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A critical discussion of present-day English  
pronunciation teaching methodology through  
Vaughan's  
*Domina la Pronunciación del Inglés*

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# **A critical discussion of present-day English pronunciation teaching methodology through Vaughan's *Domina la Pronunciación del Inglés*.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation analyzes critically the methodology used in the textbook published by Vaughan Systems on English pronunciation: Richard Brown's *Domina la Pronunciación del Inglés* (Brown *et al.*, 2014). I have identified a mismatch between the theoretical assumptions as stated by the book (what it says it does) and the practical undertaking of the method (what it actually does); I also bring in theoretical considerations of pronunciation teaching in order to assess critically the methodology.

In the introduction, I review some of the most relevant theoretical aspects in English pronunciation teaching, as they will help me elaborate on my argumentation: models of pronunciation, issues of description and representation, and second language pronunciation acquisition. Then, I lay out what the methodology involves in connection with these three theoretical aspects, putting the emphasis on the mismatch and practical discordances. Finally, I discuss possible explanations for the limitations of the method, concluding that it has a valuable potential for fostering motivation and a positive attitude towards learning English despite its lack of consistency.

## **RESUMEN**

Este estudio analiza desde una perspectiva crítica la metodología usada en el manual publicado por Vaughan Systems sobre pronunciación del inglés: *Domina la Pronunciación del Inglés*, de Richard Brown *et al.* (2014). Se ha identificado una falta de correspondencia entre los supuestos teóricos que expone el libro (lo que dice que hace) y la puesta en práctica del método (lo que hace realmente); también se aportan consideraciones teóricas sobre la enseñanza de la pronunciación para evaluar críticamente la metodología.

En la introducción, se reseñan algunos de los aspectos teóricos más relevantes para la enseñanza de la pronunciación del inglés, ya que contribuirán a la argumentación: modelos de pronunciación, cuestiones de descripción y representación y adquisición de la pronunciación de una segunda lengua. Después, se expone en qué consiste la metodología en relación a estos tres dominios teóricos, prestando atención a la falta de correspondencia y el desajuste práctico. Finalmente, se consideran posibles explicaciones a las limitaciones del método, llegando a la conclusión de que tiene un valioso potencial para fomentar la motivación y una actitud positiva hacia el aprendizaje del inglés a pesar de la falta de consistencia.

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## 1. Introduction

Vaughan Systems was founded in 1977 by Texas-born businessman and Spanish philologist Richard Vaughan (b. 1951) and it has since specialized in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Spain. The company's main area of work is Business English but it is best known for other projects which have become increasingly popular in recent years, such as Vaughan Town, Vaughan Radio or Aprende Inglés TV. Also quite well-known are his textbooks and booklets, sometimes given as freebies with important Spanish magazines, which usually deal with specific aspects of the English language, such as *Domina los Malditos Phrasal Verbs Ingleses* (Lennard, 2012), *Inglés Express con Vaughan* (Vaughan, 2013), *Aprende Inglés con Canciones de Película* (Vaughan & Bentley, 2014) and many others.

This dissertation aims to analyze critically the methodology used in the textbook published by Vaughan Systems on English pronunciation: Richard Brown's *Domina la Pronunciación del Inglés* (Brown *et al.*, 2014). The analysis is twofold: on the one hand, I have identified a mismatch between the theoretical assumptions as stated by the book (what it says it does) and the practical undertaking of the method (what it actually does); on the other, I bring in theoretical considerations of pronunciation teaching in order to assess critically the methodology. I therefore set out to discuss what can be the reasons for the mismatch and whether they have positive pedagogical implications. In order to do this, I will first review some of the most relevant theoretical aspects in English pronunciation teaching, as they will help me elaborate on my argumentation. Then, I lay out what the methodology and the mismatch involves. Finally, I will discuss possible explanations in order to draw conclusions regarding the complexity of teaching the pronunciation of English.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1. Models and goals of pronunciation**

There are as many types of pronunciation as speakers of English, and all of them are acceptable as long as they provide successful communication. However, successful communication is not such a straightforward term as it may seem and most methodologies rely on particular sets of linguistic values. Moreover, some of these values are perceived as more or less suitable for specific contexts and this is the source of judgements of 'good' and 'bad' pronunciation. Thus, most methodologies agree that it is necessary to have a model or set of values of reference.

A model, however, must not be confused, as it often is, with the goal of pronunciation learning. Rogerson-Revell (2011) makes this distinction clear in her definition of a model as 'a set of standard pronunciation forms for a particular accent which can be used [as] a point of reference or guideline with which to measure pronunciation appropriacy or accuracy', which is different from 'the level which a learner's pronunciation aims to reach in order to facilitate effective communication' (p. 8), i.e. the goal. Two learners may have very different goals while taking the same model as reference: one of them may be a Mexican worker who wants to pass off as American in order to be promoted so her goal is sounding native-like; the other student may be a German businessman who wants to make a deal with an American provider and just wants this other person to recognize the technical words they use while maintaining his German identity which gives an idea of seriousness and reliability.

