak without an accent, Hancock's advice for teachers is clear and straightforward: 'use whatever accent you normally have, but just make sure you aren't subconsciously slipping into a simplified 'teacherese' version of it. ³ Wondering what 'teacherese' is? It's a term coined by Hancock to refer to the super clear, didactic version of English which comes as a second nature to teachers; an extremely useful version, making language more accessible to students, but when it comes to preparing them for the 'jungle' it doesn't always serve them well.

Available as an e-book or paperback, *Connected Speech for Listeners* is also supported by a full range of resources available on the accompanying website.

Given that pronunciation has been often ignored in English language teaching, Hancock's books are a must-have, for students and teachers alike, providing engaging and effective practice activities, topics that are dealt with in a fun and interesting way, proving once more that Phonetics is not a dry field of study and that the teaching of pronunciation can and should be an enjoyable experience.

3 Hancock, M. (2022). *Connected Speech for Listeners*. p. 37