Thus, a traditional and still very widespread approach towards pronunciation teaching implies a native model. Broadly, this means either Received Pronunciation (RP) or General American (GA) although variation within these two is more and more frequent, especially regarding the harsh criticism RP has received in the last few

decades. Being felt to have negative class connotations, RP is now usually replaced in most manuals by some more general terms referring to the standard pronunciation of the Southeast of England. For instance, Rogerson-Revell (2011) talks about ‘BBC pronunciation’ in line with many other works she mentions (most notable of which is the Daniel Jones Pronunciation Dictionary’s 15<sup>th</sup> edition of 1997). Similarly, in the 8<sup>th</sup> and latest edition of *Gimson’s Pronunciation of English* (2014), Alan Cruttenden has done away with RP in favor of the term ‘General British’ (GB). Still, he points out that this is a matter of labelling in concordance with other works and current sentiments, since the variety described is nothing but ‘an evolved and evolving version of the same accent under a different name’ (p. 80).

Attitudes, however, have changed with the ongoing spread of English in international contexts and the native model need no longer be the only possible option. Scholarly research has therefore been carried out to describe the nature of English as spoken in various contexts and identify the features that need be paid especial attention for the sake of intelligibility. Thus, Cruttenden (2014) points out different priorities and tolerances depending on the goal of the learner. Apart from the traditional aim at native-like pronunciation, he also introduces ‘Amalgam English’ and ‘International English’ (this term appears quite often as ‘English as an International Language’ or simply ‘EIL’). The former is designed for users of English who want to be intelligible to native speakers without necessarily sounding like them; the latter is aimed at users of English as a common language between speakers of languages other than English. Therefore, while Amalgam English gathers a series of features common to most varieties of English, International English is dictated by non-native speaker use and its most salient set of priorities and tolerances has become what is known as Jenkins’ Lingua Franca Core (Jenkins, 2000).

There are some differences in Cruttenden's EIL as opposed to Jenkins' LFC but it is important to understand that they do not originate in the same theoretical approach: an international language is used by everybody in the international community, whereas a lingua franca refers to use of English among non-native speakers alone. Thus, Cruttenden is hypothesizing and makes different suggestions to build up a set of priorities and tolerances, i.e. features of pronunciation that should be given importance (priority) and those that need not be insisted upon (can be tolerated). His observations are therefore somehow speculative and stem from his (unquestionably valuable) experience and knowledge of English phonology. Jenkins, on the other hand, has carried out research by observing non-native speakers interacting in English and she has paid attention to the causes of communication breakdown. The Lingua Franca Core, therefore, is not a hypothetical system of phonetic values but the conclusion of an empirical study. Consequently, she prioritizes the features that have been shown to cause unsurmountable miscommunication (the core) but tolerates other forms of deviance from the native speaker norm (non-core features). However, she goes further and discourages the use of those native features which have shown to be an impediment to communication between non-native speakers.

This is connected with another important point to be made: native speaker pronunciation is not necessarily the best of options for successful communication. In an interaction with native speakers, they will expect a similar command of attitudinal intonation patterns and pragmatic aspects which are very often much harder to achieve. Consequently, they might be less tolerant of other mistakes because they are made to think they are interacting with another native speaker. Also, they might find it threatening or disturbing because it goes against usual perceptions of foreigners as less skilled or to be helped. On the other hand, in an interaction with non-native speakers

who are not proficient enough, a native accent is usually a hindrance to communication because it incorporates features that the hearer does not master and which many times make it harder for him to understand the message. This happens because of bottom-up processing, typical of L2 speakers: they are expecting all phonemes to be pronounced in order to identify a word and once all words are clear they get them as a sentence. This is what Jenkins refers to as ‘non-core features with a negative impact on ELF intelligibility’ (Walker, 2010, p. 41).

All these considerations are to be taken into account when designing a method for teaching the pronunciation of English because of the impact these decisions can have on learners’ development at a psychological (identity) and sociological (attitudes) level.

## **2.2. Description and representation of speech sounds**

Pronunciation teaching is, in some way or another, concerned with the description and representation of the sounds it wants to teach. However, this can be done in many different ways. As Cruttenden (2014) explains, there are three basic dimensions to speech: production, transmission and reception; consequently, there are three main ways to describe speech sounds: in articulatory, acoustic and auditory terms.

Articulation implies reference to the physical mechanism of the human body for the production of sound: lungs, vocal folds, tongue, lips... This can entail complex terminology in order to be precise about what organs (articulators) are being used in the production of a sound. Acoustics is the scientific study of sound as the mechanical waves that have been produced by the articulators and are being transmitted through the air. Finally, reception can be described by the auditory impressions a particular sound produces in the hearer.



Typically, pronunciation teaching relies on articulatory references and auditory impressions rather than acoustic information, mainly because the former can be perceived by speakers while the latter requires specific instruments for the measurement of sound formants. It is more common to refer to articulation when talking about consonants, especially those produced in the front of the mouth, because they can be easily seen and felt. The description of vowels, which are more difficult to perceive as articulators do not come in contact, is often carried out in both articulatory and auditory terms.

The visual representation of what is described can take various forms and is open to creativity but the use of phonetic script, i.e. some kind of alphabet or symbol system, is most widespread. Symbols can also vary but the majority of teaching methods and academic publications make use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (or IPA) as regulated by the International Phonetic Association (also but not so frequently IPA). Other alphabets are either obsolete (e.g. Henry Sweet's Romic Alphabet) or adaptations of the IPA or similar (e.g. Americanist Notation). One practice alternative to a phonetic alphabet is respelling or the addition of diacritics (such as macrons and breves<sup>1</sup>) to the English alphabet. In any case, all systems rely on symbols that represent sounds in a one-to-one correspondence (this is known as the 'Phonemic Principle') as a way to compensate for the irregularity of English spelling.

Transcriptions are usually classified as either broad (i.e. phonemic) or narrow (i.e. allophonic). This already hints to the fact that transcription is not just a matter of having a system of as many symbols (or symbols plus diacritics) as sounds we want to represent. This is why Monroy-Casas (2011) refers to three types of criteria that the

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<sup>1</sup> According to popular notions of vowel length where each written vowel (graphemes <a e i o u>) has a long and a short value, macrons (ˉ) indicate the long value and breves (˘) the short one. Thus, 'brain' has a long A ([eɪ]) and is represented as /brān/, while 'bran' has a short A ([æ]) and would therefore be represented as /brǎn/.

transcriber should attend to: 1) phonemic criteria, i.e. the choice of what sounds constitute phonemes and which do not in order to account for a broad or a narrow transcription; 2) sub-phonemic criteria, i.e. what features are given priority in the representation e.g. quality or quantity or a mixed system; and 3) pedagogic criteria, i.e. ‘the usefulness of a specific type of transcription’ (p. 39) or the particular purpose the transcriber has in mind when doing his task, e.g. driving attention to aspiration while disregarding vowel length.

Representation and description go hand in hand, since it is no use having a symbol without reference to the sound it represents. Still, speech sounds can vary in so subtle ways that any set value is a generalization as it is unmanageable to have specific symbols for every possible sound. Conventions such as the IPA are therefore very helpful in providing an agreed value that can be referred to. This idea of having pre-set values as a reference is especially important when dealing with vowels, as their description relies heavily on auditory perception, whereas consonants can be referred to in articulatory terms with more precision. Today’s reference vowel qualities are those set in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by phonetician Daniel Jones in his *Outline of English Phonetics* (1918) and are known as the Cardinal

Vowels. These are eight vocalic entities (‘primary CC.VV.’) plus the corresponding eight with a different lip position (rounded if unrounded and vice versa, known as the ‘secondary CC.VV.’) that are felt to be, in auditory terms, the two extreme points of vocalic articulation ([i] and [ɑ]) and the equidistant points in

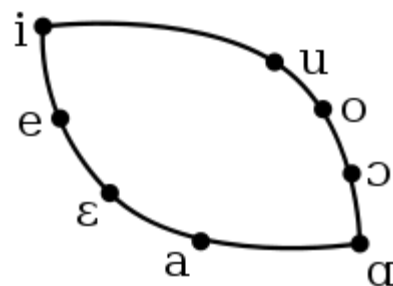


Figure 1. Oval diagram of the Primary CC.VV. (Jones, 1918, p. 36)

between these two ([e ε a], front and unrounded, and [u o ɔ], back and rounded). Interestingly enough, Jones (1918) applied the Cardinal Principle also to some

consonants where there is perceptible auditory gradation (e.g. fricatives from linguodental to linguovelar). However, as Monroy-Casas (2011) explains, the IPA (the Association in this case) did not deem it necessary since consonants are easier to deal with.

Pronunciation teaching, in consequence, has traditionally consisted in making the learner acquainted with the necessary terminology and symbol system in order to introduce to him the phonemic values of the English phonological system. However, Enrique Cámara Arenas from the Universidad de Valladolid has recently developed a different method which he has called ‘Native Cardinality Method’ or NCM for short. What he suggests, as explained in Cámara Arenas (2014), is to forget about building an independent L2 phonological system and rather “expand the learner’s L1 phonological system so as to include new units” (p. 3045). So NCM implies taking the Spanish phonemes as Cardinal Vowels and Consonants of

reference and getting from there to the phonology of English in a four-step process: 1) raising the learner’s awareness of articulation of L1 phonemes; 2) exercising perception of values other than L1; 3) exercising production of values other than L1; and finally 4) guiding the production of English phonemes. This approach does not lack precedents and many have done it intuitively, as he

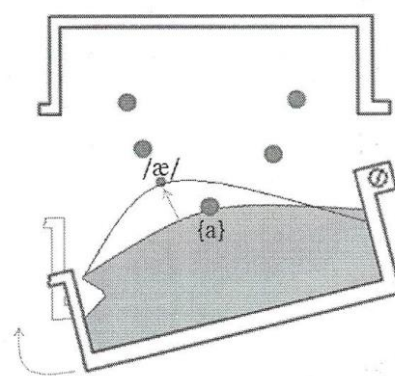


Figure 2. NCM applied to showing how Spanish {a} has to be modified for the production of GA [æ]. (Cámara Arenas, 2012, p. 58)

acknowledges, but he must be recognized the merit of having dealt with this approach in a systematic and scholarly manner and of having applied it in a practical textbook: *Curso de Pronunciación de la Lengua Inglesa para Hispano-Hablantes: A Native Cardinality Method* (2012).

Apart from other tools and techniques specific of NCM, Cámara Arenas (2012) insists on four fundamental elements which work together in the assimilation of an L2 phonological system: kinaesthetic sensitivity (the feeling of the articulators in contact in the mouth), perceptive sensitivity (the sound associated to the experience of the articulators in contact), knowledge about articulation (an understanding and schematic representation of the articulators), and a specific alphabet (a univocal graphic symbol). So these four elements are learned together as a ‘cognition unit’ so that a phoneme consists of a specific physical sensation, an auditory perception, a drawing of the articulators and a phonetic symbol, all stored together orderly. So it follows that it is necessary, in order to success, to be consistent in the use of the four dimensions in both descriptive (terminology) and representational (symbol system) terms.

### **2.3. Second Language Acquisition and pronunciation**

Some final remarks have to be made regarding the process of learning pronunciation. There are some aspects which are common to SLA in general such as the positive influence of motivation (see e.g. Gardner, 2007), consciousness raising and language awareness. These two latter concepts are distinguished by Fukuda (2009): consciousness raising consists in drawing the learner’s attention to formal aspects of a target language (say, a particular allophone); language awareness, on the other hand, is rather connected with sociocultural sensitivity towards the nature and role of language as a human phenomenon. Both can be helpful in teaching: consciousness raising can be used especially by native L2 teachers who know their linguistic system in a natural way; and language awareness can be particularly helpful for non-native teachers as knowing at least two languages provides a wider linguistic perspective. Of course, this does not imply that they cannot be used by either.

More specifically connected with phonology, Rogerson-Revell (2011) mentions several influential factors in pronunciation achievement, namely age, personality, sociocultural factors, student aptitude, exposure and the role of the L1. I will briefly tackle those that will be useful for my discussion below.

‘Pronunciation, much more so than grammar and vocabulary, is inextricably bound up with identity and attitude’ (Rogerson-Revell, 2011, p. 17). This is why sociocultural factors are of especial importance since model accents, as dealt with above, can have a negative impact and hinder pronunciation acquisition if seen as threatening to L1 identity. Similarly, developing an L2 identity different from that of the L1 can be especially hard for learners other than children who have not formed their identities yet or are at least at a more malleable stage. In this line, discussing the teaching of ELF pronunciation, Walker (2010) suggests two main goals: intelligibility and identity. An ELF approach should strive for both, while more traditional approaches usually identify a native accent with intelligibility and encourage the development of an L2 identity.

Attitudes also take part here and studies have shown both teachers and learners consider that a native accent is preferred over others (Jenkins, 2007). However, there is a feeling that native competence is beyond the non-native speaker’s ability and this also influences learning. This was mainly shown by Porter and Garvin (1989) but despite the date of the study it is relevant because the situation has not changed much, as Walker (2010) explains.

Another factor referred to above is the role of the L1. Rogerson-Revell (2011) presents different studies which show how the similarities in two phonological systems can imply different things: on the one hand, coincidence of phonemes can mean that these can be easily learned; on the other, many times the proximity of two phonemes

implies that they are taken as similar and the L2 value is never produced because no effort is felt to be necessary. So L1 transfer is a double-edged sword. NCM (Cámara Arenas, 2012) above makes use of it in his intention of re-programming the L1 phonological system: there is a section on 'lo que no hay que aprender' (p. 21) and the rest of the method develops the idea of approximating Spanish phonemes to the English ones. Those aspects of pronunciation (and language systems in general) which are expectably problematic because of L1-L2 divergence have been explored and studied thoroughly and can be found in books like Swan and Smith's *Learner English: A teacher's guide to interference and other problems* (1987) or Pamela Rogerson-Revell's (2011) section on 'Pronunciation Problem Areas' (p. 263).

When analyzing these areas of conflict, it is relevant to bear in mind the concepts of phonetic universals and markedness. This refers to the fact that some phonological processes are more common in human languages and are therefore more easily learnable. Processes that divert from these, such as the English tendency for closed syllables (Rogerson-Revell, 2011), are therefore 'marked' and can be seen as harder to learn. At the end of most discussions, Cruttenden (2014) includes a section of '[a]dvice to foreign learners' where he points out what problems most students are going to come across in the learning of each specific aspect of English pronunciation, instead of dealing from the comparison with a specific language as the other books I have mentioned do.

### ***3. Domina la Pronunciación del Inglés: methodological***

#### **mismatch and inconsistencies**

I shall now proceed to explain what are the inconsistencies I have noticed in the 2014 Vaughan Systems textbook *Domina la Pronunciación del Inglés* (henceforth 'DPI'). The book is entirely written in Spanish but for the items of study, i.e. words and texts, so all renderings in English are my own translations and if any mistake were found, I declare it inexcusably mine.

#### **3.1. Native model, non-native goal**

Expectations are set high when you pick up a book with a title saying: 'Master the pronunciation of English'. This is repeated also in the back cover, so the first question would be what mastering English pronunciation is considered to be: intelligibility is an option but it could involve going further to sounding like a native (which in fact might imply less intelligibility in an international context as we have explained above).

Well, the front page appropriately has a remark: 'Hablarás como un nativo.' Again, in the introduction on page 10, the approach of the book is proposing the native speaker of English as the target interlocutor: the aim of developing our pronunciation is being able to interact with the natives. This is repeated in virtually all the units in the book as reference is continuously made to what natives do and how we should imitate them. For instance: 'Aunque "like" se pronuncia /láik/, muchas veces los nativos pronunciamos "like to" así: /lai-ta/' (p. 150); '/becósaza/ [...] es la forma en que muchos nativos enlazan las palabras "because of the"' (p. 74); 'Muchas veces los nativos pronunciamos "do you" así: /llú/' (p. 126).

A final place in the book where it is patently evident that the method is encouraging the learner to sound exactly like a native is found in the ‘Guía de Pronunciación’ section on page 346: ‘recomendamos que exageres muchos los sonidos. Así conseguirás que tu inglés se aproxime más al de un nativo’. In fact, following this remark, there is a whole paragraph encouraging imitation: ‘¡¡Trata de imitarnos!! [sic] Así conseguirás sacar mucho mejor esos sonidos nuestros que tanto te cuestan’.

So it can be said that DPI’s proposed goal is sounding like a native. What native model in particular is to be imitated? This is what is said: ‘en nuestros libros nos ceñimos a una pronunciación inglesa que consideramos “neutral”’ (p. 346). The quotation marks might mean that there is no ‘neutral’ pronunciation really or maybe that they put it like that for want of a better word. They are referring to a variety that we can identify as a standard Southeastern English pronunciation (call it RP, BBC English, GB...). Despite no explicit reference, I identify it like this for two reasons: 1) Richard Brown, who appears as the author, is British, and the speaker in the recordings that come with the book is clearly using what Cruttenden (2014) would call ‘Regional GB’ with a London touch (glottal stops and dark L vocalization included); and 2) the transcriptions used are non-rhotic and make differences between GB vowels that are not present in GA.

The conflict, however, arises from the fact that the explanations and transcriptions are not consistent in aiming at this native model. Of course many of them do match a General British accent but my contention is that disparity exists in important elements.

Rhoticity is one of the aspects where consistency cannot be found. In the majority of words, pre-consonant and pre-pausal R is discouraged: ‘chair’ is /chéee/<sup>2</sup> on

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<sup>2</sup> I use slant brackets for DPI transcriptions because that is how they appear in the book (as in quotations above), not because it represents a phoneme.



page 89 and ‘Internet’ is /intanet/ on page 145. However, there are instances of rhoticity: they may not be very many but they are all very noticeable and no explanation is given. Chapter 8 explains that ‘door’, ‘floor’ and ‘more’ rhyme with ‘law’, ‘draw’ and ‘saw’ (p. 48). On the next page, ‘sort of’ is represented as /sorta/ and one page later specific reference is made to non-rhoticity: ‘No estarás pronunciando la “r” de “sort”, ¿verdad? Pronuncia una “o” alargada, pero olvídate de la “r”. Decimos /sssóottt/.’ Seven lines below, ‘journalist’ is represented as /lliernalist/ with pre-pausal R.

Apart from how confusing all this can be to somebody who does not know anything about rhoticity (as I bet most readers of this kind of book will be) it is using a mixed model. Of course, this is not a problem but the matter is that no explanation is given. Another ‘Americanist’ intrusion is that of T lenition or tapping on page 184: ‘la “t” se convierte en “d”’ and we have ‘out of the’ as /áudoza/ (which an untrained Spanish speaker is very likely to interpret as [‘auðoθa] instead of the wished [‘aʊrəðə], in any case). So apparently we have a mixture of features from different accents which could correspond to Cruttenden’s (2014) Amalgam English. However that model is trying to provide simplification while DPI is mixing it all without giving reasons.

Another reason why I cannot agree to say that they are using a native model is the lack of important allophonic features regarding plosives: aspiration and clipping. A native model relies on these two phenomena for the distinction of fortis and lenis plosives, where a system like Spanish relies on voice. Cruttenden’s International English allows for the use of voicing as a distinctive feature but Jenkins’ LFC does not. This means that Jenkins has observed empirically the importance of the use of aspiration even when no native speaker is involved, but it is nowhere to be found in DPI.

So this method is not using purely a native model consistently, but it is not providing the basics of pronunciation as proposed by current research, either. Rather, it appears to point towards a Southeastern British English in a general line while including features totally alien to it and disregarding some crucial phenomena at the same time.

### **3.2. Inconsistencies and vagueness in description and representation**

In this section I do not focus so much on an internal mismatch as above; rather, I describe the methodology used in order to contrast it with the theory as explained above.

Descriptive terminology is virtually nonexistent in DPI. The description of sounds is always made in reference to a Spanish phoneme with some degree of similarity with the target English phoneme. This is evidently close to Cámara Arenas' NCM in this sense, but it differs greatly because Cámara-Arenas' *Curso* (2012) has a 34-page introductory section on the production and perception of speech sounds ('Primera Fase: Conocimientos y Experiencias Básicos') which provides the reader with the appropriate terminology and knowledge to be able to follow the explanations. DPI, on the other hand, makes use of vague instructions and unconventional ways of speaking like '[l]a 't' inglesa tiene un sonido duro' (p. 354). This remark, for instance, is not referring to an articulatory reality but rather to an auditory impression which does not describe the sound because it can be interpreted in many ways (what does 'un sonido duro' exactly mean?).

References to manner and place of articulation are unavoidable but what DPI does is evade technical terms. Instead of saying what a plosive is and resorting to that knowledge, it describes a plosive articulation every time that it is deemed necessary. Place is more easily dealt with as parts of the mouth are more easily described, even if

using words like ‘alveolar’ would be advisable to avoid repetitions like ‘no coloques tu lengua entre los dientes, sino justo detrás de los mismos, en la parte superior del paladar’ (p. 13); ‘la lengua toca la parte superior del paladar, justo detrás de los dientes superiores. Es decir, la lengua NO [sic] sale de la boca’ (p. 28); ‘Coloca la lengua detrás de los dientes superiores tocando la parte superior de la boca’ (p. 183); ‘con la lengua tocando la parte superior de la boca, justo detrás de los dientes’ (p. 348); ‘sitúa [tu lengua] justo detrás de los dientes superiores, tocando la parte superior de la boca’ (p. 354). It can of course be argued that after such insistence, the learners must have completely understood how they must pronounce their Ts and Ds.

The main advantage of using conventional or at least terminology that has been explained beforehand is that it is not possible to mistake what is meant. However, if colloquial terms are used, these are open to interpretation and DPI does not provide any explanation of what is meant by expressions like ‘más fuerte’ or ‘más duro’. Plus, one sometimes wonders if DPI draws on common beliefs rather than actual phonological knowledge: for instance, the vowel in ‘cup’ is described as having a sound ‘parecido al de una “a” castellana, pero un poco más largo de lo habitual’ (p. 23). It is strange to find such a description for a short vowel especially when Spanish makes no length distinction and English short vowels are usually shorter than they are in Spanish.

The representational tool of DPI is also completely unorthodox, as somebody acquainted with the IPA must have noticed in the examples above, and it does not apply any of the principles, or fit in with any of the categories, explained in Monroy-Casas (2011). On page 346 of DPI, ‘Guía de Pronunciación’, we can read: ‘hemos creado un sistema que utiliza la fonética castellana para aproximarse lo más posible a la pronunciación inglesa’. This ‘system’ is neither a phonetic alphabet nor some sort of Spanish respelling of English, but rather something in-between. It is not a phonetic

alphabet because symbols are not applied consistently, i.e. they are not symbols (in fact the word ‘symbols’ appears in quotation marks in DPI) as they do not always stand for the same phonemic value. For instance DPI /z/ can stand for IPA [θ] or [ð], and DPI /s/ and /sss/ can be interchangeably IPA [s] or [z] depending on the word. It is not simply respelling with Spanish orthography since there are graphemes which stand for values other than those of Spanish. For instance, DPI /hhh/ is not silent but aspirated (IPA [h]); DPI /dz/ is used to refer to [ð]; and DPI /ll/ can sometimes mean [ʒ]. It is therefore not as simple as reading it with a Spanish knowledge: the symbols have to be interpreted in the proper context.

Another drawback of the system is the confusion it can create to learners developing the ability to read in English. There is a risk that they might apply English spelling rules to the transcriptions so DPI /oo/, which stands for [ɔ:], can be read as [u:] or DPI /z/ (explained above) can be read as, in fact, [z], especially if the students are already acquainted, as they will probably be, with orthodox transcription systems as found in dictionaries and other textbooks.

Furthermore, asking the learners to read in Spanish might make them transfer from the L1 more than they would otherwise and create a false belief that English phonemes do not really differ so much. This would have the opposite effect of encouraging the use of a heavily Spanish accented pronunciation: there is nothing wrong about it from an ELF perspective, but DPI is allegedly taking the native as model and goal.

The inconsistency of both description and representation can make it more difficult to assimilate all the concepts. Of course, language is naturally inconsistent but creating a system that can provisionally contain linguistic reality at least in an artificial, constructed way can be very useful to create ‘cognition units’ as referred to above when

dealing with the Native Cardinality Method. Cámara Arenas' idea of working with the four dimensions together makes no sense in DPI because each of the dimensions is not independently systematic.

Certainly, issues of description and representation are relevant because of the positive impact that raising consciousness about them can have on pronunciation: Rogerson-Revell (2011) points out some studies which have shown that 'students learning L2 pronunciation benefit from being explicitly taught phonological form to help them notice the differences between their own productions and those of proficient speakers in the L2 community' (p. 23).

### 3.3. Pronunciation acquisition factors: contradictions

In this section I explore some contradictions that I have identified in the assumptions behind the practice apart from those between theory and practice. We could say that the mismatch here exists between the implicit theoretical presuppositions that can be inferred from what is found in DPI.

DPI is written in a friendly and uncomplicated way that keeps the learner motivated and favors a positive atmosphere for acquisition to take place. The cover of the textbook looks like a motivational poster making you believe that you will succeed: it is full of promises and it has a confident Richard Vaughan in a suit next to a Union Jack (which, apart from standing for the English language, is very fashionable nowadays and looks even natural next to a Texan). So the

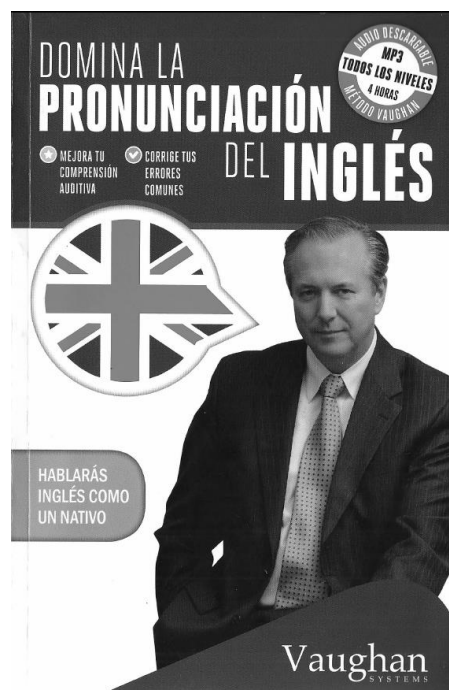


Figure 3. Cover page of *Domina la Pronunciación del Inglés*. (Brown et al., 2014)

message that the whole book is transmitting is that it is not as complicated as it seems as long as you follow what they tell you to do.

The inconsistency is in the practical exercises inside the book which are hardly motivational themselves: the only indication is repeating the sounds over and over till you pronounce them properly. There is no diversity whatsoever: all 66 sessions say you repeat and go back to previous sessions till you ‘master English pronunciation’. I am not saying the method does not work, but I think it is hard to keep motivation high when repetition is the only activity offered which deviates from just reading the book.

Another relevant factor is that of identity and if not a contradiction, there is at least a double message. On the one hand, Spanish is taken as a friendly element which is used in reading the ‘transcriptions’ explained above and as a point of departure for description of English sounds; on the other, the instructions are constantly telling you to get rid of any nuance of Spanish-soundingness. Consequently, sounding Spanish might be a cause of anxiety and hinder acquisition because it would threaten the learner’s L1 identity, especially if the learner is an adult (and I doubt a child will be using this kind of book but of course it could be). Moreover, they encourage you to sound like a native and making you believe that you can in fact sound like a native; however, the explanations rely on a dichotomy *we* (native speakers) versus *you* (non-native speakers) which has ideological implications of fixedness of the category: one must be born a native, so unless you are one there is no real chance you speak like one, because you are not ‘one’ but ‘other’. This might be undermining to the learners’ self-confidence, as they are receiving two different messages at the same time.

Finally, since it has been written for Spanish speakers, DPI lays emphasis on the predictably problematic areas as explained above. It is especially remarkable that most chapters deal with sounds at the end of words or syllables, i.e. in a position where they

are marked as opposed to the universal tendency to open syllables. However, there might be too much insistence upon this position since some other aspects of L1 transfer are disregarded, such as the use of voicing for fortis-lenis distinction as explained above.

#### **4. Discussion: possible pedagogical reasons and implications**

So far I have explained what kind of inconsistencies I see in DPI. This final section is a discussion which aims to speculate from a critical standpoint about why this particular textbook has been designed like that, i.e. what are the pedagogical benefits that have been given priority at the expense of others that are usually favored such as systematicity and consistency.

One possible belief that could account for the mismatch between the stated and practiced model and goal could be what was pointed out by Porter and Garvin (1989) above: a pessimistic belief that even though every learner would love to speak like a native it is not possible and we have to acquiesce to a limited version of the phonological system. This would mean that it is taken for granted that non-native speakers are not able to take on a foreign phonological system. If this belief is widespread enough, people will not question the limited scope of the method: if it comes short of the native model, it is just natural.

What I just mentioned might be another reason: the method is aimed at the layman, not the phonetics expert, so why bother whether he or she will notice. With a beginner audience in mind, this is just an introduction to pronunciation and it is aimed at selling to them. It might be thought that somebody who wants to tackle pronunciation more seriously will buy another kind of book. The typical Vaughan fan is not really going to interact with natives but rather going to use English for tourism, watching YouTube videos and so on. Therefore, it might be important to think about the native without necessarily speaking like them. Again, this points to some sort of Amalgam English, which is practiced in DPI.

In any case, why is that not stated clearly? Reference could be made to the fact that this is not a complete guide to English pronunciation. Maybe this is too obvious and



need not be said, but the fact is that according to the book itself, it is presented as the key to all your pronunciation problems: ‘Este libro te ayudará a dominar la pronunciación del inglés ya que te dará *todas las herramientas necesarias* para pronunciar correctamente’ (back cover, my emphasis). I can think of two possibilities.

One would be that making choices for the learners without their awareness (one of the key concepts in SLA as pointed out above) might imply some condescending paternalistic attitude towards them: *we*, native speakers, choose what *you*, poor thing struggling with English pronunciation, should do. This is not so far from reality and many times it is precisely non-native speakers who are ready to recognize in native speakers infallible experts of all linguistic aspects of English. I am thinking of how many academies in Zaragoza are proud to show banners saying ‘SOLO PROFESORES NATIVOS’, as though that meant the lessons are necessarily better, but also how many of my acquaintances would definitely say that it is best to have a native teacher. As Walker (2010) points out, students influence teacher’s attitudes and vice versa: students prefer the native model, so teachers give it to them and since it is given to them, students think it is the model to be preferred. Consequently, Vaughan could be reflecting this widespread sentiment: the native model is the one to be offered officially, whatever is happening in actual terms in teaching.

The second, and pedagogically sounder, possibility is that, since learners want to be taught to speak like a native speaker, it is more important to keep them thinking that they can do it than clearly acknowledging some kind of ‘reduced’ model. This would presume that motivation is preferred over anything else: even if we are only going to teach some aspects of pronunciation, the learners will be more efficient if they are made to believe that they are going to end up speaking like the natives.

As to the lack of systematicity in both description and representation, there might be behind a belief that, dealing with a reality as complex as language, it is not really possible to manage it coherently: this is what the English language is like, this is the way ‘we natives’ deal with it so this is the way we present it to you. Also, for those who have not really studied English pronunciation (especially if it has been unconsciously acquired as a mother tongue is), there might be a feeling that pronunciation does not really need much explanation and it is possible just to rely on intuition and the learner’s natural tendency towards correct imitation. This would account for the ambiguity of terminology: what is explained does not really matter as long as the learner hears it and repeats it (i.e. imitates it). To this we could add the belief that many aspects of pronunciation are actually unteachable because of their complexity, as already pointed out.

I said above that the DPI transcription tool does not fit Monroy-Casas’ (2011) criteria but it must be acknowledged that it could be said to be following pedagogic criteria to some extent. What I mean is that it is exclusively functional: it is not devised as a tool to potentially describe all sounds of the languages of the world like the IPA, it is simply fulfilling the function it has in every specific instance in the textbook, which accounts for variation of use depending on what is to be insisted upon.

## 5. Conclusion

Out of all the possible reasons I have been discussing, I think it is relevant to understand that, whatever the real reason behind what I have observed, *Domina la Pronunciación del Inglés* has to be seen as a useful tool in the teaching of the pronunciation of English. As long as one keeps in mind the limitations it brings about and the nature of its contents, it can be used as a very basic introduction to aspects of English phonology that Spanish speakers tend to neglect. Most importantly, it has a valuable potential for fostering motivation and a positive attitude towards learning.

Other than that, my study has pointed out several aspects where this textbook fails to fulfil what it states it is going to do. The most relevant lack of correspondence is that between the promise of speaking like a native and the actual features as they are presented in the book. However, I insist that my belief is that the authors are giving priority to motivation and self-confidence over other aspects which are deemed less relevant: accordingly, it does not really matter whether you are learning more or less accurately as long as your motivation is high enough to keep you soaring towards communicative competence and a proficient use of the English language.

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